

only fair that we should as far as we can study the convenience of the people most affected by the removal of these properties. It is interesting to note that such efforts to temper justice with mercy sometimes lead us into trouble from unexpected directions, for while you naturally look for opposition from the unlucky owner of the building which has fallen under the ban, one is less prepared to deal with an attack from your own side of the fortification. Under such circumstances, should the District Health Officer unjustly recall memories of one Naboth, who owned a vineyard, he may perhaps be pardoned on the ground that experience has not led him to expect such zealous allies under the public-health banner.

A fruitful source of decay in houses is the habit so common among builders in this country of leaving as small a space as possible between the plates and the ground; often the ground-level at one or more sides of the house is higher than the floor, and seldom is there any free ventilation of the foundation. It is difficult to see what is gained by placing a house squat down on the ground and then boarding round closely so that the damp must be drawn up into the house; yet this seems to be the accepted method of building wooden houses, with the result that they become decayed and unfit for habitation when they should be still perfectly sound. Building by-laws cannot be regarded as complete unless they provide for a dry foundation and free ventilation below the basement-floor.

OVERCROWDING.

In my report last year I made some mention of the overcrowding in Wellington and suburbs, and drew attention to the insufficiency of the Municipal Corporations Act as regards the provision of open spaces for houses. The following figures show the actual amount of population per acre in the centres and their suburbs: Auckland and suburbs, 19.4 persons per acre; Wellington and suburbs, 39.6; Christchurch and suburbs, 14; Dunedin and suburbs, 18.8. Wellington has thus more than twice the crowding found in the other centres.

While we have reluctantly to accept a minimum so low as 300 square feet of yard-space per house in the crowded parts of Wellington, it is manifestly absurd to permit houses to be so crowded together in the outlying suburban portion of the city—such as Melrose. The condition of affairs at Kilbirnie, where may be seen rows of jerry-built cottages jammed close together with acres of unoccupied space all round, forms a good example of the present evil and has stirred the City Council to frame a building by-law (now under consideration), which it is hoped may in a measure check the evil.

Bad as such a condition is in a suburban area, it is infinitely worse to find a similar state of affairs arising in small backblocks townships. To take particular instances which have come to our notice during the year, we have found at such places as Kaponga and Taihape that houses exist with back yards which would not meet the requirements of the regulations for air-space in a London slum. If such a condition is permitted during the infancy of these townships, what will be their state when they arrive at old age? At Taihape especially, slum dwellings are already to be found—miserable shanties crowded together on small sections—the outcome of the land speculator's desire to make the most of his investment.

A local authority, if a borough, under section 404 of the Municipal Corporations Act, may now make by-laws regulating frontage to streets and preventing overcrowding of land with buildings—privileges which have by section 11 of "The Public Health Amendment Act, 1903," been extended to all local authorities. But it is not always easy to persuade a local body as to the necessity for such regulations. They have for one thing been hampered by the fear of legal difficulties, as the by-law would seem to clash with the provision in the Municipal Corporations Act as to yard-space. It is satisfactory to have the authority of the Crown Law Officer that by-laws made under section 404 of the Municipal Corporations Act are, where the limitation is reasonable, in no danger of being quashed as *ultra vires*. Attempts have been made in this direction in certain boroughs which have adopted reasonably strict by-laws on the subject—notably, Petone and Miramar.

But it would be better to have more definite legislation on this matter, and an amendment in the Public Health Act is much needed which shall definitely override the limitation of the Municipal Corporations Act and be compulsory on all local authorities. Of course, care would have to be taken to allow of a gradation of the limitation according to value of land, already existing conditions, and so forth. It should not, however, be difficult to arrive at a standard—for instance, in unsewered townships a sufficient area should be allowed to each house to enable the occupier to dispose of the slop-waste waters in a sanitary manner; and for this purpose one could say broadly that $\frac{1}{4}$ acre is required. A smaller area might be permitted in small towns provided with sewers, and so on till we come down to the 300 square feet, which it may perhaps be necessary to admit for the crowded parts of the larger cities; but a clause should be added making it possible in a city to draw a distinction between the populous centres and the still clean and airy suburbs.

The question of shops with residential quarters in the upper stories also requires consideration, as it is evident that such cannot be treated on the same level as purely business premises.

Such details as the above could be left for settlement by the sanitary authorities, so long as the main object is secured—that of insuring pure air and unobstructed sunlight for every home. Fresh air and light are perhaps the most valuable of all sanitary commodities, therefore anything which tends to the deterioration of these must be regarded as the worst of all sanitary crimes.

OVERCROWDING IN DWELLINGS.

Probably it is only in Wellington City that we can find any very general overcrowding of persons within the dwellings, still, even in up-country places, we drop across more or less isolated cases where a large family is occupying some miserable shanty to the detriment of their health and to the public danger. At some of the country hotels, too, overcrowding may be found in the bedrooms, there being in this instance, however, the excuse that the rooms are generally occupied for only a night or two.