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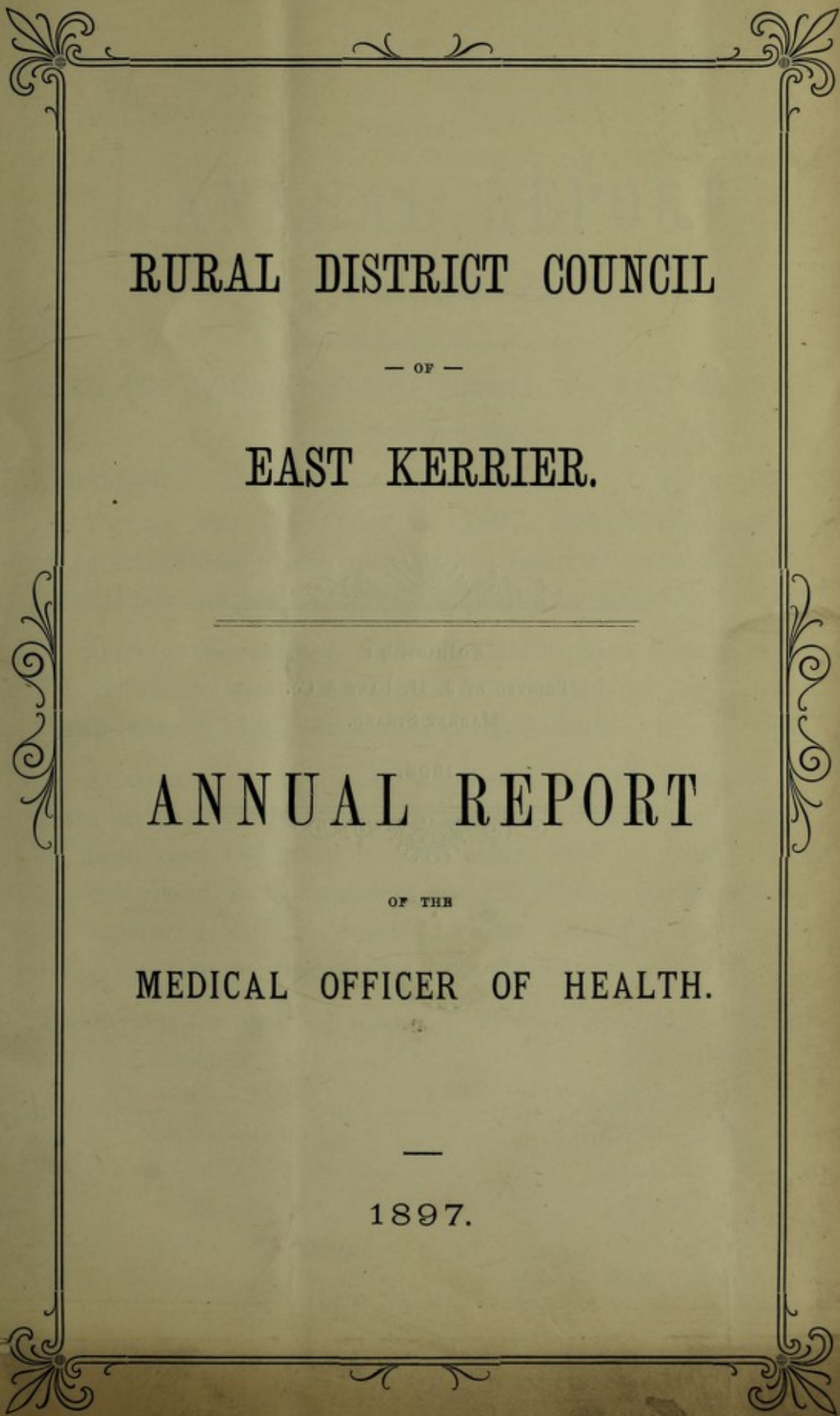
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RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

— OF —

EAST KERRIER.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

—
1897.



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1898.



ANNUAL REPORT

For 1897.

TO THE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL OF EAST KERRIER.

GENTLEMEN,

During the past year of 1897, 204 births have been registered, 95 of which were males, and 109 females, giving an annual birth rate of 23·97 per thousand inhabitants.

During the same period 130 deaths have been registered, 72 of which were males, and 58 females, giving an annual death-rate of 15·27 per thousand inhabitants.

As usual, I again append a list of the birth-rates and death-rates for each year of the past ten years. But it must be kept in mind that the rates for the years 1888 to 1892, inclusive, are calculated on a population of 9,527 (before the amalgamation of Penwerris with Falmouth), whilst those for 1893 and the following years are calculated on a population of 8,510.

Birth-rates for past ten years.

1888—?

1889—25·1

1890—27·5

1891—26·3

1892—24·6

1893—23·8

1894—24·3

1895—26·9

1896—25·7

1897—23·9

Death-rates for past ten years.

1888—14·4

1889—16·2

1890—20·7

1891—20·9

1892—14·1

1893—19·6

1894—20·6

1895—18·2

1896—14·3

1897—15·2

From this list it will be seen that the birth-rate for 1897 was almost the lowest of the past ten years, whilst the death-rate was satisfactory, and amongst the best of the past ten years. The natural increase for 1897 was seventy-four; for 1896, ninety-seven; for 1895, seventy-four; for 1894, thirty-one; for 1893, thirty-six; for 1892, ninety-eight; for 1891, fifty-one.

With this Report I enclose Forms A and B duly filled in, according to the requirements of the Local Government Board. Table A gives the number of deaths in each parish during the year, and these are grouped according to ages and according to cause of death. Table B shows the number of cases of infectious diseases which have arisen during the year. A study of both these Tables affords a fair idea of the sanitary history of the district during 1897.

On reference to Table A it will be seen that from diseases which are compulsorily notifiable under the Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act, three deaths occurred, two from Typhoid Fever and one from Puerperal Fever; whilst from non-notifiable infectious diseases there were twelve deaths, eight from Measles, three from Whooping Cough, and one from Diarrhoea. At the same time it will be seen that diseases of the Respiratory System caused twenty-two deaths, Heart Disease seven deaths, and that five died from Injuries. It must be mentioned that three of the deaths registered were of men who met their deaths upon H.M.S. "Thrasher," when she ran ashore on the Dodman. The bodies having been landed at Mylor, the deaths were registered as having occurred within our district. Cancer caused seventeen deaths, which is an exceptionally heavy number.

Of the total number of deaths, thirty were of infants under one year of age, and seven were of children between one and five years of age; whilst fifty, or more than the third of the total, were over sixty-five years of age, seventeen of these attaining eighty years and over.

I have more than once before said that if any permanent

reduction in the death-rate is to be gained and maintained it must be chiefly through reducing the death-rate among children of tender years, and that one of the main causes for the deaths of many children yearly is the gross ignorance which exists as to the feeding and rearing of infants. In my last Annual Report I entered fully into this subject, and suggested that this Council should place in the hands of all mothers, when they come to register the births, a card of instructions upon the proper feeding and rearing of babies. My suggestion was promptly acted upon, and I was requested to lay before a Committee a list of the proposed instructions. This I did; and eventually the Council adopted the list and gave orders for a large number of cards to be printed, and for each Registrar to hand one to each mother when the birth was registered. It is, of course, too early yet to be able to say whether any good has resulted from this step, as it was not at work before about June; it will take quite another year before any conclusions can be drawn. But, at any rate, it must be a satisfaction to know that in many houses, where up to last year ignorance on these points prevailed, there is now at hand information which, if acted upon, must in the long run prove of benefit. It is an experiment out of which no possible harm can come and most probably some good; this, Time alone will prove, but, at any rate, this Council has done its duty, and has set a good example to other Councils. As I have said before, it is altogether too soon yet to say whether any benefit has resulted from the issue of these cards of instruction, but with regard to 1897 I may say that they were not issued until June, and I find that of the ten deaths from Rickets and Convulsions during the year, seven occurred before June and three after.

In Table B, the population, according to the census in 1891, is given. In addition to this the population of each parish, estimated to the middle of 1897, is given. This estimation is made upon the manner of calculation adopted and approved of by the Registrar General, and until a new census is taken the population

must show a yearly decrease when so estimated, there having been a decrease in population from 1881 to 1891.

During the year of cases of zymotic diseases there have been notified :—two cases of Small Pox, nine cases of Typhoid Fever, twenty-six cases of Scarlatina, one case of Puerperal Fever, three cases of Erysipelas: whilst of Measles and Whooping Cough there have been very many cases, particularly of the former.

Of all these the most unusual and the most alarming were the two cases of Small Pox. The first case was notified to me in April; the case was in Budock, a young girl. The mother of the girl was the second case, she contracting the disease from her daughter. With regard to the origin of this disease, I could not for some time discover any possible or probable reason. No one from the house had been anywhere from home, and no one from anywhere else had visited them, but on asking if anything had come into the house from anywhere the people remembered that on April 3rd or 4th some yards of twilling arrived from a travelling draper, living on the other side of Truro. I found at the time that the last case of Small Pox in the County was in January, since which, until these cases, no case had occurred. I immediately wrote to Dr. Bonar, the Medical Officer of Health of the Truro District, and he informed me that he had had no cases in his district. As I said before, the twilling arrived about April 3rd; the girl commenced to sicken on April 13th or 14th (that is, ten days or eleven days after the arrival of the twilling), and as this is about the normal incubation period of Small Pox (that is, the time which elapses between exposure to infection and the onset of symptoms), and as there is no knowing where a traveller and his goods may have been for the past two or three months, in what houses they may have been and by whom the goods may have been handled, I think that the twilling is a possible, if not a probable, cause for the appearance of this disease in our District. I immediately on hearing of the disease reported it to the Clerk, who at once summoned a special meeting of the Council. As we had no Isolation Hospital it was

determined to deal with the cases as best we could on the spot. Mr. Chubb and I did all that was possible: we were helped considerably by the position of the house in its relation to neighbouring houses, by the position of the room in which we kept the cases in its relation to the rest of the house, and by the faithful manner in which the husband carried out our instructions. I do not know of any other house where we could have obtained better isolation, and from first to last I believe the cases were very fairly isolated. The proof of this is that we confined the disease to the first two cases. This result was eminently satisfactory, especially when we remember how that great safeguard against Small Pox is neglected in this District. Vaccination is practically a dead letter in this Union: instead of being encouraged it is discouraged. Of course, as soon as the rumour of Small Pox commenced, there was a rush for vaccination; people soon lost the courage of the opinions they held before the rumour. It is fearful to contemplate what might have been the result had not our efforts at isolation been attended with such marked success. Of course, at the time the question of providing an Isolation Hospital came to the fore, but after several meetings and searching for a site it all fell through.

The nine cases of Typhoid Fever occurred at various times throughout the year. In February there was one case (fatal) in Flushing; in June one (fatal) at Tregew, Mylor; in August three in Ponsanooth; in November two in Flushing; in December one in Mylor and one in Perran; so that throughout the year there were five cases in the parish of Mylor, three being in Flushing and the remaining two cases in different parts of the parish. The houses, in which the three Flushing cases were, presented no special features to account for the disease different from what apply to the whole of the village; and I can only say that, taking into consideration the sanitary state of Flushing, instead of wondering that there were three cases we ought to wonder that there were not many more. Flushing, though an old place, has of late years improved in many respects: some bad properties,

which in days gone by used to be complained of constantly, have been entirely swept away, and the village in certain parts has been thereby opened up ; whilst in other parts nice new tenements have replaced old and dilapidated ones. But I have more than once before said that so long as the present system of excrement disposal remains in vogue so long will there crop up every now and then Typhoid Fever, or some other filth disease. I know that, taking the system as it is, this Council has done its best to mitigate the evils which must necessarily accompany it, for in February the District Councillors of Mylor met Mr. Chubb and myself and entered into an agreement with Mr. Bennett, of Mylor, for the systematic emptying of all the cess-pits of Flushing and for the disinfection of the same at the time of emptying. Instead of the indiscriminate emptying of pits at any hour and on any day and the carrying-out of the pits to be deposited in piles in the streets, there to lie to the danger and annoyance of all around until carted away, it was agreed that all pits should be emptied by 9 a.m. from February 14th to October 15th, and by 10 a.m. from October 15th to February 14th, the contents of the pits to be carried out in guries and emptied direct into the cart and not to be deposited at all in the streets, and that as soon as a pit requires emptying it is to be emptied at once. Before this many, depending on a farmer if wanting to have a pit emptied, had to wait until it was convenient to the farmer to do so ; whilst others, in order to get some money value for the pit, allowed the pit to get full enough to be of some worth. The present arrangement is a genuine effort on the part of this Council to grapple with an objectionable system with the view of its causing as little offence and of being as small a danger to the public health as possible. But after all, though the possible evil effects and objectionable features of such a system have been guarded against as far as possible by the agreement entered into, yet there the thing is still, practically untouched ; for the village is riddled with cess-pits, many of which are of the very worst description. Their contents pollute the air around, whilst, owing in many cases to their dilapidated state

and their relation to the houses, the soil under and around many of the dwellings must be saturated with sewage. It is no wonder, therefore, that we get a case of Typhoid Fever now and then with such masses of offensive sewage lying and accumulating in the heart of this important village. Left alone, they are a danger to health, and doubly so each time when they are disturbed for removal. These cess-pits are a constantly recurring grievance, and I think a time will soon come when the question of substituting some other system for the present one will have to be dealt with.

The case of Typhoid Fever at Tregew was uncertain in its origin. The tenant complained of offensive smells from some pig's houses at the end of the garden, especially in certain winds. These houses have now been removed. The fifth case in Mylor occurred at the end of the year, and was due to bad drainage.

The Ponsanooth cases were only three out of eight cases of Typhoid Fever, which actually occurred in this village; but five of these belonged to another district, a part of Ponsanooth lying within the Rural District of Redruth. The first case occurred in April, and at intervals of a few weeks the remaining cases developed. Mr. Chubb and I went through the village to endeavour to find out some specific and definite cause for these cases, but we failed to do so. Behind one house, in which were two or three cases, we found a most unsatisfactory dairy, but we could trace no connection between the supply of milk from this dairy and the rest of the cases. In the third case we found an offensive cess-pit built up against the back wall of the house: the contents of this pit must have soaked under the foundations. This in itself was quite enough to account for this case. But coming, as all these cases did, practically at one time, we, as I said before, tried to find a common definite origin, but could not. We found the cess-pits of the village far from satisfactory, a large number being merely holes in the soil, which, for some distance around each pit, must be super-saturated with sewage,

especially as most of the pits are open, and therefore wet. Given favourable conditions, with the soil in so many places charged with sewage, the appearance of a filth disease, such as Typhoid Fever is, was not to be wondered at. We had at the same time many complaints made to us of the mill-pond near the chapel: the smells from this pond were complained of as being offensive at times, and as the pond had not been cleared out for thirty years, and for that time had been the chosen spot for the disposal of dead cats, dogs, &c., one can quite understand the occasional bad smells complained of. Notices were served, and hundreds of loads of mud were removed.

It will be seen that, without being able to point to any definite cause for these cases, I have brought together more than one unsanitary condition of things, all of which together probably had a hand in this outbreak of Typhoid Fever in Ponsanooth.

The ninth case was in the parish of Perran in December: for this case there was no definite cause.

Of the twenty-six cases of Scarlatina notified during the year, twenty-three were in the parish of Perran, the other three were in the parish of St. Gluvias. The first cases occurred at St. Gluvias Poor House; two were notified, and when I went there I found that in another house there was a girl peeling from the disease and yet going to school. How an outbreak among the scholars of this school did not take place is a mystery. Shortly after these St. Gluvias cases the disease appeared in Perran. Twenty-three cases came to my knowledge, but I believe there were even more cases than these, some not coming to light. All the Schools, Sunday and Board Schools, were closed for some weeks. For a time I was at a loss to explain the epidemic, until I went to a house where I found a child peeling freely. This case was notified to me. The people then said that the child had been ill for two or three weeks. From dates taken of other cases I consider this case was the first case in Perran; the child's grandmother goes about in all directions

with a donkey cart dealing, and probably brought the disease from elsewhere. Under the same roof as this first case, but in an adjoining house, an assistant mistress at the Board Schools lived, and whilst the child was peeling the mistress went daily to her duties at the Schools. It is easy to see from this how the disease became epidemic. The notification of the first case came too late, only when peeling was freely on. Had the grandmother or someone only called in a doctor at first, steps would have been taken which would probably have saved a good deal of subsequent sickness and expense, to say nothing of the Schools being closed for weeks, &c. It was decided after this by the Council to post up the requirements of the Notification of Infectious Diseases Act in any parish as soon as any case of infectious disease made its appearance in that parish, and showed any tendency to spread.

With regard to measles in 1897, there were two heavy visitations throughout the year. In the early part of the year there was a continuation in Perran and Budock of an epidemic which commenced before Christmas, 1896. The disease then appeared in Flushing and Mawnan, especially the latter place, where, owing to the number of children attacked, the Schools had to be closed. It then extended in February to Mabe and Constantine, in which latter parish the Schools were also closed. Every parish suffered from this epidemic: five deaths resulted. Up to September the district was free, but in that month the disease appeared in St. Gluvias, and chiefly in Ponsanooth. The Schools at Ponsanooth had to be closed, as almost every child was down with that complaint. I do not, however, think there were any deaths.

In May, June, and July, Whooping Cough was present in more than one parish, but more especially in Mylor. In April and May there were many cases of marked influenza in many parts.

From what I have written it will be seen that in 1897 the

district suffered very heavily from zymotic diseases. As soon as each case became known Mr. Chubb and I visited the house and took all necessary precautions : especially was this the case on the appearance of small-pox in Budock and scarlatina in Perran. Throughout the year we also visited the several parishes of this Authority, and a good deal of general sanitary work has resulted.

I.—DRAINAGE. Under this head the chief item of work accomplished was at Praze, St. Gluvias, where the drainage from Truro Hill and that portion of Praze lying within our district has been connected with the main drain which runs along the Commercial Road, and which belongs to the Urban District Council of Penryn. The Urban District Council of Penryn had for a long time complained that though they had gone to a great expense to lay a main to receive all the drainage from their portion of that district, and so, thereby, to prevent the pollution of the Praze river by sewage, as had formerly been the case, yet all the drainage from Truro Hill and a portion of Praze still discharged into the Praze River ; that is, that drainage from another Authority still continued to pollute a Penryn stream, when Penryn had done all it could to keep its own drainage from entering that stream. I am glad to say, however, that during the past year an arrangement was arrived at by the two Councils by which the drainage from the Rural District was allowed to discharge into the Urban Main. The work has been carried out satisfactorily, and the Praze river is now free from sewage pollution.

Other drainage work has been carried out in Budock, at Bareppa, and at Flushing.

II.—WATER SUPPLY. The Water Supply throughout the District is, on the whole, very good. Improvements have been effected in the water supply of Ponsanooth and at Flushing. At Constantine the surface supply for flushing the streets has been improved. The wells throughout the district have been

generally well looked after. A very great improvement has been effected at Bargus well, Perran. At Tregew, Mylor, two wells have been closed by an order from the Magistrates, the County Analyst having condemned the water from these wells for drinking purposes in consequence of pollution by sewage. The Council has called upon Lord Clinton to provide a pure supply in place of the closed-up wells. I hope his Lordship will soon do this, as a supply, and a pure one, is really necessary to this locality, although most of the houses have private wells.

With the exception of a portion of Budock, all Truro-hill and a portion of Praze in St. Gluvias, I believe the Council supplies all the rest of the district with water ; but these places mentioned by me derive their supply from the Falmouth Waterworks Company, and all houses that can possibly connect with the mains have been compelled to do so. As the Council knows, I have more than once laid before it complaints made by people using this supply, that the water at times is of bad colour, bad taste, and unfit for drinking.

In my opinion, the reason for all this is that no means for the proper filtration of the water before it leaves the reservoir to enter the mains is provided by the Company. This also is practically the opinion of the Urban District Councils of Penryn and Falmouth, who are more deeply concerned in the matter than this Authority is ; and I am glad to say that as a result of the stir that has been made about the water, the Company is now taking steps to properly filter the water before it reaches the public. Of course, during the agitation which arose when the question was to the fore, a great many unreasonable and not exactly true things were said about the Council, and the manner in which it allowed pollutions of all kinds, and from many sources, to enter the streams which eventually find their way into the storage and other ponds of the Waterworks Company. There were some who expected the Council to do impossibilities ; but it must be patent to most people that where a supply is derived from an extensive watershed, in which are farms, well-cultivated

and well-stocked with cattle, a certain amount of pollution is bound to get into the streams running through these farms, especially after heavy rains. At the same time there were certain things pointed out to this Council which endangered the purity of the supply and which could be attended to and remedied. All such had the immediate attention of this Council, and I do not see that there is anything going into the streams which come from the watershed from which the Falmouth Waterworks Company derives its water, which will prevent that water, if properly and scientifically treated by the Company after its reception into the storage pool and before its delivery to the public, from ranking among the best of drinking waters.

III.—EXCREMENT DISPOSAL. The general system of excrement disposal throughout the district is well-known, and with proper precautions works well. It is the only system possible in places where there is, as a rule, only such water supply as is sufficient for mere drinking and domestic purposes. In most parts there is not much to complain of, and when complaints do arise they are attended to individually. At Flushing, however, which is really a small town, the system is a bad one; a water-closet system ought to be substituted for it here, but with the present water supply such a system could not be worked. I have earlier in this Report, and in former Reports as well, pointed out the objectionable state of things in Flushing due to the present system of excrement disposal in that place, and have stated what this Council has done to make this system work with the least possible offence and danger to the public health. It will be for the New Council to decide whether this stain upon the fair name of Flushing shall be wiped out or not. As to Ponsanooth, since the cases of Typhoid Fever there, considerable improvement has been effected in the condition of the pits in that village. In Budock the pan-closet system works well. This place was a few years ago as bad as Flushing. The main sewer in the river works well and keeps the river free from all that was objectionable and so dangerous to health only a few

years ago. This Authority has cleaned up this river during the past year, but during the summer months this river should have constant attention, as people will throw all sorts of things into it in spite of the regular system of scavenging that is provided; and when there is no stream, or very little, whatever is thrown in lies where it falls and creates a dangerous nuisance in the hot weather.

IV.—SCAVENGING. This is done regularly in Budock and Flushing, but in no other place in the district.

During the past year Mr. Chubb and I have done a good deal of work under the Cowsheds, Milkshops, and Dairies Act. Every Cowshed and Dairy in the district has been visited, with the result that a considerable improvement is noticeable in their condition generally. In some cases entirely new cowsheds have replaced dilapidated and quite unsuitable ones. There was one prosecution under the Act.

With regard to the question of an Isolation Hospital, I do think that when the first case or cases of a dangerous infectious disease appear we should have the means near at hand for isolating such cases and for preventing a possible epidemic. It is well to be prepared before-hand, which is better than getting into a panic because we have neglected to provide the means when we had plenty of time to do so. As I have before advised, I think that this Council should enter into negotiations with neighbouring Authorities to build an Isolation Hospital which would be common to each Authority.

I have the honour, gentlemen, to remain

Your obedient servant,

JAMES BLAMEY,

Medical Officer of Health.

February 26th, 1898.

