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BOROUGH OF MARLBOROUGH.

ANNUAL REPORT OF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

GENTLEMEN.—In accordance with the instructions of the Local Government Board, I beg to present my annual report. The population at the last census was 3,632. I do not estimate the population as an increasing one, as it will be seen that the birth rate is practically stationary, and the number of inhabited houses also remains nearly stationary. Acreage, 196; number of persons per acre, 15.3; birth rate, 29.38; death rate, 19.9; infant mortality, 190.34; average death rate for six years to 1897, 14.6. Among the causes of death it will be seen that seven are from phthisis, viz., 16.6 per cent of the total deaths. The infant mortality is high, but in a small population this is a very variable quantity, having varied from 364 to 190.34 in the last seven years. Of the 74 1/2 urban districts in the county six have a lower death rate and six a higher death rate than Marlborough.

WATER.—The water supply continues to be most satisfactory. After the late drought the height of the water in the well was never less than 14 feet. Quarterly bacteriological examinations have been made both from the well and from the water. After passing through the mains from the reservoir the first examination was both qualitative and quantitative and showed that there were no deleterious organisms present and that the number of organisms had not increased after passing through the mains. All the reports showed that the water was excellent.

DRAINAGE.—The Local Government Board's inquiry with respect to Messrs Fairbank's scheme of sewerage and sewage disposal was held on January 7th, and the report sanctioning the scheme with slight alterations at the outfall works was received on December 10th, 1898, and the work is now to be proceeded with as soon as possible. The sewerage scheme proposes to use those sewers which are now supposed to be efficient, adding others for the collection of surface water, and to provide new sewers where the present ones are inefficient. The sewers are to be picked up by a sewer running parallel to the river. All the surface water possible will be allowed to pass into the old sewers. The sewage, after being ~~summed~~ ^{screened} is to be pumped by centrifugal pumps to the outfall works, which are to consist of septic tanks and biological filters, with the addition of land over which to pass the effluent if necessary. It is satisfactory to find that expert opinion is gradually more and more tending to a belief that the solution of the difficulty with respect to sewage disposal is to be found by calling to our aid the help of many different kinds of micro-organisms, in the first place for the solution of the solids in the septic tanks, and secondly for the conversion of putrescible organic matter into innocuous mineral substances in solution in the biological filters, or what have been aptly termed the natural bacteriological laboratories.

HOUSE DRAINAGE.—It would be a great gain during the carrying out of the drainage if definite regulations were drawn up for many details which are now left to the fancy of the occupier of the house or of the builder he employs. Take for instance the construction of water closets, which are sure to become more numerous with the increased facility for drainage. Obviously the size of the flushing tank where the public water supply is used becomes a public and not a private question, and the form of the closet used affects the amount of water which will be necessary for effectual flushing. There are a considerable number of w.c.'s in the borough without any flushing tank.

GULLIES IN HEED-STREET.—The street gullies in Heed-street which I have noticed in previous reports are now being replaced by new sanitary gullies.

CASETTES.—There are still many cesspit privies existent and these in some of the smaller yards where several cottages abut on the same yard are often very offensive. It is to be hoped that the example of some of the owners will be followed and the present opportunity taken while the drainage works are in construction to substitute w.c.'s for these barbarous and filthy contrivances.

COTTAGES.—The demand for cottages in the borough is still greater than the supply, and I feel sure that much ill-health is caused by overcrowding in dark insanitary houses. It has only been found necessary to abate one case of overcrowding, but this hardly represents the real state of affairs, since several old, closely-packed houses without any back premises are filled to their utmost capacity. There is no doubt that one of the greatest boons to the town would be the erection of more well-built cottages.

BAKEHOUSES.—The bakehouses are all well kept and clean.

COWSHEDS.—The cowsheds are generally well kept. All have the water supplied from the mains.

SLAUGHTER-HOUSES.—It has from time to time been necessary to make complaints about every slaughter-house in the borough, and on several occasions infractions of the bye-laws have been noticed. There is but one which has uniformly been found in a really satisfactory state of cleanliness, but even then animals had been kept too long in the pens before slaughtering. The construction of some of the others renders it next to impossible that they should be thoroughly sanitary. It would be well if a copy of the bye-laws relating to the slaughter-houses were hung in a conspicuous position in each. I have a very strong feeling in favour of a public abattoir, even in a town of the size of Marlborough, regulated by the sanitary authority, and according to the present state of our knowledge of the causes of disease there are many arguments in favour of this arrangement.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.—There have been fourteen cases of infectious disease during the year, six of scarlet fever, six of diphtheria, and two of enteric fever. The two latter were obviously imported. All the scarlet fever cases were isolated, and it is satisfactory that the disease did not spread.

ISOLATION HOSPITAL.—It has been decided to build a caretaker's cottage on the premises of the Isolation Hospital, which will do away with many of the objections to it. Where there were other children in the infected families notifications have been sent to the school managers to exclude them from school for a definite period.

PTYRISIS.—I have already mentioned that there were seven deaths from ptyrisis. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this is an infectious disease and requires many precautions of disinfection. Much has been said about the notification of this disease, but from its character and course this is very difficult; nevertheless, it would be well that all deaths from ptyrisis should be immediately notified to the authority and disinfection undertaken as in other infectious diseases. The disinfection has been carried out by the Sanitary Inspector, and the bedding, &c., has been disinfected in the rural authority's steam disinfecter, under his supervision. Compensation has been paid in respect of stripping and lime washing, etc., in one house.

FISH CONSUMED.—Two cases of fish belonging to a salmon from Striden were seized and condemned in the market on August 13th, during the very hot weather. (Signed) THOMAS H. HAYDON, M.O.H.

Screened.

