

Mr. John Spear's report to the Local Government Board on the prevalence of "fever" in the urban sanitary district of Maryport.

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Mr. John Spear's Report to the Local Government Board on the prevalence of "Fever" in the Urban Sanitary District of Maryport.

GEORGE BUCHANAN,
Medical Department,
April 13th, 1882.

On the 24th June 1881 the Local Government Board received information from the Registrar-General that "fever" was prevalent in Maryport. Amongst a population of 8,126, eight deaths, three of which were ascribed to enteric and two to typhus fever, had been registered within the preceding three weeks; and the Board accordingly requested information of the Sanitary Authority as to the nature of the fever, the number of ascertained attacks, and the condition of infected localities. In reply, a report by the Medical Officer of Health was forwarded. Fever was spoken of as epidemic, and, in regard to its nature, as having "from the mild typhoid form assumed the form of typhus." No indication was given of any action by the Sanitary Authority under these circumstances. On the contrary, statutory deficiencies were spoken of as likely to render any such action, beyond provision "for the cleanly condition of the streets," even if attempted, futile. During the following (the third) quarter five deaths were again registered from fever—three from typhus, one from enteric, and one from "low" fever. On the 4th of January of the present year I received instructions to visit the district and inquire into the nature and circumstances of the outbreak. During my visit, lasting from the 12th to the 14th of January, I saw two cases of fever, the only two remaining at that time under treatment at a stage when a diagnosis could be made. Both were unequivocal attacks of true typhus. One, especially, was associated in its causation with many preceding cases; it was one, indeed, of a long and unbroken series that had constituted the major part of the outbreak, and its diagnosis therefore was possessed of a wider application. Several persons recovering from the disease were likewise seen, and they presented all the appearance—in marked distinction from the aspect of typhoid cases—of typhus convalescents. The epidemic visitation which formed the immediate subject of this inquiry, was, it may be said with certainty, one of typhus fever.

The origin of the infection cannot now be determined. There were rumours of earlier cases of "fever," and two deaths, it is to be noted, were registered from "typhoid" during the last months of 1880; but the first undoubted case, and the one from which apparently all subsequent mischief sprang, occurred in a wretched crowded tenement in Eaglesfield Street. The sufferer here was a man aged 39, living with a woman and eight children, and associating with the sailors of vessels trading between Maryport and places in Ireland. This man died on April 18th, 1881, after a few days' illness, the cause of death being registered as "bronchitis," although the medical attendant, from subsequent events, now recognizes the case as having been one of fever. A brother-in-law, aged 29, who had assisted in nursing the deceased man, was the next to sicken; he died on the 6th of May. His death, likewise now ascribed to "fever," was registered as from "meningitis." The house this man occupied, in Bank Lane, consisted of two small rooms and an attic; it was built on the back-to-back plan, and the ventilation of the rooms was most imperfect. Here lived five adults and five children, and they all, with the exception of one or two of the children, caught the fever. The mother-in-law, one of the inmates, died on May 25th from, as registered, "heart disease, enteric fever," duration 14 days. A sister-in-law, aged 29, another inmate, died the day before, her death being registered as from "tubercular meningitis, convulsions." A woman who came to nurse the sufferers was likewise infected, and, going then to her own home, infected her sister. These two people, together with three others from the house in Bank Lane, were eventually removed to the fever hospital of the Guardians. Meanwhile the fever was spreading in and from the house first invaded. The children of the deceased man, and the children of the woman with whom he lived, caught it; and the former, being removed on their father's death, and whilst still ailing, to the house of an aunt, infected that family. The aunt died on the

31st of May, her death being registered as from "enteric fever," of 24 days' duration, and her mother, who lived with her, died four days later, having, it was said, exhibited symptoms of the prevailing malady, although the death was registered as from "old age and exhaustion." The disease further extended to the family of another brother, living in a poor, ill-ventilated, "back-to-back" house, in a court in Kirby Street. Here six persons suffered. Clothing taken from the person of one of the patients before mentioned was deposited for two or three weeks, without precaution, in a wash-house used in common by several families. A neighbour who handled these clothes contracted the fever; it spread throughout her family. Her mother, who came to nurse her, caught it likewise, and took it to her own squalid home. There, in a house connected with a public bake-house, the whole of the inmates, consisting of three adults and six children, eventually suffered; and the three adults died. The house, which was reported by the Health Officer to be totally unfit for habitation, was, after the second death, closed by the Sanitary Authority, the remaining inmates being removed to the hospital of the Guardians; and this is the only instance in which, amidst all this fever and urgent need for action, the Sanitary Authority appear to have intervened.

It would be tedious to follow further the progress of the epidemic. The above are fairly representative facts as to the manner in which the infection, throughout its course, extended, and as to the sort of house and household chosen for its invasion. Considerably over 100, probably nearly 200, cases occurred; and between April and the date of my visit 17 deaths at least must be reckoned. Some 53 cases were treated in the little fever hospital belonging to the Guardians. Removal thence, effected under the orders of the Poor Law Authority, was resorted to for the most part only as the sufferers came to be deprived, by extension of the sickness, of the aid of their friends. It was accomplished often late on in the progress of cases, and sometimes infected individuals would be left at home whilst others were removed. In a word, the hospital was used, as a Guardians' hospital should be used, for the relief of destitution; but the promptitude and thoroughness required when the control of a spreading disease is the object to be gained was wholly wanting. Moreover, no measures of precaution seem to have been applied in respect of the vacated dwellings; nor in the case of infected individuals left at their homes. The Inspector of Nuisances stated that in several cases he had given verbal directions as to disinfection and cleansing; but no disinfection had been carried out under his supervision, nor under that of the Medical Officer of Health, and no formal notices to disinfect were served.

The Sanitary Condition of the Town.—Maryport is a town that one might expect would harbour typhus should that disease once make its appearance there. The houses, almost everywhere, are built on a quite insufficient area. Standing in the streets one sees on either side to all appearances ordinary dwellings; but, entering these, there is found to be no through communication, often no through ventilation whatever, to the back; and, returning to the street, in the line of houses there will be discovered narrow arched openings, and these lead to crowded and mostly squalid courts, the houses of one side of which back the houses of the street just visited, whilst the houses of the opposite side back the houses of the street just beyond. Or a more common adaptation of this general plan is for four streets to be built in the form of a square facing outwards. The quadrangular space thus enclosed is not, however, left vacant; in it are huddled similar small and squalid courts and squares, deficient often in light as well as in ventilation, and entered by passages similar to those above described. Then as to the condition of individual dwellings, a very large number that I visited I found wholly unfit for habitation; not only because of their crowded surroundings, but by reason also of their own defects—want of light and ventilation, dilapidation, dampness, absence of sanitary conveniences. In many of the dwellings the rooms are extremely small; the filthiness of them is really shocking; and the factor of them often such as to compel an immediate retreat from the opened door. Windows are commonly not made to open, or a single small pane on hinges is all the means of ventilation provided. There are many cellars wholly unfit for habitation, judged of by any standard whatever, that are occupied separately as dwellings. Some of these are wholly beneath the surface of the ground; and sometimes a back cellar, receiving its sole supply of light and ventilation from the cellar in front, will be used by several persons as a sleeping apartment. Overcrowding is very common, partly owing, it is said, to the number of labourers now employed on new and extensive dock works; and not unfrequently it is of the most indecent kind.

The town is as yet unsewered, and the open channels which take the place of sewers, and down which, along the front streets, slop water and other foul liquid is discharged, are



often defective, as regards their original construction, their size, gradient, and condition of repair. The subsoil is consequently saturated with sewage, and little pools of sewage may often be seen collected along the course of the gutters, both in the streets and in the yards. The effluvia arising from this condition of things is distinctly perceptible in the streets of Maryport even in cold weather. It is said that men are specially employed in keeping these channels clear; but, notwithstanding this, their condition is as I have stated.

The disposal of solid excrement is effected for the most part by what purports to be the pail system. It is probable that in the older parts of the town most of the houses were at one time unprovided with privy accommodation of any sort, and many are in that condition still. Others, and these the larger number, are now provided with pail-closets of a very primitive kind. The closet is often situated in an inconvenient, and to the scavengers inaccessible, position, and this I noticed not only in the case of old property but in regard to some houses of recent construction; it is, in the case of old property, (in the new there is improvement,) rough, and often flimsy in construction; the seat may thus be a mere wooden bar, and the receptacle an ordinary zinc pail. Not uncommonly, moreover, this privy is supplemented in tenement property by a large common ash-pit, which speedily becomes almost as foul as the old-fashioned middenstead. For the removal of the refuse, carts belonging to the Authority traverse the streets almost daily, and the people are expected to bring the pails to the streets to be emptied. But the Authority exercises no efficient supervision to secure this being done; and it is a duty liable to be neglected, not only by careless people but by others, on account of the inconvenience and disgust attendant on its performance. As a matter of fact these privies are generally throughout the town insufficiently attended to; the receptacles were often found full, and still oftener to be in want of a thorough scouring. This latter process, since the Authority make no provision for it, and since the tenants when it is done by them have to discharge the foul washings, to their neighbours' disgust, down the open street gutters, is scarcely ever performed.

Defective as this form of pail-closet is, and insufficient as is its mode of scavenging, yet it is distinctly preferable to the old middenstead. This latter erection is to be seen in all its offensiveness in some of the courts of the town, as well as in the yards of some houses of recent construction. The scavenging of such receptacles is in the hands of a contractor.

Water Supply.—Waterworks were established by the Sanitary Authority in 1868. The water is that of Bassenthwaite Lake, and is pumped from a mill-race, at a place some eight miles distant from the town. It is filtered before distribution, and is said to be a pure water. I did not make a personal inspection of the source of supply; but the waterworks manager reported to me his opinion that, although houses are situated near the stream above the intake, there appeared to be no opportunity of the water becoming polluted.

Lodging Houses.—Only three houses are at present licensed as common lodging-houses, and these I found, in common with others that ought to be so licensed, overcrowded. The Maryport Improvement (Town and Harbour) Act of 1866 (amended by a more recent Act) contains a provision forbidding lodgers to occupy any room that does not afford to each inmate a space equal to 400 cubic feet. The framers of this enactment were probably not ignorant of the tendency of that class which forms so large a proportion of the population of Maryport to huddle together in insufficient space, nor of the insufficiency, as regards space and ventilation, of so many of the dwellings; and their local Act shows that they rightly appreciated one of the special dangers to which the town is exposed. Unfortunately, however, as may be inferred from what has preceded, no attempt was made to enforce this enlightened provision; had it been judiciously applied, the town must have been in a position superior to that which it now occupies. The injurious tradition which regarded overcrowding even of the most indecent kind as of no account, would by this time have been broken down; building operations would have been stimulated by the demand for additional accommodation; and such a disease as typhus fever, it may be confidently affirmed, could scarcely have obtained a foothold.

Byelaws.—Building byelaws were only obtained by the Authority in 1880. They follow closely the model byelaws issued by the Local Government Board for the guidance of Sanitary Authorities; and it is to be hoped they will be carefully enforced. Byelaws with respect to nuisances, with respect to common lodging-houses, and to houses let in lodgings, have also recently been obtained.

Hospital Accommodation.—It has already been said that the Authority possesses no hospital for the isolation of infectious diseases, and abundant evidence was afforded by

the late outbreak that the little hospital belonging to the Guardians, as now made use of, cannot be regarded as in any sense a substitute for this necessary provision. The sanitary condition, moreover, of this hospital, is, it must be added, most defective. It consists of the upper story of what was originally a brewery; the rooms beneath being now used as store-rooms by a rag and bone dealer. The effluvia from his collections penetrate, it is said, to the wards of the hospital; and the dealer in his turn complains that, owing to leakage from the hospital drains, sewage percolates to his stores. The privy-midden of the hospital, used for the reception of the excreta of fever patients, is built against the boundary wall of a public thoroughfare. The hospital, at the time of the last outbreak, was greatly overcrowded; and, as consequently might be expected, the nurse and her husband in attending upon the patients contracted the fever.

Sanitary Administration.—The sanitary affairs of Maryport are in the hands of the "Town and Harbour Trustees,"—a body consisting of eighteen representatives, elected in equal proportion by the ratepayers and shipowners of the town and port on the one hand, and by the Lady of the Manor, and the coal-owners of the district, on the other. In the active pursuit of a policy, described as a liberal and far-sighted one, in respect of harbour and dock interests, it would seem that the sanitary interests of the town have been sadly overlooked. It is certain that beyond the provision of a water supply fourteen years ago, the provision of some means of scavenging, and the making of the bye-laws, there is nothing of note to be recorded as having been effected by the Authority. A Medical Officer of Health was appointed in 1870, he being paid at first by fee, latterly by a salary of 25*l.* per annum, for his services. The Inspector of Nuisances, who is also surveyor and waterworks manager, receives a salary, [as Inspector, of 30*l.* a year; and lately an Inspector of Lodging-houses, at a salary of 15*l.*, has been appointed. The records show, however, that the ordinary work of abatement of nuisances and of the removal of conditions injurious to health, which in a town like Maryport should never be allowed to flag, has been almost totally in abeyance. Difficulties, legal and other, in this regard, have frequently been referred to in the reports of the Medical Officer of Health; but such difficulties, so far as I am able to judge, might easily have been surmounted. I will give an instance of this. On July 5th, 1881, the Inspector of Nuisances reported that in a cellar dwelling at 22½ King Street, consisting of two rooms, 13 persons were living, so that the dwelling was overcrowded. The cellars, as such, were occupied unlawfully; together they afforded only some 2,200 cubic feet of air space; an insufficient space, taking the requirements of the Authority's own Act as a basis of computation, for six individuals. Not one single requirement of section 72 of the Public Health Act, with respect to existing cellars, was observed; the cellars were dark and damp; the ceilings at an average height of only 14 inches above the level of the adjacent ground; the window of the front cellar was not made to open, and in that at the back a tiny pane of glass, about 8 inches square, was on hinges,—and that was all. The report of the Inspector was referred to the Medical Officer of Health; and that officer, it is recorded, "did not consider this overcrowding." The Authority accepted this decision; and the cellar, with several others equally unfit for human occupation, is inhabited to this day.

For a long time the Authority have resisted the wishes of the Local Government Board that they should provide themselves with information respecting the mortality of their district; but this information is in future, I understand, to be obtained.

JOHN SPEAR.

Recommendations.

1. The Authority should without delay cause a house-to-house inspection of their district to be instituted, with a view to ascertain the nuisances that call for abatement under the Public Health Act. For this purpose the town should be divided into sections (a very easy matter in Maryport), and the record of such an inspection as above, with respect to one or other of these sections, should be presented at each monthly meeting of the Authority, until the whole work is completed. The record should show (a) the houses overcrowded; (b) the cellars occupied unlawfully as dwellings; (c) the houses that from various causes are unfit for habitation; (d) other nuisances arising from structural defects of houses or premises; *e.g.*, from dilapidation, want of light or ventilation, dampness, absence of privy accommodation or defective character of the same, absence or inadequacy of paving and channelling of yards and other open surfaces. And this information being before them, action should be taken by the Authority under section 94, section 97, section 73, or section 150 of the Public

Health Act, 1875, or other provision applicable to the case in question. Nuisances arising from the act or default of the tenant, such as from the want of cleansing of rooms, or staircases, or yards, or privies, should be dealt with immediately by the Inspector of Nuisances. Notice under section 50 of the Public Health Act, for the periodical removal of manure, &c., should be given by the Authority, and duly enforced.

[It would facilitate the abatement of overcrowding in the town, if it were practicable for the Authority, as Harbour Trustees, to erect temporary huts or barracks for the accommodation of the large number of young unmarried men now employed by them upon dock and harbour works.]

2. The Authority should devise an improvement scheme whereby some of the courts in the most crowded neighbourhoods may be swept away, streets being opened out, and the ventilation of the remaining dwellings improved.

3. They should take in hand the sewerage of the town; the street gutters being left to their proper use—the removal of surface water.

4. Sewerage being provided, the watercloset system of excrement removal would be found the one best suited to the requirements of Maryport. Meanwhile, privy-middens and large ashpits should be removed; the latter being replaced, if necessary, by small movable ash-tubs. Pail closets, which will admit afterwards of ready conversion into waterclosets, should be constructed under proper supervision, and in situations accessible to the scavengers. The emptying of these privies should be effected at more frequent and regular intervals, and under strict supervision. It would be advisable that the Authority should provide for the cleansing of the privy pails; and for this purpose clean pails should be brought by the scavengers to replace those taken away to be emptied and cleansed.

5. Every effort should be made to obtain early information of the appearance in the district of infectious diseases; and provision should be made, by the erection of a hospital, for the immediate isolation of those sufferers from an infectious disease who are without such proper lodging or accommodation as will admit of their being retained at their own homes without danger to others. Provision should likewise be made for the proper disinfection of clothing and bedding by the Authority; and a mortuary should be provided. Sections 120, 121, 122, and 126 to 129, inclusive, of the Public Health Act, having reference to the spread of infection, should be systematically enforced.

Health Act, 1875, or other provision applicable to the case in question. Inasmuch as the Act of 1875, or other provision applicable to the case in question, is not in force, the provisions of the Act of 1875, or other provision applicable to the case in question, should be given by the Authority, and only enforced.

It would facilitate the abatement of overcrowding in the town, if it were practicable for the Authority, as aforesaid, to erect temporary huts or barracks for the accommodation of the large number of young persons now employed in the town.

2. The Authority should devise an improvement scheme whereby some of the courts in the most crowded neighbourhoods may be swept away, streets being opened out, and the ventilation of the remaining dwellings improved.

3. They should take in hand the drainage of the town; the street gutters being left to their proper use - the removal of surface water.

4. Sewerage being provided, the water-closet system of excrement removal would be found the one best suited to the requirements of the town. Mechanical, gas, and large receptacles should be removed; the latter being replaced, if necessary, by fresh water-closets, which will admit of the removal of excrement in a more sanitary manner. Water-closets should be constructed under proper supervision, and in addition to the water-closet system, the existing latrine pits should be closed up, and the excrement therefrom removed, and under strict supervision. It would be desirable that the Authority should provide for the cleaning of the privy pits; and for this purpose clean pits should be brought by the cartage to the pits, and the pits to be emptied and cleaned.

5. Every effort should be made to obtain early information of the occurrence in the town of infectious diseases; and provision should be made, by the erection of a hospital, for the immediate isolation of those who contract infectious diseases who are without such proper lodging or accommodation as will admit of their being retained in their own homes without danger to others. Provision should likewise be made for the proper disinfection of clothing and bedding by the Authority; and a mortuary should be provided. Sections 120, 121, 122, and 123 to 129, inclusive, of the Public Health Act, having reference to the spread of infection, should be systematically enforced.