

The Health Department, Its activities ##### - and its needs.

This plan of introducing us to our own city is a good one. It is time that we were getting better acquainted. Mayor Simon was right in saying that usually we are familiar and interested only with the conditions and improvements that effect us personally. # Beyond that we rarely go. We know the price of eggs - we have to pay for them.

Those of us who are on water meters have learned that water meters are not always bad things and we have developed a sort of a community # responsibility (such as we read about in the "Appeal to Reason" - a community interest in leaking faucets that would have been impossible under the old system. Some highly developed citizens really find pleasure and take pride in the growth of the city and in creditable public improvements. They look from the heights into the future and see a great and wonderful city. But too unfortunately there are many whose interests begin and end with their immediate personal necessities, comforts and pleasures. These people see no need for more than one city park and without the animals that would be a dreary place. A City Beautiful is a ridiculous idea and garbage incinerators - Phew! What's the use with bill-boards and gulches so handy? If they have a motto it is: "Don't Worry! Three meals a day and a nickelodiam

and life is complete.

The activities of the health department are easy to follow but the results are hard to check up. The failures show on the surface but the successes are indicated only in the comparative death returns covering a long period of time. The function of the department is to prevent disease and its existence is due to the well established fact that an ounce of preventive is ^{worth} ~~better than~~ a pound of cure.

Previous to the adoption of the present charter the city can scarcely be said to have had a health department. Aside from the work in connection with the police station and the care of smallpox cases but little was ~~attempted~~ attempted. A health office was authorized by the charter and a health ~~board~~ board created and given authority over all matters pertaining to the health of the city. Four years ^{ago} this board reorganized the department giving the health officer authority over every division of the department and holding him responsible to the board.

The health board is comprised of five members: the Mayor, the Chief of Police and three physicians. These three physicians serve without ~~compensation~~ compensation freely devoting their time and special knowledge to the best service of the city. The value of this work is not fully appreciated by the general public. Consider for a moment what it would

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mean to the city if the city attorney had an advisory board of three able lawyers to consult with him concerning all law matters wherein the city might be interested. Suppose the building inspector had a similar board of three qualified architects and the city engineer had a board of three experienced engineers on whose advise and help he might rely. The advisability of dividing authority and responsibility may be ~~questioned~~ doubtful but the value of ^{such} ~~the~~ counsel cannot be questioned.

The body politic differs from the human body in one important particular. When a department of the human body is creating a disturbance something is wrong. But when a department of the body politic is operating too quietly it should be stirred up and examined; there is apt to be something wrong with its circulation. A startling innovation is occasionally helpful. It attracts attention and ^{may} thereby instill ~~new~~ new life into a moribund institution.

Over two years ago

The even tenor of the ways of the health department was rudely interrupted by the advent of a contralto in the title role. This innovation attracted the attention of the city to the fact that there ~~was a health department and while the wisdom of the board was questioned~~ ~~this action on the part~~ was a health department and while the wisdom of the board was questioned

its courage was generally recognized and commended. The more timid citizens who had never ~~thought of a health department before~~ thought of a health department before became alarmed. They prophesied openly and awaited the impending calamity in a state of nervous apprehension bordering on collapse.

The public interest thus fixed upon the department has increased of course and has stimulated its activities. An ambulance service was installed.

To show how an ambulance service might reduce the death rate of a city

it is only necessary to mention that all of those poor people who died

at the St. Vincent Sanitorium from Meningitis during the epidemic of that

disease in the early months of 1907 were carted there in an express

wagon. The driver said that they often screamed with pain from the be-

ginning to the end of that rough ride and how many deaths were determined by

such treatment at a critical period of specific brain fever can never

be known. That was a ~~shameful thing~~ a shameful thing.

To a person unfamiliar with the facts it would seem ~~incredible~~ incredible

that the ambulance service of this great city is less than two years old

By the exercise of diplomacy a bacteriological service was secured to the city. This service is valuable in many ways and without it it is absolutely impossible to diagnose mild forms of diphtheria from

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from common sore throats or to determine when it is safe to raise a diphtheria quarantine. ~~#####~~ Since the installation of that work about two years ago the deaths from diphtheria have been reduced more than fifty per cent. This is probably due to early diagnosis and consequent proper treatment, but more largely to the detection of mild cases and the prevention thereby of the malignant ones that might otherwise follow.

It was not so easy to get a school inspection. To demonstrate its usefulness about thirty good physicians volunteered to serve for one term in their ~~###~~ home districts. One of these found everything going along very quietly in the school assigned to him but he detected about sixty cases of itch in the first week and stirred up a regular furore. The diagnosis was of course questioned and the bacteriologist called upon to settle the dispute which he did ~~#####~~ to the satisfaction of both sides, for he not only demonstrated the presence of mites which greatly pleased the inspector and his friends, but the assistant who did most of the work became infected and developed the disease which those on the
greatly pleased ~~###~~ other side of the controversy.

After considerable opposition a paid school inspection was added to the health department at the beginning of the fall term of school

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a year ago. There was a good deal of complaint and unfavorable criticism at first, mostly from people whose children had itch or nits ##

but the merit of the work is no longer in question. Over a thousand cases of pediculosis were reported by the inspectors during the first

years work and while those ~~#####~~ that sort of thing who are accustomed to ~~#####~~ in their homes

still resent interference, those parents whose children acquired vermin

in the schools are staunch supporters of any means that promises to

prevent ~~#####~~ the recurrence of such visitations. Compared with the cases of contagious

diseases excluded ^{from the schools} by the inspectors this matter of pediculosis is #

very trivial; ~~#####~~ but a louse is such a real thing - such a pal-

pable entity, that when it comes to presenting a convincing argument

for the maintainance of constant and vigilant inspection the ocular

demonstration of robust, crawling vermin leaves the unseen though

deadly bacillus of diphtheria far behind. ~~and~~ *W* With the bacillus of

Diphtheria in mind let us consider how the school inspector with his

culture tube co-operates with the bacteriologist to reduce the death

rate. When a child with a sore throat is found in school a culture is

taken and turned over to the bacteriologist and it is knowh within a

few hours whether or not the case is diphtheria and an epidemic may be

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prevented in this way. Within the last few days

such ^a ~~ease~~ ^{has} have

been excluded from a certain large school in the city.

The last acquired and one of the most important divisions of the health department is the milk inspection. This was authorized by the council last spring and made a fair beginning. It was simply the first step in a very important branch of the service. For some reason the work

did not thrive. During the month of August it ~~#####~~ exhibited

marked especially a quiet

~~a profound~~ sort of ante-mortem quiet, but just as it seemed tottering

to its early and ignominious finish a cry went up from the little children to which the whole city responded. The effect of unwholesome milk on the death rate may be approximately estimated from the death certificates of the babies who died during the months of August and September.

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Now comes an activity of the health department ~~###~~ may be properly

designated a pernicious activity: our system of quarantine. It is the system followed by most cities although some are growing out of it - and

might be well

in this it ~~#####~~ to have Portland in the van instead of the rear

of a good thing. Our system of quarantine is a choice of evils. It is the best we can do under existing conditions, but existing conditions ought to

be better. When a dangerous contagious disease develops in one member of

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a family the home is usually quarantined and often several healthy persons, usually helpless, susceptible little children are penned in and subjected to a forced infection. This is a wicked system and every person who dies as a result of it is - well, every life so lost is sacrificed unnecessarily. The healthy members of a family where a contagious disease develops have just as much right to protection as the rest of the public, and there is no good reason why such a family, in addition to the misfortune of ill-health, should be called upon to bear the expense of public protection. Quarantine is maintained for the protection of the public and the public should pay for it.

Every city should provide well equipped and well managed isolation hospitals to which all first cases of contagious disease should be immediately removed. This would relieve the families of the sick of the burden and danger of a system that must from its very nature be ineffectual. It is ineffectual because it conflicts with self-interest. It ~~imposes~~ imposes a financial burden upon those who are often least able to bear it. It shuts off wage earners from their employment or makes it necessary for them to live away from home at an increased expense. It frequently endangers the life of the mother of a young family - the most valuable life

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in the world. It extends the period of quarantine sometimes for weeks and months by the disease passing successively from the convalescing to the other members of the family, and this may go on until all of those subjected to the process are either immunized or dead. It is comparatively useless to the public, for it depends upon the co-operation of its victims and they soon begin to feel that they are getting the worst of it - and as a matter of fact they are right. With all of its inconveniences, discomforts and dangers this unjust, inefficient, go-as-you-please system is very ~~#####~~ expensive. Indeed it is extremely wasteful. The cost imposed upon householders of separately maintaining ^{to} patients under quarantine is at least five or six times greater than ^{for the} ~~the cost of maintaining such patients~~ ^{and} by contract in the separate pavilions of an organized hospital.

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In regard to the needs of the department ^a ~~the~~ garbage incinerator and a proper garbage gathering system are ~~##~~ among ^{its} ~~the~~ most pressing needs ^{at} ~~of~~ the present time. The old crematory and ~~#####~~ its surrounding dump are pretty bad, ~~#####~~ but not so bad as ~~off~~ garbage wagons. The dump at least stays in one place while the ~~#####~~ wagons - reeking, leaking nuisances trail all over the

city at all times of day and night.

An incinerator would have been built ~~##~~ before this time had it not been for the difficulty of securing a proper site. No greater mistake can be made than that of putting an expensive public plant in the wrong place and the present site is unquestionably the wrong place. The garbage incinerator or destructor should ~~##~~ either be out of the city and reached by ~~###~~ properly constructed garbage cars or it should be ~~##~~ in the garbage ~~#####~~ producing district of the city ~~#####~~ so that the nuisance and expense of hauling might be reduced to a minimum. An English engineer standing on our present site and looking to the north and the east and the west and seeing nothing but river and hills turned to the south and asked how far all the garbage had to be hauled from that one direction. Then he covered the whole situation by remarking: "This site must have been chosen because of its inaccessibility and inadaptability to the purpose for which it was chosen."

~~#####~~ The most beautiful city in Europe is Budapest. The reason that it is the most beautiful city is that beauty dwells in the eye of the beholder and Budapest looks like

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Portland. The ~~###~~ beautiful blue Danube (which was mud-colored when we saw it) flows through that city as our beautiful Willamette flows through Portland. There are the heights on one side and the broad ~~#####~~ ~~#####~~ stretch of the city on the other. Their natural advantages are not so great as ours but they have made the most of them. Their river is embanked as ours should be and it is not decorated with back doors and overhung with outhouses and befouled with broken ~~re~~ reeking sewers as our beautiful river is. This condition hasn't even the excuse of economy for the yearly expense resulting from damages due to the rising of the river would soon build an embankment through which the sewers could be run to deep water and in the end ^{it} would be both a public and private gain. It may be argued that labor is cheaper in Budapest and that argument can be met with the answer that we have more money and can afford to pay more. They have had more time. About this there ~~can~~ be no question, ~~###~~ but to a certain group of Americans who entered a hotel in Budapest some time ago the most striking first impression was a sign written in English and in red letters which read: "DO IT NOW!"