

ALLEN (J.K.)

Some sanitary memoranda





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### SOME SANITARY MEMORANDA.

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IN order to produce a sanitary reform among the people at large, two things are essential: first, sanitary literature must be placed in the hands of the people much more freely than it is at present; and, second, it must be of a character which will appeal directly to that indefinite part of a person's knowledge called common sense. A sanitarian is sometimes looked upon by a certain and large class of people as a vague theorist, and when he suggests that bad-smelling water (usually from "the best well in the town") should not be drunk, or that certain kinds of food should not be eaten because of the liability of these articles producing sickness, he is said to be "too particular" "more nice than wise," etc. Some people would, seemingly, rather live as they have in years past, sublimely ignorant of the dangers lurking in articles of food and drink, and attribute the sickness and deaths in their families to an "inscrutable providence," than to be compelled to avoid a favorite diet or to dig a new well. It is on this class of people that a certain amount of sanitary work must be done by our boards of health. Peculiar lines of work must be carried out in order to successfully combat the peculiar ideas of the persons mentioned.

"Out of sight, out of mind," is too often illustrated in the domestic arrangements of many of our town and country homes. A foul-smelling, disease-breeding refuse barrel at the rear of a finely-kept front may be frequently found. It is in the sole charge of the servants, to whom it is a catch-all for everything not otherwise disposed of. It may not be noticeable in the daytime unless

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in close proximity to it, but at night, when the "wind goes down with the sun," and ozone, the beneficent natural disinfectant, is present in less quantity, the emanations from this foul reservoir may poison the air for the sleeping innocents for a half block around. If farmers could all be persuaded that good flesh or milk could not be produced from a mass of sour, decayed and decomposed material, those abominations called "swill barrels" would be less frequent, and table-refuse, which could not be fed while fresh, could be buried or sewered away by the infiltration process to be oxydized by exposure to earth, and air, and water.

It is quite difficult, apparently, for some persons to realize that clean, sweet-tasting and good-smelling water may contain contamination from the privy-vault and cess-pool some seventy-five or one hundred feet distant. They will believe that water percolates in little streamlets through the ground and gathers in the well or in larger streamlets, or veins, but the moment it is insinuated that some of these streamlets may come directly from the privy-vault, the statement is considered ridiculous. To what extent water may thus be contaminated, is shown in a striking manner by the fact that in about 15,000 barrels of material removed from privy-vaults in one year by an odorless excavating company working in Michigan, only 2,000 barrels could be pumped out by the "odorless" process proper, the remaining 13,000 barrels being of so solid a nature that it had to be removed by the "pitting" process, which is simply taking the fecal matter out with pails. This shows that nearly all the liquid matter originally deposited, and all water soaking in the vaults during moist seasons, had run out into the soil, and perhaps carried in its train germs of typhoid fever, dysentery, etc., which on being deposited in wells, springs, and other sources of water-supply, are taken into the systems of unsuspecting victims and a "vicious circle" of sickness and death is established. Could the dry-earth system be more fully introduced in places where a lack of a sewerage system renders water-closets useless, and could the discharge of patients ill from infectious diseases be thoroughly disinfected by copperas water before being buried from any well, the danger of contamination of the water-supply in this manner would be much lessened. "We have decidedly to look to our wells."

It is frequently the case that drinking-water is contaminated in some manner other than by drains and vaults. An instance

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came under the writer's notice recently where some of the several cases of illness in a family, occupying an apparently healthy house and location, were suspected of having been caused by the use of well-water. On being subjected to test it looked clean, smelled pure and tasted good. Heisch's test, however, showed the presence of organic substance, and, after standing several days, a heavy organic sediment formed near the bottom of the jar. The well was cleaned and the remains of several large frogs were removed. This shows the necessity of having the tops of wells tightly covered so as to preclude the possibility of cats, rats, frogs, etc., getting in to not only end their own life but to cause an uneasy sensation in the stomachs of "drawers of water."

Another unsanitary object often found in dwellings of the more unpretentious kind is the "wood-box," generally placed behind the stove, and in the winter or after a few days or weeks of wet fall weather, a search will nearly always be rewarded by finding one or more inches of decomposing wood, chips, bark, etc., in the bottom of the box. This, on being stirred up, emits an odor decidedly unwholesome in its nature. It is a question being studied with some interest by Prof. Brewer, Dr. Kellogg, and others, as to the effect of decomposing of wood upon health, and Dr. Kellogg states that the decomposition of wood is accompanied by the development of bacteria and other low forms of life which, in the light of modern investigations, may be regarded as intimately connected with the development of serious diseases. Dr. Coleman, of Richmond, believes decomposing wood to be more or less intimately connected with the causation of typhoid fever.

In a paper by Dr. Reed, in *THE SANITARY NEWS* for May 15, 1881, he condemns the custom of placing out-buildings too near the house. This custom has, in a recent visit to New England, been particularly called to the notice of the writer. It is almost the universal practice in that section of the country to have the house, wood-shed, privy, carriage-house and stock-barn under one continuous roof. I am told the chief reason for this is the great depth which snow sometimes there attains. When the snow reaches the tops of doors and windows, the farmer does not then have to shovel a path to reach his well or wood, or to care for his stock. This is undoubtedly quite a convenience, but it seems to be a dangerous source of contamination to the water-supply at all seasons, and to render the inmates of the house subject to foul gases,

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especially in the summer. Another serious objection is the danger of total destruction in case of fire.

Bearing these and other self-suggesting unsanitary conditions in mind, let us have a literature that will accomplish the substitution of better methods for many of our household labors and circumstances, and let us have that literature widely distributed.



