

LABORATORY
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THE INSPECTION OF DOMESTIC WELLS

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SIR,—Two established facts regarding typhoid fever, and enteric fevers generally, are the following:— 1st, the contagion of these fevers is essentially water-borne; 2nd, they are characteristic of the Country rather than the City.

It is true that, when one case of typhoid fever originates in a city, we may generally expect to find it not a solitary case; indeed, a more or less extended epidemic is the usual history. In country places, it is on the contrary, quite usual to find the malady restricted to individual families; and most physicians, having large country practice, are acquainted with households in which a more or less continuous succession of fever patients are found from one year's end to another.

It requires no great ingenuity to explain these phenomena. They are just what one might expect, who is at all well acquainted with the conditions of domestic water supply.

The procuring of a satisfactory supply of water; the maintenance of such supply in a state of purity; and the more or less frequent inspection of the article, to ascertain its character, are matters which must chiefly interest the localities concerned.

When, as in the case of most cities and towns, the municipal supply is obtained from a single source, the problem of inspection becomes a comparatively simple one.

It is otherwise with smaller towns and villages, and with farms, where wells, usually the property of individuals are in use.

It is true that the widespread danger to health and life which results from the pollution of the single supply, in the case of a city or town, does not obtain in the case of wells. Excepting the wells of public schools, hotels, and a few of more or less public character, the danger is usually restricted to a single family. But wells supplying lodging houses, eating houses, factories, and especially bakeries, breweries and creameries, must not be forgotten.

While it is practicable and sometimes not difficult to effectively protect from pollution the river, lake, or other source of city supply, the protection of well supplies is much less easy. This is partly due to their great number, partly to their usually being placed in close proximity to the house, stables, privy, &c., and chiefly to the ignorance and thoughtlessness of those who use them.

The chief danger of water pollution lies in the readiness with which sewage may find entrance to an otherwise satisfactory supply.