

PHYSICIAN'S REPORT.

INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND,

BRANTFORD, October 6th, 1880.

J. W. LANGMUIR, ESQ.,

Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities.

SIR,—I have the honour to transmit the following, as the Report of the Physician for the current year ending 30th September, 1880.

It is known to you that a great tidal wave of disease swept over this Province during the winter of 1879-80. In common with nearly every city, town, village and hamlet in the country, our Institution passed through the trying ordeal of an epidemic, first of measles, and afterwards of scarlet fever. The first case of measles made its appearance in the month of January, and in a few days afterwards about forty pupils were down with the disease. In such an exigency, with our limited hospital accommodation, it became necessary to convert three of the dormitories into wards for this large number of patients. Our resources were also severely taxed in improvising a staff of efficient nurses, yet I am happy to state the whole number were brought safely through. In one of the younger pupils, however, the attack was complicated by a severe inflammation of the lungs, accompanied by such grave symptoms as a high temperature and low muttering delirium, but after hanging in the balance between life and death for several days the inflammatory action subsided and the little patient was finally restored to health.

Only a short rest was granted us before scarlet fever made its unwelcome appearance in our midst, but, by taking the precaution to isolate the cases as they occurred, the disease was fortunately limited to some half dozen pupils. About the same time the malady found its way into the families of the Principal, the Trades-instructor, the gardener and the teamster, outside the Institution, so that a total of fifteen or twenty cases were under treatment, all of whom passed through the disease in safety. Both measles and scarlet fever are popularly considered communicable from one to another, and no doubt measles are highly contagious, yet in the case of scarlet fever there are facts which prove conclusively that the disease is spread by other means than contagion, as in its sudden and universal outbreak in a large city, where the question of contagion must be excluded as impossible, and under such circumstances the epidemic could not be controlled or circumscribed in its progress. Aside from any epidemic cause, whether atmospheric or electrical, the most common origin of these exanthemata is to be found in foul water, or the vitiated atmosphere generated by cesspools and privy vaults, and from these causes we are comparatively free. Had it been otherwise—had there been these unwholesome conditions of air and water combined with the overcrowded state of the Institution, the consequences might have been serious in the extreme. And I am here reminded to observe, that owing to the large increase in our numbers, greater perils are in store, should an epidemic overtake us with dormitories so closely packed with human beings as to prevent a pure and healthy atmosphere within. Let us hope your influence will be used at the next session of the Legislature to secure the increased accommodation so urgently demanded.

In the treatment of the diseases of the eye, with which a class of our pupils are afflicted, very practical and beneficent results have been obtained during the year. Pupils who entered the Institution practically blind, have been returned to their homes with vision so far restored as to permit their engaging in the ordinary avocations of every day life.

The food supplied has been generally satisfactory, with one marked exception. I refer to the butter, which is an important article of diet; but for a considerable time the contractor furnished quantities so rancid and rank as to be not only unpalatable but positively deranging and injurious to the delicate stomachs of the pupils.*

* As soon as this matter was reported to me I instructed the Bursar to return to the contractor the bad butter, and to buy good at the contractor's expense. I also gave notification of the cancellation of the contract.—INSPECTOR.