

SANITARY SUPERVISION OF SCHOOLS.*

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EXPERIENCE in sanitary work in our Province has clearly shown that however adequate sanitary legislation may appear on the statute book, it must fail to accomplish the desirable result if not wisely and judiciously administered by suitable executive authority.

The Public Health Act of 1866 was inefficient because the proclamation necessary to bring it into active operation was issued only when some unusual widespread epidemic or contagious disease threatened and alarmed the public. Being called into existence at irregular intervals and unexpectedly, the organization required for its effectual administration was necessarily imperfect.

The Act of 1873, conferring upon municipal councillors the powers now granted to local Boards of Health, failed also, inasmuch as municipal authorities remained inactive and never appreciated the necessity of constantly guarding against the many causes of sickness and death continually in active operation around them. Even after the establishment of the Provincial Board of Health, and the effort to arouse municipal authorities in 1882, a further change in the Public Health Act was found necessary. Consequently the Amendments of 1884 were passed, providing for the appointment of special local Boards of Health, composed of not less than three ratepayers, who might be selected outside of municipal councils. This gave an opportunity for securing the services of those who were particularly interested in sanitary work and better qualified for these duties.

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Now we have besides all this the active co-operation of executive medical Health Officers, who are organized for the purpose of rendering more effectual the various legislative enactments that may from time to time be granted for the preservation of the public health. Thus we are rapidly proceeding in sanitary reforms, amending or improving our Provincial sanitary organization as time advances and experience directs.

Permit me, then, Mr. President, to ask your attention to one feature of public health service which at present appears to be worthy of the consideration of this Association of Executive Health Officers,—“The present need of sanitary supervision of schools.”

The Public School Act requires that every child between the ages of seven and thirteen shall attend a public school in which elementary instruction is given for the period of at least 100 days in each year, and makes the parent or guardian responsible under a penalty for such attendance. It is obviously wrong for the State to enforce a system of compulsory education which might possibly endanger the health or lives of children confined within school rooms for several hours each day. Consequently trustees are required by law to provide adequate school accommodation according to the regulations prescribed by the Education Department, and to keep the school-house, outbuildings, and grounds in a proper sanitary condition. These regulations require trustees to

1. Provide a school site which shall be removed as far as possible from a swamp or marsh, and so elevated as to admit of easy drainage.