

STREET CLEANING AND REFUSE DISPOSAL.*

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In this age, it is admitted generally that sanitary science and public health have made such rapid progress as to become a part of the order of every careful person's life.

Public health and sanitary science have many and varied phases of approach. The medical officer keenly dissects from week to week the vital statistics of his district, for by so doing, he is enabled to discover the cause of death and disease, together with the locality where such are especially prevalent.

The measure of success which the sanitary inspector meets in the performance of his detailed work among the people often ranks with the diligence with which he applies preventive measures. "Prevention is better than cure," and the most eminent scientists and medical men of the day are ever striving not only to "cure" disease but to educate the community in the best methods which may be applied to "prevent" disease.

When disaster overtakes a citizen through a defective sidewalk, street or sewer, woe to the official who knowing of the defect, failed to remove the danger. His negligence will cost the town many dollars and may cost him his position, and his family bread and butter. Nay, more, it may cost a human life. Is not the man equally negligent who, knowing the danger to the health of his fellow-citizen and knowing also how that danger may be removed, makes no effort to give his fellow-man the benefit of his knowledge.

The foundation and the most important feature of sanitary science, is "scavenging." Sewers and water supply are secondary considerations if scavenging is neglected.

During the last century, our cities and towns have become congested areas, densely populated, and each producing a vast amount of filth in its midst. Irrespective of the many perhaps at present unavoidable unsanitary areas in almost every city and many towns, there will always remain to be dealt with the natural filth products from the population and business connected with all cities and towns.

It is because of this latter factor more especially, that within the last quarter of the century there has been brought to the front that great preventive science for the suppression of the cause of diseases, "scavenging," as applied through the machinery of a scavenging department under the control of a superintendent with scientific knowledge.

A few years ago this department was created in some of the larger cities when it was regarded as a luxury, but to-day the smallest town realizes that something similar is an absolute necessity. Why? Because it has become recognized generally that filth and noxious refuse in or around the centres of communities has more to do with the creation of disease than any other evil that exists. Each town has its health officer, and if the town itself does not attend to the scavenging, the health and town authorities make sure that the individual householder does it in a sanitary manner.

The working population have to live near their work and this work is in the town. It is here that the land becomes expensive, building costly and labor at the highest rate; consequently the rental values are forced up to such an extent that the smallest possible living and sleeping accommodation has to suffice for a man and his family. Very often when work is not plentiful or wages low, or the offspring many, the accommodation has to be kept within very narrow limits.

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The people who are tied to the town and more especially the slum area, have neither time nor thought for public or even personal health. The insanitary conditions of their district and its surroundings have become second nature to them, and if they think of them at all, they resign themselves to the conclusion that it is a penalty attached to their station in life, and must be endured.

It is here that scavenging can work wonders. This science properly applied, cleanses the streets, purifies the air these people breathe, the houses they live in, the shops they work in and the yards and recreation grounds (too often the streets) their children play in.

The principal that should control every scavenging department is to provide such measures as will enable it to get in touch with all the filth and refuse as soon as it is created and to keep hold of it until it is permanently destroyed. This immediate action will lessen the danger of it becoming disseminated. Dirt and refuse upon the roads, streets, or in the back yards of dwellings cannot be said to be under effective subjection. It is so only when it has been collected, stored in some suitable receptacles (whether it be a garbage cart or a sewer) and is on its way to final sanitary disposal.

There is no section of municipal work under the public eye so persistently as that of street cleaning. The public watch every movement and are prompt in lodging their complaints. The work is one which deals wholly with dirt in one form or another, and is always objectionable and an ever-present asset to the fault-finding taxpayer. Sometimes the objector has good grounds for complaint, consequently the object of any system of cleaning should be to remove the cause as rapidly as possible and with the least amount of inconvenience to the citizen. The object of street cleaning should not be to obtain a favorable appearance only, but to insure sanitary conditions.

Street sweepings consist of the waste products of hundreds and thousands of human beings and animals and include the constant wastes that are being thrown off by the industries in our midst, the debris caused by the wear and tear upon the road surfaces, the dust and dirt from the pulling down or repair of buildings, soot and fine ashes from hundreds, perhaps thousands of chimneys, twigs, bark, and leaves from trees, pollen seeds and spores of plants, the excretion from human beings, the excrement and urine of dogs and horses, and the leakage of the contents of loaded vehicles both in transit and while loading and unloading.

Even the scavengers add very materially to the filth of a town. The horses contribute droppings and urine and the carts are sometimes so imperfectly suited to the duty they have to perform, as to distribute in part the filth they are supposed to collect.

The streets of a town are the avenues over which its produced filth has to be carried and each receptacle deposits its quota on the road as it journeys through.

Shopkeepers sweep out their collection of dust and dirt and housekeepers shake their mats on the highway to make a further addition to the miscellaneous accumulation of filth that finds its way into the streets and pollutes the air. This custom should be prohibited and each such offender should be obliged to dispose of refuse in such a way as will not menace the health of his neighbor.

If the public were only educated in these things and taught what not to do, many lives might be brightened and lengthened. As conditions now prevail we inhale particles of filth which are being continually stirred up by passing traffic. Our food and even the liquids we drink are affected. So penetrating is the action of this street filth, that it discolors our clothes and body, blackens our buildings and doubtless tends to lower vitality.