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VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE SECTION OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT THE MEETING LAST MONTH OF THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.*

THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN PREVENTIVE MEDICINE ON THE PREVALENCE OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

ON this subject, THOMAS DONNELLY, M.D., F.R.C.S.I., M. A. O., Assistant Physician, House of Industry, Government Hospitals, Medical Officer of Health, North East District, North Dublin Union, said:—The subject was of the greatest importance, because it touched every member of the community, all being, at some period of their existence, liable to be attacked by one or other of these maladies. The measures used against zymotic diseases had been in this country so successful as to reduce the mortality from them by one-third, as was shown by the Registrar-General's reports. In the decade 1865-74, the average annual death-rate per 1,000,000 living was 3,062.9, and in the decade, 1875-84, 1,922.6, or about two-thirds. The measures at present taken to lessen the prevalence of infective diseases could be arranged under the following heads: 1, Inoculation; 2, Sanitation; 3, Isolation; 4, Disinfection.

Sanitation had improved wonderfully of late years, and concurrently with it the annual death-rate from zymotic diseases had decreased one-third. Formerly the soil-pipes of water-closets were not ventilated, and hence were conduits for dangerous gases from the main sewer into the houses. Now no

sewer-gas could enter through a properly fitted water-closet, because the new pans, having a syphon trap included in one piece of earthenware, prevented its entrance, and the ventilating shaft outside the house to the roof provided for its escape into the open air. Having any metallic fixture inside the house between the pan and the trap, as in old pan closets, was very objectionable, since the excreta were liable to adhere to the metal and act upon it, giving rise to a very offensive odour.

The first step to obtain the full benefit of our present knowledge of sanitation and improved sanitary appliances was to offer reasonable remuneration to properly qualified medical officers of health who should devote their entire time to their duties, uncontrolled by local influence. Ventilation was a subject which had been very carefully studied, and the methods of carrying it out safely and efficiently much improved in recent years. Much more, however, was required, especially in tenement houses and artisan's dwellings. The prevailing practice among the poorer classes of stopping up every crevice in cold weather was much to be deprecated. This was a matter of urgent importance, especially in large towns, since it was known that overcrowding and impure air were potent factors in originating typhus and spreading it and other diseases after

* From British Medical Journal.