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REPORT ON POLLUTION OF WATER SUPPLIES.

BY THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION ON THE POLLUTION OF THE WATER SUPPLY, AS PRESENTED AT THE MILWAUKEE MEETING, NOV. 20TH, 1888, AND CERTIFIED BY THE COMMITTEE, AND PUBLISHED IN THE SANITARIAN.

IN its report at the last meeting of the association your committee explained in brief the ground of its belief in the harmfulness of sewage in waters used as potable supplies, whether these were derived from wells or larger sources; whether the water-supply of an isolated dwelling or that of a populous city. Chemical analysis was shown to be in most instances inadequate to the detection of sewage, unless the sewage was present in unusual quantity or the water unusually free from other organic matters; and the conclusion was reached that the inability of the chemical methods is of no practical importance, as the presence of sewage in the water-supply can be determined by the sanitary inspector; and further, that for protective purposes the knowledge that sewage enters the water is all that seems to be required, because where there is sewage there is danger of typhoid infection.

Your committee desires to give special emphasis to the last stated clause, because it believes that the endemicity of typhoid-fever in our cities is in great part due to the sewage in the water-supply. Many of our public water-supplies contain sewage, and its harmfulness in a general way is unquestioned even by those who have a financial interest in them. Yet there appears to be a hesitancy to acknowledge the real, the specific, danger. Typhoid-fever is present in all our cities, giving annual death-rates of from 15 to 100 and over in every 100,000 of the population; but in the enumeration of its causes its prevalence is ascribed to many unsanitary conditions before mention is made of the public water-

supply. It is allowed in certain local epidemics to be propagated from wells which have become infected by an infected sewage, but the sewage in the public supply is seldom considered other than as a sentimental objection to the use of the water. It is allowed in many instances to arise from leaks in the plumbing of houses, by which exhalations from infected sewers reach the interior of the dwelling, but the water-supply into which the sewage of these very sewers is poured is used without a thought of its deadly qualities, unless, as in the case of Plymouth, Pa., the fact is forced upon the public mind that a public water-supply has as little disinfecting power over the germs of typhoid-fever as the private water-supply of an infected well. Health officers condemn the well, and generally it is closed as soon as it is found that sewage percolates through its area of drainage: they should condemn the public supply on the same grounds.

The large financial interests involved in the establishment of a public water-supply may be assumed to be at the bottom of this hesitancy to acknowledge the specific danger attaching to the presence of sewage. Millions of dollars, perhaps, have been invested in that water-supply, and many more millions would be required to replace it by water from a purer source. These large sums are alone considered, and not the vast and annually increasing totals of the loss by sickness and death that might have been prevented. A public or private well involves but a small sum, so small that it does not stand in the way of sanitary progress. It is closed, and with its