

# THE CANADA LANCET:

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*Communications solicited on all Medical and Scientific subjects, and also Reports of Cases occurring in practice. Advertisements inserted on the most liberal terms. All Letters and Communications to be addressed to the "Editor Canada Lancet," Toronto.*

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## PUBLIC HEALTH.

An Act entitled "An Act to amend the laws relating to public health," was passed in England on the 10th of August, 1872, the provisions of which may be briefly summarized thus: It enacts that from this date England shall be divided into districts, urban and rural. The Mayor, Aldermen and burgesses of a borough, the improvement commissioners of an improvement district, and the Local Board in a local government district, are to form the local sanitary authorities in urban districts, and the guardians of the union, with certain exceptions in the rural districts. It shall be the duty of every urban sanitary authority to appoint a medical officer of health, and of every rural sanitary authority to appoint a medical officer, an inspector of nuisances, and other necessary assistants. The one clause which seems to point that this legislation is anything more than permissive, is the 18th, which gives power to the inspectors of the Local Government Board to attend any meeting of the local boards, with powers similar to those of Poor Law Inspector under Poor Law Act.

On the probable results of such legislation a writer in the *British Quarterly Review* for July, 1873, thus speaks: "It may be more conducive both to the political and to the personal tranquility of the hour, to leave England, nominally divided into sanitary districts, to continue its wonted apathy in the presence of dangers that affect health, and that are disregarded because they are not actually visible; but we cannot conceive a responsibility more serious than that which is involved in such a neglect, now that the need of administrative action has been admitted. While the government fails to

ascertain the main laws of sanitary science, and of sanitary engineering, and to communicate to the country the experience which it has acquired, and to guide the several districts in the application of that knowledge, for every life that is lost by preventable disease, for every hour that is wasted in cases like those that have been cited (see paper quoted), the Minister of Public Health is responsible. It may not be a parliamentary responsibility, but it is one that will have to be encountered before a tribunal more searching than Parliament—the tribunal before which conscience pleads, and the verdict of which is recorded by posterity."

*Mutatis Mutandis* these remarks apply with equal force to the Dominion Government. "With the broadest margin for the independent action of the different local authorities, the discharge by the Government of the functions, which only a central authority can perform, is perfectly consistent. It is the duty of such an authority to define those great principles on which all sanitary engineering shall be conducted: to make clear the present state of definite knowledge attained by science, and to give asked or unasked, to every sanitary body, the normal plan by which its efforts should be guided. The central authority has the means, and alone has the means of acquiring the information which the country demands. It is its duty both to acquire and communicate it."

That there exists in this Canada of ours equal occasion for animadversion on the present perfunctory methods of providing against the spread of contagious diseases, of enforcing sanitary laws, and of registering births and deaths must be patent to all.

We require for successful operation uniformity of effort, and that uniformity enforced by the central or Dominion Government. We have had abundant evidence that the deliberations and action of city, municipal and village councils to meet the dangers often suddenly sprung upon them, have been but partial in their success; this failure in a great measure is attributable to faulty administrative arrangements. We consider it of the first importance that the laws regulating public health should be efficiently administered not only on account of the interests of the public, but also for the advancement of the most important of all sciences, *i. e.*, sanitary science.

The probability of the *amour propre* of gentlemen constituting existing boards being touched if