

PUBLIC HEALTH.

As spring is upon us, and summer will soon follow, it is not a moment too soon to call the attention of the public to the sanitary condition of our city. The citizen who knows anything about the sanitary condition of Portland has no occasion to swell with pride, nor can he boast of the machinery intended to be used to insure the health of the people and protect against epidemics, if he takes a just view of its fitness for that purpose. Attention to this subject is the more needful just now in view of the recent deaths which have taken place here from diseases at once so virulent and unsparing, striking down and destroying the loved ones in our homes who had before them the prospect of long, useful, and happy lives. It is none too soon, then, to warn the public authorities, and arouse them from their lethargy, if such is possible, and to stir up our citizens to insist on rigid sanitary measures, feeling assured that those who recently manifested so much laudable zeal in behalf of the dumb brute, will more readily act in a cause that effects every home.

Portland, situated as it is with all its present advantages, should be one of the healthiest cities, if not the healthiest one in the United States. Its facilities for draining could hardly be better, and the water supply which is available, or can be made so, for flushing out pipes, drains, sewers, and other ordinary purposes, is most abundant. It does not enjoy the reputation it should were its sanitary interests closely attended to. The truth is, that for want of a proper system of vital statistics, or any system at all, (for none is in existence) the position it occupies is quite uncertain. It must stand low, however, and can not take its proper place without a thorough cleansing, which must be repeated and kept up continually, followed by the preparation of tables of health and mortality monthly or quarterly. These tables would show our exact position, and would squarely bring our citizens face to face with certain preventable diseases that ravage the community with alarming frequency. Nothing quickens any sluggish public more than the startling revelations made by these tables from time to time. They touch home, and people think

and act with decision and energy. The thought almost astounds one, that a city such as Portland, with its twenty thousand inhabitants, has adopted no means to obtain and preserve such statistics, which are so necessary. Of all things that call upon us for consideration and action, health should be first. What can we do well without it? What does life amount to in its absence? This thought should impress us in all the changes in locality we make during life, especially if we are acting as heads of families or as the guardians of others. When one is moving to a strange city or country, the first question should be, is it healthy? And in moving into strange houses in this or any other city, the first question should be, is the locality healthy or unhealthy? the next, is the house old or new? is it a death-trap, to catch his thoughtless, innocent children? Will malarial gases creep out of the sinks, escape from the water-closets or back yards, and invade and strike down the inmates? He can examine the premises thoroughly, and he should do so, and if he finds the drains choked, the sinks untrapped and no proper vent pipes or system of ventilation,

the premises low and damp, he should flee from it as from a scourge spot. There can be nothing but disease and death in such a house—a score of physicians could not give health in such a place. Life and health first, other matters afterwards, in their order. Any citizen who thinks at all and has any regard for his own family, if not for his neighbors, should be willing, without a moment's hesitation, to pay, and that liberally, to inaugurate and enforce strict sanitary laws to protect the health and lives of that family, to say nothing of keeping the doctor out. In cities men are pre-eminently their brother's keepers in matters of health. Their houses are in closer proximity—their business relations are intimate. This huddling of houses together, which is the constant practice and bane of cities and one of the principal objections to city life, is what calls for the greatest watchfulness and care on the part of our public authorities, to see that they are so constructed as to drainage, pipes, traps, vent pipes and closets, that only the minimum evil may arise, as some must be the consequence of the close con-



TERRITORIAL UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, AT SEATTLE, W. T. From a Photo by Peterson Bros.

tact of dwellings and business places. The day has long passed that we can father on Providence disease and death arising from our criminal thoughtlessness and neglect as to sanitary precautions. Our forefathers were in the habit of taking too kindly to His inscrutable ways and giving Him credit for many of the fearful epidemics and pestilences that ravaged the country in those days, that now are quite under our control, and are preventable. Science in those days had not so interfered with and trench upon those unaccountable ways and sports, and does not laugh at calamity when it does come, as some wrongfully charged that Providence did. We can not blame them, as they acted according to the light they had; but if they had enjoyed the scientific blaze that we do, they would not have escaped our censure and condemnation. Thanks to Science for what she has already done; let us use her as a future and unerring guide in warding off disease.

In looking about the city recently, I noticed that many of our citizens threw all kinds of filth and garbage on the streets and in many of the

lanes, and worse, that it was suffered to remain there and disgust and poison with its noisome odors. In the central parts of our city, pest-holes of dirt, and reeking filth existed, and in other parts of the city filthy heaps of rubbish, composed of the most offensive matter, stood gradually rotting and sending out stenches and deleterious gases, which, rising up, creep into the adjoining houses, feeding neuralgia and all malarial diseases and ailments. The most offensive places are those in possession of Chinese, where they run their wash-houses. The yards of many of them are littered up and strewn with an indescribable conglomeration of the vilest smelling offal; upon this is thrown the most disgusting liquids that only a Chinaman, with an experience of three thousand years, could concoct; the fetid mass gives out an odor at once as startling as frightful, and as dangerous as offensive. If the heathen were strict followers of Confucius, or hailed from the north of China, their habits would be different. Their former practice of living over water, has created a strong tendency to dump all or any filth they part with, upon yard, alley or street.

Were it not for the coolness of our climate and the abundant supply of rain we get, I have no doubt that the most appalling epidemics would have ravaged our city. Any person can see with half an eye the terribly close proximity of back-houses and cesspools to many of the dwellings. In one quarter there are four within a few feet of, and another immediately adjoining, three family residences. These vile receptacles are the most dangerous things that we have on our property, and only their necessity compels their toleration; most of them are worse than powder magazines. They require the most unsparing pains in cleansing and keeping clean, and in ventilating and discharging the foul air from them in some safe way. By these means they are made comparatively safe. As they exist at present, no one will dare to deny that a large number are in a most deplorable condition, and call for the immediate attention of the authorities.

Another fact that cannot be too strongly impressed on parents, is the bad condition of the sinks and water-closets that form parts of their dwellings. It is stated, upon good authority, that one of the houses in this city in which recently occurred several deaths, contains a water-closet with trap but no ventilation pipe. In such a case the trap is no real protection, as the fetid gas will find its way through the water and poison every one inhaling it. If such was the fact, the disease may well be traced to the escape of the pestiferous gases from the closet, and should be a warning to all in charge of such properties to at once inspect and protect themselves against any repetition of the terrible disease. A certain plumber residing in this city, stated, the other day, that he felt, at times, almost guilty of murder, when he considered the manner in which he had to be compelled, by the sheer niggardliness of people erecting houses, to do their plumbing. To save a few dollars by dispensing with a trap or a vent-pipe, the safety of the inmates was entirely sacrificed. He said that about two-thirds of the old houses in this city contained no traps or vent-pipes, and that a large number of the newer ones, which contained traps, had no vent-pipes from