

(No. 67.)



1875.

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T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

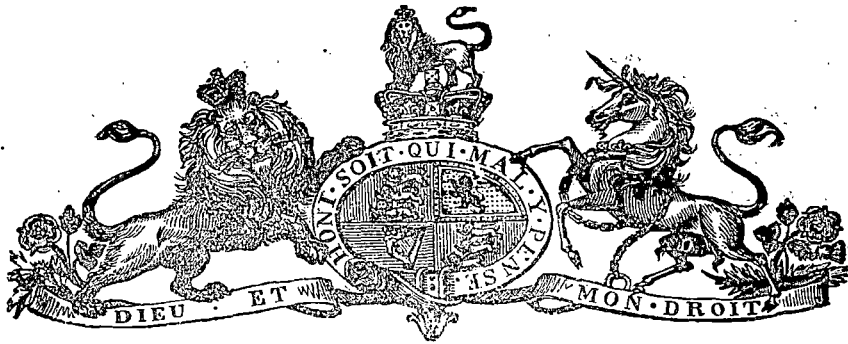
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**PUBLIC HEALTH:**

**CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE  
HEALTH OFFICERS, HOBART TOWN AND LAUNCESTON.**

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Laid upon the Table by Mr. Chapman, and ordered by the Council to be printed,  
September 2, 1875.



*Colonial Secretary's Office, 17th June, 1875.*

SIR,

THE attention of the Government having been called to the increased Death Rate within the boundaries of the City of Hobart Town, and particularly to the number of cases of Fever of a Low or Typhoid character, I have to request that you will furnish the Government with a Report upon the Sanitary condition of the City, expressing your opinion whether it is such as to account in any measure for the increased amount of sickness lately prevalent; and further, what remedial measures, if any, are needed to more effectually protect the Public health.

I have, &c.

(Signed) THOS. D. CHAPMAN.

G. W. TURNLEY, *Esq.*, *Health Officer, Hobart Town.*

[*Similar to J. L. MILLER, Esq., Health Officer, Launceston.*]

*General Hospital, June 23rd, 1875.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th instant, in which you request me to report upon the Sanitary condition of Hobart Town, with a view to ascertain the cause of the increase of Typhoid Fever, &c. which has of late prevailed; and in reply, I beg to state that a Sanitary Report, to be of any value whatever, must be based upon data obtained by personal observation and examination, aided by information received from sources of undoubted reliability. Impressions acquired by merely walking through the streets, or visiting a few houses, would not only be valueless, but might lead to most erroneous conclusions.

It is believed by the majority of Medical authorities that Typhoid Fever, Diphtheria, &c. most frequently arise from the breathing of gases emanating from sewage and decomposing animal and vegetable matters, impure drinking-water, overcrowding, and want of ventilation in dwelling-houses; and that other diseases—such as Scarlatina—are rendered more virulent, and are propagated with greater rapidity, by the same causes.

It would therefore be necessary, before attempting to write a reliable report upon the Sanitary condition of the City, to obtain accurate information upon the following points:—

1. The nature and condition of the surface and subsoils in the different localities.
2. The state of the dwelling-houses as to cleanliness, ventilation, overcrowding, &c.
3. The condition of the adjoining premises, relative to deposits of stagnant water, decaying animal and vegetable matters, &c.
4. Examination of cesspools and privy-pits, their liability to impregnate the surrounding soil by leakage, or to vitiate the air by the exhalation of gases.
5. An examination of the water cisterns as to their cleanliness, and the communication of their overflow pipes with sewers, &c.
6. Drainage and sewerage.
7. Analysis of the water supplied to the different parts of the Town.
8. Examination of food, more particularly meat and milk.

It will thus be seen that such a report would embrace a most extensive field of investigation; and as my present duties allow me but little leisure, the time at my disposal would be quite inadequate for its accomplishment; neither have I the legal power to enter upon the premises nor into the dwelling-houses of the citizens for the purpose of making the necessary examinations.

It would, however, be impossible to overrate the importance of such a report, not only as regards Hobart Town, but also as applied to Launceston and some of the other centres of population throughout the Island.

Tasmania stands almost alone as a British Colony in having no Legislative enactments nor any organisation for the protection of the Public health; the only exception being the supervision of the shipping, to prevent the introduction of contagious disease from abroad.

The creation of a Department of Public Health would be one of the most valuable benefits which the Government could bestow upon the community. The organisation of such a Department could be effected without difficulty; and the expenditure necessary for its support would be a light matter when compared with the great advantages which would ensue upon its establishment.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

*The Honorable the Colonial Secretary.*

GEORGE TURNLEY.

*Launceston, June 24th, 1875.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th inst., requesting me to furnish the Government with a Report upon the sanitary condition of Launceston, with special reference to the increase in the death-rate of the town, and to the number of cases of fever of a low or typhoid character.

It is an unfortunate fact that, during the last four or five years, the number of deaths registered in the district of Launceston (including the town and part of Selby) has increased year by year from 269 in 1870 to 322 in 1874. This is an advance of 20 per cent., while there has been no corresponding increase in the population; and numbering the residents in the district at (say) 13,000, it gives a death-rate for 1874 of 24.10 per thousand,—much beyond that of the Colony as a whole.

There is, also, no doubt that diseases of the class termed Zymotic are of much more frequent occurrence than they were in former years, and that there seems to be a steady gradual increase in the number of such cases.

When I first came to Launceston in 1855, and for many years afterwards, typhoid fever, diphtheria, and erysipelas were almost unknown,—they were certainly of very rare occurrence; whereas, during the last four or five years, every medical practitioner has been called on to treat many cases of all three forms of disease.

Puerperal fever is another scourge which, formerly almost unknown, has been more or less prevalent in Launceston for some years past, many cases having ended fatally. We have also recently suffered from the epidemic of measles, which has visited all the neighbouring Colonies, and in which the disease has been of a severe character and followed by more deaths than any other similar epidemic during my Colonial experience, though not worse, as I am informed, than the epidemic of 1852-53.

When any large number of human beings live in close proximity to one another in the same locality, as in a large town, for a number of years, an increasing amount of Zymotic disease must be looked for as a natural consequence, unless indeed cleansing, drainage, and other measures for health-preservation have been perfect and complete,—a state of things which, unfortunately, has seldom, if ever, existed anywhere.

Were a complete system of underground drainage carried out in Launceston, and were the emptying of cesspools and dung-pits—where such existed—and the cleansing of cow-yards and other places, enforced under strict official inspection, much would be done towards improving the public health. At present the sewerage is partial and incomplete; and I am credibly informed that from numerous houses the contents of the patent water-closets flow into the open gutters at the sides of the public streets.

But even a thorough underground drainage of Launceston would not be an unmixed good, for the contents would, of course, be carried into the river, which would become, in point of fact, itself a gigantic sewer,—wherein, however, the quantity of ever-flowing pure water would be so great in proportion to the impurities that the evil could not be of magnitude for many years to come,—till population had vastly increased.

Again, the outlet of the present main sewer of Launceston, and which, I believe, would be the outlet were the present plan of drainage complete, is on a mud-bank which is dry for several hours

twice a day, and where, during the summer months, all the human excreta and other refuse would lie exposed under a burning sun, while the prevalent northerly wind was carrying back into the town the gases arising from the decaying and decomposing mass.

But were the main sewer carried out to a proper position near low water-mark, and were the drains regularly flushed and properly ventilated, there can be no doubt that the completion of the sewerage of the town would be of immense advantage, and effect a great improvement in the public health.

I am strongly of opinion, however, that nothing would so improve the sanitary condition of Launceston as the introduction of a complete and enforced use of earth-closets, emptied and cleansed at regular fixed intervals under official authority. There is no reason why Launceston should not be as healthy as any other town, and to make it so are required only the adoption of the necessary measures and the outlay of the necessary money. Regular cleansing, complete underground drainage, and the universal use of earth-closets, all under authorised inspection, would make the town as salubrious a locality as the most sensitive could desire.

I have the honor to be,  
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

J. L. MILLER, *F.F.P.S.*,  
Chief Medical Officer at Launceston.

*The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.*

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*Colonial Secretary's Office, 23rd July, 1875.*

SIR,

THE attention of the Government has been called to the increased rate of mortality during the past few months, consequent in some measure upon the presence of diseases of a low febrile character.

The great importance to the community of the due observance of those precautions which tend to remove or prevent the existence of causes likely to disseminate or engender disease, especially in large towns, induces me at the present juncture to bring under the notice of the Municipal Council, in a convenient form, the several sections of "The Police Act, 1865," which relate to the health and improvement of towns.

The Government fully realise the difficulties surrounding the subject of sanitary improvements, but they feel assured that the necessity which exists for steps being taken to provide a better system of drainage, and a more frequent inspection of premises likely from their situation and condition to propagate infectious or contagious disease, will always ensure from the Council that attention to the subject its great importance demands, and I trust that they may be enabled to adopt such measures as will lead to a permanent improvement in the sanitary condition of the City.

I have, &c.,

THOS. D. CHAPMAN.

*The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Hobart Town.*

[*Similar to the Worshipful the Mayor, Launceston.*]

CONFIDENTIAL.

*Colonial Secretary's Office, 23rd July, 1875.*

SIR,

WITH reference to my letter of this day's date, forwarding copies of certain sections of "The Police Act, 1865," I have the honor to transmit herewith copy of a communication addressed to the Health Officer of Hobart Town, under date the 17th ultimo, upon the subject of the increased death rate within the boundaries of the City, together with that Officer's reply, which you will be good enough to consider as a confidential communication for the information of yourself and the Members of the Council, but not for publication.

I have, &c.,

THOS. D. CHAPMAN.

*The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Hobart Town.*

[*Similar to the Worshipful the Mayor, Launceston.*]