

(No. 29.)



1884.

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

H E A L T H O F F I C E R :

REPORT FOR 1883.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command.



REPORT for 1883 of the Officer of Health for the Towns of New Town, Sandy Bay, and Wellington Hamlets.

SIR,
BEFORE reviewing in detail the number of deaths and their causes which took place in the Hobart Registration District during the year 1883, it is well to arrive at the death-rate of the whole island. In April, 1881, the population of Tasmania was found by Census to be 115,705; this number it is estimated by the Statistician had increased in 1883 to 124,350, showing an increase in two years of 8645, as against the increase of 16,377 in the previous ten years. The total number of deaths registered in Tasmania in 1883 was 2122, or 17·06 per 1000 of the population, a rate which is, for some cause, exceptionally high, being 1·36 per 1000 in excess of that for 1882. Taking now the District of Hobart, which is principally urban and suburban, though extending from Bridgewater to Brown's River, I find that the mean population for the year was estimated at 28,648. The total number of deaths which occurred in 1883 was 782, giving a death-rate of 27·2 per 1000, or 2·8 per 1000 more than in 1882. These are compared in the following Table with the monthly deaths during the previous nineteen years.

TABLE I.
TABLE of Deaths in the Hobart Registration District for the 20 years 1864–83, inclusive.

<i>Year.</i>	<i>January.</i>	<i>February.</i>	<i>March.</i>	<i>April.</i>	<i>May.</i>	<i>June.</i>	<i>July.</i>	<i>August.</i>	<i>September.</i>	<i>October.</i>	<i>November.</i>	<i>December.</i>	<i>Total of each Year.</i>
1864	24	47	73	54	48	54	70	41	37	41	43	36	568
1865	41	53	56	38	43	32	36	42	44	40	37	30	492
1866	31	54	57	45	43	48	54	33	28	36	36	50	515
1867	56	34	54	43	46	48	68	35	35	42	48	42	551
1868	38	45	53	45	39	54	64	54	46	49	38	54	579
1869	41	40	42	27	38	35	47	42	22	49	40	39	462
1870	64	48	47	34	39	46	40	49	38	34	25	36	500
1871	47	42	51	29	33	51	42	34	47	40	45	46	507
1872	51	40	60	35	53	42	39	39	39	51	32	43	524
1873	49	53	48	50	44	39	46	45	53	58	44	46	575
1874	55	47	49	37	46	53	58	49	42	58	34	47	575
1875	48	49	99	102	77	62	55	66	51	55	45	41	750
1876	53	48	48	32	63	47	61	44	44	63	58	52	613
1877	78	64	71	68	57	44	76	72	60	54	56	60	760
1878	61	62	72	51	55	61	51	45	40	46	44	42	630
1879	68	61	64	53	50	53	68	58	44	51	30	41	641
1880	58	62	81	51	36	56	68	47	44	49	48	47	647
1881	66	58	55	40	66	48	49	58	45	44	47	59	635
1882	61	66	53	63	50	47	67	55	46	44	47	68	667
1883	81	63	49	56	67	69	75	72	68	58	61	63	782
20 years' average.....	53·55	51·8	59·1	47·65	49·65	49·45	56·7	49	43·65	48·1	42·9	47·1	598·65

An examination of this Table shows that never before in the district have so many deaths taken place in one year as in 1883, not even including 1875 and 1877, two years with an abnormally high rate, owing to the prevalence of measles during the former and scarlatina during the latter. The total of 782 is 115 more than occurred in 1882, and 183·35 more than the average for the past twenty years, which is 598·65. Of course allowance must be made for the increase of population during that time, but even then the number is high. Comparing the averages of the various months, March and July are seen to be the months least favourable to life, while November and September have the lowest rate.

TABLE II.

<i>Months of Year 1883.</i>	<i>Deaths in Hobart Registration District.</i>	<i>Above or below 1882.</i>		<i>Above 20 Years Mean of the Month.</i>		<i>City share of Deaths.</i>	<i>New Town share of Deaths.</i>	<i>Sandy Bay share of Deaths.</i>	<i>Wellington share of Deaths.</i>	<i>Invalid Depôts at New Town.</i>
January	81	+ 20	...	27.45	...	55	14	...	3	9
February	63	...	- 3	11.2	...	44	13	...	1	11
March	49	...	- 4	...	10.1	33	7	1	...	5
April	56	...	- 7	8.35	...	42	8	3	...	7
May	67	+ 17	...	17.35	...	44	18	...	2	16
June	69	+ 22	...	19.55	...	44	17	...	1	13
July	75	+ 8	...	18.3	...	39	12	2	2	8
August	72	+ 17	...	23	...	42	21	2	1	16
September	68	+ 22	...	24.35	...	44	16	1	1	15
October	58	+ 14	...	9.9	...	39	11	...	...	11
November	61	+ 14	...	18.1	...	43	11	1	2	8
December	63	...	- 5	15.9	...	38	16	1	2	12
	782	+134	-19			507	164	11	15	131
	697					697				
	85	+ 115								

In this table the deaths during each month of 1883 are given in contrast with those of 1882 and also with the average of the past twenty years; whilst the numbers occurring each month in the city and suburban towns are also tabulated. In eight out of the twelve months more deaths occurred in 1883 than in 1882, while in February, March, April, and December the deaths in 1882 were very slightly in excess. Comparing 1883 with the 20 years' average, every month is found to be in excess except March. It is difficult to explain why the increase should have been so general, though, as will be seen in another table, the prevalence of Whooping Cough and other Zymotic diseases during the year contributed materially to the result. The City share of deaths was 507, which is 94 more than in 1882. It is probable that fewer deaths than this should be credited to the city, for many cases of sickness terminating fatally are brought to town for treatment from country districts, registration taking place where the death occurs in favour of the rural and against the urban rate. For this reason, and also as it is impossible to estimate accurately the population of the city proper, I have refrained from giving what would probably be an erroneous death-rate. In New Town 164 deaths occurred, but this number includes 131 which took place at the Invalid Asylums, male and female. This leaves 33 deaths for New Town proper, which is 9 more than in 1882. In the town of Sandy Bay 11 deaths occurred, two less than in 1882, and in that of Wellington 15 deaths, equalling those in 1882. The sum of these city and suburban deaths, 697, subtracted from the total number, gives 85, which represents deaths occurring in the Glenorchy and Queenborough parts of the district, those occurring at sea and registered here as the first port of call, and those at the Hospital of patients admitted from country districts.

TABLE III.

<i>Class.</i>	<i>Order.</i>	<i>Disease.</i>	<i>January.</i>	<i>February.</i>	<i>March.</i>	<i>April.</i>	<i>May.</i>	<i>June.</i>	<i>July.</i>	<i>August.</i>	<i>September.</i>	<i>October.</i>	<i>November.</i>	<i>December.</i>	<i>Total, 1883.</i>	<i>Total, 1882.</i>	<i>Total, 1881.</i>	<i>Total, 1880.</i>	<i>Total, 1879.</i>
1. ZYMOTIC.	Miasmatic.	Scarlatina .....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3	3	..	1	7	4	..	3	..
		Diphtheria .....	..	..	1	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	1	3	4	1	12	9
		Quinsy .....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
		Croup .....	..	1	..	..	..	..	2	1	1	2	..	..	7	5	8	5	7
		Whooping Cough ..	..	..	..	..	2	5	6	2	3	..	1	1	20	..	2	7	12
		Typhoid Fever..	..	..	2	2	3	1	..	..	1	..	..	1	10	5	..	9	8
		Erysipelas	1	..	1	1	1	..	1	..	1	..	..	..	6	3	1	..	7
		Metria	1	..	..	..	1	..	..	2	1	..	..	..	5	..	..	1	..
		Catarrh, &c. ....	..	..	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	..	..	..	..
		Dysentery .....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2	..	..	..
		Diarrhœa	14	9	3	3	1	1	..	..	2	..	1	4	38	32	29	51	35
		Cholera .....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	..	..	..
		Other Zymotic..	1	1	..	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	1	..	4	6	19	8	7
	Enthetic ..	..	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	2	4	6	2	8
	Dietic ..	..	..	1	..	..	2	..	..	1	..	1	1	..	6	9	1	..	2
	Parasitic ..	..	..	..	..	1	1	..	..	1	..	..	..	..	3	4	1	3	3
ZYMOTIC TOTALS.....			18	12	7	6	12	10	9	6	14	6	4	8	112	79	70	101	98
2. CONSTITUTIONAL.....			12	9	9	5	8	7	13	14	13	9	10	9	118	97	82	85	93
3. LOCAL.....			32	26	16	34	30	36	40	32	22	28	41	22	359	278	278	294	282
4. DEVELOPMENTAL.....			15	16	15	10	16	13	10	17	18	13	5	20	168	196	180	147	148
5. VIOLENT.....			3	0	2	1	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	4	22	17	25	20	20
UNCLASSIFIED.....			1	..	..	..	..	..	2	..	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..	..
TOTALS.....			81	63	49	56	67	69	75	72	68	58	61	63	782	667	635	647	641

This table shows the total deaths for each month of 1883, subdivided into the five classes; while those of the first class, which are Zymotic, and more or less preventible by sanitary precautions, are subdivided into orders and diseases. The totals of each year since 1879 are then given in contrast. The number of Zymotic deaths during the year has been 112, which is unusually large, being 33 more than in 1882. Diarrhoea, as usual, claimed the largest number of victims, no less than 38, mostly infants. Twenty deaths occurred from Whooping Cough, which was prevalent during the winter months, but has since died out. Typhoid Fever shows an increase, 10 deaths having occurred, as against 5 in 1882—March, April, and May being the most fatal months. This disease, it is to be feared, will continue to increase both in the city and suburbs until the new system of sewage removal is thoroughly adopted. Scarlatina was prevalent during the latter part of the year, 7 deaths being registered from this cause. Metria or Puerperal Fever has the abnormally high number of 5 deaths. Owing to its occurrence the maternity department of the Nurses' Home was promptly and wisely closed. There were 7 deaths from Croup, and 6 from Erysipelas, but only 3 from Diphtheria, and none from Measles. In the other orders the deaths this year have been fewer, two of these in the Parasitic order being from Hydatid disease. In the Constitutional and Local classes the deaths were more numerous than previously, while those in the Developmental class were fewer than in 1881 or 1882. Three deaths, owing to the inefficiency of the Acts under which registration takes place, were registered without any cause being assigned, and so cannot be classified. It is fitting to remark here that some consolidation and improvement is needed in this respect, as the Acts date back as far as 1838. Registration should be compulsory within 72 hours of death, and no corpse should be buried, under a heavy penalty, until the cause of death has been properly notified. This frequently happens now, registration following burial at an interval varying with the convenience of the undertaker, who, in nine cases out of ten, adds registration of deaths to his other duties. Some official record, too, should be kept of the number of still-born infants, as is done elsewhere.

TABLE IV.

<i>Months of 1883.</i>	<i>Under 1.</i>	<i>1 to 5.</i>	<i>5 to 10.</i>	<i>10 to 15.</i>	<i>15 to 20.</i>	<i>Total under 20.</i>	<i>20 to 60.</i>	<i>60 and above.</i>	<i>Total at all Ages.</i>
January	25	9	1	1	1	37	21	23	81
February	19	4	1	0	0	24	19	20	63
March	16	2	0	3	2	23	11	15	49
April	7	1	0	2	2	12	17	27	56
May	12	4	2	3	2	23	16	28	67
June	16	9	2	1	1	29	14	26	69
July	16	8	2	1	1	28	23	24	75
August	15	7	0	0	1	23	15	34	72
September	6	10	1	0	3	20	15	33	68
October	7	6	2	0	2	17	15	26	58
November	9	6	3	1	2	21	15	25	61
December	15	4	1	2	2	24	15	24	63
TOTALS, 1883	163	70	15	14	19	281	196	305	782
TOTALS, 1882	129	33	14	6	19	201	162	304	667
TOTALS, 1881	144	37	7	14	13	215	159	261	635
TOTALS, 1880	118	46	15	9	21	209	154	284	647
TOTALS, 1879	127	43	16	8	23	217	148	276	641

In this table the deaths in each month of 1883 are classified according to the age at which they occurred, and the totals contrasted with those of the previous quinquennial period. The first point here is the abnormally large number of deaths under one year old, styled "Infantile Mortality." The true infantile mortality rate is obtained by contrasting these deaths with the births during the same period. The deaths under one year old were 163, and the births registered in the district for 1883 were 949, a proportion of 17·17 per cent. This rate is excessive, and especially when we remember that last year it was for the same district 14·2 per cent., for the Launceston District 17·18 per cent., and for the whole Colony only 10·3 per cent. As I remarked in 1881, when the per-cent-age was also large, 16·2, this high rate so rapidly increasing in our district cannot but be considered a bad sign, and must if possible be checked, whether it be due to local causes, hereditary debility, ignorance in feeding, or culpable neglect on the part of unmotherly mothers. In the period from 1 to 5 the deaths were also numerous, being 37 more than in 1882. While the more healthy sign of a large proportion of deaths at ages above sixty which occurred in 1882 is again manifest in 1883.

TABLE V.
HOBART Registration District.

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Births.</i>	<i>Deaths.</i>	<i>Births in excess of Deaths.</i>
1873.....	725	584	141
1874.....	783	586	197
1875.....	755	753	2
1876.....	761	605	156
1877.....	809	759	50
1878.....	844	639	205
1879.....	858	648	210
1880.....	900	647	253
1881.....	887	638	249
1882.....	917	683	234
1883.....	949	785	164
TOTALS	9188	7327	1861
Mean	835.8	666.1	169.2

This table gives us the births and deaths registered in the Hobart District during the year 1883; also a comparison of the same for the 10 previous years. It will be seen that both births and deaths have been more than ever previously, while the excess of births over deaths is, notwithstanding the large number of deaths, only 5.2 below the average.

It will be well here to note what progress has been made during the year in sanitary matters, and to suggest as far as possible remedial measures for some of the defects in our arrangements. During the year the substantial and handsome additions to the Hospital have been almost completed, and some of the wards have been opened for the reception of patients with infectious diseases. Several cases of scarlatina were admitted from the immigrant ships *Cape Clear* and *Gulf of Carpentaria*, while a large number of typhoid fever patients have since been under treatment here. When the proposed scheme for the erection of the administrative departments is completed, the whole will form an establishment highly creditable to the community, and a lasting proof of the zeal, energy, and ability of the present Chairman of the Board.

It has been my custom in my last two reports, as it was that of my predecessor, to point out how defective has been the drainage system, or rather want of system, throughout city and suburbs, and how urgently some reforms in this direction were needed, and it is now gratifying to record that the improvements in the creek have during the year been extended as far as Argyle-street. Certainly no one who visits this main sewer of the City, and compares the portion above Argyle-street bridge, where the bed of the creek is formed of large boulders, its banks reeking with filth from the adjacent houses, with that portion below, where the banks are cemented and a central channel carries off with little friction all but flood waters, could regret the expenditure which the improvement has necessitated—an improvement which ought to be speedily continued, at least as far as Molle-street. During the summer one of the worst localities for typhoid fever was the district adjacent to the creek above the Harrington-street bridge.

During the year the question of the removal of nightsoil has engaged the attention of the City Council, and, upon my representation, they have made arrangements for the weekly emptying of pails, with a view to the gradual closure of all cesspits throughout the city. Such a work, if thoroughly carried out, cannot but have a very beneficial effect upon the health of the citizens; instead of noisome and leaking cesspits, whose contents saturate the subsoil in close proximity to the dwellings, causing endless diarrhoea and typhoid fever, the pail emptied weekly, and its contents in the interval deodorised by the simple sprinkling of fine house ashes, is an improvement only to be tried to be appreciated. Still I fear that many will prefer the old system, the change involving some slight preliminary trouble and expense, unless they are compelled to take action. As a step in the right direction, an Act should be passed forbidding the construction of any more cesspits throughout the city and suburban towns, while a limit should be fixed,—say January 1st, 1887,—before which time all the present pits are to be closed. Only by some such arrangement as this can the change be effected without becoming too expensive to small property holders.

Connected with this subject is one which might be remedied in the same Public Health Act,—I mean the keeping of pigs. According to the Police Act, 1865, pigs may be kept anywhere, provided the sty is 25 feet from a street. The stench arising from pigs, especially kept in the filthy way they are here, is very prejudicial to health; and either pigs should not be allowed within certain fixed limits in the city (in Melbourne and Geelong they are not allowed to be kept at all), or no pig-sty should be permitted within twenty yards of a street or dwelling.

The subject of Hydatid disease is one which I think should have serious consideration; it is undoubtedly increasing, and bids fair to cause annually a large number of deaths. It depends, as

is well known, on the introduction into the human stomach of the larva of the *Tænia echinococcus*, a small tapeworm which inhabits the intestinal canal of the dog. Such introduction may take place in many ways,—water, uncooked vegetables, watercress, even dust acting as a vehicle. Sheep, like man, are subject to Hydatids, and it is from feeding on the livers and offal of such sheep that the dogs develop their peculiar tapeworm. Now it is manifest that without dogs we should have no Hydatid disease, and as there is a surplus canine population this surplus should be destroyed; a heavier dog tax should be imposed, and rigidly collected; the uncooked livers and offal of sheep should never be given to dogs for food; and in country places where men and dogs and sheep frequently drink out of the same water-hole, greater care should be exercised by the former in boiling or filtering the water. In Iceland, where the conditions for the spread of this disease are more favourable than in Tasmania, owing to the uncleanly habits of the people and the larger number of dogs, it is said that from one-fifth to one-seventh of the entire population suffer from Hydatid disease. In the Hobart Hospital, during the four years 1878 to 1881 inclusive, there were thirteen cases treated suffering from Hydatids, while in the one year 1883, in the same hospital, there were no less than nine under treatment suffering from the same disease; and in private practice it is much more commonly met with than formerly.

The situation of Tasmania has hitherto been her great safeguard against the approach of Small-pox. The long sea voyage of sailing ships, and the precautions taken in the neighbouring Colonies, have stood us in good stead. Now, however, that steamships making rapid passages visit us direct from London, where small-pox is always present, too careful a scrutiny cannot take place; and any passengers arriving with the least suspicion of the disease should be at once quarantined for the usual period. Should an emigrant vessel unfortunately reach us with small-pox on board, the want of a proper Quarantine Station would be sorely felt. However well adapted the Sanatorium at Lindisferne may be for isolating cases occurring in the town itself, it is not a true Quarantine Station; and it is satisfactory to learn that some steps have been taken with the view of procuring a suitable site. The expense attached to such a course is small compared with what must be incurred in stamping out the disease should it be admitted. The recent outbreak in Sydney, with the enormous expenditure necessary for its suppression, is a warning that should not be neglected.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

EDWARD O. GIBLIN, *M.D.*
Hobart, 10th June, 1884.

The Hon. WILLIAM MOORE, Chief Secretary.