CONFERENCE OF MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATIVES.

ADDRESS

BY COUNCILLOR B. WOMERSLEY, Chairman of the Sanitary
Committee of the Leeds City Council.

PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE.

FOR months past your visit to our City has been anticipated with great interest, and your presence affords our Sanitary Committee much pleasure; allow me in their name to tender you a hearty welcome to the City of Leeds, upon whose progress I desire to say a few words.

Leeds received its first Charter of Incorporation from Charles II. in 1661. This continued in force until the Municipal Reform Act was passed during the earlier years of the reign of Victoria.

The first Leeds Improvement Act dates back to 1755. It was termed an Act for the Enlightening of the Streets and Lanes and Regulating the Pavements of the town, the Act states that Leeds was a place of great trade and large extent with many streets, narrow lanes and alleys. Power was given to remove any nuisances or *annoyances*, which might exist in the town. After all these years, I am bound to confess we have still some nuisances left in the City.

About the time when the Queen came to the Throne the whole system of Municipal Government throughout England was reconstructed. The Corporation of Leeds was enlarged in 1835 from 36 to 64 Members, our present number.

In 1837 two very important Acts were passed as regards our City. One was for the better lighting, cleansing and sewerage, the other for the better supply of water to the town. At that time Leeds was the chief seat of the woollen industry, and the largest and most populous town in Yorkshire. A position, I am glad to say, it has never lost, due greatly to its excellent facilities for water carriage by canal and river.

Its chief industries at that time were flax spinning, woollen manufactures, dyeing, chemicals, fire clay and pottery, locomotive building, machine tool making, leather industries, paper

making, linen trades, iron smelting, &c. The flax trade has gone out—on the other hand the ready-made clothing industry is now one of our most important, giving employment to probably 30,000 persons, mostly women and girls. Boot manufacturing is carried on to a large extent in the City.

Such a variety of industries serves to complicate the sanitary conditions in our midst.

Allow me to rapidly review the Sanitary progress of Leeds during Her Majesty's Reign.

Population and Rateable Value.—At the commencement of the century our population was 53,000 with 11,600 inhabited houses, and through the century there has been a continual increase in our numbers until to-day. We have within our borders a population of 409,000 with 86,730 inhabited houses, and every two years we add to our population a number equal to that of either Harrogate, Windsor, Ossett or Durham.

In passing let me just state our rateable value is £1,445,474; our nett debt is £4,797,540 3s. 4d., or £11 14s. 9d. per head on 409,000, one penny in the pound producing £6.022 16s. 2d.

Our rates in Leeds are: City, 5s. 10d. in the pound; poor, 1s. 4d. in the pound; total, 7s. 2d.

Water Supply.—A good water supply is undoubtedly the most potent factor in promoting good sanitation. Before 1837 the water supply of the town was most unsatisfactory, being derived from wells, the River Aire, and from rain water storage. At that time it was no uncommon thing to see long rows of working people waiting their turn at the wells. But in that year a Company obtained an Act of Parliament, authorising the supply of water from the River Wharf.

In 1852 the Water Works were transferred to the Corporation. In 1865 the present scheme was begun, by which the City is supplied with excellent soft water gathered in the valley of the Washburn, fifteen miles from the Town Hall.

The available daily supply of water in Leeds, is 28 million gallons, the average daily consumption being over 14 millions, while over 73 millions were supplied to neighbouring towns during the past year.

The daily average consumption by meter, for trade purposes, is just over four million gallons. Thus, Leeds cannot be charged with having an insufficient water supply.

Open Spaces.—Another factor bearing on the health of the people, is open spaces, which have been provided with almost a lavish hand.

Upwards of 637 acres of land have been dedicated to the free use of the public for ever. These are comprised in fourteen parks or recreation grounds, at a cost of over a quarter of a

million of money. It costs the city £7,600 every year to maintain these open spaces. But we consider this a good investment in the interest of public health, and these places are things of Beauty, and will, it is to be hoped, remain to the Citizens a joy for ever.

In 1840 a public meeting was called by the working men of the town to promote sanitary reform, to petition the Town Council and Parliament on the subject.

The sanitary conditions amongst the poor was most wretched.

At that time a public exhibition was held, and the proceeds being devoted to the improvement of the sanitary conditions of the people, arising from—

1. Prevalence of an impure and infected atmosphere.

2. Presence of disease arising from deposits of animal and vegetable matter for want of a proper system of scavenging.

3. Great disproportion of privies to houses.

You will not be surprised to learn under such circumstances, sickness was prevalent to an alarming extent in 1840.

Fever Hospital.—Formerly there existed an Institute called the House of Recovery; it is true at times totally inadequate for dealing with the malignant epidemic fevers then very prevalent in Leeds; but from that time much has been done to check the ravages of infectious fever in our midst.

This Institution, moved from Vicar Lane in the very heart of the town to Beckill Street, was from time to time enlarged, and was taken over by the Corporation in 1885. In 1894 the Corporation secured the Manston Hall Estate, comprising 97 acres, at a cost of £10,000, situated about three miles from the centre of the town for the erection of additional accommodation.

The present Hospital will provide 136 beds for general infectious fevers and 58 for small-pox, and it is intended later to bring the total number up to 300 beds with complete administrative quarters and disinfecting station.

Undoubtedly the adoption of the notification of Diseases Act by the Council in 1894 has necessitated a great extension of hospital accommodation.

Last year over 2,300 cases were notified, of whom 726 were taken to the hospital, and I am glad to say under the wise and careful management of our Resident Medical Officer, Dr. Pearson, and the Matron, Mrs. Doran, our fever hospital has become quite popular with the people, and we have no difficulty in persuading persons suffering from infectious disease to go into hospital.

During the last five years 750 patients have annually passed through our hospital.

I trust a large number of the Members of this Congress will find it convenient to visit Manston, and see our splendid hospital grounds. And I would draw their special attention to the sixteen separate cottages built for the accommodation and isolation of families, while their own houses are undergoing disinfection.

Disposal of Sewage.—In a great inland town like Leeds the disposal of its sewage is a most serious problem. When I mention that we have running through our City upwards of 400 miles of main sewers, ranging from 9 inches to 8 ft. 9 in diameter, you will realise that there is an enormous quantity of sewage to be dealt with.

In 1870, after many experiments, the present works were erected at a cost of £47,000, our population was then 250,000.

The system adopted is that of lime precipitation, with large settling tanks, through which the sewage flows slowly, depositing as it goes.

At these works daily we are treating 16 million gallons of sewage at a yearly cost of £7,000, and the purity of the effluent is much greater than that of the River Aire before it enters the City. We feel we have outgrown the capacity of these works. The minds of our City Fathers are sorely troubled just now as to the best system to adopt to meet the growing demands of our ever increasing population, and the difficulty of dealing with certain trade effluents.

Scavenging.—Looking backward in scavenging matters in Leeds seems only to emphasise the progress made in all departments. Fifty years ago, an army of paupers swept our streets at an annual cost of £206 paid to the overseers, who complained, not without reason if they properly did their work, that the pay was inadequate. They advanced the price of pauper labour to £500 per annum, until at last the Corporation were forced to pay the guardians 6 pence per day for each pauper employed, so for twenty years our streets were cleansed by an army of 200 paupers.

But when it was first proposed to use sweeping machines a great outcry was made, on the ground that the machine would do away with pauper labour, as it was stated one machine would sweep nearly 400 miles of streets.

About this time, the day of small things, six horses were partially employed watering the whole of the streets. When an application was made for three more, it was said the poor contractor in his endeavours to meet the wishes of the ratepayers had lost four horses by over-exertion.

The cleansing of the streets passed from the pauper hands into that of the contractor, but at the present time, the

Corporation do the work with their own staff of men and horses and the results are far more satisfactory.

That difficult question of dealing with refuse has to a great extent been grappled with by the aid of four destructors, situated in various parts of the city, where all the solid and unsaleable refuse collected from the ashpits in the city, numbering 41,000, is destroyed. Annually we destroy 70,000 loads of refuse. The cost of burning, including all charges, is 2s. per ton. In that amount we allow 3d. as the cost of carting the residual clinker away. We reckon every ton of refuse costs the city 4s. 9d. to get rid of, 2s. per ton burning and 2s. 9d. per ton collecting and carting. If we had to cart the whole refuse out of the city, the cost would be much higher.

The total cost of constructing four destructors was £40,000 and the annual working expenses are £7,000. The average temperature maintained is 1,500 degrees Fahr.

Forced draught by means of steam jets are applied to each destructor. At present the steam power is utilised in mortar grinding. It will be of interest to state that just now we have one destructor under repair, that has been working over twenty years.

The public hardly realise the vast quantity of refuse dealt with every year by the corporation. It cannot be less than 130,000 tons of ash refuse alone, and if this had to be removed by rail, it would require a train of 17,000 trucks, reaching from Leeds to Manchester, a distance of forty miles.

I feel it right to point out, that the change from the old corporation to the reformed corporation, resulted in promoting considerable sanitary reform, but those reforms have been most marked during the last twenty-five years.

The sanitary work of this city is carried on under our excellent friend, Dr. Cameron, at the head, with a staff of 50 inspectors and clerks, dealing with all nuisances, food, drugs, cow-sheds, canal boats, &c., and together with a staff of 650 men and 180 horses, at an annual cost of £67,678, including sewage works.

In comparison with former days the people are well protected from health dangers. The whole department is daily waging war with dirt, disease and death, with good results.

It is impossible, without wearying you, for me to speak of all the good work done by this department, yet more than 17,000 houses were examined last year by our inspectors, leading to the discovery of 16,000 nuisances.

In nearly 9,000 houses all defects have been remedied. About 70,000 articles of clothing, &c., have been disinfected at our station during the past year.

Some consider the death-rate of a city a fair criterion of its health conditions.

The average mortality in Leeds during the ten years—

1865 to 1875	...	...	...	...	28·4
1875 to 1885	...	...	...	...	23·7
1884 to 1895	...	...	...	...	21·1
Three years 1894-5-6	...	...	...	...	19·1

During last year we registered the extremely low rate of 18·8.

Of the nine large cities with populations exceeding a quarter of a million, only two places had a death rate last year so low as Leeds: Edinburgh, 16·9; London, 18·6; Leeds, 18·8.

This prolongation and saving of life during 1885-94 as compared with 1865-74, represents a yearly saving of over 2,800 lives, as the result of improved health conditions. Or to put it in another way, picture to yourselves our noble Victoria Hall on the occasion of some popular musical festival. The seating capacity of the floor is crowded in every part, all available space for standing is taken up. Now the impatient crowds swell up to the Orchestra until it can hold no more. Then the gallery is thronged until every seat is filled.

We will suppose for this special occasion the vestibule is utilized, and soon every inch of space is occupied by an expectant audience, and even now there remains an overflow who go off, it may be to the refreshment room to find satisfaction in lieu of a seat.

Gentlemen, that vast human audience (very few babies whose mortality raises our death-rate) barely represents our annual saving of life in Leeds, compared with thirty years ago.

Surely no money value can be put on this saving of life and the increase of human happiness that these figures disclose. I am proud to say during the last three consecutive years, the death rate has been only 19·1.

To a large degree these results, eminently valuable to Leeds, may be taken as the interest on capital expended, and the result of knowledge diffused in the application of sanitary science in many directions during the past twenty-five years.

I cannot close without referring to a most important undertaking the City Council have on hand just now, the carrying out of which is entrusted to the Sanitary Committee.

Under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, an official representation was made by our valued medical officer, Dr. Cameron, in regard to an insanitary area of 75 acres, with a population of 15,000.

The Council wisely decided to deal with such a large area in

sections. Of the above, $16\frac{1}{4}$ acres are just now being dealt with under Part 1 of the Act; an order having been obtained only last year. The numbers displaced in this area will be 3,844. Accommodation had to be provided upon the cleared area for 2,000 persons of the working class.

The reason that led to this most important Sanitary improvement was the fact that in this particular area, the Mortality was 90% higher than any other district in Leeds. While the death-rate in the whole City was 20.6 for the previous three years, in this area it was 39.2.

Two Inspectors were sent down by the Local Government Board to hold a local enquiry which lasted several days, but the Bill was stoutly opposed in the House of Commons, by the owners of the 15 public houses situated in this particular area. In the House of Lords the opposition fell away somewhat, but the Bill was still opposed by the owners of 4 public houses.

When the Bill was before the House of Lords an antiquated member of that distinguished House, in the so-called interests of some property defence league, moved that our Bill be read three months hence. Now this enlightened, or otherwise Lord, admitted he did not know anything about Leeds.

Gentlemen, how much longer are large Municipalities to be subjected to grandmotherly Parliaments, on occasions of Sanitary or other improvements. Surely the representatives of the people in our City and town Councils understand far better the conditions and the requirements of their town than a few members of Parliament, promiscuously brought together. Many of these gentlemen have little knowledge or sympathy with Municipal life.

To obtain a seat in such Councils, a Councillor has often to obtain far more votes than some Members of Parliament. He is as well qualified to judge of our city requirements as an average Member of Parliament. A very unnecessary burden is placed on the Municipal Authorities in this county in having to go up to Westminster and there through the lips of professional gentlemen lay their case for some street or drainage improvement, or for authority to borrow money first before a Committee of the House of Commons and then before another Committee of the Lords, who are in no special way qualified to judge of the merits and demerits of our scheme, but who are too much liable to be influenced by permanent officials.

To my mind this is a subject that ought to engage the mind of the combined Corporation of this county. If we must have some kind of centralisation, then let us have some county authority to deal with these matters within our county limits.

And why should not the legal adviser to every Corporation be

competent to lay the matters affecting his own city or town before any duly authorised authority without the interviewing of Queen's Counsels, however eminent. I have never heard of one of these gentlemen failing to take up his retaining fee, but have known them to fail when the case came on.

If this reform could be accomplished, thousands of pounds would be saved to the long suffering ratepayers of this country.

In closing may I express the hope that every Municipal authority represented at this Conference may experience in the coming years such improved health conditions as shall make life worth living in all our great cities and towns.