WATER SUPPLY IN RURAL DISTRICTS.*

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By the Public Health Act, 1875, power is given local authorities to construct necessary waterworks, two months' notice of their intention being given to allow of objections being heard by the Local Government Board. The supply must be maintained pure and wholesome, and at a pressure which will carry it to the top storey of the highest dwelling-house in the district supplied. The authorities may supply to public baths or wash-houses, or for trade purposes on terms agreed on, or may gratuitously supply public baths or washhouses established otherwise than for private profit; and urban authorities must provide and maintain fire plugs, etc., for securing a sufficient supply in the case of fire. When the water of any well, tank, cistern, or pump, used for drinking purposes, is reported to an authority to be so polluted as to be injurious to health, they may apply to a court of summary jurisdiction, and the court may cause the water to be analysed at the cost of the local authority, and may make an order temporarily or permanently closing the well.

The Public Health (Water) Act, 1878, amends the Public Health Act, 1875, as far as relates to water supply. It makes it the duty of every rural sanitary authority to see that every occupied dwelling in their district has within a reasonable distance an available and sufficient supply of wholesome water. If the medical officer of health or inspector report that a house is without such supply, and the authority are of opinion that it can be provided at a reasonable cost, they shall serve a notice on the owner, requiring him, within a specified time, to provide a water supply; and at the expiration of this time, if the notice is not complied with, the authority may serve another notice stating that if the requirements of the first notice are not complied with within a month, they will provide such a supply, and recover the expense from the owner. This provision does not exempt the authority from the duty (imposed on them by the Public Health Act, 1875) of supplying their district in cases where danger arises to the health of the inhabitants from the insufficiency or unwholesomeness of the existing supply and a general scheme of supply is required, and such supply can be got at a reasonable cost. It is not lawful in any rural district for the owner of a dwelling-house, built or rebuilt from the ground floor, after the date of the commencement of this Act, to allow the same to be occupied without having obtained a certificate from the sanitary authority that a sufficient supply of wholesome water is available. It is made the duty of the rural authority, from time to time, to ascertain the condition of the water supply within their district.

These powers would be sufficient to enable every authority to obtain an adequate and wholesome supply for every household, if it were not for the restrictions implied in the words "reasonable cost." It often happens that the medical officer of health or inspector reports that a house is without a sufficient supply of wholesome water, but the authority are not of opinion that the supply can be provided at a reasonable cost, and so no action is taken. Or supposing danger arises to the health of the inhabitants of a district from the insufficiency or unwholesomeness of the existing supply, and a general scheme of supply is required, if such supply cannot be got at a reasonable cost, the supply is not got. It thus happens that the powers relating to the provision of water in the Public Health Act, 1875, and the Public Health (Water) Act, 1878, are in great part inoperative. The local authorities are not to blame for this, for often supplying an outlying farmhouse, or carrying out a general scheme of supply in a remote, sparsely populated district, is manifestly such an expensive undertaking it would be impossible to be of opinion the work could be done at reasonable cost. No one is particularly to blame, but as long as the powers given have such limitations the water supply in many districts will be insufficient, and shallow wells, so liable to pollution from the surface, will be used.

QUAIN'S DICTIONARY OF MEDICINE.*

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The chapter on Contagion, contributed by Sir John Simon, is a piece of exquisite English, dealing with a complex subject in a widely philosophical

* From Dr. Vacher's Annual Report, 1894.

* A Dictionary of Medicine, including General Pathology, General Therapeutics, Hygiene, and the Diseases of Women and Children. By various writers. Edited by Richard Quain, Bart., M.D., F.R.S., etc., assisted by Drs. F. T. Roberts and Mitchell Bruce. (Longmans and Co., 39, Paternoster Row. 40s. nett.)