

SPECIAL ARTICLES.

THE ATTITUDE OF NEW ZEALAND
TOWARDS CONSUMPTION.

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EVIL in many instances is only disguised good. The appearance of plague in 1899 in New South Wales was the causative agent in the setting up of a Commission to report on the sanitary condition of New Zealand. The result of the report of that Commission was the Public Health Act of 1900. Sir Joseph G. Ward (now Premier of the Colony) had charge of the Bill, and experts could not hope for a more energetic political head. The Public Health Act of 1900, while it has many defects, is undoubtedly far in advance of most statutes under which the conservation of the public health is carried out. In most instances the permissive "may" has been replaced by the mandatory "shall." "The local authority may of its own motion, and shall when the Chief Health Officer directs." This form of sentence gives the keynote of the Act. A hospital or sanatorium must be erected in any specific district if the Chief Health Officer directs, and it has been in virtue of this section of the Act that much of the provision has been effected. It may be well to point out in what respect the hospitals in the colony differ from those of Great Britain. In the old land provision for the sick, saving those mentally affected, is mainly the result of private charity. In New Zealand, Boards have been set up for specific areas, and all hospitals within that area are controlled and financed by the Boards. An estimate of the expenditure necessary is made, and the Central Government and the local authorities situated within the zone are notified. The local authorities are required to pay to the Board one-half of the sum necessary, while the other half is paid by the Government from the Consolidated Fund. This much it is necessary to set out in order to understand clearly the significance of the campaign which has been waged unceasingly, and with such success, against consumption by the Department of Public Health.

New Zealand, as most will be aware, is situated roughly between 34 and 47 degrees of south latitude, and between 166 and 179 parallels of longitude. The area of the two islands approaches very nearly that of England and Scotland, but in place of Britain's 48,000,000 of people

this Britain of the south has less than 1,000,000 (875,000). The last census showed that there were 42,000 Maoris and half-castes.

One of the first steps taken was the placing of tuberculosis upon the list of infectious diseases compulsorily notifiable. This was done in 1901. Although the colony has for many years had the lowest general death-rate, and the lowest death-rate from tubercle in the world, I decided at an early stage of the Department's course steadily to strive to reduce the incidence of and mortality from this disease. One of the first steps was to bring home to the people the gravity and importance of the enemy; and, secondly, to emphasize at every opportunity that the disease was mainly spread from one person to another by means of infected sputum. Lectures were given by the various officers in their several districts, and placards such as the following distributed—

N O T I C E .

CONSUMPTION.—TUBERCULOSIS.

CONSUMPTION, a form of tuberculosis, is an infectious disease which, in Great Britain, causes the death of some 70,000 persons annually. It causes much sickness and many deaths in New Zealand, despite the excellence of our climate, chiefly through ignorance of its infectivity and carelessness on the part of the sufferer and others. It is in a great measure preventable. Consumption is spread chiefly by the dried expectoration of those suffering from the disease being blown on to food and swallowed by others, or floating as dust in the air, being inhaled by individuals not quite healthy or predisposed from birth to chest diseases. A small quantity of the discharge contains countless minute germs. It can be easily understood, therefore, how important it is that no one suffering from consumption should spit anywhere but into a spittoon containing a disinfectant (carbolic acid 1-20), or on to rags which can be burned at once. Every care should be taken to destroy all discharges immediately, or, if that be not possible, they should not be allowed to get dry before being burned. Consumption is a disease which affects some of the domestic animals. The Government is endeavouring to stamp it out from among the cattle in the colony; but the scalding of milk before its use, especially for children, is a wise and necessary precaution.

By observing the following precautions, the public can do much to help the authorities in their war against this veritable scourge of modern times.

PRECAUTIONS.

1. Consumption having been declared by the Governor an infectious disease, all cases must be notified to the District Health Officer in accordance with Section 26 of "The Public Health Act, 1900." The duty of notification rests with the occupier of the house where the patient resides, and with the medical man in attendance.

2. No person ought to spit in a public street.

3. Any house or room which has been occupied by a person suffering from Consumption must be thoroughly disinfected before being occupied by anyone else.