BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL REPORTS.

SPECIAL REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE
ALDERSHOT CAMP SEWAGE FARM.

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IN compliance with the request of the Editor of the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* that I should examine the present condition of the Camp Sewage Farm at Aldershot, and report to him thereon, I visited it on July 16th, and carefully inspected it.

I desire to state prefatorily that the average population of the garrison tributary to the farm in question is about 16 000, with a daily water supply of between 600,000 and 700,000 gallons.

The camp is said to be sewered on the duplicate system—that is to say, the surface or storm waters are professedly conducted into the watercourses of the district, and the sewage only into the sewers. As in most other instances, however, perfect separation has not been effected, with the result that, during times of rain, the quantity of sewage discharged into the sewers is considerably more than the water supply.

The Camp Farm, which has been from time to time the subject of such adverse comments in the House of Commons and in the press, was, I am informed, laid out by Mr. James Blackburn, a well-known advocate of sewage farming, in or about 1866, when the question of sewage treatment generally was nothing like so well understood as at the present time. It consists of 115 acres of free soil, most suitable for sewage treatment, 100 acres of which are actually sewaged. Mr. Blackburn paid no rent to the Government, and held the farm for a term of fourteen years, giving it up at Michaelmas, 1880. During his occupancy things were well managed, and there were no complaints.

In 1880 a Mr. Brown succeeded Mr. Blackburn, and was granted a lease until Michaelmas, 1894, staying on, however, as tenant at will until June of this year (1895). Mr. Brown paid the War Office a rent of £400 a year, and during the latter portion of his term things began to present a very different appearance to what they did in Mr. Blackburn's time.

In June of this year, in consequence of the frequent complaints publicly made against the farm, Lieutenant-Colonel Jones, V.C., late of Wrexham, who has had much experience in sewage farming, was entrusted with its management by the War Office, who began to see that there was real ground for complaints; and he was instructed to apply such remedies as he thought proper in order, it may be presumed, to satisfy public opinion. As Colonel Jones has only been in residence for a few weeks, he naturally has not yet had an opportunity to do anything of a thoroughly practical character.

The appearance of the farm on the day of my inspection was the reverse of agreeable, for the systematic neglect of years is apparent at every turn. The homestead, which on a sewage farm should be an example of order and careful maintenance, especially in such a place as Aldershot, is next door to a ruin; and there is not a gate on the whole farm. The condition of the roads and fences likewise is very bad. The tanks at the outlets of the four outfall sewers, which were never of good design, and which are most unsuitable for the deposition of sludge, have fallen into decay, and having apparently never been cleaned out for a long time present a disgraceful appearance, the large quantities of sludge collected in them giving off nauseating odours. Much of the land is out of cultivation, and its surface has in many places lost the even level, or slope, to which it was apparently carefully reduced and maintained by Mr. Blackburn, with the result that the sewage collects in the low places, forming stagnant and offensive pools. The main furrows by which the sewage ought to be rapidly conveyed from the various tanks for distribution over the land have, from want of proper attention, become simply large and ill-shaped ditches, which serve to collect the sewage and check its rapid conveyance to the various points of outlet. The smaller branch furrows have been equally neglected.

Not content with applying, or rather misapplying, the sewage to the land which he leased from the Government, the late tenant, presumably whenever he wished to do so, was allowed to convey the sewage to several low-lying meadows of his own beyond the sewage farm and in proximity to the river Blackwater. Here were the same evidences of careless management, and obviously the sewage had been allowed to flow as it pleased towards, and eventually into, the river, thus causing needless pollution of a serious character.

I have no hesitation in stating my belief that the recent outcry is not only perfectly justifiable, but that the present disgraceful state of things is entirely traceable to long and continued neglect. Upon whose shoulders the responsibility for this neglect lies is not within my province to inquire. It would almost look as if the War Office, after obtaining the large annual rent of £400 for 115 acres, had closed their eyes to everything else, for certain it is that if the late tenant had been bound down by the ordinary rules inseparable from successful sewage farming, and had their due observance been systematically maintained, there would never have been cause for complaint.

I am convinced that even now if the farm throughout were properly laid out for the reception of sewage, the surface of the land carefully levelled and prepared, new tanks of modern and improved design built, and pipe conduits laid or small earthen carriers made, so that the liquid could be rapidly conveyed and distributed over the whole of the area, there would not be a better or more successful sewage farm in England, for it is seldom that such suitable soil is met with; whilst the area at command is sufficient to successfully purify the sewage of at least 40,000 people without the slightest nuisance.

The authorities should realise the exceedingly lamentable condition of things as soon as possible, and give the necessary money and instructions to immediately carry out what is required, for temporary or palliative measures will be of no avail.

The only alternative to such a course, but one which will involve a far greater outlay, is to remove the sewage farm to another site at a greater distance from the camp, one argument in favour of this alternative being that a new hospital may possibly be built on the adjacent high ground between the sewage farm and the Marlborough lines, at a distance of about 280 yards from the nearest point to which the sewage is now applied; but whether the present farm is retained or a new one acquired, it is imperative that the authorities should settle the question without delay.

It having been suggested that the town of Aldershot and the camp should combine and take their sewage to a site near Cove Common, where a new and extensive sewage farm could be laid out, I visited the sewage disposal works of the town, where I was courteously received by Mr. Rushford, town surveyor, and given every information. I found that the sewage, which amounts to a daily quantity of about 650,000 gallons, was being treated satisfactory, and that after mixture with sulphate of alumina, and subsequent deposition in tanks, the liquid is conveyed to thirty-two acres, over which it is distributed. The effluent, which is discharged into the Blackwater after filtration through this land, was clear and good. The site, however, where the accumulated sludge, after being raised from the tanks, is deposited, is very near the town, and a nuisance must at times result. An improvement would be advisable, and the district council would do well to consider whether, as there appears to be available land in proximity to their thirty-two acres, at a safer distance from the town, to which the sludge could be raised (as may be seen by a visit to the farm of Mr. Heath, at Deadbrook), it is necessary, or even desirable, to join with the camp authorities in the larger scheme of total removal, which must necessarily involve all concerned in very great expenditure.

THE Pediatric Gazette is the name of a new journal which will begin to appear at fortnightly intervals on January 1st, 1896. A specimen number will be issued in October next. As the name denotes, it will be devoted to the study of disease in infants and children. Dr. Dillon Brown, of New York, who at present edits the *Archives of Pediatrics* will be the Editor of the new journal, the annual subscription to which in this country it is intended to fix at 8s.