

A PAPER

ON

DRINKING FOUNTAINS.

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READ IN THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE.
LIVERPOOL MEETING, OCTOBER, 1890.

My attention was first called to this subject during a visit at Geneva, in 1852, by observing the beautiful stone water Fountains which are so abundant in that city, indeed in every town in Switzerland, and on the Continent generally. The system for the supply of water for general purposes is on quite a different principle there to what it is here in Liverpool. There the water is the property of the town authorities, and is distributed by them to the citizens through the means of large public Fountains, free of cost. Formerly every householder was obliged to get all the water he wanted from the Fountains, and have it conveyed into his private cistern, either by his own servants, or by regular water carriers, whom he paid for their labour. This is still the general custom on the Continent, though in some towns the more recently built houses are furnished with a direct supply of water, which is paid for as in this country.

In Liverpool the whole of the water which supplies the town is the property of the town authorities, but in 1852, with the exception of two horse troughs at the docks, not one drop of it was to be had without paying a water rate, and then it was only supplied by a pipe inside the house.

On making inquiries among policemen and working men, it was ascertained, beyond a doubt, that the want of any means of obtaining water to drink was greatly felt, especially in the neighbourhood of the docks. The policeman said that he was continually asked for water, and pointed to the vast number of emigrants from Ireland or the Continent on their way to America and Australia then passing through our streets, who, accustomed to find public Fountains in every town and village in their own country, were in such great distress as to where they could get some water, that some of them were glad enough to drink at the horse trough; but, generally, he had to direct them to a public house, where, naturally, they were expected to pay for a stronger and less refreshing drink than they required. The intelligent working man was also eager to add his testimony to the immense advantage a water tap would be to the porters and labourers who throng the streets in the neighbourhood of the docks.

At that time the supply of water was limited, and it was not without difficulty that two small drinking taps were put up at the Prince's Dock, in 1853; the numbers who made use of them were such, that the ball tap affixed to one of them, and the spring tap by which the other was worked, were both worn out in the course of a few months, and it became necessary to devise some more durable way of giving water in the street.

In March, 1854, the first granite Fountain was erected at the south end of Prince's Dock, and three months later the numbers drinking there, in the course of twelve hours, were carefully counted, and found to be 2336. This Fountain is of

polished red Aberdeen granite, consisting of three pieces ; first, a small basin projecting from the dock wall sixteen inches ; secondly, a square slab about two feet square, fixed in the wall above it, and resting on it with a bronze head, through which the water flows into the basin ; and, thirdly, a small pediment as a finish on the top. The basin is fixed with its lip about three feet eight inches from the ground ; this was done on account of the very rough neighbourhood in which it is situated. It is thus fixed at a suitable height from the ground for grown up men, but rather too high for children. This may be obviated by placing a stepping-stone on one side of it ; but the tendency of children to make wet work and play tricks with water, has not encouraged me to endanger the safety or cleanliness of the Fountains, which are chiefly intended for the working man.

This Fountain is supplied by a *constant* flow of water night and day ; at first sight this may seem to be a useless expenditure of water, but, *practically*, there can be no hesitation in saying it is the best and the only satisfactory plan. The vast number of persons who use these Fountains would (as experience has shown) soon cause the best system of taps to get out of order—the taps would leak and the water run on the footpath—call forth complaints, and bring the drinking apparatus under the head of a public nuisance.

Again it has been suggested that the water might be turned on at an early hour in the morning and turned off again at night, and a considerable economy thus effected. But who will ensure that the waterman or policeman *will* turn on the water at the proper hour in the morning ? many persons are found drinking before six o'clock ; in one case 65 were counted between half-past five and six o'clock. And again, at what hour should the water be turned off at night ? No statistics have been taken later than between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, when 150 persons drank, but many persons have been noticed,

at different times, drinking at the Fountains quite late at night; so that there would only be about five or six hours during which the water would not be wanted—and to secure this small economy the efficiency during the day would be endangered, and a constant supervision rendered necessary.

The best way of economising the water running away from a Drinking Fountain is to convey it in a pipe to the nearest site, where a cattle trough can be conveniently placed. This plan has been adopted in one instance, at Elm House, in the outskirts of Liverpool; and it is understood that the Mersey Dock and Harbour Board are about to erect several cattle troughs along the line of docks, in connection with the existing Drinking Fountains. They will, doubtless, prove a great benefit to the thousands of cattle that are landed every week in our docks; and they will no doubt tend to prevent the accidents which are caused by infuriated animals running wildly along the streets in search of water.

Until several Fountains had been erected, and their usefulness proved, it was natural that the municipal authorities here should remain passive, as, beyond the inaction for which public bodies are proverbial, they were bound to protect the revenue they derive from the water which they supply to almost every householder, at a charge based upon the rent of his house.

Some Town Councillors, therefore, thought that the supply of water to the Drinking Fountains in the streets was an unnecessary expenditure of their then comparatively limited supply of water; and others urged that if water was thus given, even in small quantities, it might induce the occupiers of small houses to give up paying for the town water supplied to their cisterns, and cause them to use such water only as could be obtained from the street Fountains. It was therefore necessary, in selecting designs for such Fountains, to take care that they should be so constructed that no large vessel could be placed

under the tap, and in the small granite pattern which has been adopted here, nothing larger than a working man's dinner can, or a moderate-sized jug, can be introduced between the bronze head and the edge of the basin. This arrangement has also the advantage of avoiding a wet footway, which, on a windy day, would be the inevitable result of the water not being immediately received in a basin placed within a few inches below it.

Subsequent experience has proved that these small wall Fountains are, both as to pattern and material, perfectly well suited to the object for which they are intended. No material is equal in durability and cleanliness to polished granite; and Fountains inserted in the walls are more useful than if they were placed in public crossings or open spaces, as they are less liable to be injured; the footway protects them from carts and horses, and they present themselves in a most convenient way to the passer-by, who cannot fail to observe them, passing, as he does, with a few feet of the flow of water.

The extent to which this means of obtaining water to drink in the streets has been appreciated in Liverpool is shown by the statistics which have been taken from time to time, and which are truly surprising. On the 9th April, 1855, 2308 persons were counted drinking at the Prince's Dock Granite Fountain, in twelve hours; on the 22nd June, of the same year, 3840 persons drank at the Iron Fountain, George's Dock Bridge, in twelve hours and a quarter, making an average of more than four persons drinking every minute throughout the day. In winter the numbers are very much smaller; on the 9th January, 1856, a very cold and frosty day, 348 persons drank in eleven hours; still this gives an average of one person in every two minutes. Since the number of the Fountains in Liverpool has been increased from six to forty no very perceptible diminution has been observed in the number drinking at each; at a Granite Fountain in Park Road, quite in the upper part of the town, and far away from the

docks, 2184 persons were counted drinking on the 18th of last month (September.) A calculation based upon a series of such figures, taken at different seasons, and in different parts of the town, by persons of perfect reliability, employed for the purpose, gives an average number of upwards of 1000 persons drinking *every* day throughout the year at *each* of the forty Fountains scattered throughout the town and its outskirts.

The only objection which can be urged with any force against street Fountains is the one already mentioned, namely, that householders may, by procuring water in the street, contrive to defraud the Water Company or the Corporation of a small amount of their water rates; but this can scarcely be the case if Fountains are erected only in populous thoroughfares, markets and other places where the number of the persons wishing to drink would effectually prevent any carrying away of the water for other purposes. It would be well, however, to avoid placing a Fountain in the immediate vicinity of small houses which have not a supply of water of their own. On this point the evidence of Major Greig, the head of the Liverpool police, is most valuable. He thus writes on the 20th September, 1858:—

“In reference to the Public Drinking Fountains, it may be
 “supposed by some persons that advantage is taken of them for
 “purposes other than those for which they were intended; this
 “may be the case, in some instances, at some of the Fountains
 “contiguous to the line of docks, but the quantity of water so
 “taken is scarcely to an appreciable extent, being taken by
 “emigrants filling their cans; occasionally a sailor lad will fill
 “his tea or coffee kettle, and boys from the offices in the
 “neighbourhood also fill their cans; whilst the benefit to
 “passengers, &c. passing through our crowded thoroughfares,
 “especially people from the manufacturing and rural districts,
 “who fill the streets as excursionists, must be obvious to every
 “one. Many instances have occurred of emigrants eagerly

"inquiring of the police where they could get water, and have "gone to the water troughs for cattle on the dock quays to get "it, before the erection of these fountains."

It may be remarked that in seaports there are certain classes of persons to whom Drinking Fountains are especially valuable, namely, those who, by the regulations of the Harbour Board, are obliged to live on board the ships in dock; there is an average of 800 to 1000 vessels always in our docks, and it may be calculated that, including the crews not yet paid off, 3000 to 4000 sailors are living on board of them; they have no water fit to drink in the ship, as she has probably returned from a long voyage, and the water casks are not replenished until a day or two before the vessel goes to sea again. Formerly, the water casks, when refilled, had to be carefully watched to prevent the thirsty sailor from emptying them when trying to get a drink of water from them. Bargemen, who are a numerous class in Liverpool, are also often noticed filling small cans at the Fountains, and for the same reason.

In other towns Drinking Fountains have been introduced with great success. At Leeds the Corporation have erected six at their own expense. At Hull Mr. Henry T. Atkinson has placed three, and soon after the water had been turned on to the first one, 3124 persons availed themselves of it in one day. At St. Helens 800 to 1000 persons drink every day at an Iron Standard Fountain, erected by Mr. Charles Bishop. At Derby one of the small Granite Founts has been placed by the Rev. J. Erskine Clarke in an abutment of St. Michael's Church, and though it is not in a very populous street, the numbers reach 400 to 500 a day. At Aberdeen Mr. A. M'Donald has erected one at the Railway Station, and on a showery day the numbers reached 1629. Mr. Edgar Garston, of this town, caused four Granite Fountains to be erected in Chester, and his example was immediately followed by Mr. Peter Eaton, the Mayor of

Chester, who erected four more. E. S. Ellis, Esq. has placed two marble Drinking Fountains in the Leicester Railway Station, which have been found so useful to the travelling public, that at their next meeting the Directors of the Midland Railway Company resolved to erect Drinking Fountains at all the principal stations on their line. At Glasgow the municipal authorities have promised to erect thirty-two moderately handsome Fountains, two in each ward; and the corporation of Sunderland are at present erecting several of cast iron, enamelled on the inside, in their principal thoroughfares, the railway stations, and in the public park. In several other towns efforts are being made to obtain Street Fountains, but they are sometimes rendered unsuccessful by the difficulty of obtaining a supply of water. When the water is the property of the municipal authorities as it is here, in Manchester, Leeds and many other towns, it is natural enough that the ratepayers should insist that a supply of water be granted to Drinking Fountains for their benefit; but when the water belongs to a private company, whose interest it is to sell their water at the highest rate which their Act of Parliament permits, the position is changed, and it becomes the duty of the ratepayers, represented by their Town Councils, Parish or Vestry authorities, to *pay* for the water supplied to their Drinking Fountains.

In some instances water companies have reduced their charge in consideration of the object. At Derby the water company charges only 3d per 1000 gallons. At Kendal the charge is only nominal, and at Birmingham the Water Company has offered to supply a few Drinking Fountains gratis. It is to be feared that the city of London will not find its Water Companies equally liberal. I am informed that one of them has even refused to supply a Fountain which some gentlemen proposed erecting in the outskirts of London, though they were willing to pay a fair remuneration for the water

consumed. It is to be hoped, however, that through the generosity of individuals and the intervention of the parish authorities, or, if need be, of Parliament, the metropolis will not be the last to supply her millions with the means of obtaining a cup of water gratis in her thoroughfares. Sites for Fountains are not wanting—the entrances to all the bridges, and the walls of churches and other public buildings are among the most appropriate.

Some opposition was at one time anticipated on the part of beerhouse keepers, but I am glad to say that these fears have been proved to be without foundation, and it is with no small pleasure that I can state that a Drinking Fountain is now being erected in Dublin by a publican and spirit merchant, who is placing it in the wall of his own premises.

To prove the importance of a gratuitous supply of water, by means of Public Fountains in our great commercial and manufacturing towns, it is only necessary to consider the circumstances under which the great bulk of the labouring men in those towns carry on their daily work. Take the instance of this Town of Liverpool.

The labourers, shipwrights and porters employed in our docks and warehouses live at a considerable distance from their work; often two or three miles. When leaving their home, therefore, in the morning, they generally carry their dinner out with them, and only return home after their day's work is done. It is evident that during these ten or twelve hours they must quench their thirst with something or other, once, if not oftener.

Four years ago it was almost impossible for any one to procure a glass of water without going into a shop and buying something—spending, in fact, what he might otherwise have economised. Under these circumstances it was of course natural, almost necessary, for the thirsty labourer to drink a glass or two of beer at one of the establishments so conveniently placed

at the corner of the streets he passed, and thus to spend at least a tenth part of his day's wages, to say nothing of the temptation to which he exposed himself.

I am not going to enter upon the temperance question; but I wish to point out to the friends of liberty and free trade that, in our great cities, beer has a monopoly. There is no water. In most towns there are no public pumps, and even where they do exist they are gradually disappearing, to make room for the improvements of the present age. The venerable old pumps of the City of London belong to a generation which is fast passing; wider streets and better sewerage will soon sweep the remaining ones away.

What does the present generation give us in their stead? A supply of water within every house—of water that has to be paid for, but which cannot be given away. The passer-by in the street cannot avail himself of the water which is supplied to his neighbour. If thirsty, he must buy wherewith to quench his thirst, and, where both must be paid for, he may prefer the stronger drink.

If water was made easily accessible, free of charge, in all leading thoroughfares, how many would be thereby assisted to maintain themselves as respectable and valuable members of the community.

Society provides gaols for criminals, and poorhouses for the children of vicious and improvident parents, and the honest man has to pay the rates for their maintenance. Is it not, then, the duty as well as the interest of society to provide such a natural means of helping its members to be sober and economical?

I am indebted to the Editor of the British Workman for the annexed Illustrations of a Granite Fountain and Cattle Trough.