

The sanitary services

by P.J. Ryan

Off the main streets were hundreds of lanes. The houses in these lanes had no lavatories or indoor water supplies. Buckets were used as toilets and were emptied into Corporation cars at night, the poor widow giving of her mite and the larger or more affluent families giving of their abundance. A few water taps in each lane provided water supplies. The waste water from the houses flowed along the lanes and into the gullies in the main streets.

The houses were lime-washed or papered and were lit by candles or paraffin lamps. On the outside they were limewashed in various colours, golden ochre being the favourite colour. Clothes lines were strung across the lanes but scarcely impeded pedestrians. Some of the lanes were paved with cobble stones and others with limestone flags from Liscannor, Co. Clare. All the foot-paths in the main streets were flagged.

In many parts of the city were public drinking fountains which served a great public need. The earliest of these fountains was in a wall by the Dock Road; it was built in 1852 when the pumping station on the Shannon at Rhebogue was built to provide the city with its first public water works. Prior to these fountains, wooden and iron pumps with handles supplied water from wells. Another public amenity was the many drinking troughs for horses and cattle, with a secondary trough underneath for sheep and dogs.

Public lavatories were usually located near the public fountains, the one provoking the use of the other. They were brick built and whitewashed, with a band of tar near the ground. Inside was a long iron trough with rounded edges on which patrons sat and mused in wonder. On the walls were poetic inscriptions which showed that some of the writers were acquainted with the works of the poet Shakespeare. Because of their simple structure the toilets offered no scope to vandals. There were almost twenty-five of these toilets in the city, but as they were a denial of the divine origin of man, and offensive to pure Christian piety, they were gradually removed. The consequences of their removal was that twenty thousand annual visitors and fifty thousand citizens were denied the right to exercise a natural function. Visitors and citizens, like the early Christians, had to suffer on, such is the power of priestcraft.

There were over a dozen slaughter-houses in the city where sheep and cattle were killed for food. A slaughter-house consisted of an enclosed yard with an open shed where the carcasses were hung up for cutting. In the case of sheep, the living animals surveyed the dead from the cutting of the throat to the removal of the woolly fleece. The entrails and dung from the slaughtered animals were piled up on one side of the yard until the stench from the rotting mass and the complaints of the neighbours compelled the abatement of the nuisance. The slaughter-houses were located or concealed in dead-end lanes and back streets of the city, and were infested with rats throughout the year. During the summer the walls and carcasses were covered with bluebottles and smaller



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flies. The drone of hoverflies could be heard outside the yard gates.

The meat from those yards was sold in the butcher shops in the principal streets. Because of the concealed position of those yards, diseased animals could be slaughtered, dressed and sold as good meat from a healthy beast.

Any family having a yard near its house usually reared pigs for slaughter in the bacon factories; there was a good profit from this work. The main incentive lay in getting a large sum of money on the sale of the pigs rather than mere wages doled out weekly. In this manner about seven thousand city-fed pigs were sent to the bacon factories each year.

There were four bacon factories in the city; they were family concerns and were owned by Henry Denny and Sons, Malcolm Shaw and Sons, Matterns, and James O'Mara and Sons. The blood from these factories was collected daily and sent out to a water mill on the Groody river where it was dried in open concrete tanks, ground into powder and exported as blood manure. The four companies also combined in maintaining a breeding station for pedigree sows and boars, near the watermill.

A branch line of the G.S. & W. railway crossed the Roxboro Road into Shaw's factory and ran across Mulgrave Street to the Pig Market, and from there into Denny's factory in Cathedral Place. Pig-buyers attended fairs throughout the country and sent pigs on to Limerick by rail. In this manner pigs arrived direct into the Pig Market and factories. The products of these factories were world famous for their quality. This was due to the variegated diet of the pigs: one firm claiming in its advertisements that its pigs were milk-fed bacon. One humorous advertisement showed a squalling baby seated on a rug and a bonham happily guzzling the milk from the child's feeding bottle.

Each factory killed about three hundred to six hundred pigs per day. O'Mara's is the only one of these bacon factories still producing bacon in Limerick. The others have closed down or changed ownership or switched to other products. The closure of these factories was mainly due to restrictive legislation which diverted the pigs to micro factories all over the country. A financial burden on the Limerick bacon factories was the compulsory employment of droves of Government inspectors whose salaries were met by a reduction in the price paid for pigs and an increase in the price of bacon. The producer and the consumer were unable to bear this burden and the bacon industry declined.