

town, Annapolis, Westminster, Brunswick and Williamstown all have plants for sewage treatment. Cumberland is an exception. There the sewage is emptied raw into the Potomac, though one of the leading corporations of the town has recently completed an \$800,000 chlorinating plant for its waste and sewage.

A few days ago a report came from Cumberland that thousands of small bass, sunfish, suckers, eels and carp were dying just below the town as a result of pollution. The Conservation Commission is aware of the condition, but can do nothing to correct it until the city erects a disposal plant. This is being considered, though Cumberland's more immediate problems are flood control and renovation of its water system.

Considerable publicity has been given recently to complaints of conditions in the Washington Suburban Sanitary District, notably on the Little Falls branch of the Potomac, in the Rock creek area, and in the Anacostia basin which drains Bladensburg, Hyattsville, College Park and other suburban developments as far north as Greenbelt. Complainants assert that stream pollution exists close to the National Capital, which ought to lead the whole country in sanitary measures. These conditions are being corrected by connecting sewers in the District to the trunk sewers of Washington. In the Rock creek section it is estimated that eighty per cent. of the houses beyond the District line in Maryland are now connected with a trunk sewer. Within the year a treatment plant is to be erected below Bladensburg that is expected to take care of the Anacostia basin.

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There are times when one hundred per cent. coöperation and the best intentions do not bring one hundred per cent. results, for sometimes disposal plants are called upon to carry a load greater than that for which they are designed. No doubt there are many places in which concealed sewage outlets from dwellings to adjacent streams fail to attract the inspector's eye. In spite of the progress being made in recent years to correct stream pollution, much remains to be done. So it is still a bit too early to drink the waters of a purling brook near a congested area with the same confidence that you would drink it from a tap in your home. Just the same, it is no little achievement when a corporation, no matter how big, or an individual, no matter how influential, realizes that neighbors have to be considered, when a municipality becomes aware that it has to think about installing a disposal plant if it wants to keep up with the parade.

EVE. SUN

# Stream Pollution

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*Part Of The Price Of Progress*

By FRANCIS F. BEIRNE

Deep.

**I**N prehistoric days primitive man not infrequently built his house over a stream. Primarily he may have been inspired by a desire to escape his enemies. But he could not have long remained unaware of the advantage of a flowing stream in relieving him of the refuse that no doubt existed in even the earliest homes.

That primitive urge is with us today. It is so easy to dump things into the nearest stream and forget about them. It is more difficult for neighbors living a bit downstream to forget. While there are some people who look upon streams as ideal for the disposal of home or factory sewage and waste, there are others who look upon the same stream as nature's gift to the picnicker and the fisherman. Here is an uncompromising conflict of ideas, for picnickers do not want to wade in open sewers and fish will not live in water with a high acid or a low oxygen content.

The commercial people and the sewer people have had their day and many a stream has fallen prey to the march of progress. But now it is getting to be the turn of those who prefer the streams in their primitive beauty, for the public is growing conscious of what may be accomplished in that direction. It is becoming increasingly difficult for an individual, a corporation or a municipality to hook its waste and refuse system to a stream and ignore the voice of objectors.

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Looking into the subject, it is pleasant to discover that in Maryland stream pollution is a problem that is being tackled by at least two governmental agencies and that considerable progress is being made in the protection and reclamation of streams. The two agencies are the State Board of Health and the State Conservation Commission. The Board of Health is concerned chiefly with the health of human beings; the Conservation Commission with the health of fish and other seafoods. Each supplements the work of the other. Everybody knows, of course, that laws forbid unsanitary practices that may affect unfavorably the health of the community. There may be some who do not know that there also is a law on the Maryland statute books that forbids the deposit of waste from "any house, building, trade establishment or manufacturing place . . . or any vessel" that "shall become or dangerously threaten to become deleterious to or destructive of fish or shellfish life." If, after a warning, the nuisance is not abated, the responsible person or persons are liable to a fine of \$300 and/or three years in prison, each day of continuation of the nuisance, a civil warning to be regarded as a

The Conservation Commission let it be known that it meant business not so long ago when it brought action against a distillery that washed out its tanks with caustic soda and let the liquid overflow into a stream, causing the death of some 2,000 fish. The case was brought into court and the judge imposed a fine of \$300.

Officers of the commission declare that they do not want to be unreasonable, they realize that correction of conditions sometimes costs money, but they mean to bring the law to bear where the practices of an individual or a corporation lead to the death of fish and the discomfort of people in the neighborhood. They report that, on the whole, they are receiving general coöperation.

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In the case of another distillery rye mash, with a heavy acid content, was leaking into a stream and killing the fish. Complaints reached the commission, which sent an agent who verified the report and issued a warning. The proprietor was at first resentful at the intrusion, but concluded not to buck the law. He built new vats for his used mash and now sells the mash instead of letting it go to waste.

Complaints came to the commission from residents of Curtis creek, Marley creek and Furnace Branch that deposits of sulphuric acid from industrial plants in Curtis Bay were killing the fish and making bathing impossible. Representatives of the Health and Conservation departments met with officials of the company concerned and discussed means of eliminating the nuisance. The solution was a \$500,000 plant for the recovery of the acids. At last accounts the recovery plant was showing a profit and the commission has a letter from a resident of the area reporting that conditions have greatly improved and looking forward to the area becoming once more a center for fishing and crabbing.

Vegetable canneries have been another source of pollution that has a deleterious effect on fish life, as the liquid from corn and peas has a high acid content. One source of complaint has been the north branch of the Patapsco below Westminster. The company concerned now has plans for a settling and precipitation tank that should prevent similar complaints next year. Numerous miscellaneous plants lie along the Patapsco from its source to its mouth and the Conservation Commission reports that it is receiving one hundred per cent. coöperation in its efforts to rid the river from industrial pollution.

The Susquehanna and the Patuxent, having no cities or industrial plants of any size along them, present no serious problems in pollution. Havre de Grace

is an exception, the sewage, untreated, going into the river. An unfavorable condition on the Gunpowder, caused by a distillery, has been removed. No complaints have come from residents along the rivers of the Eastern Shore and the assumption is that there must be nothing to complain of.

In the neighborhood of the city the middle branch of the Patapsco to the west of the Hanover street bridge proved to be pure when the last tests of the water were taken. Back River presents a problem of a different nature which has yet to find a solution. It is one made by nature rather than by man. Here there is comparatively little flow with the result that the bottom is very rich and, in consequence, grows abundant grass. During hot weather, such as we had a few weeks ago, the grass is burned by the sun and dies. Then nature has a sort of convulsion in which the whole mess is turned upside down, the grass rots and gives off toxic gases. Not acid but lack of oxygen, prevents fish life. It is a body of water where a fisherman who dislikes suspense can throw a line over with an almost certain prospect of not catching anything. The Conservation Commission is hopeless of doing anything about it. It can't bring nature into court.

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In the law on pollution there is one pertinent exception, for in the closing sentence the statute says specifically that it "shall not apply to the sewage disposal plant of any city, town or county in this State." In other words, individuals may not kill fish or pollute streams, but the community may. Therefore, if questions are asked about the trunk sewer which carries sewage from Catonsville, Halethorpe and Arbutus to be emptied raw near the mouth of the Patapsco, the Conservation Commission has no answers. That is a situation which lies beyond its authority. However, in this particular case, Baltimore county is working on a plan to connect its sewer with the city's disposal plant at Wagner's Point which is designed to take care of the Patapsco drainage area. That failing, the county may erect a sewage treatment plant of its own.

Garrett and Allegany counties have their own particular problem which arises from acid waste which overflows into streams from coal mines. This is corrected by sealing abandoned mines and also some of the flow from used mines. Latest reports from there indicate that conditions have been much improved.

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Throughout the State, towns have been improving their sewage disposal systems, generally with the assistance of PWA funds. For example, Frederick, Hager-