

THE BUCKERELL PUMP.

To the Editor of the Daily Gazette.

Sir, - So long ago as February, 1922, you were good enough to publish a letter from me stating the facts in the Buckerell Pump dispute, which has dragged its lazy length along for nearly four years. The stage then reached was that the Minister of Health had struck out a new line, holding that the well and pump were "for the gratuitous supply of the inhabitants of the district to the local authority" within the meaning of Section 64 of the Public Health Act. It seemed a stranger doctrine in the case of a pump in a rural district, but it was presumed the meaning was that any inhabitant of the district who in passing or otherwise could make use of the water was at liberty to do so, and that the cost of maintenance, therefore, would be a charge on the common fund. It appears, however, that the Minister of Health has also held that the well is a supply of water to a contributory place i.e., the parish, which extends over several square miles, within the meaning of Section 229, and he has recently, after extraordinary delay, sanctioned a loan of £325, recoverable in 15 years by a separate rate on the parish. A counsel consulted by the principal ratepayers is of opinion that they could not successfully contest the decision in a Court of Law. But whatever be the legal interpretation of these provisions, I think few, if any, laymen will dissent from the view that the application of them to the facts of this case is a glaring injustice, and that provisions which can be applied with such a result could not have been contemplated by the legislature, and should be amended. At the expense of the ratepayers of the parish the owners of the few cottages dependent on the pump are relieved of all liability for supplying them with water whether by the maintenance of the well and pump or otherwise - a liability which falls generally on owners of houses in a country parish as a necessary condition of their occupation, and one which has been accepted by the owners in this case for certainly more than 60 years, and which, I believe, the principal owner at any rate, has never questioned. This burden on the few substantial ratepayers will be a considerable addition to the rates already oppressive, but can no doubt be borne by them without serious inconvenience, but this cannot be said of the more numerous cottagers of small means, few of whom live within a quarter of a mile of the pump

- some at a distance between one and two miles. The iniquity of exacting from these people a considerable share of the cost of the work from which they can derive no benefit whatever if too obvious for comfort.

The iniquity is aggravated by the facts that the expenditure was incurred without reasonable precaution or control, and that much, if not most, of it is obviously useless for the purpose for which the work was proposed. It was undertaken in defiant disregard of the protests of the parish ratepayers without the estimate which was ordered by the Council to be obtained, without any contract, and the actual cost was treble what had been reported as the probable approximate cost. The excuse for beginning the work hurriedly was a complaint of scarcity of water after the abnormally dry summer of 1921, but except so far as mud was cleared from the bottom of the well, as had often been done before, the work could not increase the supply of water, and the well was closed for a long period while the scarcity was greatest. The work was proposed for the prevention of contamination from the graveyard. It has not been stated that an analysis of the water which was ordered was obtained before the work was begun after the lapse of about 18 months. The main cause of the excessive cost was the use of ferro-concrete cylinders in the upper part of the well, which are obviously useless for the prevention of contamination. Anyone of ordinary intelligence might have foreseen that water reaching the edge of the well could not be prevented by these cylinders from trickling down behind them to the water in the unlined bottom, and in fact after heavy rain the water is as muddy as it ever was. It was stated in the Council without dissent that the expenditure was out of all reason, and that the work would never have been allowed to go on if it had been known what the cost would be. No doubt it is not unreasonable that all ratepayers should jointly have to put up with the consequences, however unjust, if any action or inaction in the matter of controlling their officials on the part of those whom they send to represent them in the Council, but it is not reasonable that the burden of such consequences should have to be borne exclusively by the ratepayers of one parish.

Yours truly,

J. MONTEATH.

Buckerell Lodge, October 23rd, 1928.