

It appears from census reports that the number of persons engaged in occupations—working persons—is about 40 per cent. of the entire population. At this rate, there would be in Ontario nearly 8,000,000, and in the whole of Canada about 21,000,000, of lost laboring days, through sickness, in one year, taking the lower estimate. These represent a loss in productive capacity equaling in value as many millions of dollars at least.

Finally, there is the loss of stamina, of physical and intellectual vigor,—the ‘muscular tenuity,’ which inevitably flow in a stream greater or less as causes of disease,—insanitary conditions, prevail. These cannot be estimated. While they might be approximated as concerns the present generation, they are too far, far-reaching for us to form conception of as bearing upon, through heredity, the generations of the future. If unchecked, they could only be lumped at last as forming a large part of a great whole, which caused the degeneration, destruction, and final extinction of the race.

Now in arriving at the above conclusions, showing the almost fabulous sums to be actually lost to this country through sickness and death, it cannot, I think, be justly said that I have made the calculations upon too high or too large bases. In every case I have taken the lowest estimates. The following question then becomes truly momentous, viz. : Can any large, or even small, proportion of the cases of sickness prevailing be prevented by any practicable means, and life be materially or appreciably prolonged? It is beyond the shadow of doubt that a large proportion of the cases of sickness and death daily occurring, are due directly and indirectly to causes which are preventable or removable, and, I may add, *easily* preventable or removable. Proof of this springs up in the observation of every intelligent person; while to the physician the truth of it is being continually confirmed by fresh examples. Case upon case comes before him of sickness, of sickness sometimes ending in recovery, sometimes in death, which he knows might have been readily prevented; the cause of which he feels might have been easily avoided, often almost as easily avoided as encountered.

We know that the laws and conditions of life are determined, but we know, too, that the circumstances which surround life,—the essentials of life, and the measure of conformity to the determined conditions, are infinitely various, and the degree to which health and life are developed and sustained is in accordance with them. Men have long studied Nature’s laws in reference to the development of life in vegetables and animals, and hence great improvements have been made in the qualities of foods. Man, himself, too, happily in most countries, has bettered his condition and prolonged his life. By the improvements in food he is better nourished; by the improvements in the arts he is better clothed and housed.

There is less sickness, and that which visits humanity is less destructive than in former times. The record of these most important facts are unfortunately few; yet they all concur in their testimony to the increase at least of man’s longevity.