

The term slum is in the present instance applied to the homes of two classes of the community, viz., those of the working class who strive to live honestly, and those of the poor who find it difficult to make a living or who do not intend to. The homes of the poor consist mainly of the abandoned hovels to be found here and there—those houses which have seen better days, the property often of well-to-do citizens or corporations, not the property of the poor occupant who has to pay rent of an exorbitant amount, considering the absence, in most cases, of even necessary conveniences and comforts, and that “necessary repairs” are a negligible quantity. Indeed, all is dilapidation, decay and desolation. The environment reeks with the odours of successive strata of dirt, household refuse, and domestic slops, while the walls are cracked, and the stairways rickety and unsafe, narrow and dark. The houses are often without cellars, are low and damp, being sometimes built flat upon the ground; while darkened rooms, inaccessible to sunlight, add a sombre hue to a condition which can only be summed up as “damnable.” Such in brief, is a description of what, in the aggregate, constitutes in the popular mind in Canada the “slum.” *

The slum house stands in a similar relationship to the community as the physical degenerate does to society: both alike are to be found in all grades of the community, both are found more frequently amongst the poorer classes. No matter where the slum house is found it is a danger and a menace to the community. Like the bacteria of which we hear so much to-day and of which we will know more in the days to come, the disease-producing organism may be of a virulent or non-virulent type and yet be the same. The slum, like the tentacles of the devil fish, receives its prey within its walls, retains and engulfs him “by imperceptible, yet rapid degrees. Its denizens sink into apathy and develop that strange malady of the modern city, the slum disease. This is an infection productive of infections, a contagion which, as it spreads through the slum, creates new slum dwellers as it passes, leaving its victims stricken with inertia, slothfulness, drunkenness, criminality.

“..... Let them escape or not, one and all suffer equally in their lack of resistance to disease. Mal-nutrition, bad air, and overcrowding swell the columns which tell of tuberculosis, pneumonia, diphtheria, and every kindred disease. The slum is the great culture medium of civilization, wherein huge cultures of disease are growing, ready when ripe to rise and sweep the city streets.”*

Amongst the poorer classes, the slum home finds its pabulum, and develops a virulence which is manifest by the great spread of

* Hollis Godfrey, *The Health of the City*.