

## THE NOVA SCOTIA HEALTH ACT.

*An Address delivered at the last annual meeting of the  
Nova Scotia Medical Society,*

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*Retiring President.*

GENTLEMEN,—Prevention is better than cure, and the most brilliant triumph of medicine is when we can forestall the necessity for remedies.

Prevention may be based upon simple and direct experience or upon scientific knowledge. Worthy efforts have been and are being made to popularize sanitary knowledge. It is a subject which touches so closely the interests of all classes that no pains should be spared to acquaint the masses with such facts as underlie health and comfort and can be appreciated by most. It may be said that many will not heed the kind advice; yet knowledge is power and is at least the first step toward the correction of many abuses. Our daily papers are now discussing such matters as public topics. Many crude opinions are being uttered; not unfrequently we see most elaborate directions from those who are not students or practitioners of the laws of health, but who think *they* must throw a little spray over this popular wave. We are pleased to have the *spray*, and we hope it may soon become a stream, and then a flood of knowledge, which shall sweep down the hills and the valleys "for the healing of the nation." "Ah, blessed health," said Sterne, "it is thou who enlargest the soul and openest all its powers to receive instruction and to relish virtue." And how true the words of Emerson, "Sickness is poor-spirited and cannot serve anyone; it must husband its resources to live. But health or fullness answers its own ends, and has to spare, runs over, and inundates the neighborhoods and creeks of other men's necessities."

By the putting in action of the Public Health Act, of the Local Legislature, a force of 1500 men will be summoned to administer the Public Health Laws of this Province. In order the better to appreciate the relation of the medical practitioners to this body of men, we will for a moment glance at the principles of this Act. For its foundation it considers that every person ought to be entitled to such reasonable public protection in respect of his health, as he is in respect of his liberty and his property, and this everywhere, and at all times.

It lays down three great principles of sanitary administration.

The first is, that no member of the community shall, willfully or for profit, damage another man's supply of the three absolute essentials of life, viz: food, water, and air; and, therefore, that it is the duty of the state to secure, as far as possible, that these essentials shall be supplied in sufficient quantity and the greatest attainable purity, in all circumstances in which *these objects cannot be attained* by individual care and resources.

The second is *Universality*, through constant supervision by Health Officers in every polling district of the country.

The third is *efficiency*, the various Boards of Health being required to meet at least once in three months, and at end of each year to transmit to the Municipal Board, in duplicate, a report of the Sanitary work done during the year, and of the Sanitary condition of the district. One copy of each of said reports shall, immediately after the Annual Meeting of the Municipal Council, be transmitted to Provincial Secretary; constant and universal supervision of the essentials of Public Health being the objects aimed in this Act.

How, then, can this be attained without trained and capable men as members of the various Boards of Health.

Here I wish to present to you the responsibility of the medical practitioner. With him rests the burden of instruction in Public Health Matters. To make this, or any Public Health Act, a success you must become the Apostles of the plain and simple knowledge of what makes air and water and food and dwellings wholesome. You will frequently be called upon to advise as to the best measures to be taken for the prevention and check of infectious and contagious diseases. And you will have not only to counsel the local authorities as to the best means which lie within their power for the prevention of disease, but you will also be required to furnish all needful instruction to their subordinate officers, the Sanitary inspectors, as to the detailed and technical measures which are to be adopted. Here you are supreme. In the eyes of the law a medical man can alone be competent to furnish advice as to disease, and he finds his suggestions readily adopted by those who have to administer the Law. A great deal will depend upon the personal character and fitness of the men who will be appointed members of the various Boards of Health. Let us hope that men of intelligence, character and energy will be selected for this great and important work. Fifteen hundred, (1500,) such men will be a power no man can estimate. It will tend to a wider diffusion of Sanitary knowledge among the people. It will invest the general practitioner with a greater sense of the importance and responsibility of his office, not only in relation to the individual welfare of his patients, but also to that of the public at large. Sanitary science will henceforth form a necessary and indispensable part of the study of every medical practitioner. He will be required to have an intelligent knowledge of the bearing on the public health, of the soil, situation, climate, air, water supply and habitations of his district, the removal of excreta and refuse, drainage, the habits and occupations of the inhabitants, local manufactures, the ordinary prevailing sickness, the laws of contagion, the prevention of contagious and infectious diseases, the best methods of dealing with outbreaks of epidemics, disinfection and individual prophylaxis against infectious diseases; and above all he must