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THE VENEREAL DISEASE PROBLEM.*

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It cannot be said that the subject to be discussed is one which is palatable or delightful, yet the situation must be faced and faced honestly and without flinching. We may not find it as pleasant to speak of the cesspool and the scavenger as of the rose garden and the gardener—and yet the one may be as important as the other, or vastly more so. There are diseases which are eating the heart out of our people, sapping their very life—unless well grounded estimates are gravely wrong half a million of Canadians are infected with the most serious form of venereal disease; in Toronto at least forty thousand, many, very many without knowing it. For one reason or another, the terrible extent of these diseases is not generally known—delicacy has been considered to forbid the discussion of them in public and those who suffer from them do not disclose their disease willingly. In insanity we know that until the other day it was considered not only a calamity but also a disgrace that any one of the family should be considered insane; a little of the same feeling lingers in respect of cancer and perhaps other diseases.

In venereal diseases there has been a widespread view that those who suffer from them are being punished for sin. That thought has prevented the members of the family of the affected from making

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known the state of their kinsfolk; and the stricken one himself has concealed from all eyes that he is stricken. But medical men have long known the extent of these diseases; and at length it has become absolutely necessary for the Government to take notice of them. It has long been cast up to governments as a reproach that in case of a disease attacking animals the utmost care and attention was at once paid to them but that when human beings were attacked little if any attention was paid to them. Whether that is true or not I do not enquire—the Governments, Dominion and local, are now awake to the terrible importance of venereal diseases. The Dominion Government has set aside two hundred thousand dollars to fight this powerful enemy of the human race and the Provincial Governments are also doing their share.

It was full time. In Britain the country was wide awake; in the United States the efforts of many agencies were bent to the extirpation or at least diminishment of the evil. In both these countries it was considered that the end could be best attained with the assistance of a national council, a semiprivate body acting in harmony with the central and local authorities, and our organization was called into existence for that purpose. I was honored by being made president of the council, an honor unexpected as it was unsought; and in view of the tremendous importance of the movement I could not refuse to give what assistance I could.

It is not the sinner alone who suffers—even if that were so the case would be hard enough—but the danger of infection is never absent from millions of the innocent; not a man, not a woman, scarcely even a child but runs the risk of infection every day. These we must in some way protect. Tuberculosis, smallpox, measles, scarlatina, all call for prevention and curative measures and such measures are promptly taken. Syphilis, which is more to be dreaded than any or all of these diseases, and is more

common than any (except possibly measles), calls for more careful measures.

Think of the effect of syphilis: it affects about eight per cent. of the total population; is transmissible to the offspring and causes death in eighty per cent. of those infected; is the cause of ten to thirty-five per cent. of all insanity; of most mentally defective children; of locomotor ataxia; of paresis; of apoplectic and paralytic strokes in early life; of nearly half the abortions and miscarriages; of a large proportion of diseases of the heart, blood vessels and other vital organs. Syphilis decreases the length of life about a third and greatly decreases one's earning capacity during the remainder.

And what is very generally considered of trifling importance, "not much worse than a cold," gonorrhoea, while not so virulent, is still a deadly foe to the Canadian people, and is more common than syphilis. Gonorrhoea is the cause of more than ten per cent. of all blindness; of eighty per cent. of congenital blindness; of many surgical operations on the female generative organs; of many chronic diseases of the joints, bladder and generative organs, and this disease greatly decreases one's earning capacity.

These surely are enemies worth fighting—not in my time or in yours, not for generations to come will they be extirpated; but something, much, can be done by us in our generation.

We are not perhaps to expect that those who know themselves to be infected will do much for others—God knows they have a heavy enough burden of their own to bear—but I feel that I may call upon those who know themselves to be clean to help those less fortunate, and to assist those who are clean to remain clean.

The appalling versatility, the unearthly cunning of these diseases are such that thousands and tens of thousands have their seed within their bodies without knowing it, and I am well justified in saying that no man can be sure that today he is so clean and

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so immune from infection that he will be safe tomorrow. We intend to educate people, to make such investigation as will enable us best to educate the people while we are ourselves learning. We shall try to do all possible to prevent infection and to cure it where unhappily incurred.