SANITARY REFORM

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A lecture was delivered on this singularly important, but in Canada much neglected, subject on Friday evening last, by Mr. Carpenter. The lecturer was thoroughly acquainted with his subject, having been for a number of years actively engaged in this reform in England, part of the time as Secretary of an eminent sanitary reformer, and his facts and figures were listened to with deep attention by a numerous audience. A previous lecture having been devoted to intemperance, the chief enemy of health, the present lecture left that disturbing element out of view. Both were delivered under the auspices of the Howard Division of the Sons of Temperance.

The lecturer commenced by saying his subject, health, was one of deep and universal interest. Much as men coveted money, and strove after it, they would give it all, in case of need, for health. Indeed, without health, nothing else could be enjoyed, and it ought therefore be called the first of earthly blessings. But if it were important to the rich, how much more so to the working classes. To them health was everything—without it they could not labor, and without labor they could not live. The working man, who was deprived of health, was in a pitiable condition indeed. How important then for all and especially for the masses, to investigate the laws of health and the influences which injured or destroyed it, with a view to their removal! This was Sanitary Reform, which had attracted much attention in Britain of late years, with remarkably beneficial results.

All sanitary investigations must be based on a correct system of registration, such as had been adopted in Britain some twenty years ago, and produced many good results. Indeed it may be laid down as a rule that no pains or expense should be spared to obtain accurate knowledge, for the greatest and most beneficial results were often obtained most unexpectedly from the investigation of points that might at first sight appear mere matters of curiosity. Knowing this principle, he (Mr. Carpenter) was much pained to see objections made in the Canadian parliament, and by some Canadian papers, to the expenses of the Geological Survey. Money so laid out, supposing it to be faithfully and economically applied, was always well laid out. The system of registration was much
opposed by the ignorant at first, on account of the stringent regulations necessarily imposed in order to insure accuracy. A child could not be baptized, a marriage celebrated, or a corpse interred, without the production of a certificate of registration; but these rules, which appeared arbitrary and vexatious at first, were now cheerfully acquiesced in on account of their utility.

It had been thought by many, that man had no power to preserve his own health or prolong his own life, and hence Sanitary Reform was regarded at first with apathy, if not dislike; but it had been found by incontestible facts and experience, that however true this might be in one sense, yet there was another and most important sense in which the health and longevity of the people were in their own hands, or, in other words, if certain unwholesome practices prevailed, health would suffer, and life would be shortened, and if the proper remedies were applied, health would be restored, and the average of life greatly prolonged. It was found, for instance, not only that some cities were much more healthy than others, but that the streets or localities in the same city varied greatly in their rates of mortality, and not only so, but the rate in mortality in the same street would vary greatly before and after it had been cleaned, drained, paved, and supplied with water from a distance. It might be laid down as a general rule that all decaying animal or vegetable matter was unwholesome, and that whatever offended the nose injured the health. The refuse of the human body was also unwholesome, especially if that body was diseased; and too much care could not be taken to preserve houses and neighborhoods from everything offensive. The gases from all kinds of decaying matter in crowded lanes, courts or closes rose into the air, which was also, to a greater or less degree, robbed of its vital principle by the action of numberless fires and pairs of lungs, and this vitiated air was breathed in close rooms by old and young, destroying life rapidly. There was another way in which vitality was sapped. Many of these localities were supplied with water from wells into which filtered the refuse of the neighborhood. Such water was peculiarly unwholesome, and instance were on record where fatal fevers had occurred in all the families which drew water from a particular well. In fact, great improvement in the health of a crowded locality had resulted immediately from the shutting up of its wells and supplying it with water from a distance. An experienced sanitary reformer could, by bringing his trained eyes and nose to the inspection of a street, state with remarkable precision the rate of mortality in that street. This
had been tried by a gentleman who had devoted much attention to the subject, and who was Registrar for a portion of Manchester. He made his own inspection of every street and lane, putting down the rate of mortality per cent which he supposed likely to occur in such a locality, and afterwards had the most careful returns for several years of the actual rate of mortality prepared by his clerks, and in no case did it vary more than a half per cent per annum from his approximate guess. Not only was there a great difference in the rate of mortality in one street as compared with another year after year, but in one house as compared with another, standing near each other in the same street, all of which facts were carefully brought out by the registration of deaths. The difference of the percentage of deaths between the best streets and the worst streets in a town was often as 25 to 35 per 1000, thus showing ten deaths annually per 1,000 of the population in the worst localities, occurring from avoidable causes. But the difference of the rate of mortality was much greater between the most healthy houses in the most healthy streets, and the least healthy houses in the least healthy streets. In some cases this difference was as 19 to 48, thus showing a mortality of 29 per 1,000 annually, caused by the absence of sanitary regulations. These unwholesome localities and unwholesome houses were invariably those in which no attention was paid to sewerage, cleanliness or ventilation, and one great advantage of the system of registration was drawing attention to these facts. When a woman came to the Registrar, for instance, to register the death of a child, he would, on ascertaining the locality, tell her there had been so many deaths in that locality, and that she could not expect to live more than so many years if she continued in it, and that she must expect much a proportion of her children to die. This information would astound the poor mother, and the Registrar would conclude by advising her to save all the money spent in drink, and thus be able to pay a higher rent in a more healthy locality. In this way some unwholesome vicinities were almost deserted, and the landlords then, and not till then, made efforts to render their houses more healthy by draining, paving, supplying water, &c. &c. He (Mr. C.,) thought a landlord had no more right to let an unwholesome house than a butcher to sell unwholesome meat, and as soon as sanitary reform was understood, this opinion would be general, but meantime landlords in the most careless, cruel and avaricious manner, continued to derive revenues from houses which were the cause of the sickness and death of their tenants.