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## PREVENTION OF DISEASE<sup>1</sup>

My first duty is to thank the general committee of the British Association for the great honor they have done me by electing me to the post of president. I must confess I wondered at first why I had been chosen, but soon came to the conclusion that it was an honor done through me to all army medical officers for the magnificent work done by them during the great war in the prevention of disease and alleviation of pain and suffering.

In the next place, I may be permitted to remind you that this is the fourth time the British Association for the Advancement of Science has met in Canada—first in 1884 in Montreal, in this city in 1897, and in Winnipeg in 1909. The addresses given on these occasions dealt with the advancement of knowledge in archeology and physics.

It is now my privilege, as a member of the medical profession, to address you on the advances made during the same period in our knowledge of disease and our means of coping with and preventing it.

An address on the prevention of disease at first sight does not promise to be a very pleasant subject, but, after all, it is a humane subject, and also a most important subject, as few things can conduce more to human happiness and human efficiency than the advancement of knowledge in the prevention of disease.

Think for a moment of the enormous loss of power in a community through sickness. Some little time ago the English Minister of Health, when emphasizing the importance of preventive work, said that upwards of 20,000,000 weeks of work were lost every year through sickness among insured workers in England. In other words, the equivalent of the work of 375,000 people for the whole year had been lost to the state. When to that is added the corresponding figure for the non-insured population you get some idea of the importance of preventive work.

Another way of estimating the value of prevention is in terms of dollars, or pounds, shillings and pence, and it has lately been calculated that the direct loss in England and Wales from sickness and disability amounts to at least £150,000,000 a year. In the United States, with a much larger population, the loss is put down at £600,000,000.

Another reason why this is an important subject is that medicine in the future must change its strategy, and instead of awaiting attack must assume the offensive. Instead of remaining quietly in the dressing

<sup>1</sup> Address of the president at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Toronto, Canada, August 6, 1924.