

12. Is there a greater air of comfort and independence among the artisan and labouring classes than formerly?

I have already answered this question, in my replies to questions 9 and 10, in the affirmative.

13. If disease is increasing, does it appear most in town or in the country? If in towns, is there a dominating cause?

I have already answered this question in stating my belief that the general standard of health is better than it was twenty years ago.

14. Have you noticed any diseases arising from occupations (say, in bakers, wharf labourers, tailors, shop-assistants)?

In a portion, perhaps 10 per cent., of persons in these occupations the standard of health is not as high as the average. Occasionally I have known of cases obliged to give up office or shop work on account of possessing a weak constitution, yet on taking to an outdoor occupation they would soon be in perfect health, and remain so. None of these occupations are unfit for persons of good sound constitutions, but those of a weaker habit of body and constitution are affected injuriously by such occupations.

15. Considering the many evils arising from imperfect digestion and weak nutrition, do you consider that State inspection and care of the teeth of school-children are desirable?

The proper care of the teeth is very desirable. I would like to see the parents taking more interest in this matter. Inspection of the teeth of children attending school would, I believe, result in marked benefit, if the necessary treatment were ensured. Of course, it should be remembered that sound teeth are as much a matter of a sound constitution as of any habit of using the tooth-brush. Many people who never use a tooth-brush have excellent teeth, even in our community, and amongst uncivilized people the possession of sound teeth is the rule, without any use of the tooth-brush. This is also true of the Russian peasantry. In all these cases this is probably the result of the use of simple and more natural food. If whole-meal bread were the standard bread used, and also oatcake used daily, and the pastry and confectioners' cakes and sweets discontinued, I think there would follow a much better state of the teeth. Whatever impairs the general health increases the tendency to decay of the teeth.

16. Do you consider that the birth-rate, being now far lower than it was twenty years ago, arises from—(a) physical weakness in modern women? (b) women engaging in industrial occupations? (c) overwork or disease on the part of the men? (d) limitation of families for economic reasons?

(a.) There is no doubt that women are more sensitive and are probably less fertile; it is a fact that advanced civilization with its accompanying luxuries and enervating influences does impair fertility in a definite proportion of the women of a nation. Those nations are most fertile whose people lead the simplest lives and are not much troubled with brain-work. (b.) If the occupation impairs the general health it may diminish fertility; it probably does to some extent, but child-bearing is avoided on economic grounds by some under these circumstances. (c.) Certainly, to some extent, but only in extreme cases. Whatever impairs the natural physique and animal strength would have a tendency in this direction. It is a well-observed fact that where there has been a great mental effort over a long period of life, particularly in early life, fertility is impaired in a considerable number. As I have said before, the simpler the life, and perhaps the more ignorant the people, the higher is the birth-rate; witness that of the Irish and the Russian peasantry. (d.) I think this is an increasing cause of the diminished birth-rate.

17. Do the difficulties attending maternity cases in the backblocks influence married couples towards work in towns?

To some extent this is so. Naturally, women object to go and live in very out-of-the-way places for this and other reasons. Every effort should be made to improve the means of communication with such districts, and to place medical and nursing aid within reasonable access; but it must be remembered that there is far less general sickness in isolated districts than in populous ones. Nansen declared that he and his men never had even a common cold during all their exposure in the Arctic regions, but that as soon as they returned to the habitations of men they all took violent colds. The state of maternity is, as a rule, a safe one. There are, of course, certain risks and emergencies which it would be difficult to provide for in the backblocks; probably the dwellers in the backblocks are as safe on the whole as those in towns. There are many dangers they are free from. Closer settlement should be encouraged, and these difficulties would disappear. In the meantime most mothers living in isolated districts resort to the nearest town when necessary. Such mothers are certainly deserving of assistance from the State if their husbands cannot afford the expense. No woman should undergo the risks of childbirth out of reach of doctor or nurse.

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18. Can you suggest any means for diminishing the cost of living without prejudicial effect on health?

Memo. on question 18.—The question of municipal and State enterprises to diminish the cost of living is a very difficult one; so far those undertaken appear to have been beneficial, and further efforts might be made. Private enterprise, where the capital is available, seems to be able to carry on an industry at a less cost than the State or municipality, but in that case the profit goes to a few individuals. The whole question is only to be decided by experience, or by careful collection of the experience of other countries.