

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 314.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, MAY 10, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

A FIG UPON THE THISTLE.

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TO look for truth in the words of an insurance official is to look for figs on a thistle; and yet a fig has actually blossomed on those arid stalks. The statement made by John K. Gore, President of the Actuaries' Association of America, that human life would soon span 150 years, is no vulgar hope fathered by the wish—for long premiums—, but a deep scientific possibility.

The recent researches of Metchnikoff into the causes and prevention of old age, the rapid growth of preventive medicine, the speedily swelling volume of hygienic knowledge, all point to the gradual lengthening of human life perhaps beyond the 150-year limit conjectured by Gore.

And yet there are obstacles.

In 1655 the Dutch painter Vader Cats gave to the world his *Allegory of Life*. An apple tree perilously overhangs a flaming pit. Precariously clinging thereto, and menaced by the fire-darting dragon of the abyss, while all around him on the bank hiss venomous snakes, hangs a man, straining to pluck the fruit of life. Glaring hungrily at him crouches a giant wolf, between whose paws lies the scraped-clean skull of a previous victim. And to put the supreme touch to the hazards of the ill-starred human, two rats are busily gnawing away the trunk which alone supports him above the roaring flames which threaten and the dragon which reaches for him.

Two hundred and fifty years have passed away since Vader Cats thus conceived the state of man; but the conditions which inspired that conception have not passed away. Rather have they grown worse in the interim.

Man's life today is laid through graver perils than Cats could know. Food that a respectable burgher of that day would not have fed his cattle has now become the mainstay of the people. Murderous trades and industries, then undreamt of, are all thousands to-day have for a livelihood. A degree of unemployment flatly

inconceivable to a mind accustomed to the simple and easily-acquired tool of that time, now stalks through the land, with the tawdry badge of "Prosperity" tagged onto it. The destitution of millions, that a few may roll in gouty luxury affords an album of horrors which even Dante could not conjure up for his Inferno. On such a basis no century-and-a-half-long life can be built.

The life of 150 years may, probably will, come; but first the idle Gore class must be swept away.

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Uploaded August 2010

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