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## THE NEGRO AND PUBLIC HEALTH.

By G. W. PASCHAL

(In Bulletin State Board of Health)

The problem of sanitation public and private, in North Carolina, as in other Southern states, is complicated by the presence of a large negro element in our population. In our state approximately one person in three is colored. This proportion is much exceeded in many of our towns and in the eastern half of our state. Hence it is evident that any scheme of sanitation and health improvement that does not include the negro and his peculiarities is doomed to fail of complete success. I shall try, in this article to call attention to some of the factors that must be reckoned with and make a suggestion or two, recognizing that complete solution cannot be attained or even indicated, but hoping that, as the work progresses among our white people, the proper methods of dealing with the colored will become more evident.

Part of the problem of sanitation as concerns the negro is due not to race, but to the fact that as a class he constitutes the poorer part of our people, and the problem with him in this respect is the problem of this class everywhere. But there are other complications of the problem due to the racial peculiarities of the Negro, and it is to these that I shall try to confine myself.

In the first place, let us not lose sight of the fact that the place of the negro in our government is not yet one of perfect adoption, and in fact is one entirely inconsistent with the democratic spirit to which our white citizens conform. He has no voice in determining what the laws shall be, and hence regards laws much as in former days the slave regarded the orders of his master. If the law is based on a definite Biblical tenet taught by his preacher, he has some conscience in regard to it, but otherwise he has very little.

It is but natural that where no usual moral problem is involved he should have respect not so much for the law as for the penalties; and so when he finds it convenient to disregard the law he often does so without scruple. This is one of the inevitable consequences of having among us a race unequal in civic and political attainments and privileges, a consequence which has its effects in other matters. But in the matter of public health laws it can easily be seen what a hindrance this general attitude of the negro will be. He must be made to see that such laws are his laws, that he is to be protected, or rather is to protect himself, by their enforcement, else he will never obey them. He will, on the other hand, render nugatory much of the work done for public health among the whites. Before I complete the paper I will offer one or two suggestions as to means of securing his interest and cooperation.

Nor must we lose sight of the fact that the negro as a race is still undeveloped. He may be

learning to read and write in our schools but it will take many years to remove his inheritance of ignorance. He has not yet learned to think and reason. And in the matter of disease, especially, the negro is grossly ignorant. He knows nothing of its nature, great numbers believing that many diseases are due to enchantment and witchcraft. He knows nothing of their cure and often finds in some ridiculous nostrum a panacea of all his ills. It needs no demonstration to prove a very serious obstacle towards advancement in sanitation.

Another drawback to sanitation among the negroes is their inheritance of dirt. Before he left his native home in Africa the negro was used to dirt, and during his period of bondage in this country only a dirty hovel was usually furnished him by his master. The cleanly home is often found now, but by far the greater number of negroes are still content with squalid surroundings, and are disregardful of unsanitary and infectious conditions. They are thus a source of danger not only to themselves but also to their more cleanly neighbors and to the whites whose dwellings are in the vicinity. Since I have been writing this paper a physician of our town who is interested in sanitation has told me that he is now treating a case of typhoid fever in a hovel which is almost a cesspool of filth and swarming with flies and mosquitoes ready to carry the infection to the nearby house which is the most costly residence in our town. It is evident that any effective system of sanitation will have to take into account the uncleanly surroundings in which many negro families live and seek to help negroes remove them. I say help, for unless the cooperation of the negroes can be secured the task is hopeless.

Again, the negro's attitude towards life must be disregarded. Many make the egregious mistake of thinking that because the negro is light-hearted he is happy. Perhaps they were once as free from care as they are now supposed to be. But the truth is that at present the greater part of the negroes among us are dependent. The dark pall of unequal privileges and opportunities hampers their aspirations for individual advancement. Hence the negro comes to set a low estimate upon the value of life and health. He has not much to win by being well nor much to lose by dying. As for those who are near and dear to him there is no prospect sufficient to make him care for their future as the white man cares for his own. So he is ready to run the risk of contracting some contagious disease and to spread the infection as Samson's foxes spread the fire among the cornfields of the Philistines. Hence also the great amount of sexual impurity and consequent disease prevalent and destructive among our city and town negroes. These are evils that no amount of laws or supervision can correct. The only thing that will

avail will be to give the negro a more hopeful outlook. In place of his despondency we must create hope. And here is where the health officer must be joined by the statesman and the preacher. If the undeveloped race among us is to be kept in an atmosphere of despair the nemesis of a thousand ills will come to curse us, and not the least of these will be the ineffectual sanitary laws.

Another racial element in the problem is that the negro is more susceptible to certain diseases than the white man. One of these is tuberculosis. I have been interested for many years looking over the records of deaths among white and colored in the Bulletin of the North Carolina State Board of Health. One of the most uniform and striking facts revealed in these figures has been that the percentage of deaths from tuberculosis among the negroes is nearly twice as great as among whites. This may be due to the fact that the negroes are ill fed, ill housed, ill clothed, rather than to any racial peculiarity. But as I have intimated above, even these things are partly due to race. But one thing is certain, tuberculosis is one of the infectious diseases which is very prevalent among our negroes, and will be very hard to get rid of among them. And yet anyone can see that both tuberculosis and other infectious diseases which have their lair among the colored population, can never be controlled unless the field of effort is that of all the population, white and black. Any other scheme of work will be futile.

I have said enough to indicate the nature of the problem with which the presence of the negro element of our population has complicated matters. Perhaps I may be pardoned for suggesting some methods of dealing with it.

First, I would suggest that the interest of the negroes themselves be enlisted. Sanitation is manifestly a hopeless task unless we can do this.

The preachers of that race can help and I believe will. The negro preacher has great influence with his race. If he becomes interested in sanitation he can impart that interest and will take pride in doing so. A very patent illustration to show that sanitary laws can be made effective among primitive people by giving them a religious sanction, is found in the sanitary laws of the Mosaic code. To make these laws effective they were given with the authority of the Hebrew God. It is not supposed that the negro preachers have any such wide influence as Moses had, but in their positions as teachers and prophets of the race they can do much and the securing of their interest will be a step forward.

A further step will be to gain the help of the negro school teachers. In common with other teachers of the State, they ought to be required to know a certain amount of sanitary science as prerequisite to teaching in any grade. Furthermore they and all other teachers ought to be required to teach the elements of this science. But in addition the active and enthusiastic interest of these teachers of negro children ought to be won, and I think may be won.

Finally in incorporated towns where there is a negro physician, he might be made a subordinate health officer to co-operate with the white officer in looking after sanitation among members of his own race. With an officer of their own the negroes would come to feel that this public health is a matter in which they have an interest and an obligation. Then half the battle will be won.

And in conclusion let us all who are interested in public health, both layman and physician, remember that what will do the negro good will do the white man good; that a healthy negro population will be an economic asset to both his race and to the whites; that a diseased negro population means loss to both races; and that health among the whites is conditioned upon health among the negroes. And let us not be afraid to exercise a little Christian charity towards the lowly race.

### HOME HEALTH CLUB.

Dr. David H. Reeder, Chicago, Ill

#### WHAT SHOULD I EAT?

When one reads the various food advertisements, food bulletins and health literature of the period, it creates a distrust in regard to almost any good wholesome food. Not long ago I was asked to take lunch at a prominent hotel with a friend and his wife. I seldom eat heartily at noon, if I have much mental work to do afterwards, and I ordered a bowl of vegetable soup and afterwards a piece of fruit pie. My friend and his wife were horrified to think that I, a teacher of wholesome diet, should eat pie. They ordered meats, vegetables, with ice cream cake and coffee. They were to spend the afternoon in the park and would walk several miles. With the possible exception of the coffee, their lunch, as well as mine, was well suited to the work we were to do. To the person in average health and normal mental attitude, any good clean food, properly eaten, is wholesome and healthful. Did you notice these words, "properly eaten?" Well there is the crux of the whole story, aside from another phrase, "mental attitude."

A strong vigorous young man, who does physical out door work can "bolt" his food, wash it down with hot coffee, eat almost anything which is before him, and lots of it, and may remain apparently strong and well for a number of years, but after awhile he notices an accumulation of gas in his stomach. He belches frequently after meals and there is an uneasy sensation in his stomach. He thinks he is hungry, although the food he ate is still undigested. He finds a nearby saloon where a free lunch is served, and a glass of beer, with a few bites of food, satisfies him for the time being. More eruptions of gas rise from the stomach and when the uneasy feeling appears next day he promptly repeats the experiment. Soon he tries it two or three times daily, and then more and more frequently until the abused stomach has added another loafer to the ranks of the unemployed. He may make a fight and go to his family physician and be given medicine, but no instruction about how to eat or what to eat. It's a senseless, useless fight without sensible and sane methods of eating.

The teeth are the guardians of the stomach. The sense of smell and of taste are the sentinels. They can be fooled with cunningly contrived dishes and the teeth are under the control of the voluntary muscles. Every particle of food, especially fruits and cereals or starchy foods of any kind, should be chewed until it is reduced to a soft pulpy mass thoroughly incorporated with the salivary juices of the mouth; otherwise they cannot be properly digested. Meats do not require so much chewing, although it is better to chew all food thoroughly.

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