Inter-Racial Coöperation

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN NEGRO HEALTH

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IN A PAPER read before the National Conference of Social Work in Toronto a speaker undertook to show the relation of the psychology of the Negro to his health. As the paper was read by a physician, it was hoped that the author had some data on how mental attitudes in the Negro created certain functional disorders. The paper contained scarcely more than the usual plea and certain felicitous expressions of oversensitive self-critics.

In this article the writer does not attempt to discover any mental patterns inherent in the Negro's germ plasm affecting his susceptibility to disease. Here is presented simply those conceptions concerning the origin of disease and beliefs concerning the cure for disease which affect the health of the race. In addition, a modest attempt is made to indicate the probable effects of the social environment upon the health of the Negro.

Cause of Disease. Let us consider first the conceptions held by many Negroes concerning the cause of disease. Primitive conceptions of disease are still entertained by the white population; and the Negro exhibits in this respect no special psychic traits. He has simply a larger amount of ignorance and is relatively isolated in his mental environment. The influenza epidemic called forth special church services among even supposedly enlightened white people. Therefore, it is not surprising to find comparatively few Negroes ascribing disease to physical causes. When the writer has inquired of many Negroes the cause of disease, they have seemed puzzled. "People just get sick," was the extent of their insight in many cases. An excellent example of the failure to refer illness to concrete palpable factors is found in a case in which it was impossible to persuade a mother that her baby's intestinal disorders were due to its having eaten cabbage, fat meat and green fruit at one meal. "The baby was going to get sick anyway," was her stubborn objection. Most of them regard disease as a visitation of God. Consequently, some regard, if not the efforts to promote health, then surely the belief that health is something that can be acquired by proper hygiene, as a sort of impiety. As illustrative of this attitude the writer was cautioned recently, even by a teacher, that to speak of a brilliant student's death from a preventable disease as a shame, was an impiety. Let us pass on to beliefs concerning cures for disease.

Cures for Disease

Below are gathered a number of cures current among the colored population in the South. They represent those found to be rather common:

Whooping Cough. (1) If the mother of the child affected, goes to a house of a couple who had the same name (i.e. Jones married to Jones) before marriage, and without saluting any one in the house, asks for a piece of corn bread, and gives the same to the child affected, the whooping cough will be cured.
(2) Tea made from a hornet's nest and given to the child is another cure.
(3) Wear piece of deer horn about neck.
(4) Hold child over privy during coughing spell and let him inhale the odor.

Chills. To break a baby's chill, dip a cotton string into turpentine, run the string through the baby's hand, as many times as the baby has had chills; undress the baby and tie the string about his waist. By allowing baby to wear it, he will never have a chill.

Slobbering Baby. Let him taste a number of things (anything) until he gets what he wants and he will not slobber any more.
**Cramps and Rheumatism.** Wear eel skin about waist or ankle to keep away cramps or rheumatism.

*Chicken Pox.* Lie down before a hen house door and let chickens fly over you.

*Ear Ache.* Go to the barber and have him stuff some kinky hair into the ear.

*Diphtheria.* Wear dirty stocking about the neck.

*Child Birth.* Place a "dirt dauber" on the navel.

*Abscess.* Use cow dung for poultice.

*Spasms.* Pull off child's shirt while he is having the spasm and throw it into the fire.

*Measles.* Let child drink tea made from sheep dung, mixed with whiskey.

*Sore eyes.* (1) Bathe eyes in fasting spittle (before you eat or drink anything).  (2) Bathe eyes in urine.  (3) Apply breast milk.

*Nutmeg* worn about the neck will keep away several diseases.

**Effect of the Social Environment**

In this section the writer enters upon a more or less speculative inquiry. He will attempt to point out how the social environment of the Negro produces in him mental attitudes which may create functional disturbances.

We shall first take up the question of fear. The South has used every method to make the Negro afraid to emerge from the sphere of activities to which it has consigned him. It may not be possible to estimate the relative importance of fear and complex sentiments in producing apparent social stability in the South; but fear does play an important role. When supposedly civilized intellectual white men of the South still speak of a general massacre to rid the South of the Negro, there is some basis for this fear. Negroes are constantly afraid that they will overstep the bounds set for them by white people. Besides being prohibited to enter certain towns in the South, Negroes ride through others with fear and trembling. A man once remarked to the writer that when he got on the street car in a certain southern city, he felt as if he were sitting on a keg of powder. When a colored woman, a stranger, in a certain southern city, crossed at the wrong signal and the policeman yelled to her, "We string up niggers down here for that," we see the ever present effort to terrorize Negroes. A gray-haired colored gentleman once told the writer that he could not know what living sixty years with a feeling of uncertainty of life and property meant to one. No human organism in which the fear instinct is constantly aroused can function properly. To the extent that the Negro lives under the domination of fear, he is unhealthy.

It cannot be gainsaid that the Negro lives in a social atmosphere of repression. This extends from restricting his movements as a human being to preventing self-realization. "Colored people allowed on this elevator" concessively reads a sign in a modern skyscraper in Atlanta. "A college education spoils a Negro," is still the ground for restricting Negro education in the South. During slavery the Negro found a therapeutic escape from the repressing influences of this world through his religion and his spirituals. Today his religion and his songs are not as effective as mechanisms of release. Some believe the greater frequency of insanity among Negroes in the North is due to the tantalizing effect of the social environment that raises expectations that cannot be realized. If this explanation be true, then here we find an indisputable connection between the social environment and the mental health of the Negro.

The psychology of the Negro developed in the repressive environment in which he lives might be described as the psychology of the sick. It is a common experience to ask a Negro in the South how he feels and to receive the reply: "Right poorly." Further inquiry hardly ever shows that he is physically sick. This appears to be a purely defense mechanism. Subjectively, it affords the Negro that defense against self-depreciation that is intolerable. A sick man is not expected to assert himself. Objectively considered, he will elicit pity rather than resentment from the dominant race. The writer has noted on more than one occasion that even in cases where physical superiority counted, the Negro has hesitated to "let himself go," lest he appear to challenge the superior social position of the white man. This attitude in the Negro which we have described as the psychology of the sick, manifests itself in his religion. A social environment in which yearnings are repressed, usually produces a religion that looks beyond life for the satisfaction of desires.
The religion of the Negro has been characterized as the religion of death. It is for "dying souls." It is impossible to estimate what are the pathological results of the above outlook on life. It must certainly mean a reduction in that energy that characterizes healthy organisms.

In concluding this brief discussion of the probable effects of the social environment, we can only refer to the many daily irritations suffered by even the less sensitive members of the race. The writer knows several colored persons who avoid going into the white section of a city after meals, lest some anger provoking encounter bring on an attack of indigestion. Instance again the remark of a laboring Negro who says, "Makes me sick every time I get on a Jim Crow car." The treatment of Negroes in hospitals belongs in this class. The attention of the writer has been directed to cases of nervous patients in which both physicians and nurses took pleasure in tormenting cultured patients by insisting upon calling them "auntie" or treating them as servants or even criminals.

In presenting the mental attitude of the Negro towards disease and his beliefs concerning cures, the writer has not claimed that they are found universally among the Negro. They do not represent racial traits. They represent what he has found among the lower culture groups. The writer has not gone into those psychological factors which we cannot discuss here; namely, the psychology of white people in relation to Negro health. This is of great consequence where we see a disposition on the part of whites to discount the value of Negro life, and to oppose efforts to reduce infant mortality and increase his resistance to disease.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE RACE PROBLEM*
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THE WORKS on the racial problem, as it is called, that have appeared in the past few years, have testified to the gravity of the situation with which the people of the world are presented at present. The studies have ranged all the way from fulminations against a group that is particularly disliked or feared by the writer of a particular book or article, to careful, calm studies of the action of race and attempts to find out what the thing we call race-differences may be. Too often the works that prove most popular, and which excite the greatest attention, are those written by persons with facile pens, who have been caught up in the stream of popular superstitions and prejudices, and who contribute to the prevalent stereotypes that any given group of men may be lumped as incompetent or God-like, as inferior or superior, as being composed of dolts or geniuses.

It is, therefore, an occasions for particular attention when a work from somewhat a new angle gather in it a large number of anthropological, work in hand is undertaken in a serious, scientific spirit of openmindedness to the implications of