

FREEDOM AND THE NEGRO.

Dr. J. Addison Hodges, of Richmond, Virginia, read a paper before the American Medico-Psychological association, last week upon the subject "The Effect of Freedom upon the Physical and Psychological Development of the Negro." The following is the address in part:

Naturally, in the investigation of the racial history and tendencies of this people, there must be much of interest to enchain the attention of the student of sociology and political history, but, relegating to others the task of discussing the many vexed questions embraced in the so called negro problem, the alienist and student of scientific medicine may well inquire with me: What Has Been the Effect of Freedom Upon the Physical and Psychological Development of the Negroes of the South?

Has it been damaging or otherwise? Has the negro since emancipation, the critical and epochal period of his history, improved his physical health and mental and moral condition, or has he retrograded both physically and mentally?

Negro of the Past.

To answer this question intelligently and authoritatively, it is necessary to know accurately the health of the negro prior to emancipation, and, also, something of his mode of life, as well as something of his natural and inherited tendencies. Indeed, it is doubtful, says Dr. Miller, if any race of men 'ever lived under better hygienic restraints, or had governing their lives, rules and regulations more conducive to physical health and mental repose. Their habits of life were regular, their food and clothing were substantial and sufficient as a rule, and the edict of their masters restrained them from promiscuous excesses and the baneful influences of unrestricted indulgences.'

Under these environments the negro 'had no thought for the morrow,' nor did the claims of family and household press upon him to worry and affect his mind; neither did avaricious dreams nor ambitious hopes as to the possibilities of the future stir his brain, but 'secluded from the madding crowds ignoble strife,' he spent his quiet and peaceful days, an humble life in an humble home, with a master to care for every want of self and family, and in health and in sickness.'

The negroes, unadulterated with alien blood, had no heredity of disease, and to some extent were considered immune to the climatic diseases of the South, and thus under the restraining and inhibitory influences of the institution of slavery, they developed into magnificent specimens of physical manhood.

Traits of Character.

Independence of thought and action with them was more theoretical than practical; they were accustomed to obey the dictates of their owners, whatever those dictates may have been; privation

and want—those frequent causes of degeneracy—were unknown to them; their environment, it is true, was narrow; but a marvellous attachment to the families of their masters prevailed, because of a general sense of obligation to the latter for their sustenance. These conditions of life, and the resultant traits of character that were formed, were largely the conservators of that healthfulness of mind and body which characterized the negro slave.

Certain of the diseases which are now the bane of the negro's existence was then comparatively unknown, and this is notably true of insanity and tuberculosis. According to the testimony of travellers and natives, consumption and mental disease are almost unknown among the savage tribes of Africa. Among the slaves of the southern states, also, these diseases appear to have been conspicuously rare according to the experience of individual observers. In fact, there are many intelligent people of competent authority and of full acquaintance with the negro, who unhesitatingly state that they never saw a consumptive or insane negro of unmixed blood in the south prior to emancipation. This fact I believe to be so well established, although owing to the lack of authoritative statistics taken at that time, it cannot be verified by actual figures, that I will not add to this discussion by the introduction of additional personal testimony to this effect, but will enquire what is and has been the history of the negro as to these diseases, insanity and consumption, since emancipation.

Abundant testimony from reliable sources is not wanting to establish the fact that negroes now no longer enjoy immunity from these maladies, but that they are dying much more rapidly from them than the whites.

Increase of Insanity.

No one in this day places a too implicit confidence in statistics, and in the figures that I shall cite they have only a relative significance, but as a just comparison between the whites and the blacks in the different census enumerations, they have a reconciled value, and show unmistakably that brain diseases have become more common in the negroes as compared with the whites.

In speaking of the increase of insanity in the colored population of Georgia, Dr. Powell, superintendent of the Georgia Lunatic Asylum, makes the following comments: 'There has been a radical change in the susceptibility to certain diseases, notably insanity, phthisis and similar maladies in this class of our population, from which they were almost entirely exempt up to 1867. The census of 1860 will show that there were only 44 insane negroes in the state of Georgia, or one insane negro to every 10,584 of the population, and consumption in the full blooded negro was rarely seen. The

census of 1870 shows 129 insane negroes in this state, or one to every 4,225 of the population. The census of 1880 gives 411 colored insane, or one to every 1,764 of the population; while in 1890 there were 910 colored insane, or one to every 943 of the population.'

By other authorities it has been claimed that the increase of insanity among the negroes in Virginia has been for 25 years at the rate of 100, or more, per cent. every ten years.

As a summary of the foregoing, it may be briefly stated that "in the returns from death from consumption in the last five years, the colored death rate is very nearly triple that of the whites," and that the increase in insanity among the negroes now nearly approximates that of the whites, this alarming increase in the former being especially notable, if we remember that in one hospital in this state at present there are 105 more insane negroes than there were in the entire United States in 1860. The testimony that has been adduced, then, appears to me ample and conclusive as to the following points: (1) That insanity and consumption were comparatively infrequent in the negro race before the war; (2) that both of these diseases have disproportionately increased in the same race since the war; (3) that the causes that give rise to one of these diseases also produce the other, and (4) that the negro race is especially liable to certain forms of nervous diseases. The question now naturally arises, what is the cause for this rapid and remarkable transformation in the health of these people during the short period of three decades? Why should insanity and consumption develop side by side, and at an equal pace? Have the changes in the environments of the negro had aught to do with this state of things, or, in other words, what is the relation of freedom to these diseases?

Laws of Slavery.

To arrive at a correct solution of these questions, and to appreciate the effects of the changed political and social relations, because of freedom, on the mental, moral and physical constitution of the negro, it is necessary to know his manner of life during the ante-bellum and post-bellum periods of his history.

Up to 1865 it was to the interest of the owners of Southern slaves not to allow them to violate the laws of health; therefore, their hygienic surroundings were carefully and cautiously guarded from their youth through life. Their lives, from necessity, were regular and systematic, and they were absolutely restrained from all dissipation and excesses, and when sick they promptly had from the family physician the very best medical attention and nursing, and were carefully treated in every respect until pronounced fully restored by the physician. Freedom came to him, and a change came over his entire life. Freedom re-