

NEGRO COCAINE "FIENDS" ARE A NEW SOUTHERN MENACE

By Edward Huntington Williams, M. D.

Murder and Insanity Increasing Among Lower Class Blacks Because They Have Taken to "Sniffing" Since Deprived of Whisky by Prohibition.

FOR some years there have been rumors about the increase in drug taking in the South—vague, but always insistent rumors that the addiction to such drugs as morphine and cocaine was becoming a veritable curse to the colored race in certain regions. Some of these reports of alleged conditions read like the wildest flights of a sensational fiction writer. Stories of cocaine orgies and "sniffing parties," followed by wholesale murders, seem like lurid journalism of the yellowest variety.

But in point of fact there was nothing "yellow" about many of these reports. Nine men killed in Mississippi on one occasion by crazed cocaine takers, five in North Carolina, three in Tennessee—these are facts that need no imaginative coloring. And since this gruesome evidence is supported by the printed records of insane hospitals, police courts, jails, and penitentiaries, there is no escaping the conviction that drug taking has become a race menace in certain regions south of the line.

In the North drug addiction is prevalent enough in all conscience. The hospitals for the insane in New York State admitted one insane drug taker every 386 other patients last year; and New York's record is about the same as that of her immediate neighbors. But in Georgia the proportion was 1 to 42, in North Carolina about 1 to 84, in Tennessee 1 to 74, and in one of the Mississippi hospitals 1 to 23.

Stated otherwise, these Southern States had from five to fifteen times as many insane drug takers as New York State. But these comparisons, although sufficiently startling, fail to show the extent of drug addiction in the South. For most of these insane drug users, both North and South, were the victims of morphine; whereas the negro drug "fiend" uses cocaine almost exclusively.

This preference is not explained by the difference in the effects of the two drugs, but rather in the manner that each may be taken. Morphine when taken into the stomach acts slowly, and tends to upset digestion. If taken hypodermically its effects are produced almost immediately, and gastric functions are less disturbed. But hypodermic medication requires special apparatus, a liquid solution of the drug, and a somewhat complicated process of preparation.

Cocaine, on the other hand, can be taken in the dry form by the simple process of sniffing into the nose like an ordinary pinch of snuff. And its effects are almost instantaneous when so taken. It can, indeed, be mixed with a brown powder that resembles ordinary snuff, and taken without detection under the very eyes of watchful officers.

The drug produces an exhilaration which is usually simply a mild intoxication, although it may produce the wildest form of insane exaltation, accompanied by the fantastic hallucinations and delusions that characterize acute mania. But this condition is followed by a state of terrible depression a few hours later—or would be followed by such depression if the drug were not again taken to prevent it. It is for the purpose of averting this depressed state, as well as to produce the exaltation, that the "fiend" continues to use the drug once he has experienced either condition.

Proof Against Bullets.

But the drug produces several other conditions that make the "fiend" a peculiarly dangerous criminal. One of these conditions is a temporary immunity to shock—a resistance to the "knock down" effects of fatal wounds. Bullets fired into vital parts, that would drop a sane man in his tracks, fail to check the "fiend"—fail to stop his rush or weaken his attack.

A few weeks ago Dr. Crile's method of preventing shock in anesthetized patients by the use of a cocaine preparation was described in these columns. A similar fortification against this condition seems to be produced in the cocaine-sniffing negro.

A recent experience of Chief of Police Lysterly of Asheville, N. C., illustrates this particular phase of cocaineism. The Chief was informed that a hitherto inoffensive negro, with whom he was well acquainted, was "running amuck" in a cocaine frenzy, had attempted to stab a storekeeper, and was at the moment engaged in "beating up" the various members of his own household. Being fully aware of the respect that the negro has for brass buttons, (and, incidentally, having a record for courage,) the officer went single-handed to the negro's house for the purpose of arresting him.

But when he arrived there the negro had completed the beatings and left the place. A few moments later, however, the man returned, and entered the room where the Chief was waiting for him, concealed behind a door. When the unsuspecting negro reached the middle of the room, the officer closed the door to prevent his escape, and informed him quietly that he was under arrest, and asked him to come to the station. In reply the crazed negro drew a long knife, grappled with the officer, and slashed him viciously across the shoulder.

Knowing that he must kill the man or be killed himself, the Chief drew his revolver, placed the muzzle over the negro's heart, and fired—"intending to kill him right quick," as the officer tells of. But the shot did not even

stagger the man. And a second shot that pierced the arm and entered the chest had just as little effect in stopping the negro or checking his attack. Meanwhile the Chief, out of the corner of his eye, saw infuriated negroes rushing toward the cabin from all directions. He had only three cartridges remaining in his gun, and he might need those in a minute to stop the mob. So he saved his ammunition and "finished the man with his club."

The following day the Chief exchanged his revolver for one of heavier calibre. Yet the one with which he shot the negro was a heavy army model, using a cartridge that Lieut. Townsend Whelen, who is an authority on such matters, recently declared was large enough to "kill any game in America." And many other officers in the South, who appreciate the increased vitality of the cocaine-crazed negroes, have made a similar exchange for guns of greater shocking power for the express purpose of combating the "fiend" when he runs amuck.

The list of dangerous effects produced by cocaine just described—hallucinations and delusions, increased courage, homicidal tendencies, resistance to shock—is certainly long enough. But there is still another, and a most important one. This is a temporary steadying of the nervous and muscular system, so as to increase, rather than interfere with, good marksmanship.

Makes Better Marksmen.

Many of the wholesale killings in the South may be cited as indicating that accuracy in shooting is not interfered with—is, indeed, probably improved—by cocaine. For a large proportion of such shootings have been the result of drug taking. But I believe the record of the "cocaine nigger" near Asheville, who dropped five men dead in their tracks, using only one cartridge for each, offers evidence that is sufficiently convincing. I doubt if this shooting record has been equaled in recent years: certainly not by a man under the influence of any other form of intoxicant. For the bad marksmanship of the drunken man is proverbial; while the deadly accuracy of the cocaine user has become axiomatic in Southern police circles.

Since every one in authority in the South is alive to the dangers of the cocaine habit, and eager to suppress it, two questions arise. How does the negro get his supply? And why do not the officers in authority prevent his getting it?

The reply to the first question is simple: the exact source of supply is unknown. The question as to why those in authority do not stop the practice of drug taking may be answered even more tersely: they can't stop it.

Of course the immediate channels of local distribution are frequently detected. Newsboys and bootblacks act as local vendors, and frequently these

culprits are caught and punished. But this does not solve the mystery of the general clandestine traffic; for these local vendors refuse to "peach" on their associates.

One newsboy in a North Carolina city accumulated a small fortune by the sale of the drug. His regular price was "10 cents a sniff," or 25 cents for a day's supply, which he dispensed in

small pill boxes. This is a common method of distributing the drug—a vile concoction of cocaine mixed with some inert powder to give it bulk. The boy procured his supply in the pure (more or less) form, and prepared the mixture to meet trade demands. He was "the honored guest" at frequent gatherings of the cocaine-taking brotherhood, (and sisterhood,) supplying his

patrons when they dropped in casually for their "dope," to loiter about, luxuriating in the delicious exhilaration. Any cabin might serve as a resort, safe from the prying eyes of police officers. Although these officers suspected the boy of peddling the drug they failed to catch him at it. And even when he finally acquired the drug habit himself, as most of these peddlers do

eventually, and was so thoroughly "doped" that he squandered his money and gave away the drug, he would never reveal the source of his supply. But there is every reason to believe that he obtained regular consignments through the underground channels that flourish in many localities, entirely out of reach of the police.

The Mississippi River is probably the greatest highway for "wholesale" distribution, but Gulf ports and seaports are also avenues of entrance. It is perfectly easy for a man to drop over the side of a boat coming into Mobile harbor, or one of the numerous channels at the mouth of the Mississippi, and disappear into the interior carrying a few pounds of the deadly powder, every ounce of which represents one thousand average doses.

But in all probability the greatest wholesale traffic is carried on from fixed shipping points, from which packages are sent to local peddlers, disguised in one of a hundred ways that escape detection. And when we consider that even a single ounce—a quantity that does not fill an ordinary watch pocket—will keep fifty "fiends" well "doped" for a week or more, we can readily understand why every effort to suppress the traffic utterly fails.

Why Do They Do It?

Many of the negroes, even those who have not yet become addicted, appreciate the frightful penalty of dabbling with the drug. Why, then, do so many of them "dabble"?

There are various facts that suggest an answer to this question, and evidence in the form of the opinions of physicians, officers, and the cocaine users themselves, that supports these facts. The "fiend" when questioned, frequently gives his reason in this brief sentence: "Cause I couldn't git nothin' else, boss." That seems to be the crux of the whole matter.

A brief survey of conditions in the South and a bit of recent legislative history make it perfectly evident why the negro "couldn't git nothin' else."

In many States in the South the negro population constitutes from 30 to 60 per cent. of the total population. Most of the negroes are poor, illiterate, and shiftless. If we include in this class the poor whites, who are on a par with the average negro in poverty, ignorance, and general lack of thrift, we may reckon the aggregate number as representing about one person in three in the entire population. Governing, or even keeping in reasonable control, such a host is an onerous task, even when most of the individuals of the host are sober. The inevitable number of alcoholics adds to that task enormously.

The simplest way to remove this added menace—it seems simple, theoretically, at least—would be to keep whisky out of the low-class negro's hands by legislating it out of existence as far as he was concerned. And

so Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Tennessee, and West Virginia passed laws intended to abolish the saloon and keep whisky and the negro separated.

These laws do not, and were not intended to, prevent the white man from the well-to-do negro getting his accustomed beverages through legitimate channels. They obliged him to forego the pleasure of leaning against a bar and "taking his drink perpendicularly," to be sure; but a large proportion of the intelligent whites were ready to make this sacrifice if by doing so they could eliminate the drunken negro.

That their only sacrifice was in method of taking, not in the amount of ardent spirits consumed, is shown by the records of liquor shipments that go to individual consumers. The Interstate Commerce Commission reported in 1911, using the figures presented by the Southern Express Company as a basis, that "the total annual movement indicated (for the South alone) is 6,085,284 gallons," almost exclusively into prohibition territory, of course.

In December, 1913, the officials in Asheville, N. C., reported that they were receiving 400 gallon-packages daily, 12,000 gallons monthly, or about three gallons per month for each family. And Asheville is quite as abstemious as the other well-governed cities of the South.

But none of these countless gallon-parcels reached the lower class negro, the "one man in every three" in the South. His own ignorance and poverty make this a certainty, as the governing white intended.

Of course it is nothing short of "class legislation," this giving to the rich and depriving the poor. But what of it, so long as the discrimination applies to whisky? Nothing, of course—provided, always, that those discriminated against do not find some substitute worse than the original trouble-maker. But unfortunately for the negro, and for his community, such a substitute was found almost immediately—a substitute that is inestimably worse even than the "moonshine whisky," drug-store nostrums, or the deadly wood alcohol poison. This substitute, as I have pointed out, is cocaine; and a trail of blood and disaster has marked the progress of its substitution.

Should any one doubt that prohibition is directly responsible for the introduction, and increase, of cocaine-taking in the South, let him consider a few pertinent facts supported by the opinions of competent observers.

Hospital and police records show that during the prohibition period drug habits have increased with alarming rapidity. Physicians, officers, and "fiends," with very few dissenting opinions, attribute the rise of cocaineism to the low-class negro's inability to get his accustomed beverages. Of course "fiends" are usually larcenous, and even officers of the law or practitioners of medicine may be mistaken. But it is entirely improbable that all these men, from such widely different walks of life, should reach the same conclusion without adequate grounds for doing so.

Moreover, in cities where prohibition is strictly enforced, (relatively speaking,) the drug habit is increasing with alarming rapidity; whereas in cities in which little attempt is made to prevent liquor traffic, there is a comparatively slight increase in cocaine taking. Thus the officials of Raleigh, N. C., and Knoxville, Tenn., to mention but two places where the prohibitory statute is enforced, report that cocaine taking has doubled and quadrupled in the last four years. The Knoxville police arrested seven cocaine-taking women in a single day recently. In Memphis, on the other hand, where half the population is colored, but where no attempt is made to prevent the sale of liquors, the drug habit is increasing slowly, if at all.

From Bad to Worse.

In short, the South in attempting to correct a bad condition has created one infinitely worse. For the evils of alcoholism—its effects upon the individual, or upon the community—are not to be compared with the horrors of cocaineism.

What is the South going to do about it?

As far as the thousands who have already formed the habit are concerned, there is little choice in remedies. Once the negro has formed the habit he is irremediable. The only method to keep him from taking the drug is by imprisoning him. And this is merely palliative treatment, for he returns inevitably to the drug habit when released.

For the thousands of negroes who have not yet acquired the habit, but who will do so eventually if present conditions continue, the outlook is scarcely more hopeful. The drug traffic puts an irresistible temptation in their way, and this traffic continues to flourish.

The failure to suppress it cannot be attributed to lack of interest or strenuous endeavor on the part of officials. Every one of these, to a man, is doing his utmost to stop it, not merely from a sense of duty, but because of the much more compelling motive, self-preservation. It is literally a matter of life and death with them. And yet they fail utterly.

The great stumbling block in the way of suppressing the traffic is the fact that the causes that produce it have become entangled with a political issue. The question is not merely—what is best for the negro, or the race? But it is: What is best for the politician? Presently the issue will take some other fantastic political twist, and then they will "call in the surgeons to patch up the wound."

But meanwhile these politicians have forced a new and terrible form of slavery upon thousands of colored men—a hideous bondage from which they cannot escape by mere proclamation or civil war.

