

Home Occupation in Families of Consumptives and Possible Dangers to the Public.*

By MISS MABEL JACQUES,
Member Visiting Nurses' Society, Philadelphia.

One might almost make a sweeping assertion, and say that in the home of every poor consumptive there is work of some kind going on that will carry out into the world the destructive tubercle germ.

Until it becomes possible to abolish work done in these unsanitary homes, and to find safe occupation for this class of people, it seems impossible that much progress can be made toward successfully stamping out the disease.

Being most familiar with the homes and industries of Philadelphia, I shall have to quote freely from the existing conditions in that city.

Let us first consider the different forms of work which are liable to be done in these homes before we go into any detailed account of the dangers incurred thereby.

Statistical reports indicate that the greatest amount of tuberculosis is found amongst the negro race; the chief occupation in their homes being laundry work. Occasionally we find dressmakers, restaurant keepers, barbers, and now and then a tailor.

Amongst the Italians we find finishers of readymade clothes, such as trousers of various grades, men's coats, shirts, and caps, women's collars and neckwear generally, small manufacturers of macaroni, ice-cream, and candy, button-hole makers, custom tailors, rag-strippers, paper flower makers, barbers, and cigar makers.

In the Jewish homes we find nearly the same occupations, excepting the macaroni, ice-cream, and candy makers.

The English and Americans do probably less work at home, but we find amongst them finishers of aprons, children's dresses, neckties, paper-box makers, stocking seconders, baseball stitchers, makers of paper candle shades, bread makers, wash women, and the small storekeeper that we find amongst all nationalities.

There are, of course, people from many other nations living in our cities, with whom tuberculosis is more or less prevalent, and who are likewise doing work in their homes, but I should like to speak more particularly about those that I have mentioned.

It has already been stated that the homes in which tuberculosis appears most frequently seem to be those of the negroes—that in-

* Read at the Tuberculosis Congress, Washington.

creasing race of people, who are not only forming a large part of the population of many of our cities, but who also do about half of our household work.

Most coloured people who are not living out at service are taking laundry work into their homes.

The family of the consumptive is generally a very poor one, and all those who are able to work must do so; even the one member of the family who stays at home to care for the sick one must do her share toward bringing something into the general fund, and she will ask you: What can be more easily done in the few spare moments she has than a small wash?

When questioned as to whether any precautions are being taken about handling these clothes after waiting on the patient, you are looked at with surprise, and doubtless discover after further questioning that they are being washed with those of the patient's. Later they are taken home apparently clean and white to their owner, who wears them without a suspicion of what they have been through.

The outline of a recent case might illustrate the above. Upon visiting a child, who for three years had been confined to her bed, owing to a discharging tubercular abscess, I inquired into the manner in which the wound was being dressed, and found that the mother was accustomed to dress it once a day, using warm water and old linen. Questioning her as to the disposal of these dressings, she replied that they were washed and used again. I cautioned her about this, suggesting possible infection to herself, and promised to keep her supplied with old linen sufficient to enable her to burn the dressings after they had been once used.

The family appeared to be a very poor one, and upon making inquiry as to its source of income, I found that the father was janitor of an orphanage and the mother did laundry work at home. Again referring to the dressings, I asked if by any chance they were washed in the same tub that was used for the outside laundry, and was met with an affirmative response, and a remark that there was nothing else to wash them in. It also developed that the dressings that were not very badly soiled were rinsed off under the hydrant and then washed, not only in the tub used for the outside laundry, but actually at the same time.

When casually asked if she had ever told the people that she worked for what was the trouble with the child, she replied quite indignantly: "No, it ain't smallpox."

We are working amongst this class of people and meet similar incidents every day. We find baskets of snowy linen standing beside the

previous page

next page