

And it is with the community as with the individual: that which makes a nation great is not the wealth of its people, or their intelligence, but their good name. It is because I believe that the medical profession may have a large influence in moulding the spirit of a nation, that I wish in the hour which custom allots me here, to offer a few remarks on National Character and Public Health.

How may our national character help or hinder us in our work, and how may we, as the guardians of the public health, help to make or mar our national character?

The public health laws of a country will depend largely on the character of the people. The character of the people will be conditioned largely by their public health, that is, by that standard of health of the individuals composing the nation which, as a national ideal, all the people are interested in and willing to make sacrifices for. This is Public Health in the largest view.

And first let us consider some of the features of national character which may influence public health.

There is *love of liberty*, and a free people is usually a vigorous and healthy people.

But there is a liberty not according to knowledge. When an individual claims the right to act according to his own judgment in matters of which he is profoundly incapable of judging, his boasted liberty may prove a perilous possession to himself and his neighbors. When a community refuses to be bound by laws which Sanitary Science has declared to be necessary, it abuses its liberty and may bring serious damage upon itself. The laws of health cannot be broken with impunity, and this spurious love of liberty frequently stands in the way of sanitary reform.

We have a striking instance of it at present in the stupid rebellion against sanitary laws shown by many communities on the lower Mississippi in the present epidemic of yellow fever.

From the thought of liberty to that of bondage may seem a strange step, yet the next national characteristic which I mention as having an influence on public health, namely, the worship of material things and the feverish haste to accumulate wealth, lays upon us a bitter and grievous bondage. The public and the representatives of the public are too apt to regard with impatience, if not with scorn, the claims of any interest which does not seem to have immediate or direct bearing on the great national occupation of money making.

There is an epigrammatic expression in the works of Aristotle which might well be inscribed in letters of gold over the council chamber of our legislatures and our boards of trade. It may be freely translated thus, "It is not seemly for a free people to be always seeking for cash returns."