

The year is 1913

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Finishing my period of training with a few days in Alexander County with Dr. W. P. Jacocks, I was assigned to conduct dispensaries in Caswell County. This county in the northwestern part of the State is one of the oldest and one that had played an important role in the State's history. Its population in 1913 was about fifteen thousand, of whom about half were Negroes. Eight dispensary points had been selected at the time the appropriation was secured earlier in the year. Milton was chosen as headquarters since it was the only town in the county on the railway, and to reach Milton it was necessary to go by train to Danville, Virginia, and then travel over a branch line which connects with the railroad from Durham to South Boston, Virginia. In Caswell my microscopist was Mr. E. B. Davis, who had spent a year or more with the Hookworm Commission. He had recently married and the Caswell campaign was in the nature of a honeymoon for him and his lady.

Milton proved to be an interesting town. From the depot, fully a mile away, we had to walk to the business section. The first thing we noticed was the number of vacant houses, and nicely built houses, probably two for each one that was occupied; and near the center of town we passed a fire department, an old time hose and reel type, which was in decay and looked as if it had not been used for many years. At the end of the street near the Dan River were several large, three- and four-storied brick buildings which had once been tobacco warehouses. We soon learned the explanation for these strange conditions. Milton had formerly been the largest tobacco market (dark leaf, I believe it was) in the world but when the main line of the Southern Railway was built through Danville, fourteen miles away, the market had moved there and Milton had been eclipsed. However, the town was undergoing a small business comeback and the large old colonial inn had recently been restored and refurbished, so we had a fairly comfortable place to live, according to hotel standards of the time. Our rooms were quite satisfactory and the meals were good, and the charge was \$20 per month for room and board. Modern sanitary conveniences were lacking and the bucket privies which had been built, supposedly according to directions given by the State Board of Health, had not been made fly-tight, so the house, including the dining room, was usually filled with flies. Also, the hotel was infested by many large rats.

At the time of our arrival Milton was agog over the prospects of a business revival. Two of the largest deserted warehouses had been bought by business men from Richmond and it was rumored that they were to be reopened, but it turned out that the purchasers had bought the buildings in order to take out the window panes, which they sold for more than the houses had cost them. And mention must be made of "Mr. Bob," a large, pompous, old-time gentleman who dressed meticulously and spent his days sitting in a rocking chair on the hotel porch. He was a relic of older and more prosperous times. Also, mention should be made of our landlady. It seems that the inn had been bought and restored with money which she had inherited. She spent her spare time sitting on the porch crying quietly to herself because, as she said, "Anyone as rich as she was had to work so hard."

After getting located in Milton we hired a horse and buggy and began our advertising campaign. Since schools were not in session we did not feel that much headway was being made with this educational work. Our first visit was to Yanceyville, and here we were in for another surprise. This county seat was a center of old aristocratic families who owned large and prosperous tobacco plantations in the nearby country districts. The courthouse was of marble and very impressive, and we were told that "before the War" it was the finest public building in North Carolina. It was pretty, but it was not well kept. Its lawn was shaded by large oaks and elms and maples and here were arranged tables at which, during fair weather, men and women sat and played Rook, a popular card game at the time. They played during the morning and again in the afternoon after the heat of the day had passed, moving into the courthouse corridors when it rained.

Yanceyville was a political center and there were three, and I believe four, newspapers published in the town, a newspaper for each group of candidates for the legislature or for county offices; all of whom, of course, were Democrats. These newspapers were printed on small hand presses and had only a local circulation. In fact the county seat was so much concerned with politics and Rook that we were able to arouse but little interest in our health campaign. In the local opinion, we were made to understand, the town was as up to date as any in the State and did not need improved sanitation; and as for the Negroes who lived on the nearby tobacco plantations, why worry about them!

But our apprehensions vanished when we met Dr. Stephen A. Douglas Malloy, the county superintendent of health, and the only doctor living in Yanceyville. He welcomed us enthusiastically and except for his assistance our campaign would have met with but little success. At his suggestion we arranged to hold a special meeting in the courthouse on the following Saturday morning. Leaving his work, and he was a busy man, he went with us to the courthouse where we talked with the county officials. Their interest became more apparent than when we had introduced ourselves to them a short time before. Then we visited the newspaper offices and met the editors, all of whom agreed to print notices of our coming meeting and demonstration. Among these was Tom Henderson of the Yanceyville Sentinel, a strange fellow who had made a brilliant record at the state university and was a recognized Greek scholar.

Dr. Malloy presided at this inaugural meeting and due to his influence the member of the Legislature and the county officers were present. Even some of the Rook players came in and there were a number of speeches stressing the part Caswell had played in the leadership of the State. All this talk took place before I was given an opportunity of telling about hookworm disease and of the methods to be used in the coming campaign. All were interested in the exhibit, though they expressed the opinion that infection would be found only in rural sections and among the tenants on the tobacco plantations. Tom Henderson was there and he gave an interesting report of the meeting in the next issue of the Sentinel. This report he supplemented by the following editorial.

Avaunt, thou evil genius of man's inertia. Thy days are numbered in Caswell. Henceforth that tired feeling will know us no more and health and prosperity will bless the remaining days of our life. The disciples of Esculapius backed by the State of North Carolina, the County of Caswell and John D. Rockefeller's (sic) millions are hunting for the little varmints day and night with spyglasses.

The first appointment of the itinerary free dispensary was held yesterday and the courthouse was converted into a museum or more properly a verminatory, where the "rele thyng" in worms, hook and otherwise, was displayed and it was a display calculated to influence any man to take any kind of treatment if there was a possibility of all those worms feeding on the corpuscles, especially when he is told by the M.D. that some six thousand usually inhabit the person affected and that each of these lays six thousand eggs

a day and that it takes a drop of blood a day to satisfy each one of the little varmints. Who wants to run the risk of losing thirty-six thousand or is it thirty-six million drops of blood each day?

The county commissioners had insisted on eight dispensary points, which was a mistake since each place could be visited only twice during the campaign, travel over the rough roads being slow and tedious. In fact, to reach some of the country points where there were no hotel accommodations, we had to leave Milton or Yanceyville as early as three in the morning to keep our appointment for nine o'clock. At Prospect Hill, our most distant dispensary point, we were put up at the home of Mr. Warren, an uncle of Dr. A. J. Warren who was later head of a division of The Rockefeller Foundation. But the country was interesting, and if the roads were bad some of them passed over streams on old-time covered bridges. Most of our dispensary points were near the home of at least one of the county commissioners and Dr. Malloy had stimulated their interest to the point of having groups of their Negro plantation workers examined, so that by the close of the campaign we had reached 4,020 of the county's population of 14,858. Microscopic examinations were made of 1,742, of whom 310 were infected with intestinal parasites, while 128 persons had hookworm infection.

The campaign closed on Wednesday, July 23rd, and with the assistance of Dr. Malloy a health rally was held in Yanceyville. The superintendent of schools, the representative in the Legislature, and the county commissioners took part in the program held in the morning. The principal speaker was Dr. C. L. Pridgen, of Raleigh, who had succeeded Dr. Ferrell as State Director of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission. Following the speaking, dinner was served by the ladies and then a report and discussion were made of the hookworm campaign in Caswell in which all of the doctors of the county took part. An appeal was made by Dr. Malloy for the employment of a full-time county health officer. The commissioners, I remember, were probably more interested in the financial than they were in the scientific report of the campaign. They had appropriated \$250.00 as the county's part of the expense but the cost of the items for which they paid amounted to only \$201.08. A refund of \$48.92 was made and one member of the board was heard to whisper to his neighbor, "This may be an honest thing after all."