

THE CINEMATOGRAF AS A MEANS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

PAPER III

In former issues of the PORTO RICO HEALTH REVIEW, the two films issued by the Department of Health of Porto Rico, entitled "Fighting the White Plague, and Saving the Children," were discussed and readers of the REVIEW were given an idea of how the screen is being used to arouse the interest of the public in Porto Rico regarding health matters; and to explain in a graphic way how to avoid and suppress disease. That the departure to this new field of educational activities by the Department of Health of Porto Rico will have a vital influence on the physical development of the rising generation is unquestionable. Therefore, a third film has been prepared entitled "Anemia—the Plague of Porto Rico".

The film is presented in seven reels. It has been so prepared as to appeal to all people, old and young. In the first part, Porto Rico the Isle of Enchantment, is displayed. Fascinating views of the Bay of San Juan, the palm-studded hills, and the magnificent roads which lead through a wonderland of scenic beauty are thrown on the screen. The spectator readily acquaints himself with the ideal climatic advantages so conducive to health which the country affords.

But in spite of these favorable conditions which prevail in Porto Rico, the spectator learns that nearly ninety per cent of the rural inhabitants of the Island suffer from uncinariasis. Facts are presented which show how this disease undermines the strength and vitality of its victims in a most subtle way and finally damages the entire organism. A man twenty-three years of age suffering from uncinariasis is shown in contrast to a man in good health, who is tall and well developed, while the victim of uncinariasis is no taller than a boy twelve years old, yet his countenance is that of a man much older than twenty-three. Another man is shown who has an ulcer on one of his legs which does not heal because of his anemic condition.

Graphic illustrations follow showing the entrance of the parasite into the intestines from its earliest to its most advanced stage. The parasite is from seven to ten m. m. in size. Each female uncinaria produces thousands of eggs a day. These eggs are expelled with the excreta and are soon transformed into larvæ, in places where the

conditions of moisture and shade are favorable. The ground in the rural zones is shown infested with these larvæ; the reason for this being that latrines are not used. Hence, the larvæ either remain in the ground until they die or penetrate the skin of a person who walks over the infested regions. Here the spectator visualizes the larva as it enters through an abrasion, and then is conveyed through the lymphatics and lungs, eventually finding its way into the intestines where it develops into a mature uncinaria.

It is estimated that every person from the rural regions of Porto Rico has on an average of four hundred and twenty uncinaria in his or her intestines. The constant loss of blood, and the toxins which the parasites liberate into the system of the individual cause anemia, and due to this fact many families are very poor in Porto Rico, since they are not well enough to earn a living. Physically unable to earn enough for their daily maintenance they are naturally ill-fed. The breakfast of the average person living in the country is black coffee only. On this, the men go to the fields and work under the scorching heat of the sun until noon, and before long, through weakness and the progress of the disease they become too ill to work.

Dizziness, palpitation and fatigue are the symptoms of uncinariasis. These facts are emphasized as the spectator is shown a laboring man, a victim of the disease, working a while and then forced to stop as the dizziness and intense weakness overtake him. Sometimes he suffers several of these attacks of extreme weakness during the day and is finally compelled to stop working although he knows that his children are in need of food.

Not only adults but many children are victims of the disease. Not knowing how to guard themselves against the contaminated ground and being ill-nourished they soon become pale and emaciated from the effects of uncinariasis in their organism; and the spectator is introduced to a nice-looking boy in school who listlessly watches the other children play during recess, but who is too weak and tired to enjoy the games.

The second part of the picture points out clearly that uncinariasis is avoidable and curable. The Department of Health is carrying on an intense campaign against this terrible plague which casts its pall over the rural population of Porto Rico, and in cooperation with the International Health Board of the Rockefeller Foundation is bending every effort toward rural sanitation in order to prevent future infection. The fact is emphasized that the solution to the problem is the

successful enforcement of rural sanitation which will prevent reinfection and thus cause a total eradication of the disease.

The spectator is also given an idea of how the rural sanitary inspector carries on his work. One scene shows the inspector visiting a shack in a remote hill region. He first takes a census of the family, then he orders the building of a latrine according to the plan outlined by the Department of Health. Later the latrine is inspected, and if it presents all the requirements as set forth in the sanitary regulations it is approved. After the examination of the excreta of each family has been made, those found infested are immediately given treatment. Here the spectator sees how the medicine is prepared in the office of the Rural Sanitation Unit, he then follows the doctor as he examines the patient, administers the medicine, instructs how to prevent contamination of the soil, and emphasizes the need of complete cooperation on the part of the rural inhabitants in order to rid Porto Rico of this plague, and in this way assure good health to all. The picture ends with a scene which presents a healthy, happy family; the parents able to work again; and the children well enough to want to play.

Perhaps nothing will play a more important part in the general success of public-health activities in Porto Rico than the Bureau of Rural Sanitation, which by bringing about the strict enforcement of the law as to the construction of latrines, as well as to the treatment of those suffering from the disease, will rid the Island of one of its worst menaces and will blaze the path to a new existence for the people of the rural districts.

The educational value of this film is incalculable. In arousing the people to the necessity of avoiding the disease by the proper observance of sanitary regulations it will be the means of helping to build up a robust rural population.

