

# MURDER BY MICROBE

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**T**WENTY THOUSAND Filipinos are going to die this year.

The murderer will be a tiny organism, about three-thousandths of a millimeter in size. Known to scientists as the *bacillus tuberculosis* the minute murderer is a rod-shaped microbe, slightly bent or curved, and when seen under a microscope after staining, may present a beaded appearance.

**E**XPERIMENTS have shown that the tubercle bacillus in dried sputum may live for as long as three years if protected from light. It travels around with the dust. It is found in hospital wards, public carriages and public buses. If a man sneezes in your vicinity, it may travel down your nostrils and seek a resting place in your respiratory system where it will start to multiply.

A child crawling on the floor may pick up the microbes on his hands. And in a few months or

years he may be a skeleton of himself because a careless mother failed to wash baby's hands before he started sucking his thumb.

The sputum of the tuberculosis victim may travel into your house by way of your own shoes, the hem of your mother's long skirt; your sister's slacks, or the hair of your pet dog after a good roll in the dust of the street. You never can tell tuberculosis, and even an innocent kiss may mean murder if you don't watch out.

**T**UBERCULOSIS has been called the captain of the men of death. The accuracy of the description can be gauged if you consider that as late as 1940 it was listed as eighth among the causes of death in the whole world. In 1900 it was listed as Public Enemy Number One, a position which it still holds in the Philippines.

Consider the following facts: 38,000 men, women and children in this country have been carried

away by the white plague since the liberation. 111.1 out of every 100,000 Filipinos die of the dreaded TB. And for every victim who ends up in the grave, there were 20 more who already have the disease.

The tragic thing about tuberculosis is that it strikes its victims down usually between the ages of 20 and 35. The fifteen years comprising this span are generally conceded to be the most fruitful in a man's career. But when the white plague strikes at him with a clammy hand, he becomes a bed-ridden patient, a burden on his family and his community.

**PEDRO REYES** is a young student. Out for honors he begins to study far into the night. He deprives himself of the proper rest in order to devote himself to his studies.

After a while he senses vaguely that the least exertion tires him out; he feels that he isn't learning as fast as he should and that his work is becoming shoddy and half-hearted.

Perhaps he begins to cough, a dry cough which he really doesn't notice or, if he does, fails to treat properly. The cough becomes mucopurulent, and he has to spit in order to relieve his mucus-congested throat. If Pedro is a wise young man, he will see a doctor.

There is nothing really wrong with him—yet. He may merely be suffering from bronchitis accompanying pulmonary lesion. But if he disregards that vague feeling of illness, that dry cough which rapidly becomes mucopurulent, he may be taking the first step towards a tuberculosis sanatorium.

He begins to feel feverish sometimes, getting chills and sweating freely as he tosses about in exhausted sleep. He may not lose weight at first; but as that cough gets worse and those sharp pains keep stabbing at his chest, he begins to lose weight. Then he begins to notice that his sputum is flecked, just a little with blood. Thoroughly disturbed, he goes to the offices of the Anti-Tuberculosis Society in Tayuman, Manila.

Here, after a thorough examination, his worst fears are confirmed. Doctor Avellana tells him as gently as possible that he has been infected by the white plague, but that, if he follows instructions, he can be cured. By this time, Pedro is so stricken with fear he is willing to do anything to get well.

The doctor recommends proper food, fresh air, complete rest. And Pedro's little world of dreams falls upon his head. He must discontinue his studies; his professional career will be delayed. But

he is lucky if he gets away as easily as this.

He may be married with a wife and children to support. To stop working would be tantamount to condemning his family to death by slow starvation. And furthermore, who is going to pay for the treatment necessary to set him back on the road to recovery?

These questions he must settle for himself.

And usually he chooses to go on working, keeping his grim secret to himself while the tiny microbes continue tearing his lungs to pieces. His disease worsens. He begins to spit blood. Every time he coughs he emits a shower of microbes that endanger his own family, his friends, his fellow students or employees. And finally, when his lungs can no longer sustain his body, he has a last hemorrhage and drops into the grave.

The career of Pedro ends with a spatter of blood.

**REALIZING** that many Filipinos who are TB victims simply cannot afford what it takes to effect a cure for tuberculosis, the Philippine Anti-Tuberculosis Society is waging a campaign to raise P500,000.00 to fight the dreaded white plague. The money which will be secured from the drive will be used to buy medicines to secure the necessary

equipment for Pneumothorax (collapse of the lung) and other methods which have been perfected to counteract tuberculosis, to buy milk and fresh vegetables for countless TB carriers who must either be helped or die.

The money will also be spent in educating Filipinos on the prevention and cure of tuberculosis. Posters, pamphlets, films, books will be distributed throughout the Philippines, dealing with tuberculosis: how it starts, how spread, how stopped, how cured.

For where tuberculosis is concerned, an ounce of prevention is still worth a pound of cure. The history of the world has shown that when education and improved social conditions for the masses can be secured, the death rate from tuberculosis always bogs down.

This is especially notable in the United States where the death rate from tuberculosis has gone down to approximately 40 per 100,000 population, a ratio which is only one-third as large as that of the Philippines.

A survey of the large cities in the United States has shown that the prevalence of tuberculosis among the Negroes living in congested slums is eleven times higher than in other sections where the inhabitants have ma-

naged to retain a higher standard of living. The same is true in the Philippines; perhaps, the proportion is even higher.

During the Japanese occupation a rambling tenement in the Leve-riza slum district housed 187 children between the ages of 1 and 18. During the period from 1943 to 1945 eleven of them died from tuberculosis, encouraged by malnutrition, lack of fresh air and the proper surroundings. Slums are always breeding places

for tuberculosis; as long as slums remain, the white plague will always have a happy hunting ground. As long as poverty and wretchedness persist, the white plague will continue to reap its victims and the ratio of 111.1 in every 100,000 will not go down.

It is becoming increasingly clear that unless the people of the Philippines do something about it, tuberculosis will always be one of the costliest hazards which the people of this country must meet.



### MONKEY BUSINESS

"Papa," said Pepito, "is it true that we are descended from the monkeys?"

"Why, of course. Science has proved that man is taken from the monkey and is going more perfect."

"Then, Papa, you are more of a monkey than I am."

Smack! "How dare you call your father a monkey!"

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### THOUGHT

Five per cent of the people habitually think; fifteen per cent occasionally think, and eighty per cent would rather die than think.

—Ecl. Review