

The Week

In Christian America The "New Negro"

THE plans on foot to build and maintain a "Jim Crow" hospital in Evanston, Ill., have given rise to some interesting sidelights on American Christianity. More than that, they have been the occasion for some wonderment that people can be so moved at human sufferings, and still overlook the direct cause of it all. Read what Mrs. N. C. Knight, a prominent matron of Evanston, has to say on the subject:

At present there is no public hospital in Evanston which receives Negroes except in emergency, and only one private institution, a sanitarium of limited facilities. Most Negroes here who need hospital care have to go to the county hospital.

The only public ambulances available for taking sick people from Evanston on the long journey to the county hospital is the single police ambulance which Evanston maintains, and I have known that to be refused because it was felt it could not be spared so long out of Evanston.

Imagine, if you can, Christian people lamenting the fact that such conditions as these exist—but doing nothing to remedy them. They think that by starting a segregated hospital they will have solved the problem. But they are all wrong again. They will be placing their stamp of approval upon rotten conditions—they will be trying to make a right by adding two wrongs. It simply cannot be done.

The only way to straighten out this situation is to lower the bars set up by these Christian institutions—by making them open to all who need them. Imagine a person, suffering the agonies of the damned . . . writhing in pain . . . begging for relief . . . and being bounced along over a 30-mile course past a dozen hospitals to one that will receive him. Imagine all the others saying in the name of Christ that they cannot give the ailing person succor because he is not white. God, where will man's inhumanity to man lead him next? Where will it all end?

If white people think they can salve this terrible open wound by building more segregated hospitals, they are wrong. You have suffered and bled and died too long to sacrifice what you have suffered for now. You have known what it means to ride miles and miles over shell-torn roads to hospitals that received you and dressed your wounds—wounds you received in the name of universal brotherhood—certainly you can continue to ride in police ambulances to other hospitals that will receive you until it is possible for you to enter the one that is truly Christian enough in character to bid you enter!

You are going to oppose further segregated hospitals in the North and are going to fight that those now existing be abolished! You want only human treatment—you need no special stalls as do cattle. You have earned your place in any hospital—and that is more than can be said for many who are now admitted. Surely you will contend for it until it is given you! You must make this a Christian nation even though you know it does not want to be made Christian. That, now is your mission!

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"I AM Colored, but I offer nothing in the way of extenuating circumstances except the fact that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was not an Indian chief."

That sentence came from the pen of Zora Neale Hurston, one of that crop of younger "Impertinents" of the Race who are responsible for the term "New Negro," and one of those who, while not exactly fitting the term, can always be described by it with impunity. Miss Hurston is writing in the World Tomorrow for May and her subject is "How It Feels to Be Colored Me."

As you read this article—and all of you ought to read it—you somehow get the feeling that this young woman had said something in her flippant way that you would like to have said. She goes on further:

But I am not tragically Colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a low-down, dirty deal and whose feelings are hurt about it. Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Some one is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you.

This is a mighty fine philosophy and could well be absorbed by the entire group. After all, as Miss Hurston has said, we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by the fact that we are starting at the bottom. And man's history has shown that where we are now, others were once, and others will be again. If that isn't enough to make us more cheerful at the prospect before us, then we might as well give up now—pack our "oyster knives" and go home. Fools still rush in where angels fear to tread, and many have weathered their precarious ventures—and are no longer fools. The "New Negro" may yet prove to be the real thing.