

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 1,944. Vol. 78.

JULY, 1930.

Price Sevenpence

EDITORIAL.

THE CURABILITY OF LEPROSY.

The prevention and cure of disease is a subject which is of supreme interest to the medical and nursing professions, and indeed to all who are concerned with the health of the Empire.

Amongst those who take a deep interest in all efforts to improve the standard of health must be named His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, who has travelled far and wide on affairs of State. Thus His Royal Highness has taken a deep interest in the work of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association, of which he has become the Patron.

For thousands of years until recently, men and women tainted with leprosy have had to endure a fate worse than death, a slow progress to a sure and painful increasing corruption in life. They have been isolated from their fellows and regarded with suspicion and abhorrence as "unclean," and have been doomed to a lingering death. But recently, with an increase of medical knowledge, following on a scientific study of the disease, it is possible to give a hopeful prognosis in certain cases.

The current issue of *Leprosy Review*, the Quarterly Publication of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association, publishes an article on "The Curability of Leprosy" by Dr. E. Marchoux, which contains the following inspiring message of hope:—

"Leprosy is curable in the same way as tuberculosis, and the methods that prove efficacious for the treatment of the latter are efficacious also for the former.

"Leprosy, like tuberculosis, may cure spontaneously. If this method of cure has not been reported very often, it is because early diagnosis of the disease is difficult, so difficult, in fact, that it is rarely made. When leprosy shows itself by external signs it is already very far advanced, and has reached a stage exactly comparable to that of cavernous tuberculosis. It is no wonder then that spontaneous cure is not seen to occur in manifest leprosy. But when earlier infections are studied carefully, regressive phenomena may be observed which are comparable to those occurring in incipient tuberculosis. Doubtless the general state must be favourable, and the patient must have those conditions of comfort, rest, good food and fresh air that are required by consumptives."

Finally he draws the following conclusions:—

1. Leprosy is curable in the same way as tuberculosis.
2. The discrete forms are capable of spontaneous cure.
3. A fortiori these discrete forms are more accessible to treatment.
4. We possess in the therapeutic and hygienic arsenal weapons that are efficacious against the disease.
5. The progress that it would be most desirable to see realised is that which would furnish us with the means of discovering discrete infections with Hansen's bacillus as easily as tuberculin proclaims the presence in the organism of Koch's bacillus.

In "Leprosy Diagnosis Treatment and Prevention," Dr. E. Muir gives the following precautions to be taken by Doctors and Attendants:—

"1. Never touch an infectious leper or any article which he has used or touched without thoroughly washing the hands immediately afterwards.

"2. In attending to lepers or dressing their wounds use rubber gloves where possible, at least, this should be done in cases which are highly infective. . . ."

These rules may seem a counsel of perfection, but it should not be impossible to avoid the faults enumerated in the earlier part of this article, in fact, one would say emphatically, that every effort should be made to eliminate or minimise points of contact between the healthy worker and the infective patient, this for the sake of the worker, his or her family connections and society at large, as well as in the interest of the great game in which we are engaged, namely, to rid the world of leprosy.

Dr. G. Gushue-Taylor in the same review gives the following instances of ways in which leprosy may be contracted.

A healthy worker changing money for leper people handles their coins, and takes no precautions as to washing hands, the process continuing an hour or more.

Healthy workers in dressing room or laboratory, assisted by lepers, in some cases infective skin cases, the healthy and unhealthy handling the same instruments, test-tubes, forceps, trays, handles of doors, chairs, etc., and with little evidence of washing the hands, or washing at prolonged intervals.

Leprosy is contagious, but exact mode of transmission from the patient to the healthy, whether by nose, skin or alimentary tract, is not known, though there is a great probability in favour of the first two mentioned as primary routes of entry.

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