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EDITORIAL.

THE SHADOW OF LEPROSY.

The British Empire Leprosy Relief Association, under the above heading, publishes an extremely interesting and valuable report for 1933. The Association, the Headquarters of which are at 29, Dorset Square, London, N.W.1, and of which the Prince of Wales is the Patron, is doing splendid work in combatting this most dreaded, painful and terrible disease with the very limited means at its disposal, by the application of the preventive and the early treatment now available to science, and which in expert hands yields such admirable results.

In this country, happily, the disease is practically non-existent, but "over the larger part of the Dominions of His Majesty the King, hangs the shadow of leprosy, the depth of which can be appreciated only by those who have had first hand contact with the disease. A shadow it is indeed, commencing first as a doubt in a person's mind, an innocent area, but that same painless spot is sufficient often to condemn many a man to life-long ostracism and to banish many a child from his father's house."

Think of it, of the deepening of the shadow, of the hopelessness of the outlook for the sufferers if untreated, the progressive disfigurement, mutilation, pain and despair of men, women and children with the same right to health, the same capacity for enjoying life, the same love of home and children as those of us in the full enjoyment of health. Think again that "the results of the brilliant work done and the important discoveries made during the past 10 years have indicated that leprosy is a preventable disease, and that given proper methods, which include adequate treatment, it should be capable not only of control, but of ultimate elimination from the Empire." Are our hearts so hard that they are untouched by the great weight of preventable misery endured by the Empire's lepers? Are we so thankless for the great gift of health, that, if we cannot give personal service in the fight against the terrible disease of leprosy, we do not at least endeavour to strengthen the hands of those who have the knowledge, the skill, and the will to engage in the struggle, by making some contribution to the Association organised for the relief of leprosy in the British Empire? On the financial support the Association receives in contributions great and small depends the amount of remedial and curative work the British Empire Relief Association is able to undertake and achieve. It is surely a reflection on our humanitarian impulses, and on our lack of vision, that the Association has to state "in the past ten years, with limited resources consequent upon the little response of the public to our financial appeals, we have endeavoured to lift this shadow from the face of the Empire. We

cannot say we have yet done so, but we can say that we are increasingly letting the light of hope filter into the dark places of the Empire where the shadow of a living death is abroad." Without vision—*our* vision if we are not doing our part to help to lift the shadow—the people perish. Could not churches and chapels on a given Sunday plead the cause of the lepers who cannot plead their own? Could not the B.B.C., the voice of which penetrates far and wide, make an appeal for the work of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association as its "week's good cause"?

Dr. R. G. Cochrane, the Medical Secretary, who has been visiting India and Ceylon, found his visits very encouraging. "It was gratifying to note that many are no longer so fearful of the disease that they seek concealment, rather there is an increasing tendency on the part of the people to consult reliable physicians whenever there is any blemish on the skin of a suspicious nature. The initial reaction, however to the policy of enlightenment which has been pursued by the Indian Council of B.E.I.R.A. has apparently made the problem more acute. The leprosy colonies, specially in Bengal, Bihar and the Central Provinces are overcrowded, and one is astonished at the number of sufferers who have to be turned away. It is now being revealed that the number of those infected with leprosy is greater than was formerly believed. In fact, unless a proper perspective is maintained, an attitude of despair might easily be adopted.

"As a result of the work of recent years, leprosy is now much better understood, and although the problem is of tremendous magnitude, it can be said with confidence, that the disease can be prevented, and therefore ultimately controlled if proper measures are taken."

The Medical Sub-Committee of the Indian Council states that "the modern treatment of the disease has resulted in hundreds of cases being restored each year to a state of complete health, and to a resumption of their normal means of living. Among the more advanced cases the suffering of thousands of these has been relieved, and their lives are no longer a burden to themselves or to others. The recent developments in the field of leprosy have completely altered the whole situation from one of despair to one that is full of hope."

What a privilege to have a share in the good work! This members of the Nursing Profession are doing, as is evidenced by a paper in the current *Leprosy Review*, the Quarterly Publication of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association, by Miss M. P. Thornton, S.R.N., one of the Sisters in Charge of the leprosy work in Purulia Leper Colony since 1926, in which carefully compiled statistics are published, which must be of considerable value, while the ministrations of nurses to these sorely afflicted people must be comforting indeed both professionally and psychologically.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)