

The Bearing on Prophylaxis of Recent Advances in Treatment.

In the Association's Annual Report for 1927, under the heading of "Remarkable medical progress," I gave a brief account of the present position in the treatment of leprosy, and emphasised the evidence of Dr. E. Muir and others to the effect that nearly every case of leprosy can now be cleared up and prevented from going on to the infective stage, and I pointed out how this would enable the disease to be reduced rapidly in countries sufficiently advanced to carry out the following simple plan. Whenever a leper is discovered, all his household and other close contacts should be examined for early cases of the disease, and this should be repeated every six months for five years. There is strong evidence, which is given in the work on leprosy by myself and Dr. Muir, that 80 per cent. of infections are obtained by living in the same house as a leper, and that in 80 per cent. the incubation period before the early symptoms appear is under five years. From this it follows that some 80 per cent. of new infections should thus be discovered in an early stage, when they can be cleared up by the modern treatment, and the numbers remaining reduced by 20 per cent., and in another five years the number of new infections would theoretically be reduced to 4 per cent. of the original numbers, and that within a single decade. As most of the infective advanced nodular cases would have died off in that time, and the nerve ones would have become uninfected, it is clear that where this plan is practicable leprosy might rapidly be reduced to small proportions, and it is being taken up on my advice in several European countries.

Unfortunately, some British papers, just before our annual meeting, quoted me as saying that every case of leprosy is curable, and that the disease could be stamped out of our Empire within ten years, which is very far from my actual statement, as given above, and this exaggerated account was telegraphed to some countries, whose medical authorities naturally contradicted such a grotesque perversion of our position in the matter. We at once issued, through Reuters and the Associated Press, a correct statement of our position, and I emphasised this at our annual meeting, pointing out that the statements contradicted in some cables had never been made by us, but as it is very difficult to catch up a false rumour, I am taking this opportunity to contradict it once more.

In a paper on "Recent Advance in the Treatment of Leprosy and its bearing on Prophylaxis," published in "The Practitioner" of April, 1928, I have dealt more fully with the present position, and have emphasised our contention that the sole reliance on compulsory segregation, unmodified by the adoption of our suggestion to allow early, for the most part uninfected, cases to be treated at hospitals and clinics, is likely at the present day to actually do more harm than good by leading the early amenable cases to be hidden, for fear of lifelong imprisonment, until the early curable stage is past, and we have distributed this paper widely, and shall be glad to forward it to any interested. The following recent figures from Honolulu serve to emphasise the curability of the early stages of leprosy. In 486 admissions to the Kalihi Leper Hospital (from 1921 to 1926), 143, or 29.42 per cent., have been paroled as apparently cured, and only 28 had shown any signs of relapse, mostly in advanced nodular cases. Among 204 advanced cases, only 16, or 7.84 per cent., recovered; of 212 moderately advanced ones, 82, or 38.68 per cent., recovered; but among 70 early cases, no less than 45, or 64.29 per cent., were paroled as recovered. Thus the recoveries were eight times as high in early as in advanced cases; clearly indicating the necessity of attracting lepers in the early stages of the disease to come for treatment, instead of repelling them by compulsory imprisonment, if this scourge is to be reduced rapidly.

LEONARD ROGERS.

Encouraging News.

Dr. A. B. Macdonald, of The United Free Church Mission at Itu, Southern Nigeria, writes:—

"So far I have treated 1,000 lepers. On the whole **the work has been most encouraging**, even with the little I was able to do for them. I took in all stages, and consequently I have had 6 per cent. deaths. Most of those who died looked hopeless cases when they came in, but, being more or less flung out of their own towns, I took them in. After 9 to 24 months' treatment, other 5 per cent. showed apparent cure, while 90 per cent. were vastly improved. Sensation returned, they felt stronger, the nodules had subsided to a large extent, and the white leprous patches were darker."
