

## Leprosy in China.

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Although from time to time attempts have been made to ascertain the extent and general conditions of leprosy in China, its prevalence and treatment in certain extensive areas are unfortunately still awaiting. The country is vast in its dimensions and intercommunications in many districts, even under modern conditions, are next to impossible. In these very districts the native medical profession is so thoroughly empirical in its practice and outlook that no reliable information may be expected from this source. Until an enlightened civil administration seriously investigates public health conditions throughout the empire, much will remain hidden among the mountains and valleys of these inaccessible districts.

Meantime, certain data is available from the better traversed regions, and a brief review of these indicate some interesting features of the general leper situation.

Of the eighteen provinces making up China proper, undoubtedly the one with the highest leper index is Kwantung in the South, followed next by Shantung in the North-West. Both of these provinces have an extensive coast line, and, inasmuch as the Chinese have for generations been adventurous sailors and keen traders, it is interesting to note that in the early days many of them found their way to our British colonies. There they undoubtedly carried the "lepra bacillus," which later was to play havoc with so many of these emigrants, and, in turn, become a source of anxiety to the Colonial Authorities.

To indicate the prevalence of leprosy in South China, Dr. James Cantlie is found writing from Hongkong some forty years ago, claiming the ear of the Home Government to protect the colony from the many lepers found on the streets, many of whom were presenting themselves at the hospital for treatment, and for whom little could be done. "There is no law," he writes, "against the importation of lepers, nor yet against begging in Hongkong, therefore the streets of the city with its rich inhabitants are as an El Dorado to the leprous Chinaman of the mainland." Leprosy is apparently just as prevalent in the South

to-day as it was forty years ago; in the case of Hongkong, however, all Chinese found suffering from leprosy are now repatriated to Canton.

With this condition of things before their eyes, it is no wonder that our pioneers of tropical medicine and surgery—Drs. Manson and Cantlie—estimated the total leper population of China at an extravagant figure. Investigations have since shown the leper problem in other provinces is not nearly so acute as it is in Kwantung.

While the neighbouring provinces of Fukien, Kwangsi and Yunnan have many foci of the disease, the victims of leprosy living there, for some reason or other, do not seem to be on the increase. Curiously, as the interior of the country is approached from the Coast, wide non-infected gaps appear between the leper areas. Thus, the native of the Northern provinces, *e.g.*, Chili, Shensi and Shansi, show no trace of the disease whatsoever. The only lepers met with would seem to have journeyed from known leper-infected areas, such as Shantung, North Kiangsu, Chekiang, Fukien and Kwantung.

In the very centre of China, at Siaokan, in Hupeh, there is a distinctly circumscribed endemic area of leprosy, and again in the South of Hunan, the country bordering on Kwantung, shows numerous leper foci.

To the North of Hupeh no endemic leper areas are met with until Kansu is reached. Here many Mohammedan families are reported to be victims of the disease.

In the mountainous districts of Kweichuh and Yunnan the aboriginal Mios tribesmen would seem to be particularly susceptible to the ravages of the leprosy bacillus. Szechuen, in the extreme West, except in certain small areas on the immediate Tibetan and Kansu borders, seems quite free from leprosy.

Finally, in respect to the distribution of leprosy in China, it is worth noting that locally infected and vagrant lepers are found in many districts bordering the whole length of the Yang Tsz from Chungking to Shanghai.

While it is true that many leper centres are associated with low-lying and humid conditions, it is equally true that in China many leper foci are found on the uplands and in mountainous districts. Perhaps the biggest factors in the spread of leprosy in China are total ignorance of health laws and malnutrition. Floods and drought invariably mean diminished food supplies for a large percentage of China's teeming population. Under such conditions the marvel is that leprosy and other endemic diseases are not more devastating. Through the ages immunity to certain

diseases has been undoubtedly established, and infant mortality is so high that in no country is it more true to say that those who have survived are the fittest.

As to remedial and protective measures against the spread of leprosy, the question naturally arises: "What measures have the Chinese authorities undertaken of an effective nature for the unfortunate leper?" The reply is: "Practically none." If it is true, as frequently stated, that within the Chinese Empire more lepers exist than in any other country, there certainly should have been a corresponding effort made to deal with the disease. Beyond providing the pauper lepers with the merest pittance, and driving them from the confines of the cities to the hillsides, or to some so-called leper village, such as is seen in Kwantung or Fukien, the Provincial Authorities have been utterly indifferent to the leper menace.

Perhaps the non-intervention treatment found in many districts should not be put down to deliberate and intentional cruelty, so much as to complete neglect. In the light of present-day requirements, no properly organised State should be indifferent to conditions producing disease, nor to the crowds of friendless, hopeless and starving lepers who wander throughout the streets and countrysides. It is earnestly to be hoped that with an enlightened Nationalist Government early efforts will be made for dealing with health conditions and that under such the lepers will greatly benefit.

Meantime, Christian enterprise and sympathy have been extended through The Mission to Lepers to a small percentage of the lepers in most of the leper-infested provinces of the country. Voluntary segregation on a necessarily limited scale has been made possible there in homes provided by the Mission. These have been voluntarily managed by Christian missionaries of the various societies with which The Mission to Lepers co-operates. The homes have been maintained at a minimum of cost, the expenditure incurred being chiefly confined to the actual maintenance of the inmates and the upkeep of the institutions.

Quite recently a Chinese Mission to Lepers has been formed and Auxiliaries established in some of the big cities on the coast. With more settled conditions in the interior earnest efforts will doubtless be made to elicit sympathy and practical aid for the lepers from Chinese citizens and Provincial Authorities.

With the marked success in the modern treatment of leprosy in the adjoining country of Korea, where the death rate is said to have been reduced from about 15 per cent. in former years to 1 per cent. last year, comes a direct challenge to China.

The accumulated experiences of successful treatment in this and other countries, if put into operation by the Chinese Authorities, would undoubtedly greatly hearten the workers among lepers there. Meantime, the fight to overcome repugnance or indifference to the leper may be severe and prolonged, but it is worth while, and will eventually result in untold blessings to many of China's lepers.

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## A Barbarous Way to Cause Rain.

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The Madras correspondent of "The Pioneer" (Allahabad) sends the following gruesome story, dated August 28th last:—

"Eighteen persons belonging to Mutsandra Village, in Hosakote Taluq, have been taken into custody for alleged serious offence under the Penal Code, although it would appear the alleged act was committed to satisfy local superstition.

It appears that there is a tradition in villages, that if the dead bodies of persons who were suffering from serious diseases like leprosy, be burnt after being put under the soil for some time, it would propitiate the God of rain, and the village where such an act is performed, would no more suffer from drought. It is this belief that was responsible for the alleged desecration of graveyards, for which offence the accused have been arrested.

It is stated that, some time ago, two Moslems' bodies bearing marks of leprosy had been buried, and 18 villagers, over-zealous to propitiate the God of rain on account of the recent failure of the rains, exhumed the two bodies and burnt them. The Mahommedan section of the village took offence at this, and a very serious situation was only averted by the timely arrival of the police."