

## Leprosy in Nyasaland.

---

By F. E. WHITEHEAD, O.B.E., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., Director, Medical and Sanitary Services.

---

It is estimated that there are some six thousand lepers in a population of about 1,800,000 native inhabitants in Nyasaland.

Until recently very few of these lepers came to the hospitals for treatment. During the year 1926, for instance, out of a total of over 146,000 natives who received treatment at the Government hospitals and dispensaries, only 84 came on account of leprosy.

The numbers treated at the various Mission hospitals for leprosy are not known exactly, but it may be assumed that they were about the same. In the year 1927, as a result of the interest in the treatment of leprosy taken by The British Empire Leprosy Relief Association, whose Secretary visited Nyasaland, the number of lepers treated both by Government and the Missions increased.

In this year monetary grants were made by the Association and by the Government to eight Mission stations to be spent upon either starting new treatment centres, or enlarging and improving existing ones. At the close of the year 1928 there were eight centres working and it is hoped that 1929 will see one or two more.

The treatment centres generally consist of a main building where patients are given injections, and where drugs, etc., are kept, and of the lepers' living huts. The huts are made of grass and are similar to ordinary village huts. They are inexpensive to build, often they can be built by the lepers themselves, and when they fall into disrepair they can be burnt and new ones put up in their place.

Drugs are supplied free to the centres by the Association and by the Government.

The feeding and maintenance of the lepers at these centres is a heavy expense, which so far has been borne almost entirely by the Missions, though in one or two cases assistance for maintenance has been given by the Association and by Government. In a few cases the lepers themselves have contributed a small sum towards their upkeep.

At most of the centres the lepers grow food crops but these are not nearly enough to be self-supporting.

For various reasons it is not considered advisable to introduce any form of compulsory segregation of lepers, except perhaps occasionally in special circumstances. At present more lepers apply for

admission to the centres than can be dealt with, and there appears to be no reason why, if the Government could afford a substantial grant for maintenance, the large majority of the lepers in the country could not be treated at the centres without any compulsion.

The treatment given most generally, consists of two injections of "alepol" weekly. The Nyasaland native has not as a rule the objection to intravenous and intramuscular injections which exists amongst some races. This is probably due to the spectacular results seen upon yaws which is treated in certain districts where this disease may occur, with injections of sodium bismuth tartrate or novarsenobillon. These results have impressed the people of those districts to such an extent that they prefer an injection to ordinary medicine. Unfortunately they expect to have the same results in leprosy as in yaws, and may show disappointment when they do not see a quick improvement.

At the time of writing, complete reports have not been received from all the centres for the year 1928, but from the reports that have been received, it appears that there are over 300 lepers living at the centres in addition to those who attend as out-patients for injections or for examination after their discharge from the centres.

During the year 1928 thirty lepers have been discharged from various centres as cured of their symptoms. These cases report periodically for examination and further injections if considered necessary. Two hundred and fifty-seven showed improvement during the year, but were not cured, whilst fifty-two either showed no improvement or were worse. Only two deaths were reported.

At the Government hospitals thirty-four lepers were admitted and seventy-nine treated as out-patients.

Although the above figures represent only a small proportion of the lepers in the country, they show a considerable advance as compared with one or two years ago.