

Leprosy in Europe.

By The Rev. JUSTIN E. ABBOTT, D.D.

No. 8.—LEPROSY IN WESTERN EUROPE.

My visits to the countries of Western Europe, to acquaint myself with their leper problems, have been at intervals, including 1922 and 1926. This survey has to do with Iceland (not visited), Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Spain (not visited), Portugal and England.

ICELAND.

Leprosy has been endemic in Iceland for many centuries, showing the disease is no respecter of race or climate. In 1896 Dr. Ehlers of Copenhagen estimated the number of lepers on that island to be 226. In 1920 the number had fallen to 67. Of the number to-day I have no reliable estimate.

Iceland's policy regarding leprosy has been a vacillating one, through following conflicting advice. What their present policy may be I do not know.

DENMARK.

When visiting Denmark in 1923 I learned that there was but one known case of leprosy in that State. The patient was in one of the hospitals in Copenhagen.

HOLLAND.

While there is no endemic leprosy in Holland, the connection of that country with the Orient is so close that it cannot be difficult for lepers to enter by the sea ports. When visiting Holland in 1923 I was told that there were no known cases of leprosy. Yet in 1925 I learned there were four cases in hospitals and nine in their homes.

BELGIUM.

The foregoing observations regarding Holland apply to Belgium. I heard of no known cases of leprosy in that State, but it would not be difficult to believe that some lepers might be discovered among those who have entered her sea ports.

FRANCE.

France for many centuries has had leprosy in her Maritime Alps, in Southern France, and elsewhere. A great diminution has taken place in these endemic cases. But lepers in France are numerous, because for various reasons they are drawn to that country from her colonial possessions, and from South America, especially from Brazil and Argentina. France, however, has as yet taken no census of her leper population, and all estimates of their number are mere guesses,

that range from about 500 to 1,500. Paris alone is believed to have some 300 lepers.

France has done very little for the lepers found in her borders. I went to see that little in the Hospital of St. Louis in Paris. Clothed in a doctor's white robe I was taken to the wards devoted to venereal diseases. Here in little rooms, or rather cells, two lepers in a room, were six lepers. The rooms were clean and bright, but their environment of diseased and mutilated humanity was a distressing sight. The other lepers of Paris are free to walk her streets. There are lepers in Paris who can afford private treatment, and are receiving it. Up to 1926 I heard of no special Government or private effort to minister to this suffering class of human beings.

In contrast with this feeble Governmental effort to care for the lepers in France should be mentioned that of the organisation recently formed, called the Association de secours aux victimes des Maladies Tropicales, which on the 18th of August, 1926, purchased an old monastery in Southern France, known as La Chartreuse de Valbonne, with the purpose of making it a Home for lepers of France. It has required time and money to put in proper repair the mass of buildings that cover about six acres, and to fit them for the purpose for which they were bought. It is hoped however, that the opening may soon take place, and lepers be admitted to enjoy the care of sympathetic friends, amid most beautiful natural surroundings of hills and forest. Mr. and Mrs. Delord, he being Secretary of the Comite de Secours aux Lepreux, were instrumental in the discovery of this wonderful place and in bringing to a successful end the long drawn out process of purchase. I spent ten days in this newly bought monastery, in the family of Mr. and Mrs. Delord, and was filled with admiration for them as I saw their efficiency in handling so large an enterprise. In connection with this monastery, founded in 1203, there are 125 fertile acres. They had long been neglected but Mr. Delord has rapidly brought them back into cultivation. Repairs have been made, and the modifications necessary for sanitation and comfort have been carried out with such speed as the benefactions of friends of lepers have allowed. When this ancient monastery is opened to the lepers it will be the most beautiful Home, and the happiest of retreats that can be imagined.

SPAIN.

I was unable to visit Spain. That there are many lepers in Spain is well known, but no census having as yet been taken their number is not known. The figures given me at Geneva in 1925 were as follows :—

Lepers in hospitals	...	...	228
Other lepers	...	...	351

PORTUGAL.

Through the courtesy of the Public Health Department at Lisbon, arrangements were made for me to visit the leper wards connected with the large hospital in the suburbs of the city. The physician in charge of the lepers took me through the two wards, one for leper men the other for leper women, both wards being situated in the group of wards assigned to contagious diseases. The wards were as clean and bright as could be asked for, and judging from the reception given to the doctor, he was of the sympathetic kind that created an affectionate regard in the hearts of the lepers, but it was for those twenty-four unfortunate beings a life-long prison without joy or hope.

The number of lepers in Portugal is not known. A conservative estimate places the figure at 200. On account of the close relation between Portugal and Brazil, the latter country furnishes Portugal with the larger number of her lepers.

Plans were shown me in the Public Health Department for the building of three leper homes in northern, central, and southern Portugal.

ENGLAND.

From Sir Leonard Rogers I learned that he estimated the number of lepers in England to be about one-hundred. Some of these were being cared for in two small leper Homes. Some were receiving private treatment. Considering that England has such close relation with the countries of the Orient, and Africa, where leprosy is so prevalent, it is a matter of surprise that there are not more lepers on English soil.

SUMMARY.

Using figures that are mere estimates, and yet believed to be conservative, the number of lepers in Western Europe are as follows:—

Lepers in	Iceland	...	...	67
	Denmark	...	...	—
	Holand	...	...	18
	France	...	...	700
	Belgium	...	...	—
	Spain	...	...	579
	Portugal	...	...	200
	England	...	...	100
				<hr/>
				1,659

SUMMARY FOR EUROPE.

While the estimate of lepers in Europe is manifestly incomplete, owing to the fact that many countries have taken no census of their leper population, yet the figures given below represent a conservative

estimate for the year 1926. Although only an estimate it is however, impressive enough to deserve the attention of all the European countries of the League of Nations, and of all interested in freeing this world of its terrible disease :—

Lepers in Baltic countries :

Norway	...	...	130	
Sweden	...	...	32	
Finland	...	...	75	
Esthonia	...	...	226	
Latvia	...	...	210	
Lithuania	...	...	21	
Germany	...	...	8	
			<hr/>	702

Lepers in Central and Southern Europe :

Poland	...	...	—
Austria	...	...	—
Hungary	...	...	—
Czechoslovakia	...	...	—
Yugoslavia	...	...	84	
Italy	...	...	226	
Switzerland	...	...	25	
			<hr/>	335

Incomplete estimates :

Crete	...	...	400	
Cyprus	...	...	250	
Malta	...	...	249	
Rumania	...	...	338	
Bulgaria	...	...	?
Greece	...	...	?
Albania	...	...	?
			<hr/>	1,237

Lepers in Western Europe, as estimated :

Iceland	...	...	67	
Denmark	...	...	—
Holland	...	...	13	
Belgium	...	...	—
France	...	...	700	
Spain	...	...	579	
Portugal	...	...	200	
England	...	...	100	
			<hr/>	1,659

Lepers in European Russia in 1918 ...

 1,709

Estimated number of lepers in 1926	...	5,642
Not included in the above	... ..	358

Total number of lepers in Europe in 1926	6,000
--	-------

As the above figures omit estimates for Bulgaria, Greece and Albania, where leprosy is known to be prevalent, as also Turkey in Europe, and islands of the Mediterranean, not mentioned above, 6,000 may be considered as a conservative, but a sad and impressive figure, representing the total number of lepers in Europe.

In the three articles I have written on Leprosy in Europe, I have made it plain that there are countries that do little or nothing for their lepers, others are making provision for them, but not taking advantage of the best methods of dealing with them. Of none can it be truly said that their leper policy is wholly satisfactory.

Encouraging News.

PROGRESS IN THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUDAN.

Dr. K. G. Fraser of the C.M.S. Hospital, Amadi, White Nile, S. Sudan, writes as follows :—

“ You will be glad to hear that since opening the Leper Camp in May, 1926, I have discharged in all 17. They are still under observation and may of course, require more treatment, but it is altogether very encouraging.”