

## Editorial

The British Empire Leprosy Relief Association holds a very definite place in the campaign against leprosy. Its objectives as enunciated at the recent Annual Meeting of the Association, are as follows:—

1. The study of leprosy and of the conditions under which it exists and spreads.
2. Helping the leper, by care, tr
3. Combating leprosy with a view to its final control.
4. Interesting, rousing and educating the British Public in the problems of leprosy.

With regard to the first: we can say confidently that we now know far more about this disease than we did 13 years ago when the Association was begun; and the Association, in co-operation with others, has taken no small share in this advancement of knowledge. Without referring to the more technical matters which have been elucidated, we have now a much more accurate idea of the widespread distribution of leprosy and of the various factors which govern its incidence. Study of the disease itself has shown that, while the majority of those who suffer from leprosy are not infectious, yet a minority of highly infectious cases have the power to spread the disease to many others, and thus one generation infects the next.

It is now generally acknowledged that leprosy is largely a child problem, and that those infected in their early years furnish the majority of the serious and infectious cases which spread the disease to the next generation.

With regard to treatment it is now recognised that though medicines are of value, the main remedy lies in healthy occupation and sound nutrition.

Psychological and sociological studies have shown that compulsory segregation and compulsory treatment are generally worse than useless. The leper must be led, not driven. Compassion not fear, will secure his co-operation, and without that co-operation neither effective treatment nor limitation of the infection can be secured.

While the B.E.L.R.A. formerly laid emphasis on special treatment and the supply of special drugs, it now lays its chief stress on personal service, and seeks, with the co-operation of Toc H, to supply doctors and lay workers, men with the spirit of service, who will give themselves to the work of helping the leper and combating leprosy.

The second objective is helping the leper. Since last year the Association has, with the co-operation of Toc H, sent out no fewer than six workers to Nigeria, so that there are now double the number there were last year. Of these, four are lay workers who are supported by five-year sponsorships supplied through Toc H. In addition, there was sent out in the beginning of this year a young doctor who offered his services for this work, and an honorary worker, a lady, who had already had considerable experience of medical work in West Africa.

The first five men sent out have returned, or are returning for well-earned leave. The excellent work they have done has helped to demonstrate the value of occupational therapy, and has helped to open up the way to the undertaking of leprosy work by others; so that in a short time there will probably be seven or eight well-staffed leper settlements in Northern Nigeria, where till recently there was only one.

Good reports are received of our one representative in India who is stationed at the large and progressive leper settlement of the Methodist Mission at Dichpali, in the Nizam's Dominions.

There is now a need for more lay workers, not only in Nigeria, but in other parts of Africa, such as Tanganyika and Rhodesia and later possibly in Sierra Leone. A lay superintendent has been requested for Cyprus and a sponsorship has been offered for a lay worker in Jamaica. So the Association's sphere of usefulness in this direction is gradually expanding.

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However urgent the call to help the leper may be, there is a yet more urgent objective before the Association—that of combating the disease of leprosy itself. Throughout the Empire various missionary societies are undertaking this work with the aid of local Governments. The Association, in addition to supplying workers and giving grants, seeks to advise Governments and Missions as to the most effective methods of treatment and control.

Only a very small fraction of those capable of spreading infection are at present isolated—not sufficient to control the disease to any appreciable extent. In India, with its million lepers, only some 7,000 are found in leprosy institutions. In Nigeria there is accommodation for less than one in forty. It is clear that by itself segregation in settlements and similar institutions can never do more than touch the

fringe of leprosy control—at least in poor and densely populated countries.

Well-equipped and well-staffed settlements can, however, be used as centres for an educative campaign in the villages. The more intelligent patients in these settlements can be trained during the years that they spend under treatment, so that when they recover and return home they may help in the campaign against leprosy. \*School teachers and other intelligent village dwellers can also be taught how to take an active part in demonstrating to the inhabitants of their villages the very simple measures that are necessary to stop the spread of leprosy. In fact, it may be said that the most important function of a leper settlement should not be merely sheltering the leper and giving treatment, important though these are, but its chief undertaking should be to act as a centre of training and enlightenment in the district in which it is situated. It may take many decades before this educative work can show demonstrable results, but it is only along these lines that leprosy can in the end be controlled.

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The fourth objective is to gain the support of the British Public. The Association has spent much energy during the past year in interesting the public in the tasks it has set before it, and in this too it is taking an increasingly larger share. A new and influential branch has been begun in Sheffield and we hope soon to form active branches in Manchester and other cities in the North.

Much interest continues to be aroused by the Exhibition which was shown last year at eleven centres. But far more remains to be done in interesting, rousing and educating the public of this country. Many, when they first hear of the Association and the work it has in hand, are astonished that they had not heard of it before, and at once hasten to give all the help they can.

Our Report for the year emphasises the fact that leprosy is a "Problem of Colonial Development". We are proud of these overseas dependencies of ours, and it is up to us who have undertaken responsibility for the backward races that inhabit them to see to it that we do our utmost to control and in the end eliminate this terrible scourge which causes so much suffering and distress.

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\*A well-illustrated booklet on "The Control of Leprosy" is available for the use of teachers and others in endemic areas.