

CORRESPONDENCE

Editor, "Leprosy Review,"

167, Victoria St.,

London, S.W.1.

Dear Sir,

I feel that it is necessary for me to launch a protest at the constant use of the word 'leper' in medical literature, and particularly in articles on the subject of leprosy. This letter is prompted by the fact that you, Sir, as Editor, have inadvertently altered my manuscript on Child Leprosy in the last issue of the "Leprosy Review" and introduced the word 'leper' on two occasions.

You may say that this protest is not valid and that it is impossible to find another word. I would remind you that the Conference of the Leonard Wood Memorial held in Manila in 1931 recommended that the word 'leper' should not be used, but I fear this recommendation is completely ignored even by those leprologists who attended the conference. I would, however, point

out that we do not seek for special words for persons suffering from measles, neither do we in medical literature talk about consumptives nor do we use the term 'lunatic.' Why, therefore, should we talk about 'lepers'? I am not in the least interested in changing the name of leprosy to Hansen's Disease.

Surely, what we should attempt to do is to change the outlook of the public towards leprosy and endeavour to get people to look upon this disease as an ordinary one and not as one which is loathsome. This has largely been done in the case of tuberculosis, and if we insist on referring to the disease and not to the patient, leprosy will gradually have the same connotation in the eyes of the public as any other disease and not be considered as one particularly set apart from all others. I would point out that the Government of Madras have set an excellent example by issuing a special Order that the word 'leper' should not be used in official correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

Christian Medical College,
Vellore, S. India.

ROBERT G. COCHRANE,
*Hon. Director, Leprosy Campaign,
Madras Presidency.*

NOTE—The Editor regrets the inadvertent use of the word 'leper' in the preparation of Dr. Cochrane's article for printing. We agree wholeheartedly in deploring the implications of shame and guilt which have debased the meaning of the word leper. These implications, however, are not due to the name but to an irrational attitude to the disease itself. Something less clumsy than 'a sufferer from Hansen's disease' and less unpleasant than the word 'leper' would be of real value. But euphemisms will not eradicate leprophobia.