

EDITORIAL

Attempt at Leprosy Eradication

When the question of eradication of leprosy is considered there are three schools of thought.

1. Eradication is possible and should be attempted.
2. Eradication is not possible and nobody ever eradicates anything.
3. Eradication is possible and should be attempted, *but* before we begin we must plan and super-plan and insist on seeing every step of the way.

Of these three schools of thought, we are glad to say that the British Leprosy Relief Association is thinking of supporting actively the first, and also has given considerable attention to the third.

It is thought that sufficient knowledge about leprosy and its treatment has accumulated by now, under the faithful enquiries of a host of leprologists and research scientists, on which to act and to have a sporting chance of achieving eradication or something very near it in an offered geographical area where it would be welcomed—say for 10,000 known leprosy patients. This modern accumulation of knowledge is imperfect, but for practical purposes there is enough on which to work, because we already possess an effective drug and the recent revolutionary aid of physiotherapy allied to plastic and reconstructive surgery, which, though it does not stamp out the disease in itself, is a *sine qua non* for any modern leprosy control scheme. To put it quite simply, unless we make sure that the patient is seen to be cured, which for the lay mind definitely means removal or correction of deformities and removal of cosmetic stigmata, despondency settles on the patients and is reflected in their co-operation, so that the leprosy control schemes will soon falter and fail. We include surgery in our thinking not only because we want to bring this aid to the patients and rehabilitate them as well as try to cure them, but if we leave it out we face the fact, as we have said, that the whole attempt is in danger of failure.

An important and perhaps predominant factor for the success of a Pilot Eradication Unit is undoubtedly careful choice of personnel. It is thought that a unit or project designed to attempt eradication will stand or fall on the quality of the men and women chosen. The intention is to keep the number of these people down to 7 or 8—a physician-in-charge, a surgeon, a laboratory technician, a physio-therapist, and several nurses, and a practical administrative helper as well.

This point of choosing a team well, and providing housing and central working space, definitely visualises facing the fact that the majority of leprosy patients prefer to be treated in homes or villages, so transport will be supplied for the staff, and out-patient work

based on surveys and repeated surveys will be the main way of reaching the patients.

To emphasise this important recommendation, namely to be very careful about choosing a small but effective team, we refer to the ancient story of Gideon who, faced with the problem of overcoming the Midianites, cut down his army from 3,000 to 300, and even introduced a test for sincerity and eagerness by causing the army to drink water at a stream, and took for the assault only the 300 who lapped water. The result of Gideon's efforts was total victory, but the point is that there was a careful choice of personnel.

So then, it is possible to visualise the Pilot Eradication Unit as something offered by the Association to needy countries who like the idea, with the object of making a demonstrative assault on the old enemy, leprosy, with chosen personnel banded together as a happy band of brothers, tackling first a limited objective but being ready to train nationals in the process. Also they will carry out continued research on the field and incorporate the latest rehabilitative surgical measures with the ultimate aim, not only of relieving 10,000 patients in a chosen area, but with the hope that the plan would be extended by many such units operating in many places. It is, we think, a grand conception which comes down hard on the side of the idea that leprosy can be eradicated, and anyway is willing actively to try out the idea.

ANAXIMANDER (611–547 B.C.) one of the Ionian school of philosophers, said in effect, "if you have a good idea and think it is good, try it out and demonstrate to yourself and others whether it works".