

## Book Review

**Historia de la Lepra en España**, by Felix Contreras Dueñas and Ramon Miquel y Suarez de Inclan, 1973, Madrid. Graficas Hergon, S. L., Miguel Servet, 15. 207 pp. and Index.

This semi-popular history of leprosy in Spain traces the course of the disease from the earliest possible allusions in Egyptian papyri down to the 20th century. The authors refer to the various theories of the origin of leprosy before describing the more definite influx into Spain of the sufferers from a clinical entity resembling leprosy as the result of the wide-ranging voyages of sea-going Phoenician traders. It is probable that the spread of leprosy to the countries bordering the Mediterranean is to be explained more in these terms than in the overland caravans that criss-crossed the Roman Empire.

The Iberian peninsula suffered military incursions of the Arabs, which included the quieter invasion of *Myc. leprae* of the south and east of present-day Spain. Thereafter, the returning Crusaders brought more leprosy into the country. In their turn, Spanish conquistadores took leprosy with them into the Caribbean and Central and South America and as far north as the lands that would later become the southern States of the United States of America. The vexed question of the pre-Columbian existence of leprosy in the Western hemisphere is bedevilled by nomenclature and by the dearth of accurate clinical descriptions in the ancient records, and also by the importation of *Myc. leprae* along with the slaves from the West Coast of Africa.

A valuable part of the book gives details, with dates, of the founding of hospitals for leprosy sufferers in South and Central America—Dominica, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, etc.—and further afield by Spanish priests in Japan.

The distribution of leprosy in modern Spain is described, province by province, and indications are given of the patchy nature of the endemic and the measures taken to alert doctors and the public of the signs of the disease. The wide influence of Spanish leprologists and of South American leprologists who have looked to Spain for inspiration and example, is shown in the contributions made at successive International Leprosy Congresses, particularly those held in Havana (1948), Madrid (1953) and Rio de Janeiro (1963). By their training activities and research such centres as those at Fontilles (Alicante, Spain) and in Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and Mexico, continue to play a notable rôle in the struggle against leprosy.

Fitting tribute to Dr Contreras is paid by Raoul Follereau in a foreword.

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