

## THE CAIXAS BENEFICENTES OF THE BRAZILIAN LEPROSARIA

Visitors to certain of the leprosaria in Brazil, especially those in São Paulo but also various others, come away deeply impressed by the mutual-benefit or welfare organizations of the inmates called the Caixas Beneficentes, headed by a patient official and a board of directors. On being shown about one of these institutions one is struck by a handsome building which is the social center, comprising club-rooms, an auditorium with stage for cinema shows and theatrical plays and other functions and additional facilities varying in different places. On asking how the government can afford to provide and maintain such installations one learns that they do not belong to the government; they belong to the caixas. There may have been help by donations from outside, but they are caixa property. One sees a busy refreshment parlor, well located, equipped and stocked, and asks if it is owned by a capitalist patient; again, laconically, "the caixa." Elsewhere is an attractive dining room, obviously not the common mess hall; it is not run by the administration, but by the caixa. There is an animal husbandry lay-out, too extensive and well set up to be owned privately by an inmate; and that, also, proves to be a caixa enterprise.

Another interesting feature of the organization of these leprosaria is the *prefeitura*, or office of the mayor. That official (an appointive one) and the head of the caixa are important figures in the institution, and their offices are provided accordingly. For instance, in the attractive Aimores colony near Bauru, in São Paulo, one of a row of houses built for inmate-family occupancy is the prefeitura and the one next door, equally well-equipped, is the office of the caixa. To these two more or less complementary inmate institutions the administrator (director) delegates duties and responsibilities, and from them gains cooperation in the detailed running of the institution to an extent which is to say the least unusual. The men chosen to fill these positions have the mark of authority and capability.

If the caixa system has ever been written up adequately, that has not been done in English to our knowledge, nor has any adequate publication on the matter in Portuguese been seen. Even visitors to the leprosaria where the system is in operation are liable to come away ill-informed about it—what it is, how it is organized, and what it does. Visiting at the Sanatorio Padre Bento with Dr. Lauro Souza Lima, who conceived and developed there the caixa system which was later introduced into other

leprosaria, we made an attempt to get an over-all understanding of it; but he was more modest than informative. At Aimores more was learned of the activities of the caixas, and that information was supplemented at the Itapoa leprosarium near Porto Alegre, in Rio Grande do Sul. Much of the information so gained appears in a story run in the News section of this issue. Recently there has been published a quasi-official statement on the organization and functioning of the caixas, which is reproduced in that article.

Impressed with these inmate organizations of the Brazilian leprosaria, the visitor comes away wondering if organizations of like kind could not be developed with profit in such institutions in other countries, or if they are an expression of some peculiar genius of the Brazilian people.

H. W. Wade