
LEPROSY AND COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE

The peculiar social aspect of the leprosy problem is a familiar thing, and important. The effects of the aversion that most peoples have of the evident leper are such that he is of special appeal to the humanitarian and to the medical missionary. To the public services in countries where the disease is prevalent this attitude makes of it a special responsibility and a special burden, necessitating the expenditure of disproportionately large amounts for the care of its victims and for combating it.

A less conspicuous aspect of the matter is its effect, or possible effect, on commercial enterprise. A few years ago an absurd attempt was made to apply this influence when certain interests in the United States tried to discourage the importation of vegetable oil from the Philippines on the ground that there was leprosy there. This far-fetched objection found little response, occasioned no panic.

However, it seems that this type of influence is at work in a totally different way—within rather than without a certain region where the disease is endemic, with the result that anti-leprosy activities there are handicapped. In this region the tourist traffic is an important commercial enterprise, and it is apparently feared that this business might be harmed should the existence there of the disease become known, or brought particularly to attention by special efforts to combat it.

The wisdom of this attitude may be seriously questioned, without reference to the medical or public health side of the matter. It is questionable whether the existence of the disease in any region can really be concealed, and whether the effort to do so is as wise as frank admission and active efforts to combat it.
