

EXPERIMENTS WITH DYE THERAPY

One of the most striking therapeutic experiments that have been made in leprosy is the work with dyes recently carried out by Dr. G. A. Ryrie, at the Sungei Buloh Leprosy Hospital, in the Federated Malay States, the preliminary report of which is reproduced in condensed form in this issue of the JOURNAL. This work differs radically from the external application of dyes, as basic fuchsin at Culion¹ or methyl violet at Maseru², in that they were given intravenously. It has aroused prompt and wide-spread interest, both because of its somewhat spectacular nature and the apparently encouraging results, and also because the time is ripe for something new. The present treatment methods, however much better they may be than the older, are still not all that are to be desired, and patients and physicians alike want something more generally and more rapidly effective.

In view of the interest in the work with dyes a reminiscence may be indulged in, since it is not without point. Some twelve years ago a medical practitioner in Manila claimed a new leprosy treatment, and his claims aroused a clamor which led the authorities to permit him to treat a number of cases. For reasons of his own he kept the nature of the materials which he used strictly secret, and the most that could be told about the treatment was that a dye was injected and, later and separately, a colorless substance. It was understood that the former was intended to prepare the way, so to speak, for the reception and action of the latter. The most striking feature of the treatment was that the dye showed, most definitely, selective affinity for leprotic infiltrations and nodules.

Though little came of this experiment the fact of selective staining was borne in mind by the writer of these lines when, somewhat later, he for a time

¹ DENNEY, O. E., Philippine Journal of Science 10, B (1915) 357.

² SLACK, E., Annual Report, Medical Officer, Batsabelo Leper Asylum, Basutoland, 1931 (in manuscript).

had to do with the treatment work at the Culion Leper Colony. The then Chief Chemist (G. A. Perkins, Ph.D.) made a preliminary investigation of the possibility of producing a new type of fluorescein-combined drug. However, the matter was not pursued. The chemical work was not encouraging; reports of work with animals told of dangerous sensitization to light through the injection of similar dyes, which bespoke the need of great caution in dealing with patients; finally, circumstances made it necessary to avoid any radical experimental departure from straight-line treatment lest possible untoward results should hamper the leprosy work.

Dr. Ryrie has had the courage, and the opportunity of patients' willingness and obvious official sanction, to undertake such experiments. His results are most interesting, and not without definite encouragement. This, we believe, can be said in spite of the facts, first, that there was considerable irregularity as regards benefit, and, second, that forty per cent of the negative cases have relapsed, with reappearance of the lesions that had subsided.² Even if dye therapy may not produce complete cures, it may well prove to be highly advantageous if in any important proportion of cases it will cause rapid recession of lesions to a certain point, provided that improvement can be continued from that point by more ordinary, slower methods. It possibly may be of value as an alternative treatment for occasional use when, as is often the case, a patient's progress comes to a standstill under one of the current treatments. There are, of course, other possibilities, such as the simultaneous use of another drug, as in the supposed leprosy treatment here recalled, or in the chemical combination of some more effective agent with a dye or other substance that is taken up selectively by the lepromata.

It is to be hoped, however, that the emphasis which Ryrie places on the precautions to be used in carrying out the treatment will not be overlooked, lest this line of work be unfairly prejudiced; and that his frank evaluation of the present status of the matter be borne in mind, lest extravagant expectations be aroused on the part of patients and the public at large during this uncertain, experimental phase of the matter.
