

BOOK REVIEW

- 6 **Miracle at Carville.** By BETTY MARTIN, edited by Evelyn Wells. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1950, pp. V + 302, \$3.00.

Leprosy is a physical disease caused by a microorganism. But it is much more than that. In whatever country it is found there is something about it which makes it a social disease, because it is regarded by the public with fear and horror and therefore breeds shame and the desire for concealment in the sufferer himself, and indirectly in his family. Books have been written depicting this condition, perhaps the best of which is *Who Walk Alone* by Perry Burgess. But the unique quality of the present work is that it is a true autobiography, written by one who spent more than a decade passing through this gruelling experience.

Much has been written on the sulphone treatment in recent years, but here we have for the first time a personal picture of the long-drawn-out mental agony of leprosy, and then at last the wonderful relief when an effective drug clears up first the clinical signs and then renders bacteriological examinations negative. It was at the National Leprosarium, Carville, Louisiana, that sulphones in the form of Promin were first tried out in leprosy, and the author and her husband were among the first to benefit from the treatment. The first result was a discouraging exacerbation, but when this had subsided the patients were much better, chronic ulcers of the legs healing up and the patients being rendered stronger and fit for work. Gradually it came to be realized that the sulphones were permanently effective, unlike the many so-called "cures" of the past. This was the "Miracle of Carville," and certainly it did appear as a miracle to these poor sufferers for whom so often in the past hopes had been raised only to be dashed to the ground a few months later.

The book is written in a simple, interesting style giving details of every-day life, the hopes and fears as felt and seen first in the home and then in the leprosarium. There is a love story, a flight of the couple by night from the institution when the disease appeared to them to be arrested, and then relapse and return to Carville where more years are spent in despair, with gradual weakening and encroachment of disease. This is the background against which appears at last the dramatic discovery of the effectiveness of sulphones in leprosy. Up to page 222 almost breathless interest is maintained, but the next 50 pages are occupied chiefly with propaganda, useful in itself especially for the American public, but for the reader outside America clashing with the free narrative of the rest of the book. The narrative is resumed again in the last 25 pages.

This book should be read and pondered on, especially by all engaged in the treatment and care of those afflicted with this, till recently, saddest of all diseases.—[Book review from *Trop. Dis. Bull.* 48 (1951) 601.]

- 7 **Lepra na infancia. [Leprosy in childhood.]** By DE SOUZA CAMPOS, N. and DE SOUZA LIMA, L. Monograph, Serviço Nacional de Lepra, Rio de Janeiro, 1950, 210 pp., with photographs and tables.

This is a new publication of the National Leprosy Service of Brazil, a small book which describes the experience of two renowned specialists

with respect to the peculiarities which Hansen's disease may manifest in childhood. It covers all aspects of the matter, from the concept of heredity to prophylaxis.

To be useful, we wish to emphasize certain important facts brought out in the monograph, the excellence of which can be appreciated from the detailed observations with which, over a period of not less than a decade, each of the young patients on which the study is based were observed and followed up.

It is known that, among adults, leprosy is more frequent in males than in females, some authors giving a ratio of 2:1. One of the explanations given for this difference is the action of the sex hormones. The authors have found a lesser disproportion among children, 52% of males and 48% of females; and, based on the same theory, they believe that this slight difference is attributed to the "sexual neutrality" of childhood.

The idea of heredity is discarded by the observations of the authors, especially the extensive experience of one of them (Souza Campos) in the Santa Terezinha preventorium in São Paulo. It is held as a conclusive argument that Bungeler and Alayon, in 51 autopsies performed on the bodies of children of bacillus-positive mothers, found not the slightest evidence of leprosy.

The classification of the clinical forms of leprosy approved by the Havana leprosy congress was adopted in this monograph, complemented by a special list of subtypes determined by experience with leprosy in children. Within the tuberculoid form, emphasis is laid on the nodular variety described by Souza Campos some years ago. Of sarcoid or lupoid structure, it is the mildest of all forms since it does not produce acute reactions; rather, it is stable, never involving the peripheral nervous system, and healing spontaneously to leave the children endowed with high immunity.

In the chapter on mutations there is a fact of great interest: So far, with the exception of the secondary or "burnt-out" neural cases, only transformation between the polar forms has been described, cases which evolve from tuberculoid to the lepromatous. The authors record that in some children the opposite and more fortunate evolution occurs, from lepromatous to tuberculoid, due to sulfone treatment. But, to achieve as good results as this, or even better, actual cure, it is necessary that the children be separated from sources of contagion. Otherwise, they are the subject of continuous discharge of bacilli, or superinfections, to which is attributed diminution of resistance (negativization of the lepromin reaction), or the unfavorable change of the clinical form (from tuberculoid to lepromatous).

In the contact child, closely watched, is where one sees the beginning of the disease most frequently and in the least debatable manner—beginnings quite discrete: a hardly visible spot, slight neural disturbances, etc.—and then it is possible to follow the condition in all of its stages and transformations. For this reason childhood leprosy is an exhaustible source of knowledge for the leprologist, knowledge of which pediatrics should take note so that it will not be surprised by a trivial symptomatology which may be that of the onset of an important disease.—[Translated from the *Revista argentina de Dermatosisifilologia* 35 (1951) 209-210.]