

TO THE EDITOR:

In the news section of a recent issue of THE JOURNAL [21 (1953) 378-380] there appears, under the title "Preventive Villages in Burma and Thailand," a contribution from Dr. Richard S. Buker. During recent years I have had the opportunity of making a study of leprosy and anti-leprosy activities in these two countries, and from what I have seen I do not think that these villages can play any preventive role. In Burma, where I was about three years ago, I found that the state authorities responsible for antileprosy work looked upon these villages with great displeasure, since they considered them responsible for spreading the disease in the surrounding parts. I do not know how this work has been progressing in Burma since then.

My visit to Thailand has been more recent, and I would like to summarize briefly what I found there regarding these so-called "preventive villages." There are about 25 such places, usually known as "leprosy villages," mostly in the north of the country. I visited several of them, and found most of them situated only a little away from the village proper, which is known as the "well village"; in practice, the leprosy village and the well village form part of the same village and bear the same name. In these "leprosy villages" are found concentrations of leprosy patients from several places, perhaps even from several provinces, living with healthy members of their families including children, and in some cases the proportion of children is very high. There is free mixing of the populations of the well and the leprosy sections of the villages. In several places the inhabitants of the well village believe that the incidence of leprosy in their village has increased since the coming into existence of the leprosy village, and in some cases efforts were made to remove these places, but the right of occupation of the patients made it impossible.

These leprosy villages no doubt provide an easy method of bringing treatment to groups of patients. However, from what has been said above it will be apparent that they do not provide any isolation of patients, and cannot play any important preventive role. As a matter of fact, when one finds a large number of healthy children being exposed to constant and heavy infection from a large number of infectious patients, a question that comes to one's mind is whether some of these places are not really breeding places for leprosy.

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