

HOMES FOR CHILDREN OF LEPERS

The fact must be faced that, like the poor, the children of leprous parents will be with us for a long, long time. This undoubtedly will prove true in spite of what may be thought or said about it, and despite anything that may be attempted to prevent it. With this fact goes the question of what society is to do in the case.

Experience with such children, as far as it has gone, has been much the same as with those whose parents are affected with pulmonary tuberculosis. If they are not removed from the dangerous environment a large proportion of them are infected early in life, while they are saved from infection if they are removed early enough. For many years this has been done with success in Hawaii; Lampe, of Surinam, has recently reported the efforts along this line in that country. Elsewhere in this issue of the JOURNAL is a letter from Dr. F. G. Rose, of British Guiana, relating the plan for such an effort there, and appealing for support for the movement.

There is little choice as to the methods. Removal of the menaced children is the principal available measure. Unlike the case with many of the acute infections there is no protective inoculum, not even an equivalent of B.C.G. As yet there is no test by which those who have become infected can be distinguished from those who have not. Consequently, any effort must be applied to the children as a whole, and in view of the prolonged latent (or "incubation") period it must be applied over a long period.

First, naturally—after the right has been obtained to remove the children from the parents, either by their consent or by law—comes the effort to place them in families of uninfected relatives. Second is the possibility—one that has not been extensively explored—of having them taken over, perhaps legally adopted, by other families. In either case some degree of supervision is required to prevent abuses, the enslavement of the children.

There doubtless always will remain a greater or less proportion of these children that cannot, for one reason or another, be placed with private families. These, if anything is to be done with them, must be cared for by the public, the funds coming either from the official exchequer or through private subscriptions. This activity is one that should appeal particularly to the public at large, which might endow homes or otherwise provide for these children. Where this is done the Government will be relieved of the burden and thus be permitted to concentrate on other phases of the anti-leprosy campaign.

In view of this it is advanced that projects such as the Lady Denham Fund, of which Rose writes, are worthy of fullest encouragement. The establishment of such homes is of the greatest interest to all countries where leprosy exists, for they will doubtless play the same rôle in the campaign against that disease that they now do in some places in that against tuberculosis.

The bad times that now prevail everywhere make the realization of such plans especially difficult. However, the period at least gives an opportunity to take stock of the situation and to prepare plans that can be put forward when times improve.