

CORRESPONDENCE

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CHILDREN OF LEPERS IN BRITISH GUIANA;

THE LADY DENHAM FUND

To the EDITOR:

A question that, quite naturally in the circumstances, frequently is asked by the layman is whether it is certain that persons who are once infected with leprosy and who, after treatment, no longer show any clinical or bacteriological evidence of active disease, are completely cured. One cannot, of course, give a positive assurance of cure in any given case, nor can one see how this ever can be done any more than in tuberculosis or any other comparable chronic disease. However, a general answer to a general question can be given when sufficient evidence has been obtained by autopsies, or by the accumulation of a sufficient number of after-histories of cases belonging to this category. This question urgently demands an answer.

British Guiana is undoubtedly a peculiarly suitable field in which to procure the necessary evidence. The population is small (some 300,000 souls), and lives in readily accessible areas; the leprosy patients are numerous enough (over 700) to furnish the material; the incessant propaganda of recent years insures a steady stream of early cases; the people are very amenable and little difficulty is experienced in getting them to attend for observation month by month for many years; the four out-patient clinics facilitate regular attendance in the affected areas.

Especially satisfactory are the results of treatment in the case of children in this country. Visitors who have experience of leprosy always express surprise at the healthy appearance of the young patients. Of 61 children below the age of 16 admitted to the Mahaica

Leprosy Hospital between 1926 and 1931 only two died—both of these were admitted in a very advanced stage of the disease—while 45 have become arrested or quiescent, and 14 are rapidly progressing to a similar condition. Of these 59 only 11 have deformities, which are slight and which, indeed, were present on admission; the rest retain no trace of the infection. This is to be attributed simply to the fact that never before have we been able to induce parents to seek admission for their children at such an early stage.

For many years it has been the practice in the leprosy hospital to separate children born there from their mothers at birth, and to give them into the care of healthy persons outside. All these children are kept under regular supervision. Furthermore, the contacts of lepers, especially children, are examined at certain intervals, so that all children of leprosy parents are known and periodically examined. These constitute most valuable material for study.

Lady Denham, wife of the Governor of the Colony, originated a scheme to raise a special fund to provide a place where all of these children who have no parents— and others of them whose parents are unable to maintain them—may be housed, educated, and trained to earn their livelihood. There are over 30 such children at present. Since these children would be under close supervision for a number of years the plan, apart from its benevolent aspect, may be regarded as an experiment which in the course of time is bound to yield most important information to leprologists.

It has been estimated that the proposed Home may be erected at a cost of £7,000 sterling, and that an additional sum of £3,000 will be needed to provide an endowment for its maintenance. The total needed is therefore £10,000. Of this sum Lady Denham has already raised over £2,000. The British Empire Leprosy Relief Association has contributed £300, with an additional contingent contribution of £200.

It is impossible to raise the sum required altogether in the Colony. In view of the character of the project as a scientific experiment calculated to yield valuable information with respect to the leprosy problem, it is hoped that contributions may be forthcoming from other parts of the world.

For a century British Guiana has been in the vanguard in the treatment of leprosy. Beauperthuy, Hillis, Deycke and others worked here. We appeal for contributions to this present enterprise. Sub-

scriptions may be sent to Lady Denham herself at Government House, British Guiana, or to Mrs. F. G. Rose, Honorary Treasurer, Lady Denham Fund, Mahaica Leprosy Hospital, British Guiana.

Mahaica Leprosy Hospital
British Guiana

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