
USE OF THE TERM "LEPER"

The Leonard Wood Memorial Conference on Leprosy, the members of which organized as the nucleus of the International Leprosy Association, recommended that since the term "leper" carries with it a social stigma it should be discontinued and "case of leprosy" be employed. Elsewhere in this issue appears a letter from the editor of a contemporary leprosy periodical and fellow-member of the Manila Conference, protesting at the use of "leper" in the JOURNAL. The point has been so much in mind that the criticism was referred to two officers of the Association, whose comments are given together with the complaint.

To the principle of avoiding a term which in some of its applications carries an unfortunate stigma no objection can be raised. The same situation is met in connection with syphilis, where many an innocently infected person

would indignantly and properly protest at being called a "syphilitic." Nevertheless, that term, in a general sense and without application to particular individuals, is used constantly and by perfectly good company.

"Leper" cannot always be replaced satisfactorily by any single phrase. "Case" as defined by Webster signifies: "A patient under treatment; an instance of sickness or injury. Also, the history of a disease or injury." Dorland gives only: "A particular instance of disease; as a *case* of typhoid fever," making clear that the term is not applied to the individual as such. One would hesitate to speak, for example, of seeing a case of leprosy walking down the street, though the person with leprosy (or victim of leprosy) in question might be one of the cases of leprosy under one's care.

It may certainly be agreed without reservation that as a general proposition the objectionable word should be avoided as far as possible, and that this can be done to a considerable extent, in spite of preference for directness. However, it cannot always be done without awkwardness, and there are also occasions when to make such changes in the author's manuscript would not be justified, so it seems necessary at times to admit the term, at least for the present.