

Leprosy in Society

V. "Leprosy" in Occidental Literature^{1, 2}

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Prior studies of social concepts of, and reactions to, leprosy in this series, approached the relationship mainly from an examination of Asian experience with the disease (11,12). This avenue was employed because it was recognized that folklore and history pertaining to leprosy in the Orient can scarcely have been influenced by Biblically derived traditions. A conclusion from the study suggested that the social opprobrium which accompanies leprosy is a reaction to that complex of pathologic changes which identifies leprosy as an entity, and is not based on translation errors of the past nor on a heritage of Biblical misconception regarding the disease (13). The social reaction to leprosy is so characteristic and virtually specific, it was postulated, that when it is present it may be concluded that leprosy also is, or has been, present in the society which reflects these concepts. It was further suggested that the presence of this pattern of social reaction in antiquity may be considered as evidence that leprosy was present at the time even though records of the age may be naive, inconclusive, or inclusive of also other disease under terms presently reserved exclusively for the etiologically specific entity known as leprosy.

Use of the word "leprosy" in Western world translations of the Bible has recently been repetitively attacked. The chorus of writers on this subject has been, for the most part, a product of Western culture sensitive to the Western cultural heritage.

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Theirs is a culture from which, with the exception of South America, the actual disease of leprosy has become almost extinct. Some, as physicians or sufferers from leprosy, have seen and experienced the disease but their social reaction to it has been largely conditioned by their own culture as is evidenced by the repeated statement that the Bible is responsible for society's reaction to the disease. There is little writing on, or examination of the Western folklore of leprosy, except as related to concepts expressed in the Bible.

This insistence on attributing responsibility to a single major source for concepts about leprosy in the Occidental world, suggests the need for a broader evaluation of other possible influences as part of a search for a better understanding of society's reaction to this disease. Accordingly, a survey has been made of the use of leprosy in Occidental literature, beginning with many of the earlier classical writers and extending to the writers of current popular fiction such as the detective and espionage variety, currently popular on newsstands and quite unlikely to have been derived from use of the Bible as a reference work.

EARLY EUROPEAN MILIEU

Though an appreciable amount of leprosy appeared on the European continent in the aftermath of the breakup of the Roman Empire, it was apparently not till about the eighth century that it became a major problem. The infection was quite widespread in the Dark and Middle Ages. For the two hundred years of the Crusades (1100-1300 A.D.) leprosy was at its height in Western Europe, including England. Then, at the beginning of the 14th century it began to decline. This was the general, though not the universal pattern, for Scotland, by example, was not seriously affected till the 13th century and did not finally

get rid of leprosy till the 17th century, and in Norway the height of the epidemic was not reached till the 19th century.

Remarkably, during the Crusades there was a lessening of social revulsion to leprosy; leprophilia, bordering on religious hysteria, often appeared. This followed from the fact that Crusaders sometimes came home with leprosy, though they had been promised absolution from sin and salvation after death, by Peter the Hermit and others, for their part in the "Holy Wars." How could men who had fought "in the service of God" suffer from a disease which was equated with sin? In the resultant reversion in attitude, leprosy was held by some to be a "Holy Disease" and lazars houses for the care of those so infected sprang up widespread.

With the decline of leprosy in Europe, taking place following the conclusion of the Crusades; there was again a hardening of attitude toward the afflicted and once again leprosy came to be widely regarded as a dirty, disgraceful malady.

THE EARLY WRITERS—DANTE (ITALIAN) AND CHAUCER (ENGLISH)

Dante (1265–1321)⁴ and Chaucer (1340?–1400), writing toward the end or after the Crusades, refer to leprosy.

The following reference (6) from Dante's *Inferno*, Canto XXIX, is found in each of these four English translations: the *Portable Dante*, the Modern Library edition, the Carlyle-Wadestead translation, and John Ciardi's translation. According to the account, the men, Arezzo and Capocchio, are being punished in hell for "practicing alchemy," that is, falsifying metals:

They were covered with great scabs from head to foot
... those two spirits of the stinking ditch
scrubbed at themselves with their own bloody
claws
to ease the furious burning itch.

And as they scrubbed and clawed themselves, their
nails
drew down the scabs the way a knife scrapes
bream.
[79-84]⁵

⁴ Parenthesis enclose date or explanatory comments.

This itch is not compatible with modern concepts of leprosy, but Dante explicitly identifies it as such by saying, "And the other leper answered mockingly" [124]. Here leprosy is used as a punishment for evil doing, the devil being spoken of as punishing falsifiers, or alchemists, by torturing them with leprosy.

Chaucer, in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* makes fun of the Friar (Frere) by stating that he knows innkeepers and barmaids ("hostiler and tappestere") better than he did the lazars (person with leprosy) or beggars:

He knew the taverns wel in every toun
and everich hostiler and tappestere
Bet than a lazar or a beggestere;
For unto swich a worthy man as he
Accorded not, as by his facultee
To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.
[240-245]

Chaucer here echoes the then recent socio-religious fad of using service to those with leprosy as "holy service" and derides the man of God for preferring to luxuriate in association with innkeepers and barmaids. There is, however, none of the overt sexual connotations of leprosy which apparently are referred to in his description of the Summoner:

A SOMONOUR was ther with us in that place,
That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,
For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.
As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
Of his visage children were aferd.
Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,
Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon;
Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,
Nor of the knobbes sittyng on his chekes.
Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,
And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood:
[623-635]

Walter C. Curry in *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences* (4) states that this description is of leprosy, reflecting the medieval concepts. He quotes Bernardus de Gordon's medieval description:

The infallible signs are these: A falling out and a scabbiness of the eyebrows, a roundness (rotundities of the eyes, and an enlargement of the nostrils externally and a contraction internally. Breathing becomes difficult, and the patient speaks as if

⁵ Brackets enclose poem line, chapter or section and lines, or page references as appropriate.

through the nose; on the face there is a kind of pallor verging upon the deathly and the appearance of the face is terrible with its fixed look.

Curry concludes:

Chaucer has indicated the two principle causes of the disease: the Summoner is "lecherous as a sparwe," and is accustomed to the eating of onions, garlic, and leeks and to the drinking of strong wine, red as blood. The rascal is either criminally ignorant or foolishly indifferent. He might have learned from any physician of his time, or before, that leprosy may be contracted by illicit association with women infected with it, that garlic, onion and leeks produce evil humours in the blood, and that red wine of all others is the most powerful and heating of drinks.

POST-MEDIEVAL USAGE

One of the earliest treatises in English discussing the problems of public welfare and relief was Simon Fish's "A Supplication for the Beggars" written in 1529. The prose demonstrates strong similarities to Latin construction (7).

Most lamentably complaineth their woeful misery unto Your Highness your daily bedemen, the wretched, hideous monsters (on whom scarcely for horror any eye dare look), the foul, unhappy sort of lepers and other sore people, needy, impotent, blind, lame, and sick, that live only by alms, how that their number is daily so sore increased that all the alms of all the well-disposed people of this your realm is not half enough for to sustain them, but that for very constraint die of hunger.

[32]

What good Christian can be able to succor us poor lepers, blind, sore, and lame, that be thus yearly oppressed?

[32]

These be they that corrupt the whole generation of mankind in your realm that catch the pox of one woman and bear them to another, that be brent with one woman and bear it to another, that catch the leproy of one woman and bear it to another.

[34]

Mr. Fish's solution to the problem was as follows:

Tie these holy, idle theves to the carts to be whipped naked about every market town till they will fall to labor, that they, by their importunate begging, take not away the alms that the good Christian people would give unto us sore, impotent, miserable people, your bedemen.

R. Copeland in *Guydon's Quest, Chirurg.* (1541) says:

Then ought ye to enquire of he hath had ye company of any lepress woman. . . . A woman is not so dangerous to be a lepress to hybyte with a lazare, as it shulde be a man to habyte with a Lazarous woman.

Both these authors reflect concepts of venereal association and transmission of leprosy, such as those noted in Asian societies (11,12). Purchas in his *Pilgrimage* (1613) ties this to the hereditary concepts of leprosy by saying, "They say it procureth the Leprosie in children which are then gotten." [216]. Living in the same general period, John Donne (1573-1631) also makes this association with sexual peccancy in his "Elegy IV, the Perfume;"

By thee the seely Amorous sucks his death,
By drawing in a leprous harlot's breath;
[59-60]

At about the same time Edmond Spenser (1552-1599) was perhaps faintly echoing this theme when, in *The Faerie Queene*, he wrote:

Great troupes of people traveild thitherward
Both day and night, of each degree and place,
But few returned, having scaped hard,
With baleful beggerie, or foule disgrace,
Which ever after in most wretched case,
Like loathsome lazars, by the hedges lay.
Thither *Duessa* bad him bend his pace:
For she is wearie of the toilsome way,
And also nigh consumed is the lingering day.
[I, iv, 3]

Leprosy is here the "loathsome" depth to which "great troupes of people" have fallen. *Duessa*, the evil woman, tempts the hero to the same end.

In another portion of the same work Spenser further equates leprosy with evil, figuratively using the term descriptively to indicate the mouth of one of the seven deadly sins as follows:

He hated all good workes and vertuous deeds,
And him no lesse, that any like did vse,
And who with gracious bread the hungry feeds,
His almes for want of faith he doth abuse:
And eke the verse of famous Poets witt
He does backbite, and spightful poison spues
From leprous mouth on all, that ever writt:
Such one vile Envie was, that fite in row did sitt.
[I, iv, 32]

In "Colin Clout's Come Home Againe," Spenser has Colin Clout represent Spenser himself and his ideas. In the following, Colin contemplates Utopian conditions:

For there all happie peace and plenteous store
Conspire in one to make contented blisse:
No wayling there nor wretchedness is heard,
No bloodie issues nor no leprosius,
No griesly famine, nor no raging sward,
No nightly bodrags, nor no hue and cries
[310-315]

John Donne, in a usage reminiscent of the above, puts the same thought more negatively:

But yet as long as I remain in this great hospital,
this sick, this distasteful world, as long as I remain
in this leprous house, this flesh of mine, this heart,
though prepared for thee, prepared by thee, will
still be subject to the invasion of malign and
pestilent vapors.

[8]

This is another figurative usage in which leprosy is an image of the spiritual disease which plagues the world. William Cowper's "Expostulation" (1781) in a similar usage pinpoints the source of such moral decay:

When nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins.

[96]

Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1651) speaks of "Such men as are cleansed of the Leprousie of Sin by Faith." [III, xli, 265], and J. Brown in *Shaftesbury Characters* (1751) announces, "What this leprosy of false knowledge may end in, I am unwilling to say."

John Milton (1608-1674) continued this theme. Several references in his *Paradise Lost* refer to leprosy. Thus, "a leper once (i.e., Naaman, II Kings 5) he lost and gain'd a king [I, 471] . . ." Later he describes a "lazarhouse." From the context it appears that he meant a hospital. A part of the view of the future that Michael gave Adam is thus couched:

Immediately a place
Before his eyes appeared, sad, noisome, dark,
A lazar-house it seemed, wherein were laid
Numbers of the diseased, all maladies.
[XI, 479]

This forward view from the Garden of Eden lists the horrors of the future resulting from Adam's fall. In an earlier poem, "the Hymn," Milton looked forward from the present and imagined a world free from "leprous sin":

For if such holy song
Enwarp our fancy long
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold,
And spekl'd vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould,
And Hell it self will pass away.
[XIV, 138]

Thus, Milton used leprosy in the same figurative sense in which it had been previ-

ously employed by Cowper, Hobbes, Spenser and Donne. Leprosy represented the spiritual loathsomeness which results from sin and, in fact, is sin itself. This harks back to the Hebrew concept of *tsara'ath* which was translated as "leprosy" in the Septuagint⁽¹³⁾.

A number of writers use the term "leprosy" in the general sense of a loathsome evil. Thus Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) has Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* make the following utterances:

I ha' the poison of the city for him,
And the white leprosy, but ere he shall have her
I'll sacrifice her on a pile of wood.
[II, iii, 56]

This is apparently the worst revenge of which Barabas can conceive. The "white leprosy" may refer to or be derived from Biblical descriptions. In two other plays, *The Contentions* [1091] and *II Henry VI* [1678], Marlowe uses the line:

I am no loathsome leper, look on me.

Curiously, his contemporary, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) uses the same line when the Queen in *II Henry IV* says:

What, doest thou turn away and hide thy face?
I am no loathsome leper. Look on me.

Whether it is because of the two iambs, the alliteration, or the appropriate feeling, it is remarkable how often in literature the words "loathsome" and "leper" are brought together.

Among Shakespeare's references to leprosy, the longest and most famous appears in *Hamlet*. The Ghost of Hamlet's father explains the cause of his death to Hamlet:

Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ear did pour
The leprous distillment, whose effect
Holds such enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body,
And with a sudden vigor it doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into mild,
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine,
And a most instant tetter barked about,
Most lazarlike, with vile and loathsome crust,
All my smooth body.
[I, v, 60-72]

"Eager" is here synonymous for acid. So Hamlet's uncle poured a poison into his brother's ear which, according to the ghost, immediately gave him a "leprous" eruption,

curdled his blood, and killed him. In "leprous distillment" the usage is symbolic rather than specific, using the word "leprous" to mean "evil" or "poisonous."

Shakespeare, thus regarding leprosy as loathsome, also uses it in several instances as part of a curse. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Scarus says of Cleopatra after she has fled from a sea battle:

On our side like the tokened pestilence,
Where death is sure. Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt—
Whom leprosy o'ertake!—i' the midst o' the fight . . .
Hoists sail and flies.
[III, x, 11-14]

And Thersites swears in *Troilus and Cressida*:

Then if she that leys thee out says thou art a fair
course,
I'll be sworn and sworn upon't she never shrouded
any but lazars.
[II, iii, 36]

And, again, Timon in *Timon of Athens* curses:

. . . Itches, blains,
Sow all the Athenian bosoms, and their crop
Be general leprosy!
[IV, i, 30]

Leprosy is referred to on six additional occasions in Shakespeare's plays. Since none is remarkable they will here be noted only by the following references:

I Henry IV [IV, ii, 24-29]
Henry V [I, i, 15; II, iii, 801]
Troilus and Cressida [V, i, 71]
Timon of Athens [IV, iii, 35 & 37]

Larkey (8) has noted that the tragic and ill-starred tale of *Troilus and Cressida* was one of those strange love romances of the Middle Ages that intrigued poets and was told in many different ways by Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare and others. He noted particularly the treatment of the story by Robert Henryson who in his "Testament of Cresseid" attempted a conclusion to Chaucer's version of the story. In this version, Cresseid, having deserted her Trojan lover, Troilus, is in turn deserted by her Greek lover, Diomed, and so became the scorn of both the Trojan and Greek camps. Cresseid felt that all her troubles were due to the two gods Venus and Cupid, and denounced them in their own temple. Cupid, incensed, called on the gods of the universe—the seven planets—to

render judgment. Saturn and the Moon were appointed to render the verdict:

Then thus proceeded Saturn and the Moon,
When they the matter ripely had digest;
For the despite to Cupid she had done,
And to Venus open and manifest,
In all her life with pain to be opprest,
And torment sore, with sickness incurable.
And to all lovers be abominable.

This doleful sentence Saturn took in hand,
And passed down where mournful Cresseid lay;
Then in low tone in this wise he did say;
"Thy great fairness and all thy beauty gay,
Thy wanton blood, and eke thy golden hair,
Here I exclude from thee for evermair.

I change thy mirth into melancholy,
Which is the mother of all pensiveness;
Thy moisture and thy heat to cold and dry;
Thine insolence, thy play and wantonness
To great disease: thy pomp and thy riches
Into mortal need; and great penuritie
Thou suffer shall, and as a beggar die.

The Moon further defines the sentence:

"From health of body I thee now deprive,
And to thy sickness there shall be no cure,
But in dolour thy days to endure.

Thy crystal eyes mingled with blood I make
Thy voice so clear, unpleasant, weak and hoarse;
Thy lusty complexion o'erspread with spots black,
And vivid lumps appearing in thy face.
Where thou comest, each man shall flee the place;
Thus shalt thou go begging from house to house,
With cup and clapper, like one Lazarus."

These pronouncements were passed to Cresseid in a dream. When she awoke and looked in a polished glass she found that her face was indeed deformed. She called her father, who when:

He looked on her ugly leper face,
The which before was white as lily-flower;
Wringing his hands, oftimes he said, Alas!
That he had lived to see that woeful hour!
For he knew well that there was no succor
To her sickness; . . .

This rendering of the story of *Troilus and Cresseid*, deriving from the 15th century, is of interest for its association with leprosy of concepts previously noted (12) to be similarly associated with leprosy in the Orient; the physical mutilation and loss of beauty, punishment from the gods for sexual peccancy and defiance of the gods, outcast status as the supreme penalty, hopelessness because of incurability. The tragic working out of these factors in the life of Cresseid is subsequently detailed poignantly by the poem.

Berkeley's *Alciphron* (1732) mentions "Leprous Egyptians, driven from their country on account of that loathsome distemper" [VI, paragraph 24] and Colebrooke's 1801 *Journal in Life* [ed. 1873, page 176] also reiterates society's felt need to ostracize the sufferer, remembering that, "Last month . . . a young man was going to be buried alive, on account of the leprosy."

USE OF LEPROSY BY THE ROMANTIC WRITERS

The Romantic writers were wont to call up vistas of ancient times and exotic, distant places as part of their imagery. They sometimes incorporated leprosy in this imagery, reflecting the concepts and meanings already related to leprosy by the earlier writers. The general use and connotations of the word and its relatives were thus already well established.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) in his "Imitation of Juvenal, Satire VIII" wrote:

A leprous stain! er half his thread was spun.
Ripe for the block that might have spared his son.
[107]

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's (1772-1834) sonnet, "Sweet Mercy" dwells on ancient days and Christ's bond with the poor and suffering. The latter are represented as "lazars" and the term is clearly derived from Christ's parable of Lazarus and the rich man [Luke 16:19-31].

He did not so, the Galilean mild,
Who met the Lazars turned from rich men's doors,
And called them friends, and wept upon their sores.

In a later "Sonnet to Earl Stanhope" Coleridge writes of strong individuality and nobility gained through integrity. Leprosy is used in a figurative sense but as representing a blemish or fault:

Alone thou wendest in thy stately pace,
Thyself redeeming from that leprous stain,
Nobility.

In the following stanza from the *Ancient Mariner* Coleridge uses the Biblical whiteness of leprosy in his description of the female of the two passengers on the spectre-ship, as he creates an exotic and horrifying imaginary scene:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:

Her skin was white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
Her flesh makes the still air cold.
[III, 190-194.]

John Keats evokes rich and exotic imagery as he asks in "Isabella; or The Port of Basil" (1818):

Why were they proud? Because their marble founts
Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's
tears?—
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?
[XVI, 3-4]

Here Keats was describing the Florentines who had grown rich off their colonies and colonial labor. He similarly uses leprosy in "The Cap and Bells" [XXVII, 6].

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) in *Barnaby Rudge* calls up a far-away image with his "one old leprous screen of faded Indian leather." [XXXI]

No fewer than 15 references to leprosy can be found in the poetry of Robert Browning (1812-1889). Seven of these occur in *The Ring and the Book*, a murder mystery set in the Rome of 1698. Several quotations will serve to illustrate the dramatic quality of this work as representative of Browning's work in general. Leprosy was used for its shock effect, utilizing already established connotations and meanings associated with it in literature.

Whether through favor, feebleness, or fault,
No matter, leprosy has touched our robe
And we unclean must needs be purified.
[III, 1377]

And again:

A woman spy-suborned to give and take
Letters and tokens, to do the work of shame
The more adroitly that herself, who helped
Communion thus between the tainted pair
Had long since been a leper thick in spot,
A common trull of the town.

The "tainted pair" refers to an association between a priest and a married woman, and the description given refers to a woman servant who assisted them in their liaison. In yet another reference in this work, leprosy is associated with sin:

Till they all weep, physician, man of law.
Even that poor old bit of battered brass,
Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,
Common utensil of the lazar-house.
[III, 795]

Further references to leprosy are to be

found in *The Ring and the Book*, [II, 627; III, 35; V, 1169].

In "A Blot on the 'Scutcheon'" by the same author, leprosy is presented as a punishment for the sin of dissimulating, reminiscent of the above noted association with falsification by Dante in *The Inferno*:

... some fierce leprous spot
Will mar the brow's dissimulating.

A similar sin-associative reference is found in Browning's "Paracletus Aspires":

The ulcerous barkly scurf of leprosy
Which finds—a man, and leaves—a hideous thing
That can not but be mended by hell-fire.
(IV, 140)

In "The Inn Album" Browning tells of an old gambler who plans to fleece a wealthy youth but who is himself shorn. He proposes to liquidate his debt by handing over a lady he has seduced. The response follows:

Make me 'amends by marriage'—in your phrase,
Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,
With soul and body which mere brushing past
Brought leprosy upon me—'marry' these!
(IV, 1572)

Later in "The Inn Album" the drama continues:

Forth from those arms' enwinding leprosy
At last I struggle: uncontaminate:
(VII, 721)

LEPROSY AS SIMPLY AN OPPROBRIUS DESCRIPTIVE TERM

Growing out of the disease-related use of leprosy descriptive words has come the extension of the word use to purely descriptive terminology which carries, however, the opprobrium developed in the other usages. Thus, Sir Francis Bacon's *Natural History* of 1626 states, "If the Crudities, Impurities and Leprosities of Metals were cured, they would become Gold." [Par. 326].

"Leprous," in addition to meaning "of, or like leprosy," had come to have a botanical usage in which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it means a "plant covered with white scales resembling the skin of a leper."

Percival Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) used "leprous" in a similar manner in "The Sensitive Plant":

Spawn, weeds, and filth, a leprous scum,
Made the running rivulet thick and dumb
And at its outlet flags high as stakes
Dammed it up with roots knotted like water
snakes.
[III, 70]

Byron (1788-1824) in *Don Juan* writes as part of an "anatomy lesson":

The liver is the lazaret of bile,
But very rarely executes its function,
For the first passion stays there such a while,
That all the rest creep in and form a junction,
Like knots of vipers on a dunghill's soil,
Rage, fear, hate, jealousy, revenge, compunc-
tion,
So that all mischiefs spring up from this entrail,
Like earthquakes from that hidden fire call'd
central.
[II, ccxv]

Henry Miller (1891-) in the *Tropic of Cancer* incorporated this summative descriptive use of leprosy as a single, almost random example of what he considered an absurd disease, namely present day civilized life. The words "leprosy, leprous and leper," as Miller uses them, have almost no meaning in context. They lose sense and meaning just as does life itself in the book. Some examples:

I sit down beside her and she talks—a flood of talk. Wild consumptive notes of hysteria, [sic] perversion, leprosy. I hear not a word because she is beautiful and I love her and now I am happy and willing to die. [pg. 21]

Later:

There was a touch of spring in the air, a poisonous malefic spring that seemed to burst from the man-holes: Night after night I had been coming back to this quarter attracted by certain leprous streets which only revealed their sinister splendor when the light of day had oozed away and the whores commenced to take their posts.
[pg. 42]

On two other occasions in the same book, Miller uses the descriptive term "skull of a leper" with crass sexual overtones. [pgs. 223, 225].

NONMEDICAL, DEFINITIVE USE OF LEPROSY

A few writers have used leprosy more definitively or have become involved in its problems. Thus, in *A Burnt Out Case*, Graham Greene (1904-) dealt with characters set in a jungle leprosarium. Lep-

prosy was dealt with both symbolically and directly.

In 1908 Lew Wallace published his dramatic *Ben Hur* (17) in which he reiterated and summated many of the popular errors regarding leprosy which are embedded in Western literature as noted above. His vivid portrayal of the outcast life of those with leprosy in Biblical times lent itself well to the film version of the story that was in due course presented in "epic" style. Both presentations have been roundly denounced by many as "inimical to the cause of leprosy," but both, as historical novel, were but dramatizing the inimical concepts and reactions already embedded deep in culture and the social subconscious.

Earlier Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) (16) became concerned with leprosy in Hawaii and wrote of these in the form of letters to be found in his *The South Seas, Letters from a Leisurely Traveler* and "Father Damien: An Open Letter to the Reverend Doctor Hyde of Honolulu" (1912). *The South Seas* in several consecutive letters considers the history of leprosy in the Hawaiian Islands, the history of the lazaretto (the author's term) on Molokai Island, and descriptions of Stevenson's observations of this leprosarium and its inhabitants at the time of his visit. He noted that many factors contributed to the lawlessness of the early days of this institution and explains them as follows:

They were strangers to each other, collected by common calamity, disfigured, mortally sick, banished without sin from home and friends. Few would understand the principle on which they were thus forfeited in all that makes life dear; many must have conceived their ostracism to be grounded in malevolent caprice; all came with sorrow at heart, many with despair and rage. [pg. 186]

This is followed by a description of Molokai in those early days:

'There is no law in this place'—was their word of salutation to the new-comers; cards, dancing, and debauch were the diversions; the women served as prostitutes, the children as drudges; the dying were callously uncared for; heathenism revived; *okolehau* was brewed and in their orgies the disfigured sick ran naked by the sea. This is Damien's picture; these traits were viewed through the tarnish of missionary spectacles . . . [pg. 187]

This is a description of a place where

uprooted, sick people were sent; away from their families, cut off from their work, and without anything to keep them occupied. It also was a place where there was no care or treatment. These descriptions vividly portray the typical situation resulting from society's neglect, which in turn fed back to society a basis for its misconceptions, fears, suspicion and opprobrium.

Stevenson went on to give his personal, 1891 observations of the colony, where he noted that the inmates were cheerful, clean, well-cared for, and comfortable. In the face of extreme physical deterioration and deformity he found them unselfconscious, because all were so:

The girl at Hookena, a leper at large among the clean, held down her head. I was glad to find she would soon walk with her face erect among her fellows, and perhaps be attended as a beauty.

The changes that Stevenson found, he attributed to the work of Father Damien and so he became involved in the defense of this priest against the attacks of his detractors, notably Reverend Doctor Hyde of Honolulu whom he lambasted with great literary style, concluding in part:

Well, the man who tried to do what Damien did, is my father, and the father of the man in the Apia bar, and the father of all who love goodness; and he was your father too, if God had given you the grace to see it. [pg. 441]

The work of Father Damien and the writings of Stevenson mark a notable turning point in regard for those who have leprosy, and in the writing about leprosy. They both led away from prior tendencies to equate the patient with the disease and pointed to a recognition of the humanity and need of those who became afflicted. This was aided by the fact that Gerhard Armauer Hansen, contemporary of Damien and Stevenson, had discovered the bacillary cause of leprosy, *Mycobacterium leprae*.

As part of the newer stream of writing about leprosy, in contrast with the continuing use of the disease for its shock effect in much of the writing noted above, there came to be much over-reaction akin to the sentimental, almost unreasoning leprophilia that followed the Crusades. Some psychological basis for such reaction has been aptly

detailed by Ryrie (10). But at the same time there began to develop a responsible body of work, the literary quality of which time will determine. Among such works note should be taken of *Who Walk Alone* by Perry Burgess (2); *Alone No Longer* by leprosy patient Stanley Stein (15) in collaboration with Lawrence G. Blochman; and *Molokai* by O. A. Bushnell (3).

LEPROSY ON CONTEMPORARY NEWSSTANDS

Some of the works referred to above can, of course, be found in paperback editions on contemporary newsstands. There remains, however, also the question of how, and how extensively, leprosy is used in the general, contemporary light reading material that is currently popular.

Over the past twenty years a random survey⁶ has been made of newstand offering of paperback popular novels of detection, espionage, adventure and historical fiction. The survey does not include the so-called "love romances" or fiction with a racial message. Covering about 1,200 titles, it does, however, provide some index of current use of leprosy and the extent of such use. The works come from both British and American presses.

About 5 per cent of these works used leprosy, usually as a single descriptive effort to convey a feeling of disgust, misery, horror or other opprobrium; sometimes legitimately as indicating the presence of persons with leprosy but using the term "leper." Forgotten are earlier terms of lazars, lazarettos. The words used are pre-eminently leprosy, leprous and leper. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the generally unimaginative usage:

"Wait!" Honey Lamb ran to the biggest oil painting. Tugged at the side of the leprous gilt frame.
—*Dead Sure*, by Stewart Sterling, Dell Book, 1949

Panic was nothing to what I began feeling now, Panic was like a mosquito bite on a dying leper.
—*13 French Street*, by Gil Brewer, Gold Medal Book, 1951.

"Got any other angles on him?" He shook his head. "Nope. He was just a louse; a leper, they called him." (referring to a blackmailer).
—*Bodies in Bedlam*, by Richard S. Prather. Gold Medal Book. 1951.

⁶ Unsupported by any research grant.

"But they're lepers! she exclaimed. "Lepers!" A shiver of horror shook her entire frame.
—*So Many Steps to Death*, by Agatha Christie. Pocket Book. 1956.

"How dare you spy on the intimate pleasures of a guest?" Tim snarled. "In my country you would be castrated and thrown to the dogs for that, you stinking foreskin of a leprous hyena."
—*Tsimmis in Tangier*, By Mallory T. Knight, Award Books, 1968.

In recent years there has been considerable agitation in some quarters to change the designation "leprosy" to "Hansen's Disease." This effort now begins to be reflected in the newsstand offerings without the softening effect that the proposers of the change hoped for. Thus:

All the questions were about as welcome as a diagnosis of Hansen's Disease.
—*A Deadly Shade of Gold*, John D. MacDonald, Fawcett Publications, 1965.

"They sacrifice to the *Tiki* tonight," she said angrily, "and the grave worms crawl. But you wouldn't know about that, would you? For God's sake, don't you own a *pareu*? Or some slip-slops? Didn't your research team tell you this was the island where love was born? Why did you take the trouble to come? Why not send one of your IBM robots with stainless steel testicles? Tell it how many islanders have syphilis, how many Hansen's disease, how many missionaries. . . ."
—*The Paper Pistol Contract*, by Philip Atlee, Fawcett Publications, 1968.

ACCRETIONS TO THE BIBLICAL CONCEPTS

A brief summary of Biblical concepts regarding *tsara'ath*, translated "leprosy," provides a useful reference background. Taken by itself, without interpretive accretions provided by Biblical scholars and society, the concept is quite simple. History, experience, and the teaching of the prophets convinced the Hebrews that they were a special people, chosen by Yahweh to be His peculiar representative. As such, they were to be a separate, clean people, uncontaminated by the sin and idolatry evident among other peoples. Repeatedly, however, as individuals and as a people they departed from this ideal and such lapses were sin—moral spots or blots. Such defilement was spiritual *tsara'ath*. It had to be recognized and cast away, or departed from, else it would spread in their society and render it spiritually unclean—as it did repetitively. Such uncleanness came to be

associated with concepts also of physical defilement and violation of dietary, e.g., the eating of pork, and other taboos. Some physical afflictions were also recognized as unclean and transmissible and therefore requiring ostracism, or separation, in order to keep them from spreading from individual to individual. These were legally defined and, as with moral defilement, the priest was the judge.

The physical personification of *tsara'ath* was defined as a rising or swelling, a scab or bald spot, or a bright or white spot in the skin. If the hair of the area turned white or yellow, this was regarded as confirming evidence as was also the appearance of raw flesh (probably ulceration). If the spot or blemish spread, it was "unclean" whereas if it remained stationary it was "clean." If the "raw flesh" turned white (healing scar?) it was "clean." If the blemish did not clear up under observation of up to two weeks, then the afflicted was required to "live without the camp" and to shout his uncleanness to all who might approach him. If subsequently the affliction subsided and disappeared, the afflicted could again be declared clean and, after various ritual purifications and sacrifices, could be returned to society. Though the Bible does not specifically equate physical *tsara'ath* with moral delinquency, the sacrifices and purifications demanded for restoration to society, as well as the outcast status of the afflicted, indicates such symbolic equation. Also, in three instances it is recorded that persons were smitten with leprosy because of reprehensible acts. Miriam was made "leprous" for seven days because she rebelled against the leader Moses (Numbers 12:1-15). Gehazi, who was servant to the prophet Elisha when the latter cured Naaman of "leprosy," was stricken with the disease because of his avarice (II Kings 5). This instance provides the only hint in the Bible of a belief in the hereditary nature of the disease in that the descendants of Gehazi were also cursed "forever" with the affliction. Finally King Azariah (also called Uzziah) was made leprous because of impiety (II Kings 15:1-7 and II Chronicles 26).

Other conditions termed "issues" (appar-

ently physical discharges or pus) were also deemed unclean and contagious and demanded ritual purifications as did also spilled semen and menstrual discharge. These, however, were recognized as temporary and did not require ostracism or segregation. Other *tsara'ath* concerned certain types of spots or growths on house walls and clothing which were not well defined or specified. They, too required ritual cleansing.

The Biblical accounts make no sexual connotations with respect to the origin of the blemishes. The affliction was not regarded as hereditary; no child is recorded as having had it; there is no indication of associated rotting or falling off of parts of the body such as fingers, toes, nose, or privy parts; there is no mention of associated deformity of the extremities and baldness was not evidence of *tsara'ath*. All these concepts are later accretions, deriving from society's experience with and misapprehension concerning leprosy. These and related concepts form the major basis for the above noted uses of leprosy in literature and folk-lore. They can not be attributed to the Bible but are a product of later social reaction. The reasons for such reaction have already been presented and discussed. (13).

Despite these incongruities with respect to leprosy, as the disease is presently known, the reasonableness of the original translation of *tsara'ath* as "leprosy" has been previously noted (12) and does not here require repetition.

DISCUSSION

From this survey it seems evident that, as previously noted for the Orient (11, 12-13), so also in Occidental societies the unique complex of symptoms and manifestations that comprise leprosy set this disease apart as a particular object of horror and opprobrium.

It is tempting to believe that in all these literary and folklore traditions it is the disease of leprosy that societies have reacted against and not the persons who have suffered with it. Though this is basically true in that, were it not for their disease, the sufferers would not be outcast; it is

equally true that in horror and fear of the disease, for long moments in history, the sufferer with leprosy has been lost sight of by society save as a personification of the disease. For brief periods, notable in Jesus Christ, in the immediate post-Crusades period and, fortunately, since the work of Damien and Hansen, recognition of the individual as distinct from his affliction has flickered and gained ground.

It is evident that much of Western literature's characterization of leprosy is medically inaccurate. A number of recent discussants have attributed Western leprophobia to Biblical teaching. Although some of the concepts brought out in this review are similar to Old Testament delineations (e.g., Leviticus xiii & xiv) they are not therefore necessarily entirely derivative therefrom. Europe lived with leprosy for several centuries, reacting with both leprophobia and leprophilia. Though teachings of the Church were strong and dominant during this period it is not unlikely that much of the reaction to leprosy derived from direct experience, observation and reaction and was not merely a parroting of ancient beliefs. Indeed, it has been postulated⁽¹³⁾ that the very presence of the pattern of social reaction is in itself indicative of the presence of the leprosy complex even in the absence of accurate medical description of the disease as it is now understood.

Much attention has been given to the fact that the Biblical accounts of leprosy do not mention the significant feature of neural involvement and anesthesia in leprosy. From this it is reasoned leprosy could not have been part of the disease complex rendered as "leprosy" in translations of the Old Testament, since it is thought that such an important feature would inevitably have been noted. With respect to this notion, it is pertinent to note that not one of the many references presented in the above review, drawn from a span of several centuries, refers to neural involvement or anesthesia as being a feature of leprosy. Yet there is no question that the disease referred to in these references is leprosy as it is known today.

Two of the earliest medical descriptions

of leprosy are those of Aulus Cornelius Celsus⁽⁹⁾ circa 30 A.D., and Aretaeus⁽¹⁾ second century A.D. (quoted, ⁽¹²⁾). Neither of them mentions neural involvement or anesthesia. Those who have made an issue of the Biblical lack of mention of these characteristics seem not to have pursued this issue to a point of study as to when and by whom these neural involvements were first recognized and described. Without specific pursuit of this matter, the first reference to the neural involvement in leprosy that has come to our attention is the *Atlas Colorie de Spedalskhed*⁽⁵⁾ published in 1847 by Daniel C. Danielssen and Carl Wilhelm Boeck⁷. In all probability there are earlier notices of this phenomenon, but it seems evident that no notice was taken of it in literature, that its medical recognition came relatively late, and that society did not impute much significance to these characteristics. Absence of its recognition in the Book of Leviticus, more a social and literary than a medical treatise, compiled during the Babylonian captivity of the Hebrews (597-538 B.C.), can scarcely be argued as evidence that the disease grouping designated *tsara'ath* in the original text did not include the entity of leprosy as it was later known.

In the ancient past it is not so much medical witness as the social reaction which gives evidence of the presence of leprosy. From the above review there emerges a pattern of concept and reaction which can be briefly summarized:

1. Strong, often violent, aversion toward the afflicted, both as individuals and a group, resulting more from their physical appearance than from functional disability.
2. Affliction believed to be incurable, except perhaps occasionally by special supernatural intervention.
3. Identification of the affliction with supernaturally decreed punishment for moral, usually sexual peccancy.
4. Transmission equated with venery.

⁷ There is, however, mention of anesthesia, muscle wasting and formication in the Oxford Bodleian Library (M. S. Ashmole 1398, text on leprosy, fo. 143-144) Document from the 14th century, published in translation by Charles Singer (J. Hist. Med. 4 (1949) 237-238).

5. A belief that the affliction may be hereditary.
6. Ostracism of the afflicted by society, often in an organized and prescribed manner.

This pattern is essentially the same as that previously noted (12,14) in various Oriental societies. In that study it was postulated that when this pattern of social reaction and belief exists in a society it is evidence of the presence of leprosy even if the medical witness is deficient. This thesis is strengthened by the present study.

It is clear that to thus argue is not to maintain that all use of the word "leprosy," and other related words, identifies true leprosy any more than the literary or common application of the word "bastard" always identifies a true bastard. Many above noted quotations attest to the wide use of leprosy to indicate opprobrium and descriptive connotations not directly related to the disease itself. It seems, however, to be a fact that leprosy has always been a part of the moiety that has been designated "leprosy" and that its characteristics of mutilation, associated with incurability and progressive debilitation have been the core complex from which the social reaction to the moiety has derived. As increasing medical and social understanding have peeled away the other entities that were complexed with leprosy, leprosy has emerged and been left as the sole assignee of the odium for which its core characteristics were originally and predominantly responsible. In the process, leprosy has been defined as an etiologic, pathologic and clinical entity that can in itself be understood and through this understanding provides a basis also for an understanding of the long standing social pathology that has been associated with "leprosy."

With this understanding there seems no longer to be any valid rationale for continued opprobrium or fear (as distinct from caution), nor does there seem to be any reason for continuing attempts to attribute this odium to any specific social force such as the Bible, or for attempting to hide the disease under a new name.

A sense of humanity coupled with rationality, both usually absent from society's

reaction to leprosy, would appear to be the guideline that emerges for meeting the continuing problem. This is an approach that has led to conquest in other disease and social problems; and leprosy compounds medical and social problems to a unique degree. In the contemplation of this disease it is impossible to be either purely the humanist or the scientist. For society, the psychologic change required is formidable for "leprosy," in the historical and literary rather than the medical sense,—or better, *tsara'ath*—is deeply embedded in culture and still lies deep in the soul of humanity. So deep it lies that one may well despair of fulfillment of Spenser's vision in "Colin Clout's Come Home Againe," noted above:

For there all happie peace and plenteous store
 Conspire in one to make contented blisse:
 No wayling (wailing) there nor wretchedness is
 heard,
 No bloodie issues nor no leprosyes,
 No griesly famine, no no raging seward,
 No night bodrags (forays), nor no hue and cries.

Most fortunately, recent, real and continuing advances in the treatment of leprosy are also the most potent therapy for its social pathology. They break the pattern of both the social and medical pathologies of the disease for they promise relief from the chronicity and deforming effects of the disease, and perhaps, in time, from the disease itself with consequent negation of the whole pattern that has so disturbed society. They make possible replacement of the image of a divinely ordained, irrevocable retribution with that of an understood disease subject to management and control.

SUMMARY

A survey is presented, and illustrated by quotations, of the use of leprosy in Occidental, non-medical literature from Dante (1265-1321 A.D.) to contemporary paperbacks. This literature uses leprosy as descriptive and representative of almost all imaginable contumely and social opprobrium. The pattern of social reaction to the disease that emerges is similar to that which has previously been postulated as being sufficiently characteristic for leprosy to suggest that this reaction pattern may be used as evidence of the presence of leprosy in a

given society even if medical descriptions of leprosy in that society are inadequate. In seeking its effect, this literature makes virtually no specific mention of anesthesia, claw hands, loss of eyebrows, collapse of the nose, blindness, lagophthalmos and ulcers of the feet. Nevertheless, there is no question but that leprosy, as it is known today, was the disease meant in this literature. This suggests that more ancient, non-medical literature, such as the Bible, should not be faulted for similar omissions. Nor can such omissions be accepted as proof that leprosy was not at least part of the disease complex to which they applied the same concepts of social opprobrium that have recently been, and are still applied to leprosy. Additionally, contemporary instances are noted where authors use the designation "Hansen's Disease" in place of leprosy but with the same odious connotations that has characterized writings using the word leprosy. This evidence suggests that change of disease name has little effect on the thrust of society's misconceptions.

RESUMEN

Se presenta una revisión, ilustrada con citas bibliográficas, del uso de la lepra en la literatura occidental no-médica desde Dante (1265-1321 A.D.) hasta ediciones de bolsillo contemporáneas. Esta literatura utiliza la lepra como descripción y representación de todo el oprobio contumaz social imaginable. El modelo de reacción sociológica ante la enfermedad que emerge es similar al que se ha postulado previamente como suficientemente característico de la lepra como para sugerir que este modelo de reacción puede ser usado como evidencia de la presencia de lepra en una sociedad determinada, aunque las descripciones médicas de lepra en esa sociedad sean inadecuadas. Para conseguir su objetivo, esta literatura virtualmente no hace mención específica de anestesia, manos en garra, pérdida de cejas, colapso de la nariz, ceguera, lagofthalmos y úlceras de los pies. Sin embargo, no hay duda que la enfermedad a que se refiere esta literatura es la lepra, tal como se conoce hoy en día. Esto sugiere que no se debe culpar de omisiones similares a literatura no-médica aún más antigua, tal como la Biblia. Tampoco se pueden aceptar estas omisiones como prueba de que la lepra no era por lo menos parte del complejo de enfermedades a las cuales se aplicaban los mismos conceptos de oprobio social que han sido recientemente, y aún son, aplicados a la

lepra. Además, se destacan ocasiones contemporáneas en las cuales los autores usan la designación "Enfermedad de Hansen" en vez de lepra, pero con las mismas implicaciones desagradables que han caracterizado los escritos en que se ha usado la palabra lepra. Esta evidencia sugiere que el cambio de nombre de la enfermedad ha tenido escaso efecto sobre la mayor parte de las concepciones erradas de la sociedad.

RÉSUMÉ

On présente ici, avec des exemples et des citations, les résultats d'une enquête portant sur le recours à la lèpre dans la littérature occidentale non médicale, depuis Dante (1265-1321) jusqu'aux livres de poche contemporains. Cette littérature utilise la lèpre comme moyen descriptif et comme illustration de presque toutes les situations imaginables d'opprobre sociale. L'aspect de la réaction sociale à la maladie, tel qu'il apparaît ainsi, est semblable à celui que l'on a jusqu'à présent considéré comme étant suffisamment caractéristique de la lèpre pour suggérer que ce type de réaction peut être utilisé comme la preuve de la présence de lèpre dans une société donnée, même si les descriptions médicales qui en sont faites, dans cette société, sont inadéquates. En vue d'obtenir cet effet, cette littérature ne fait virtuellement aucune mention spécifique de l'anesthésie, des mains en griffes, de la perte des sourcils, de l'effondrement du nez, de la cécité, de la lagophthalmie et des ulcères aux pieds. Pourtant, on ne peut douter que la lèpre, telle qu'elle est connue aujourd'hui, soit la même maladie que celle à laquelle cette littérature se réfère. Cette constatation suggère que la littérature non médicale plus ancienne, telle que la Bible, ne doit pas être incriminée pour expliquer de telles omissions. On ne peut davantage considérer que de telles omissions constituent la preuve que la lèpre n'appartenait pas, du moins en partie, au complexe nosologique auquel on a appliqué les mêmes concepts d'opprobre sociale qui ont récemment été et sont encore appliqués à la lèpre. De plus, on a relevé divers exemples contemporains dans lesquels les auteurs ont utilisé le terme "maladie de Hansen" au lieu du terme lèpre, mais cependant avec la même connotation odieuse qui a caractérisé les écrits qui emploient le terme "lèpre." Ceci suggère que la modification du nom de la maladie a peu d'effet sur le poids des préjugés de la société.

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