

VILLAGE CLINICS *VERSUS* SETTLEMENTS

The foregoing heading is perhaps not quite fair, for it may suggest that the two institutions are necessarily antagonistic, whereas they should be complementary. However, it is intended to call attention to a certain spirit or at least effect of rivalry that does exist between them.

There is no small danger, whether in leprosy settlements or in hospitals for general diseases, of making the institution itself the one important feature. From this view-point the chief concern is that it be staffed and organized to the highest degree; there is a feeling of something wrong if it is not fully occupied; and its activities are very liable to be carried on at the expense of other methods of attaining the goal that, after all, is aimed at. This spirit is entirely wrong. There is everything in favor of giving our very best in and to such an institution so long as—and only so long as—it is fully recognized that our main effort should be to keep patients out of the institution rather than to get them into it.

I make bold to claim that, with the exception of an occasional emergency case, every patient admitted to a hospital is evidence of failure. Typhoid fever is disappearing in England, and tuberculosis is becoming rarer; this is not because of successful hospital treatment but because of a success which is making the hospital unneeded. Prevention of traumatism has nothing to do with the physician, but it is equally true that most traumatic cases might, and should, have been prevented. Even cancer in its hospital phase is a blot, and doubtless science will some day remove this condition from the list of diseases for which hospital treatment will be needed.

As with general hospitals, so with leper settlements, only to a greater degree. Even with our present limited knowledge of treatment, is there a single case of infection with the leprosy bacillus of which we dare say that the advance of the disease could not possibly have been prevented and the removal of the patient to a settlement made unnecessary?

From his own experience the writer is convinced that, speaking generally, leprosy is a disease of the villages rather than of the cities, and that the large majority of the sufferers in the cities have come there to work or beg. Of course this is not a universal rule, and it may be untrue in other places, but we believe that it is the

case in China at least. Yet little is being done for lepers in the villages where the disease arises, where the cases are largely in earlier stages than those seen in the cities, and where preventive measures may be applied—and must be applied if prevention is to be accomplished. In China, as elsewhere, leper settlements are built and rapidly filled with patients each one of whom might have been prevented from needing to find a place in such a home. Surely there is something wrong here.

The cost of settlement treatment is high, while that of treatment in village clinics is low, not more than a tenth of the former. Is treatment in the settlement any more effective than in the clinic? In China, one is inclined to believe, patients who continue to live in their own homes and to follow their usual vocations may respond more rapidly to treatment than in the usual settlement. Finally, what is any settlement doing to prevent the spread of the disease in the homes? To a village clinic there may be attached health nurses to follow up the patients in their homes, teach them how to live healthy lives, how to protect the children, and how to recognize the disease in the earliest stage in the children when it does occur.

It is not the intention in writing this to suggest that settlements are unnecessary, but it is held that a radical change of emphasis is urgently required. The day may come when the settlement may be regarded as a mere adjunct in the proper treatment of leprosy, a place for the few who escape the screen of village clinics and for those who fail to respond to treatment. This is an ideal which, it is granted, may be impossible of attainment in many places at present, but it is one towards which our energies should be focused.