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EDITORIALS

Editorials are written by members of the Editorial Board, and opinions expressed are those of the writers. Any statement that does not meet with agreement will be of service if it but stimulates discussion, to facilitate which the Correspondence section is maintained.

THE "CURE" OF LEPROSY

We take no exception to the claims of the bacteriologists that when a patient recovers from a disease such as leprosy or tuberculosis it is impossible to prove that the causal organism has been eradicated or that there is no possibility of relapse. That relapses are frequent must be acknowledged by any physician who handles cases of leprosy. But we protest against the weakness of the clinicians who have allowed their bacteriologically-minded brethren to steal from them a perfectly good word, clothe it in the garments of a heretic and then burn it at the stake.

We maintain that "cure" is a good old word, far older than the science of bacteriology, quite devoid of the meaning that is now sought to attach to it, and not in the least deserving the obloquy into which it has come. Webster, and such other dictionaries as we are able to consult, give us as the meaning of cure: to restore to health. Neither here nor in its cognate use—the cure of souls—is it for a moment suggested that no future fall from health, physical or spiritual, is guaranteed.

It is evident from every possible reference that what cure implies is a restoration to previous functional health, so that the victim is again able to take his place in society as a normal member thereof. Now our bacteriologically minded friends want to give an entirely new meaning to this word, and thanks to the weakness of their clinical brethren they are fast doing it. Cure is a good word, a kindly word, and it deserves no such harsh treatment.

But it is not simply as a purist that one protests the rape of this significant term. Were this all, one might be inclined to follow the priest and the Levite and pass by on the other side. But indeed we have something here worth fighting for.

What do our friends throw to us as a substitute—"arrested without deformity," forsooth. If we accept such a term as this how are we placed? We have lost that most valuable thing of all, the psychological approach to the patient—half the battle. Get hold of a patient and—perhaps in leprosy more than any other disease—convince him that he can be cured, restored to health, restored to function and, as far as the disease is concerned, to his position as a social unit; make him believe that this can be done, as indeed it is in very many cases, and half the cure is already accomplished. Throw to him instead the sop that his disease may be "arrested without deformity" and you are throwing away one of your strongest weapons in the fight against his sickness.

One sometimes wonders whether the fact that the pessimist sees so many fewer cures than the optimist is due not merely to a different, possibly more scientific, attitude of mind but also to the psychological effect that different types of minds have on patients. At any rate, we hereby lodge again the claim of the clinician to the restoration of the word "cure" to its proper significance, and invite our colleagues to find some other word implying that their patients are bacteriologically clean.