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## EDITORIALS

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*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, for which provision is made elsewhere.*

### NATURAL IMMUNITY IN LEPROSY

The possibility of the development of natural immunity to a disease in any community is a subject about which little is known though the matter is one of very considerable interest. However, the fact of its existence can hardly be called in question. Examples might be cited of the development of a strain of rats highly immune to plague in centers in India where the disease has long been endemic. Similarly, natural resistance to tuberculosis appears to develop in populations where the disease has been long prevalent, while tuberculosis conveyed from this same source to districts where it is unknown may give rise to virulent epidemics. It is not altogether improbable, therefore, that the same may be true of leprosy.

Whether this condition of immunity is due to the absorption of minimal doses of the infecting organism is not determined, nor how such resistance is conveyed to subsequent generations. There are, however, reasons to suggest that natural resistance does develop, and that possibly this resistance is transmissible.

The well-established facts of the rarity of marital infection in tuberculosis, and still more in leprosy, and the comparative infrequency of the development of leprosy in the children of lepers, are to be remembered. In view of the tendency of children rather than adults to fall victims to this disease it is surprising, not how many, but how few of the children of lepers develop leprosy. In our own experience less than 30 per cent of lepers come from homes where there are any other sufferers from the disease.

The short papers by R. M. Wilson,<sup>1</sup> in which he advocates the sterilization of the leper husband with a view to prevention of the birth of children who may eventually add to the number of lepers, are interesting, and the success from his point of view of the small experiment that he has made is suggestive; but the fact of this success seems to us insufficient justification for the procedure. Before any definite opinion in the matter is reached it might be well to consider the possible effect that this might have, if adopted on a large scale, on the development of any natural immunity in the population. At any rate it is well to remember that nature has her own ways of staging a come-back on those who try to regulate her laws.

J. L. M. AXWEL