

OBSERVATIONS IN NEW GUINEA

To the EDITOR:

It may be of interest to add a few further observations made on leprosy in New Guinea to those that were published in my article in a recent issue of THE JOURNAL.¹

We have for many months been trying to trace the source of infection in some of our young lepers from New Hanover, and have compiled scores of family trees; but the marriage customs of these

¹ Internat. Jour. Lep. 4 (1936) 171-176.

people make the task a very difficult one. Divorce by mutual consent is very frequent and remarriage the rule. Children may remain with either parent or a step-parent, so that it is not uncommon to find that a young leper during childhood has lived with four or five step-parents as well as with his real parents. One of these adults may be traced as a leper, but then comes the difficulty of determining whether he or she was leprous at the time the child was under his or her care. The information so far obtained is very interesting to us, but impossible to tabulate.

One of our records is especially interesting. About fifteen years ago three adult men were living in a communal house in a previously uninfected village on New Ireland. One of them left the village and was discovered to be a leper; he was taken to hospital and died there. During the past year the other two men, now over 50 years of age, developed early neural lesions. Two young adults who were young children fifteen years ago have also developed the disease. None of these is related by blood to any other, and there has been no other case in the village. From the village to which the original leper removed we have taken four young adult lepers in the last five years.

As to my theories (none of which is, of course, capable of proof), they are (a) that infection is a house or hamlet one rather than a family one; (b) that the first lesions are always neural (many of our C1 and early mixed cases were admitted as such only because I hesitated to make a diagnosis on doubtful and fleeting signs several years before); and (c) that leprosy is infectious in the neural stage.

Department of Public Health
Kavieng, New Guinea

DR. E. M. HOLLAND