



COMMUNAL DRINKING

TO THE EDITOR:

In connection with the remarks on the possible relation of communal "beer drinks" to the spread of leprosy in Southern Rhodesia, noted in the report for 1937 in that region, I may comment on communal drinking of yerba matté infusion in Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil.

Having observed the national habit of matté drinking, during my residence of more than thirty years in Paraguay, it is difficult for me to believe that there may not be some danger of

mouth to mouth transmission of disease in the practice of that habit. A gourd or horn into which the sucking-tube or "bombilla" has been put is filled with powdered yerba matté leaves and boiling water is then poured in. The infusion so made is drunk or sucked through the tube, each guest sucking one gourd-full, and passing gourd and tube to his neighbor of the group that sits side-by-side around the fire, each in turn refilling the gourd with hot water on the same ration of matté leaves. Often I have seen a family group, of which the grandfather and the mother were lepers, one after the other sucking from the same gourd through the same tube. It is not etiquette to wipe the tube after your neighbor, even though a leper has used it. Whether or not there were danger of infection from the leper's mouth or nose could never be definitely proved, but the intimacy of contact continually repeated provides ideal conditions for the transmission of leprosy in such infected countries.

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