



Wellcome Film Project

On Leprosy

Wellcome Trust Film Unit, 1987.

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Extracts read by Dick Graham.

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Colour

Duration: 00:05:57:11

00:00:00:00

<Opening credits>

<Billie Williams narrates over shots of pages from Daniellsen and Boeck's *Om Spedalskhed*>

The purpose of this short video is to demonstrate the value of this type of presentation of a primary source for students of the history of medicine. The work we've chosen is the Atlas published in 1847 by Daniellssen and Boeck accompanying their book, *Om Spedalskhed*, which is our first modern description of leprosy, predating Hansen's account of the microbacterial nature of the disease by a quarter of a century.

The superb plates show the appearances of patients in the Leper Hospital in Bergen during the mid-nineteenth century. The Atlas is extremely rare, originally belonging to Dr Nourse, an English surgeon interested in the disease. It is now in the library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.

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The rarity of this atlas, together with its fragile nature, make it a suitable volume for representation by audio-visual methods. We include an abbreviated version of Dr Nourse's abstract <shot of abstract> from Danielssen and Boeck's book. He prefaces his remarks as follows:

<Dick Graham quotes from Nourse's abstract and over plates from the book>

These plates were coloured in 1847, and some of the colours have since then changed and become blackish, and not as they were at first, with this exception, the plates are exceedingly accurate.

Leprosy is found in two forms – the tubercular and the anaesthetic. The one affecting principally the skin and mucous membranes, and in its morbid anatomy reminding us of scrofula. The other attacking in a more insidious manner the nervous centres and producing various peripheral symptoms as a consequence.

The first appearance of tubercular leprosy is an eruption of rounded blotches, red or brownish, slightly elevated above the skin. These blotches are at first transient, vanishing and reappearing for some months or years. At length they become permanent and more of a bluish tint. After a time the blotches become prominent, new blotches appear and the hair falls off from the affected parts. The blotches become tubercles. When the mouth, nostrils and throat are affected, tubercles soon soften and the parts are destroyed by ulceration. Wherever the tubercles are, whether within or without the body, their tendency is to soften, open, discharge a yellowish-white substance and leave numerous discharging ulcers. The eyes are often attacked in tubercular leprosy.

The anaesthetic leprosy is more insidious. After some months or years, bullae-like pemphigus appear, leaving ulcerated surfaces when they burst. This is repeated for some years; the ulcers, when healed, leave white shining cicatrices, a little sunk in the skin and slightly insensible, and any hairs on

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them are turned white. The eyes become affected and sight is slowly destroyed. The cheeks become pallid and slack. The mouth is drawn to one side and the lower lip is open. The nasal cavity dries up and the septum nasi is perforated by ulcers. The anaesthesia advances *<unknown word>* with these changes and, at length, not only the eyeball, cheeks, lips, gums and inside of the nostrils be touched without the patients perceiving it, but the limbs may be burnt or amputated without pain. The skin is undermined and ulcer forms, laying bare the muscles. The anaesthesia being fully developed, necrosis sets in, usually attacking the bones of the fingers or toes; fingers or toes are lost, one after another, and the metatarsal bones are destroyed, leaving a clubbed stump of hand or foot. After death, the sum part of the spinal cord is found to have an albuminous exudation in the sub-arachnoidian cellular tissue. The same is found in the sheaths of nerves, which are sometimes atrophied, and also in the brain, especially about the base; and at the origin of the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth pairs of nerves.

Such are the two forms in which true leprosy or spedalskhed appears.

This brief sketch of leprosy is condensed from the full, detailed account of it by Danielssen and Boecke, a volume of five hundred pages with ample bibliography down to that date.

<End credits>