Leprosy Yields to Science

By AARON HARDY ULM

The United States Bureau of Chemistry. Dr. Power was awarded a medal of honor for his part, and a very important part, in paving the way to making the oil a practicable cure for leprosy.

That part consisted of elaborate analyses of the substance. The investigation extended over several years. It resulted in the development of means for breaking up the oil into its differing chemical parts and to the determining of the exact character of those parts. Dr. Power and his collaborators discovered in the oil an entirely new series of fatty acids that differ from any other known fatty acids. Though they did not inquire into the therapeutic use of the chemicals, it was inferred that in those acids lay the virtues that rendered the oil a remedy for leprosy.

After Dr. Power's chemical studies were completed, physicians in many localities began to make use of the different fractions of the oil in such ways as to overcome the difficulties attending the use of the complete substance.

They were thus able to find ways for making the medicine palatable to the taste and acceptable to the stomach, as well as for making regular hypodermic injections feasible.

Among the first to complete leprosy cures in significant numbers was Dr. Victor G. Heiser, a United States Public Health Service surgeon, who worked with the problem in the Philippines.

In Hawaii where the disease, considering the area, is probably more prominent than anywhere else in the world, experiments with the new cure have been going on for more than six years. Many men have contributed to this, including Dr. G. W. McCoy, Dr. Harry T. Holman, Dr. McDonald and Dr. A. L. Dean. The first three have worked in the leper colonies which, since the heroic death there of Father Damien, have attracted more world attention than any like establishments in the world. They are Public Health Service physicians. Dr. Dean is president of and professor of chemistry in the University of Hawaii. Dr. Dean's contribution consisted of chemical studies, extending from those of Dr. Power, in the direction of combinations of chaulmoogra oil derivatives and other drugs, aimed at finding the ones most effective in treating leprosy.

Treatment has been administered in recent years under the direction chiefly of Dr. McDonald, though much has been done by Dr. W. J. Goodwine, at the Molokai Indian Colony, where Father Damien made his great sacrifice.

The remedies used at the Hawaii leper colonies have a wide range. The active controlling elements are chaulmoogra oil and its derivatives, used both internally and externally.

Dr. Goodwine predicts for the 65 per cent cures in the case of leprosy at the Molokai colony, and that the disease at the other colonies of the United States leper reservations will be reduced in like proportion, as Dr. McDonald says, in the case of leprosy at the Moloka'i colony.

The remedies at the leper colonies are prepared by the Department of Health. The efforts of the Department are directed to the training of capable people to take up the work. At present there are about 500 trained people in the leper colonies and it is expected that they will be able to take care of the work with the aid of about 250 lay workers.

The Department of Health expects to have the leper colonies in the United States under the control of trained people within the next five years.