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Editorial

Abstract

Hippievillage is where it's at, or words to that effect. The recent efflorescence of "the scene" has brought its own problems, not the least medical; this could be all too graphically seen in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco this summer where a lemming migration of disenchanted American youth far outstripped the city's hygiene and health provisions. A philosophy of not so much a programme more a way of life does not lend itself easily to adequate sanitation, to efficient screening against infectious diseases, to immunisation programmes for the young and to regular and orthodox nutrition; nor did the defiance of many of the hippies and the irritation of the authorities help matters. Sepsis, upper respiratory ailments, serum hepatitis (from needle injections of drugs) and venereal disease were rife. The collateral dangers from exuberant use of narcotics and dubious pharmacological cocktails further complicated the picture.

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EDITORIAL

Hippieville is where it's at, or words to that effect. The recent efflorescence of "the scene" has brought its own problems, not the least medical; this could be all too graphically seen in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco this summer where a lemming migration of disenchanting American youth far outstripped the city's hygiene and health provisions. A philosophy of not so much a programme more a way of life does not lend itself easily to adequate sanitation, to efficient screening against infectious diseases, to immunisation programmes for the young and to regular and orthodox nutrition; nor did the defiance of many of the hippies and the irritation of the authorities help matters. Sepsis, upper respiratory ailments, serum hepatitis (from needle injections of drugs) and venereal disease were rife. The collateral dangers from exuberant use of narcotics and dubious pharmacological cocktails further complicated the picture.

An interesting feature of this severe situation was the functioning of the Haight-Ashbury Clinic, run voluntarily by a few doctors, medical students, nurses and social workers. Working on a minute budget, devoted

almost entirely to equipment and drugs, they staffed the clinic throughout the summer till lack of funds eventually brought things to a halt in late September. In an area where medical bills normally reach awesome heights this "free medicine" was all the more remarkable. Most of the doctors worked in the clinic at the expense of part of their holidays. While some sympathised with the hippie movement, or were curious about the phenomenon, others presented themselves out of a sense of duty to the crisis, or had personal reasons like the father of a hippie girl who had fled from home for the golden sidewalks of San Francisco. He was not only anxious to find his daughter but was concerned to know more about the attractions that hippie life holds out for the young.

With the end of summer the overcrowding of the Haight-Ashbury was greatly reduced, many of its vacation time inhabitants returning home having had their flirt with 'freedom'. In a subculture such as this, where many of the conventional rules of hygiene and housing were jettisoned, it was rapidly proven that medical and public health amenities cannot be disregarded for long.