

RALPH HOPKINS, M.D.

1876 - 1945

New Orleans, the city of Dr. Ralph Hopkins' birth in 1876, was also the place of his death, on March 7, 1945. His family, social and professional life were closely associated with that city, and with the state in which it is located, though his academic studies were

completed at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., class of '95. During World War I as a Captain in the Medical Corps of the Army, he served at home and in France. Doctor Hopkins was always known, both to close friends and to casual acquaintances, as "Hopkins, of New Orleans."

His medical degree was granted by Tulane University in 1899. In 1894, the prevalence of leprosy in Louisiana had led to the opening of the Louisiana Leper Home, at Carville, Louisiana. The chief proponent of this measure was Doctor Isadore Dyer, then Professor of Dermatology at Tulane University. Through Dr. Hopkins' close associations with Dr. Dyer, his mentor and master, he immediately became interested in leprosy. He accompanied Dr. Dyer in his visits to the institution, and in 1901 was appointed its attending physician. Dr. Hopkins' interest begun thus early in his professional career never flagged and up to the time of his death some forty-four years later, it was rare that he missed a weekly visit to the home, or Colony, as it was more usually termed.

Looking at the Institution today, one would glean no idea of the hardships of its beginnings. Detraining, after a hot uncomfortable three hours' trip, he would be met by a team of mules and a rickety vehicle. In this, he would be jolted over the eight miles of dirt road that led to the Colony. Arriving there, he would be given his supper in an unscreened room, swarming with mosquitoes and other insects. He would often laughingly tell how he swathed his hands and face in gauze to avoid their stings, and, as a consequence, swallowed a considerable amount of cloth with each meal.

The patients' quarters were extremely primitive, being only some former slave cabins that had been patched up to serve the purpose. There was no running water. The only heat for comfort, cooking, sterilization, or any other purpose was provided by an open fireplace. Hospital equipment was totally lacking in the first years, the home having been established, apparently, to provide merely custodial care for indigent patients. Many a young physician would have been appalled and discouraged at the prospect, but Dr. Hopkins' interest, his humanitarian instincts, and his realization that leprosy posed a real problem both to the profession in general and to his state in particular, spurred him on to render service to the patients, and to work constantly for improvements in their situation. He felt that only when these things had been accomplished could real research be carried on.

His efforts, and those of others associated with him, were so successful that when the Federal Government sought a site for a

National Leprosarium in 1921, Carville was chosen. It then accommodated some ninety patients, in comfortable cottages, with an adequate water, heating, and lighting system. Operating rooms, clinics, pharmacies, etc., enabled Dr. Hopkins to direct both scientific care and some research. His brochures on the use of chaulmoogra oil, and on lepra fever are among his early contributions to the literature on leprosy.

When the Institution passed under Federal auspices, Dr. Hopkins was retained as a consulting physician, and continued to make weekly visits to the Hospital. He was delighted to have others interested in the field that had always claimed his keenest interest, while his long association with the disease enabled him to point out the pitfalls of too ready enthusiasm or too quick discouragement. Indeed, Dr. Hopkins' slowness either to approve or disapprove, was a fine balance wheel in study and research.

Dr. Hopkins' work, outside of, but still allied to the field of leprosy, led to various appointments at Tulane University. He was Chief of Clinic, and Assistant Clinical Instructor in Diseases of the Skin. For twenty years he held the dual positions of Assistant Professor of Physiology, and Assistant Professor of Dermatology. In 1924, he resigned from the Department of Physiology to become Associate Professor of Dermatology. The clinics of the huge Charity Hospital offered valuable and varied materials and experience. In 1926, upon the retirement of Doctor Henry Menage, he became Head of the Departments of Dermatology at both Charity Hospital and Tulane University.

In addition to his memberships in the local Parish and State Societies, he had been president of the Louisiana State Dermatological Society and vice-president of the American Dermatological Association. He was also a member of the Southern Medical Association, International Leprosy Association, and the American Society of Tropical Medicine. He served as editor of the New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal. He contributed many articles to medical journals—among them the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEPROSY*—the greatest number of which were concerned with leprosy.

Dr. Hopkins is survived by his widow, the former Marian Gayle Denegre, three sons, and three daughters.

The field of leprosy, which always claimed the major share of Dr. Hopkins' keen ability and professional insight, is deeply indebted to the patience and perseverance with which he carried on under discouraging conditions.

—FREDERICK A. JOHANSEN, M.D.