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EDITORIALS

Editorials are written by members of the Editorial Board and opinions expressed are those of the writers.

THE INTERNATIONAL LEPROSY ASSOCIATION

THE HAVANA CONGRESS

The last International Leprosy Congress was held at Cairo in March, 1938. On that occasion it was agreed that the next Congress should be held in Paris in 1943. Unfortunately the Second World War made that impossible.

Occasion was taken at the Second Pan-American Leprosy Conference held in Rio de Janeiro in October, 1946, to convene a meeting of the members of the Council attending the Conference, and later a meeting of all members of the Association present in Rio. Many others attended and some 40 new members joined. At these two meetings it was agreed to accept the kind invitation of the Cuban Government, extended through Dr. Oteiza, to hold an International Congress at Havana early in 1948. This has been agreed to by other members of the Council through correspondence.

The date for the International Leprosy Congress has been fixed for April 3rd, 1948. We understand that at that time hotel accommodation will be available, and the hot weather will not have begun. Visitors will thus be able to enjoy the beauty of Cuba without the discomfort of too great heat. The duration of the Congress is planned to be about the same as that at Cairo—eight to nine days—finishing on April 11th.

This will be the fifth international leprosy congress, and the second to be initiated by the International Leprosy Association. The former congresses were at Berlin in 1897, Bergen in 1909, Strasbourg in 1923 and Cairo in 1938.

Reference has been made above to the Pan-American Conference held in October, 1946, at Rio de Janeiro. This was the most important gathering of leprosy experts held since 1938, over one hundred delegates being present representing nineteen American countries. An account of the meetings and of the resolutions which were adopted appeared in the first number of the *Journal* for the current year.

Of these resolutions perhaps the most important was that on classification. What had till then been known as the "South American" classification was adopted by the Conference and was rechristened "Pan-American." It will remain for the International Congress to consider this matter and, if possible, come to an agreement which will be satisfactory from a world-wide point of view. Until such agreement is arrived at workers in different countries cannot have an accurate standard of comparison, and much of what is written about leprosy will continue to cause confusion.

Another important matter that will come up before the Havana Congress is the value of the sulfone drugs in the treatment of leprosy. At the Rio Conference the general tone was one of hopefulness, but there was a feeling that the time had not yet come to assess fully the healing power of these new drugs. At the Havana Congress we should have a broader basis (as regards both time and the number of experiments) on which to form an accurate judgment.

Other important subjects that will be discussed are epidemiology, prophylaxis, and pathology. We hope, too, that workers in welfare will be represented; this is a subject in which much advance has been made in Brazil, and one which requires more consideration in many countries.

The calling of an international congress so soon after the recent war is an act of faith. Representatives from the American countries can easily reach Cuba. But it is a different matter for those from the Eastern Hemisphere, and especially those from countries that were devastated by war, many of which have not yet had time to re-develop settled governments. Yet some of these countries are the most leprosy-ridden in the world and without their delegates the Congress would not be truly representative.

At the Cairo Congress no fewer than 107 persons came from abroad. Sixty-five, not including the Egyptian members, were ac-

credited as representatives of 39 foreign governments. The group as a whole represented 49 separate countries.

Definite progress has been made during the last ten years in our knowledge of leprosy and in measures for its treatment and control, and it is to be hoped that, in spite of difficulties, the Congress at Havana will be in no whit less representative or less profitable than its predecessors.

—E. MUIR

INTERNATIONAL LEPROSY ASSOCIATION

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General Secretary-Treasurer
167 Victoria St., London, S.W.1, England

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