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EDITORIALS

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THE CENTENARY YEAR

It is now one hundred years since the publication of the first outstanding treatise on leprosy, that of Danielssen and Boeck. The present year, though not expected to produce any comparable landmark in any sense, will at least be an especially notable one because of the International Leprosy Congress to be held in Havana and the matters to be considered there.

That meeting—which will probably be in session, if not actually adjourned, before this issue of *THE JOURNAL* will appear—would be noteworthy, if for no other reason, because it is the first one of world-wide scope to be held in the Western Hemisphere. That it is to be held there is appropriate and proper, for in the past decade or two there has been much progress in leprosy work in that region as a whole, whereas in the Old World there has been on the whole an undeniable, if unavoidable, retrogression. Any such shift necessarily involves new leadership—and corresponding responsibilities which have to be faced soberly, with enthusiasm tempered by conservatism.

The most important subject to be considered at the Havana meeting, it may be ventured, will be the results of sulfone therapy. Drugs of this class, first applied to leprosy in the United States, have now been used in certain other countries long enough to permit arriving at a definite, if not well-controlled, evaluation of at least their earlier effects as compared with those of the chaulmoogra preparations. Never before has

any type of antileprosy medicament received such unanimous acclaim as is being given the sulfones. Chaulmoogra, though not wholly abandoned and still used even in certain places where the sulfones are available, would seem to be steadily and rapidly losing place.

There would seem, however, to be a possibility that the expectations for the sulfones, or at least those now in use, have become greater than may prove justified by their ultimate effects as regards cure. To produce more or less marked amelioration in a large proportion of patients treated, does not necessarily signify that a comparably high proportion of such patients will go on to the stage of "clinical" or "social" cure. From more than one center have come indications that beyond a certain point, varying in individual cases, improvement tends to slow down and eventually to cease; and we have heard of cases treated continuously for several years without becoming negative bacteriologically.

Be that as it may, it seems beyond dispute that there is still need of some medicament, or some method of treatment, more rapidly acting and of greater ultimate effect than any now employed. The search for new drugs will of course continue, and there have been suggestions of superiority in a certain new sulfone over those which have now become familiar. Another approach to the problem which as yet has been little explored is that of combining drugs for the effect of "synergism" or "potentiation." It appears that a few limited experiments of that sort are actually under way, as in the combined use of two sulfones—as two sulfonamides in combination have sometimes been used—or the use of a sulfone together with a substance of another type. It may not be unreasonable to hope that chaulmoogra products so used may prove more beneficial than when used alone.

Another subject upon which much attention will be focused at Havana is that of classification. The proponents of the three-type South American scheme will doubtless endeavor to secure its adoption as the official, "international" one in place of the classical two-type scheme which, with variations and modifications, has been employed since the days of Danielssen and Boeck—and which not a few workers still hold to be fundamentally correct in principle. This matter is highly controversial, as evidenced by various articles which have appeared in *THE JOURNAL* and elsewhere in recent months. Whatever action may be taken at Havana, it seems doubtful that a scheme essentially satisfactory to the representatives of the different schools

of thought on the subject can be evolved at this time. There has not been sufficient time and opportunity for a fair trial and evaluation of the South American scheme in other parts of the world; and it cannot be said that one important feature of its criteria, namely the immunological factor, is fully known to anyone. It would seem to be the part of wisdom and conservatism to postpone making any radical changes until the whole matter is better understood.

For the International Leprosy Association as such, the present year will be an important and perhaps a crucial one. When it was organized—at the Leonard Wood Memorial Round-Table Conference, held in Manila in 1931—it was expected that the membership would in time include a large proportion of persons actively concerned with leprosy and its problems. Before the recent war the enrollment was never as large as had been hoped for, and to maintain the official organ, *THE JOURNAL*, the Memorial contributed each year an average of about 65 per cent of the direct cost of publication. During the war the Association as such was inactive, the Memorial meeting all the expenses of *THE JOURNAL* as it was published. During 1947 the membership list did not reach the prewar level; and, the cost of publication having increased along with everything else, the Memorial is now compelled to allot a much larger subsidy than before. There is a question whether a sufficient proportion of leprosy workers realize fully the importance of contributing to the support of the Association and this periodical.

Recently there has arisen another matter which calls for consideration of the extent to which leprosy workers are supporting the Association. It is possible that the Association, if it were sufficiently large and representative, might in some way become affiliated with the World Health Organization to serve as a consultant body. To attain any such status it should be fully representative of the leprosy world.

From the point of view of the Editor of *THE JOURNAL* the present year offers, at the time of writing, to be one of serious difficulties. Dr. James A. Doull, who served in that capacity from 1942 through 1947, summarized in the last issue the really noteworthy accomplishments of that most difficult period. For them, indeed for the fact that the periodical was kept alive at all, much credit is due him and all others concerned. If it is continued in the future on the basis that is desired—that is, if

it is to serve as a respectable and comprehensive source of information in our field—it must receive active cooperation from many men throughout the world.

At the moment there is a decided shortage of suitable original articles. It may be that under present conditions there is in total less productive work than before the war. On the other hand, it is beyond doubt that much material which ordinarily would be submitted is being reserved for presentation at the Havana Congress; and these reports will of course appear in the Transactions which, it is understood, are to be published as a separate volume. The present situation is presumably temporary, but its effects will very likely be evident in our next few issues.

Another matter of some concern is the maintaining of the abstract section on an adequate basis. It has always been desired that that section should, so far as possible, afford information on all leprosy articles appearing in other periodicals, wherever they may be published. That end cannot be attained without the interested, conscientious direct cooperation of a complement of Contributing Editors representing all countries where leprosy work is being carried on. That department must be rehabilitated. It is hoped that this problem, as well as others of concern to the Association, may be successfully resolved during the Havana Congress.

—H. W. WADE.