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EDITORIALS

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

CLASSIFICATION AT HAVANA

The Fifth International Leprosy Congress—the “Havana Congress”—adopted definitely a scheme of classification of leprosy with the intention that, hereafter, it should be the official “international” one for use in leprosy institutions and by workers throughout the world. The formula adopted is, fundamentally, the South American one, which has evolved in Brazil since the time of the Cairo Congress a decade ago. In our last issue it was pointed out editorially that only the first section of the report submitted by the Classification Committee to the final plenary session of the Congress was accepted, and it was stated that the matter would be discussed at this time from a different point of view. This is now done, with approval in principle by the chairman of the committee and certain of its members who were consulted after the Congress. It is not done for the purpose of “telling tales out of school,” but in order that those who were not present at the Congress—and, indeed, many who were there—may understand what the material adopted was originally supposed to represent and why it has certain obvious deficiencies.

In the year or so before the Congress convened the moot question of classification had been fairly conspicuous in the literature. The proponents of the South American scheme had had their say, sometimes with minutae and often with divergencies which were somewhat confusing to others. The more recent articles were chiefly by workers who still held for the

classical basis of the grouping of cases, the definitive formulation of which was first attempted by the Leonard Wood Memorial Round-Table Conference in Manila in 1931, and which on the basis of further understanding of the disease—its tuberculoid form having finally been given due recognition—was modified and amplified by the International Congress held in Cairo in 1938. The opponents of that formula held it to be unscientific and outmoded, while those of the new one tended to regard that as ultra-scientific, impracticable under many conditions, and embodying anomalies. None of the proponents of the classical division, far less coherent and evangelistic than the others, believed the Cairo formula to be beyond the need of improvement, and the proposals offered to that end were various; but in the main they held its principles to be valid.

Members of the Congress who were concerned with the classification problem, whatever their views, assembled with full realization of the deplorable state of affairs and the urgent need of arriving at a basis and formula of classification which could be accepted and applied everywhere. Some, undoubtedly, approached the occasion with enthusiastic anticipation that the reform which they advocated would come to pass; others found no pleasure in the prospect, for the divergences of opinions and points of view were so great that there seemed little hope for any real meeting of minds or of arriving at an effective, workable compromise.

The Classification Committee as it was finally composed (see footnote, p. 201, preceding issue) met in an atmosphere such as might be expected. The chairman, Dr. Vicente Pardo Castelló, faced a most difficult task and handled it with admirable skill and aplomb. At the outset each member was permitted to expound his personal views without stint or limit, the chairman from time to time interrupting to give succinct translations of the arguments (from Spanish to English, and vice versa, French being dealt with occasionally). These presentations, which took up two or three sessions, may be grouped without prejudice as in general for and against the South American classification, with diversities in both groups but much greater differences among the "antis" than the "pros."

From the outset it was obvious that, if any approach to a general agreement was to be reached, both sides would have to make concessions. That it would be possible to arrive at a compromise which would be wholly acceptable to workers of the different persuasions seemed extremely doubtful, but it was

regarded as possible at least to reach a basis for further progress toward ultimate unification. Each group, however, would first have to know precisely what the other one would propose. The following three-fold proposal was therefore offered, and approved: (1) That the "South American" group should submit a single, concrete formula; (2) that the Committee then attempt to arrive at one to be tried out by all workers (in parallel with their own if desired) until the next Congress; and (3) that action toward establishing a new official classification be deferred until that time.

The Committee was thereupon divided into two subcommittees, both of which worked with the principle of compromise in mind. One of them, for example, recognized that replacement of the old type name "neural" by "tuberculoid" was inevitable. Believing, however, that the classical maculoanesthetic form should not be regarded as "incharacteristic" or "indeterminate," it worked out a formula by which such cases would be included in the tuberculoid type, though the lesions do not have the familiar morphology which that term brings to mind. The other group accepted the view that the heterogenous lot of cases previously called "incharacteristic" should not be regarded as a *type*, on a par with the "polar" ones, but rather as a subordinate group; and they also changed the designating term to "indeterminate." They agreed that the "maculoneural" cases—at least those with positive immunological characteristics—should be transferred from that group to the tuberculoid type.

The result was that when the Committee reconvened the two sections had come surprisingly close to a common formula. Subsequently, by majority action—not without more or less vigorous dissent by a minority of individual members—it arrived at the report which was submitted to the plenary session. That document, however, had a major and most unfortunate defect. In the last-minute rush of preparing it the drafting *group*—and the writer was one of them—neglected to include a statement of the conditions under which the agreement had been reached, namely, that the new scheme was not intended to be a definitive one to become "official" at once, but was a tentative one to be studied and employed comparatively until the next Congress, at which time final action should be undertaken. In consequence, the plenary session was not aware of this intention, and treated the report as if it were intended to be final and definitive.

The results are now history. The action of the Congress,

votation being individual and not by countries or delegations, overwhelmingly adopted the first part of the report and rejected the rest. Therefore, to replace the hitherto official Cairo classification, we have one providing for two "polar" *types*, lepromatous and tuberculoid, and a third *group* to be called indeterminate," each one defined on broad lines but without any indication of subclasses within those divisions. Lacking the secondary and detailed definitions which had been prepared, those of the main ones are inadequate. Regarding clinical features that of the lepromatous type speaks only of "characteristic clinical manifestations." The same phrase appears in the definition of tuberculoid; and presumably that name will continue to be applied only to cases of distinctive morphology so designated in the past. All cases with "simple macular" lesions consequently fall into the "indeterminate" group, no matter how well-determined and stable the condition or whatever the immunological characteristics. How one should designate the "simple neural" case, with only peripheral neural changes, does not appear.

What the result of this situation will be remains to be seen. It may be anticipated that newcomers to leprosy work will find difficulty in classifying cases on the basis of the now-official formula. Whether or not experienced workers who do not already employ the South American classification will dutifully attempt to employ this one is uncertain. It seems clear, however, that the next Congress will have on its hands a problem very like the one which the recent one faced but did not resolve any too satisfactorily.

—H. W. WADE.

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