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EDITORIALS

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REPORT ON THE MADRID CONGRESS

The Sixth International Congress on Leprology—that name adopted by the local Organizing Committee in place of the previous one—was held in Madrid from October 3rd to 11th, 1953. Although for a time there had been some concern whether the attendance would be large, it proved to be by far the largest such meeting yet held. Nor could more be desired for the setting, in one of the most interesting and attractive cities of Europe and in the fine new Escuela de Estomatologia in the rebuilt University City area, or with respect to the cordiality and hospitality of the hosts of the Congress. The weather was salubrious; if at times it was a bit chilly for visitors from the tropics, it was also stimulating.

The Organizing Committee had carried through successfully a huge task in the preparations for the affair, the complexities of which can hardly be appreciated by anyone who has not participated in such an undertaking. The main burden had necessarily fallen upon Dr. Felix Contreras, the general secretary of that group, although of course others cooperated actively; and mention should also be made of Mr. Alvarado, who served efficiently as business manager in immediate charge of the administration- and registration-office activities.

Cooperation with the officials of the International Leprosy Association, which collaborated in the sponsorship of the Congress and as previously had the responsibility of setting up the

scientific side of the meeting, was most cordial and effective. The general secretary, Dr. E. Muir, had been able to visit Madrid twice during the preparatory period, and the present writer had followed closely after his second visit late in 1952. During those visits, and later by correspondence, understandings had been reached on many things which tended to smooth collaboration at the time of the meeting.

Both groups shared equally in the organization for the operation of the Congress itself—the officers, the Executive Committee, and the General Council, as will be seen from the reports elsewhere in this issue. The nature of the questions that arose and the problems that had to be solved are indicated in the minutes of the various meetings of those bodies. These are given in more detail than heretofore, for what immediate interest they may have and in order that the record may be available to the organizers of future congresses.

We do not have the precise figures of the total registration but, including the “adherent” registrants—i.e., those accompanying regular members—the total was in the neighborhood of 500. The list of regular members supplied by the registration office (see p. 489) totals 337 names. Some of them, however, are of persons who did not get to Madrid, but because they had sent in their registration fees the local authorities ruled that they should be regarded as members. To some extent this ruling affects also the number of countries and territories listed as represented, which as given (see p. 497) totals 51. The actual number of members present was undoubtedly somewhat over 300, which compares with 226 for the Havana congress and 167 for the one held in Cairo. The number of local registrants was, as usual, proportionately very large; curiously, the percentage (35.8) was practically the same as at the previous congresses.

The most immediate and pressing problem, when it came to preparing the scientific program, was the unprecedentedly large number of titles that had been submitted, even though few prospective members had gone beyond the specified limit of two. The first book of abstracts, comprising those received by the specified deadline of July 15th, contained 156 items (20 without abstracts); a supplementary booklet of abstracts received later, up to September 15th, contained 49 more items (3 without abstracts); and others sent or brought in afterward had raised the total to 227 by September 30th.

Discounting those sent in by persons who were unable to

come, there were far too many to be read in the sessions that could be scheduled in the one auditorium, and it was agreed—as it had been at Havana—that it would be impracticable to schedule simultaneous sessions in a room or rooms not equipped for interpretation. It was decided, with reluctance, that those members who, in accord with the announced regulations, had submitted two papers could read only one of them; and, since the selection would have to be made by them and few could be seen personally, there resulted considerable confusion in the daily programs put out. Because of this situation several of the Spanish members voluntarily offered to have their papers read by title to provide more time for foreign delegates. These circumstances explain why so many of the items in the last section of this issue, especially those by Spanish authors, are indicated as having been presented in that way.

Even with these provisions the working sessions originally provided for would not suffice. The printed program listed seven sessions, but one of them had to be cancelled because of conflict with one of the social events.¹ It was therefore decided to schedule two other afternoon meetings, making a total of eight sessions, although there was conflict on those days with other events of the program.

Some of the sessions were very poorly attended. This was notably true of those held on Wednesday when, without previous notice or announcement in the program, an organization of the Iberian and Latin-American dermatologists held an all-day meeting in another part of the city—asking that the Congress program be arranged so that they could be present when a certain subject of special interest to them would be dealt with. That same afternoon was the scheduled visit to the Chapinería preventorium, which was attended by a large crowd. On Friday afternoon, again, the luncheon party offered by the Compañía Nacional de la Penicilina y Antibióticos at their factory at Aranjuez, outside of the city, drew a large contingent.

Another important distraction was the work of the technical committees, which could meet only by withdrawal from other functions. For this reason, first and last, many of the

¹ A feature of life in Spain that is always interesting to most foreign visitors is the late luncheon and dinner hours, which results in corresponding late hours for other afternoon and evening functions. The afternoon working sessions were all scheduled to start at 4 p.m., and since the social function referred to was to start at 5 p.m. in another part of the city the working session originally scheduled for that afternoon could not be held.

more experienced leprosy workers were not at the sessions to hear and discuss the papers presented. It is therefore a question how much those papers could have contributed to the conclusions of the committees. It will be seen, for one thing, that the papers on classification were not read until Saturday, whereas the report of the committee dealing with that subject was turned in on Friday. By an unfortunate delay in the mail, the report of the WHO Expert Committee could not be put into the hands of the committee members until the latter part of the week.

At this point mention should be made of a factor that lessened the value of the scientific sessions to many of the listeners. This has to do with the simultaneous translations. The interpreters were handicapped in that they were located behind the scenes and could not see what was going on, and not being medical people they were unfamiliar with many of the terms used. They struggled valiantly, but they were often stymied because of the speed at which many of the papers were read. The repeated announcement that, for actual presentation, papers which could not be read deliberately in ten minutes should be cut to that length was generally ignored. The result was that frequently the members of the audience gave up attempting to understand papers in languages with which they were not familiar.

Thursday was devoted to a visit to the Trillo national leprosarium, a fine, relatively new institution located some 100 kilometers northeast of Madrid, on a large tract of land partly encircled by the upper reaches of the Tagus River, which reaches the sea at Lisbon. The crowd that—eventually—got there was so large that very few could benefit from the scheduled clinical demonstrations. It is safe to say that in few other such institutions in the world, even with catering from a neighboring city (in this instance Guadalajara), could a gathering of some 550 people be served so sumptuous a luncheon as was enjoyed at Trillo.

Space does not permit giving an account of the various purely social events which are listed on the program. Suffice it to say that they were sumptuous and most enjoyable, even though there were those who felt that, in total, they tended to distract a bit from the serious work of the Congress.

Nor can much be said here about the papers read and the conclusions adopted in the reports of the technical committees. Mention will be made, however, of certain outstanding points.

Regarding classification, the new "borderline" (or, alternatively, "dimorphous") group was adopted. Another noteworthy feature of that report is that certain cases with simple flat macules—cases commonly called "maculo-anesthetic," not properly to be regarded as "indeterminate"—were placed in the tuberculoid type. (Schemes of classification had been presented by the societies of leprologists in India and Japan, but the special features of neither were adopted.)

Among the many papers on treatment, the largest single group dealt with the sulfones, and several others with thiosemicarbazone and isoniazid. The trend of these reports is fairly well reflected in that of the committee. Chaulmoogra is now almost completely out of the picture. The value of the sulfones was confirmed, with emphasis on the relatively inexpensive DDS, and also with recognition of their limitations. Regarding the question of resistance to those drugs, there is "no strong evidence for or against" it. Thiosemicarbazone was recommended only as a useful adjuvant treatment, for patients intolerant of or unresponsive to the sulfones. About isoniazid, the consensus is that it has little beneficial action. As for streptomycin, "no striking results have been recorded." The adrenocortical hormones have marked effects in acute reactional conditions, but some workers have recorded unfavorable after-effects although others have not.

In the field of immunology, several of the numerous papers presented dealt with one phase or another of the lepromin reaction, and more with the effects of BCG vaccination. We can only refer to the report of the committee which dealt with that subject.

Many of the papers in the general field of epidemiology and control were of local or limited scope. The committee's report lays stress with respect to control on the influence of the new medicaments, and on the promising effects of BCG vaccination. There was—as will be seen elsewhere—a strong but minority feeling that the latter was accorded a more important place than had as yet been proved for it, and that the emphasis should have been upon further experimentation and observation.

The report of the Committee on Social Aspects first of all maintained the position adopted at Havana that the word "leper" should be avoided but that "leprosy" is the proper scientific name for the disease. The view was held that an international gathering could not specify the measures that

should be taken for the welfare of patients, because the needs and possibilities vary so greatly in different countries.

It is impossible to summarize the very varied presentations under the general heading of "various topics." Interest was especially centered, because of the publicity that had been given them, on two reports on bacteriology. One dealt with a mycobacterium, isolated from a leprosy lesion but not claimed to be the causative agent of the disease, which certain other workers had used in leprosy patients to induce lepromin positivity and for treatment. The other claimed success in the cultivation of the leprosy bacillus through a stage consisting of a large, motile, nonacid-fast form.

The last day scheduled for the Congress had been set aside for the usual general meeting of the International Leprosy Association, the minutes of which also appear in this issue. During the Congress week 93 persons had registered as members of the Association, all but 18 of them new members. After that meeting Dr. Giaquinto convened a private one of the several members of the WHO Expert Panel who were present. That afternoon there was supposed to be an excursion to the Fontilles leprosarium in Alicante, on the east coast, but so few members registered for it that it was called off, and very few ever got there. More people, it is understood, took advantage of the opportunity offered by Antibióticos Schenley, S.A., to visit their plant at León City in the north.

One feature of the Congress arrangements not mentioned elsewhere was the interesting scientific exhibit, housed in a part of a very long room on the third floor of the building—the other part used on two occasions for noontime social events, reception-cocktail parties of a sort ("*copa de vino español*"). There was also a commercial exhibit on the semi-basement floor. A helpful feature was the information booths on the second-floor mezzanine, staffed by interpreters conversant with several languages.

After any such meeting the question naturally arises whether it was all worth while. Opinions which we have heard expressed were, with perhaps one exception, decidedly favorable. From the point of view of those responsible for the operation, it was not wholly satisfactory. Numerous criticisms of one feature or another of the scientific side of the meeting have been offered—valid criticisms, to be taken into account in later meetings, hence some of the things said in this report. After all, however, there is always the question of

which is more important, the scientific programs or the personal contacts, and many hold for the latter. As recently stated,² "The personal exchange of ideas and the collaboration with foreign scientists are essential sources of information and ideas which cannot be replaced by written correspondence or the study of foreign publications. . . ."

Acknowledgments.—Special mention should be made of certain people who assisted greatly in the work of the representatives of the International Leprosy Association. Miss Helen M. Wallich, of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association office in London, was required, in addition to the work of the secretary of the I.L.A., to do a great deal on the program and other things, even to cutting all of the multigraph stencils used throughout the Congress. Dr. Miguel Ferrer, a young, Manila-born and -trained surgeon who had been engaged to assist the group, actually played the part of a co-worker without whose cooperation it is doubtful that the daily programs could have been prepared regularly. He and one of the interpreters, Miss Daisy Belke, stayed on voluntarily for nearly two weeks after the Congress was over to help assemble much of the material which appears in this issue. To Dr. Felix Contreras and others in authority appreciation is due for the facilities enjoyed during that after-period.

—H. W. WADE

² Council of the American Physical Society, November 1952, cited in *Science* **118** (1953) 311.