

James Ross Innes

1903 - 1968

With the passing of Dr. J. Ross Innes, M.D. (Edinburgh), D.T.M. (Liverpool), on 2 May 1968, at the age of 65, the International Leprosy Association has lost a devoted colleague whose interest reaches back to the year of its founding and whose sage counsel and quiet efficiency were for many years placed freely at its disposal. He was enrolled a member in 1931, and succeeded Dr. Ernest Muir as Secretary-Treasurer in 1958, holding this office until the end of 1965. He was responsible for much of the preliminary planning for the International Leprosy Congresses of Tokyo (1958) and Rio de Janeiro (1963) and did much work behind the scenes for the 1968 Congress in London, making innumerable contacts and serving as a member of the Organizing Committee.

James Ross Innes first became interested in leprosy as far back as 1928—and forty years is no mean spell, by any standards. It happened that, on his first sea voyage to India—long before the days of ultra-rapid jet travel—one of his traveling companions was Dr. Ernest Muir, who had already dedicated both head and heart to the fight against leprosy. It is little wonder that the young medical missionary about to take charge of the Wadia Hospital of the Church of Scotland Mission, Poona, and the Khondwa Leper Asylum, should have been fired with the desire to do something for the unfortunate victims of the little-understood disease of leprosy.

Dr. Ross Innes was well fitted for the tasks he was being prepared for. He came from Brisbane, Australia, where he received his early education at the Brisbane Grammar School. He pursued medical studies in Edinburgh University and Medical School, Scotland, where he graduated M.B., Ch.B. with honors in 1927.

After a fruitful term of service in India, he returned to Britain and in 1934 took the Tropical Medicine course at the Liverpool



School of Tropical Medicine. At the examination terminating the course, he was awarded the Milne Medal as the most distinguished student. In the same year, he submitted a thesis on leprosy for the M.D. of Edinburgh University. He was awarded the degree, with commendation, setting the standard of careful and painstaking observation and precise writing that characterized his later work.

At the request of the Colonial Office, Ross Innes carried out a survey of leprosy in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Being the man he was, he included in his report observations on other diseases besides leprosy and other conditions outside his immediate purview. This report later proved extremely useful to the military authorities in the Far Eastern operations in World War II.

While plans were afoot to utilize in East

Africa Ross Innes' experience in leprosy survey work, he returned to India as a short contract Medical Officer to the Cawnpore Mills Medical Committee. In this capacity he was responsible for the health and medical treatment of all the Europeans and Anglo-Indians in their employ. His "short contact" was extended to eight years because of the war, his work being regarded as essential to the war effort. He took a great interest in the St. John Ambulance Brigade, and also acted as Civil Surgeon of Cawnpore.

On his return to Britain in 1947, he was again approached by the Colonial Office regarding leprosy work in East Africa, and was appointed leprologist under the East Africa High Commission. It was here that his clinical experience and capacity for hard work and clear analysis were put to full use in the interest of leprosy. His reports, as wide-ranging as they were clear, became models, and many of his recommendations were acted upon by the governments concerned. He conducted surveys in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, and was called in to advise upon leprosy in Nyasaland, the Rhodesias and Zanzibar. His crowning achievement in Africa was to set up the Leprosy Research Centre at Alupe in Kenya, later to be called after Dr. John Lowe, mainly with funds from the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association. His careful work in epidemiology and the early trials of thiambutosine were embodied in published articles.

Retiring in 1957, he was appointed Medical Secretary of The British Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA), now known as LE-PRA, and Editor of *Leprosy Review*. Many members of the International Leprosy Association got to know him personally during these days, and came to appreciate his worth. He made frequent journeys to Africa, India, and the Far East, advising on leprosy problems and stimulating interest in the disease in medical and political circles. As a member of the Association, he had attended the Congresses in Havana (1948) and Madrid (1953), and as Secretary-Treasurer he played a leading part in the Tokyo (1958) and Rio de Janeiro (1963) Congresses. He was an Honorary

Member of the Indian Association of Leprologists. He was elected a life member of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in 1934.

He guided the medical policies of LE-PRA, and was largely responsible for the detailed implementation of the Medical Committee's proposals for the Leprosy Control and Eradication Project in Malawi.

As Editor of *Leprosy Review*, Ross Innes achieved a reputation for his expedition in getting accepted articles into print. He encouraged young and budding authors, and eased their pathway by his helpful advice and painstaking editing of their manuscripts. His flair for words had ample scope in the pages of the *Review*. He was himself quite a linguist. He had a working knowledge of a score of languages: he learned Russian so that he could follow the work of our colleagues engaged in leprosy research in the U.S.S.R.; he learned Spanish in order to write and present a paper on leprosy in the language. A short time ago, he set himself to learn Gaelic, pursuing these studies out of sheer philologic interest.

Much more might be said about Ross Innes' capacity as an administrator and editor. More could be said—and with reason—about his innate kindness and sympathy. His understanding patience and unhurried poise made him a "good physician" for the individual leprosy sufferer. His pleasant "burr," which seemed to be a happy blending of Australian and Scots, commended him to patients and colleagues alike.

No reference to Ross Innes would be complete without reference to his Christian faith, as sturdy as it was unobtrusive. He was a layman ordained as an elder of the Church of Scotland in 1928 before going to India. From the first, he took an active part in presbytery work; he represented the Church on many occasions, and attended General Assemblies. He was actively concerned in the formation of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and will long be remembered in Nairobi and elsewhere. He was a true Christian, who not only "preached," but also "practiced" his profession.

On retiring from the medical secretaryship of LEPROA in early 1966, he retained his post of Editor of *Leprosy Review*, and in fact had just seen the second issue of the 1968 volume off the press when he died.

Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to his widow, whom many members of the Association know as a most efficient and gracious lady, and his two daughters. Mrs. Ross Innes willingly gave of her best in helping her husband both in the work of the Association and in the production of *Leprosy Review*.

A memorial service to Ross Innes was held on 15 May 1968, at St. Columba's (Church of Scotland) Church in London's West End, and attended by personal friends and by professional colleagues representative of his many interests. Warm and gracious tributes were paid to him for his outstanding contribution to the study of leprosy and for his sterling character.

He was a good man, a beloved physician and loyal worker in the cause of leprosy.

—S. G. BROWNE

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