

Leprosy Help Through Leprosy Research

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By way of introduction I wish to quote three things which have made a deep impression on me.

The first is a remark once made to me by Professor Freerksen, the Director of the Borstel Research Institute: "Our world lives on the results obtained by research; it lives on the perceptions made by science. There is no progress without science and our world depends on science for its further development."

The second impression was from Professor Jagadisan of Madras, who gave me two pictures on the occasion of my last visit to India, viz., one of Gandhi nursing a friend who was affected by leprosy, representing charity, and the other of Gandhi looking through a microscope, representing the modern way of leprosy research and treatment.

The third impression came from an occasion in a leprosarium in Africa when a nurse introduced me to a young man completely covered with lesions. He was a patient who had been discharged two years before as completely cured, and the nurse told me "We have many cases like him!"

I believe the conclusion to be drawn from these three occasions should be the following: Progress requires research. This is not only the feeling of the scientist and the research worker. Even the statesman who wishes to increase his country's capabilities must take the way through research. The two pictures of Gandhi make this quite clear. And, after all, we have been acquainted with the bacillus that causes the disease, *Mycobacterium leprae*, for nearly a hundred years, and we have had remedies for leprosy for several decades. Yet the patient who returns covered with leprosy lesions after having been "cured" two years previously is no individual case.

He is an indication of the fact that we know something about leprosy, maybe a great deal, but, nevertheless, are still powerless against it. Even the statistics, and the increasing number of leprosy patients, show the partial ineffectiveness of our efforts. Man never gives up, however, even in the face of problems which seem to be insoluble.

Thus, individuals, institutions, and missionaries have been acting against the superstition that leprosy is a punishment from the gods. Every year there is an increase in the number of persons trying to ease the distress of leprosy patients, and enable them to lead a more human life, using all means at present available. To such a degree as mankind has come to realize that we are all one big family, and the teachings of the great religions which call for fraternity and charity are accepted, to such a degree world-wide relief activity has come, in which countries and nations are involved, too, which are unaware of this disease as it exists commonly in Asia, Africa, or South America. Countries and nations are involved even where the disease no longer exists at all.

The German Leprosy Relief Association is an example of this awakening. Briefly, the history of this organization is as follows: It began when two young people, a journalist and a student, came across a leprosy center in Ethiopia run by a French physician. The misery of the patients and the achievements of the doctor, who covered the expenses of the center mainly from the income from his private consultation, made a deep impression on them. They took photographs and wrote reports. Publishing the photographs was not easy, as they were so disturbing. But they did get published, and then some first contributions were received. An organization was founded, initially just to support this doctor. Later the organization came to call itself the German Leprosy Relief Association, as requests for

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assistance were coming from all over the world, and the German people were becoming increasingly anxious to help.

During the twelve years of its existence, the German Leprosy Relief Association has sent out about a hundred young doctors, nurses, building craftsmen, agriculturalists, and teachers to work in leprosy centers for three or more years. Seventy million DM and millions' worth of support in kind—to a total value of about 20 million dollars—have been distributed to 280 leprosy centers in Africa, Asia, and South America. It was realized at an early date that a young organization such as this, could not carry out its task in complete isolation, and so, whenever possible, effort was made to work in co-operation with national organizations, governments, or individual institutions.

With this same aim, and in conjunction with other European friends, the German Leprosy Relief Association applied for the designation "European Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations," and this has become already an excellent means of co-operation, exchanging experiences and forming policy on leprosy eradication. There have been the same or similar efforts in all countries of the world, and there are endeavors to meet the inevitable distress of our fellow people with humanity, with mercy, and with charity.

To return to the points made at the beginning of this article: Whenever the scientist, the research worker or the physician could carry on no longer, or when the help they could give was only limited, social, charitable and humanitarian efficiency became active to change the need.

One cannot criticize all that has been done in the past for the assistance of leprosy patients. One cannot either, however, forget the patient who succumbs again to the disease two years after having been "cured." I believe that this picture has been a permanent spur for physicians, scientists, and research workers. The international leprosy congresses, the numerous publications in scientific journals, and the constant research work being carried on in laboratories, bear witness to this. Also scientists and physicians have never completely given up

their efforts in this direction. The efforts have been continued here and there. But, except for a few projects, research and leprosy relief work have failed to join forces for much too long a time. This is a problem of which it is very important to be aware, and which can and must be solved.

The colloquium held at the initiative of the Borstel Research Institute, the Hamburg University Dermatological Hospital, and the German Leprosy Relief Association, is a demonstration, an appeal, an indication of the readiness, and at the same time, a task to unite humanity and science—social work and research work—to this extent in care for leprosy patients in the future. For that purpose co-operation is necessary. Co-operation means co-ordination. To explain this term, and the task, a certain disposition and clarification are necessary.

We have to answer these questions:

1. What have we learned about leprosy up to now? Where are the gaps?
2. Which fields of research have priority? What action should we take before research produces no new solutions?
3. Since means available are limited, we have to ask, especially in the field of research, who, what laboratory and which institute can master which task in the best way?

Answering these questions will be a new way of fighting leprosy. The importance of research on leprosy will be appreciated more and more, and it will come to be regarded as a concrete method of leprosy relief. Research, science and doctrines of course need complete freedom. That applies to many countries. At the last International Haematological Congress in Munich, however, Professor Helmut Baitsch, the Rector of Ulm University, has propounded another theory. He said: "It is no longer of any consequence to produce knowledge, but rather to produce the kind of knowledge needed by our society to solve its problems—not only the short-term ones but also and especially the long-term ones."

For leprosy work we could find a compromise: No one is compelled to be engaged in leprosy problems. However, lep-

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rosy requires that we devote ourselves to it in freedom, knowing of the leprosy patient of today, of yesterday, and tomorrow, the disabled case, the burnt-out case, the reactive case, the young one with the first

signs of leprosy, and the child still healthy lying on its leprous mother's breast or back. These all need help—humanitarian help—and help which can be brought only through research.