

V. Insignia of the International Leprosy Association



Insignia of II International Leprosy Conference



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"When the ASSOCIATION was organized, it was planned that there should be devised an insignia to be used as the official seal. A year later no concrete suggestion in this connection had been heard. At the meeting of the General Council in London (1932), Dr. H. P. Lie of Bergen, Norway, exhibited the insignia that had been used by the Second International Leprosy Conference held in Bergen in 1909. This bore, in formal representation, St. George, the ancient patron of European leprosy victims, overcoming a dragon and having neither sectarian nor nationalistic significance. The suggestion of struggle and idealism in this medallion appealed to the members of the General Council present and, after discussion, it was voted to adopt it, with certain modifications, as the insignia of the ASSOCIATION. The essential features of it are regularly reproduced on the front cover of the JOURNAL."²

Saint George is the patron saint of England, Argon and Portugal. He is also regarded as a patron saint of those with leprosy in Europe, and by extension, in some other areas of the world where immigrants from Europe became the dominant population.

Very little historical fact is known about St. George. According to some accounts he was born at Lydda in Palestine and put to death at Nicomedia while other sources hold that he was martyred at Lydda in 303 A.D. Legend has it that he became a soldier, rose rapidly to high rank under the Roman emperor Diocletian, organized a Christian community at Urmi (Urumah), went to Britain

¹ Kindly provided by Dr. Lorentz M. Irgens. Institute of Hygiene and Social Medicine, University of Bergen.

² *Internat. J. Leprosy* 1 (1933) 98.

with an imperial expedition and was put to death (martyred) either because of his open profession of Christianity, or because he protested against the persecution of Christians by Diocletian—or perhaps both reasons, being related, were operative. His subsequent sainthood seems to have been the result of popular acclaim rather than official canonization, but in 494 A.D. he was included in the canon of Pope Gelasius among a list of names of those “whose names are justly revered among men, but whose acts are known only to God.”

St. George's association with the dragon, well-known since the “Golden Legend” by Jacobus de Voragina, seems to begin at the close of the 6th century and to have its root in Greek mythology. According to the story St. George killed the dragon to which the king's daughter was being sacrificed thus saving the virgin maiden. In the Greek account, Perseus slayed the sea monster, popularly often depicted as a dragon, that was threatening the virgin, Andromeda. This event took place at either Joppa or Arsuf, both places being near Lydda.

St. George was highly venerated by the Crusaders. The red cross of St. George (origin also of the symbol of the Red Cross Society) on a white background was worn as a badge by English soldiers well before it was incorporated into the design of the British Union Jack together with the cross of St. Andrew. It is possible that his popularity with the Crusaders was responsible for his coming to be regarded as the patron saint of those having leprosy since it is generally accepted that the greatest extension of leprosy into Europe was attendant on the Crusades.

As the patron saint of three European powers, as a Christian martyr, as a highly venerated symbol in the religious wars of the Crusades, and as a slayer of a dragon—an act that would be regarded as unthinkable in Far Eastern countries such as China and Japan where the dragon has been regarded quite otherwise than as a horrid monster—one wonders a little at his choice by the ILA founders as a symbol “having neither sectarian nor nationalistic significance.” The insignia is also remarkable in that it depicts the dragon being subdued by a spear or a lance while legend has it that St. George killed the dragon with his magic sword, Askelon. However, since there has been no protest during the forty years that the insignia has been official and has made regular appearances on the cover of this JOURNAL, perhaps the choice was at least satisfactory and, age having lent it venerability, perhaps it may now be regarded as well established by association.