

## Homage to Armauer Hansen<sup>1</sup>

It is most fitting that the International Leprosy Association should be invited to participate in this ceremony, and to be associated officially with the tributes paid to a great son of Norway, who now belongs to us all. It is also fitting that the Tenth International Leprosy Congress should be held in this city, for Armauer Hansen—by his leap of faith in attributing a causative role to the "small, staff-like bodies" he consistently found in Norwegian patients suffering from certain kinds of leprosy—has placed the whole world of science and of medicine in his debt.

In no spirit of fullsome adulation, therefore, but with sincerity and deep gratitude, I count it an honor and a privilege to link the International Leprosy Association with the warm tribute to Hansen we have just listened to from the Rector of Bergen University.<sup>2</sup> The Association (although not founded until the year 1931) is indeed in many respects the true successor and inheritor of the Hansen tradition—the happy combination of true science and social concern, of objective investigation and deep compassion.

We do homage before this bust to a modest benefactor of humanity, to a young scientist who not only saw things as he peered down his simple microscope, but who perceived the significance and the import of what he saw. He studied and he worked, not as a drudge, but as a visionary. He was both investigative laboratory worker and field epidemiologist—long before either term became recognized or fashionable. He submitted his findings in both areas to the cold light of critical appraisal. The first to admit his indebtedness to others, he nevertheless maintained an independent judgment, even against his father-in-law. He triumphed over a series of personal and domestic tragedies that would have broken

a man of less fine caliber. He persevered against opposition from friends and foes and family, upheld by the obstinate conviction that he could not deny what he knew to be true and right.

The International Leprosy Association has inherited this ideal of scientific detachment and scientific investigation, and is proud to look back upon those earlier International Leprosy Congresses, particularly that held in Bergen, 16-20 August, 1909, under the presidency of Hansen himself. There he was, acclaimed by his peers and his followers, the man who had set the biological imprimatur on the clinical work of his father-in-law, Danielssen. But the Association has also inherited the social concern, the humanitarian urge of Hansen. These two streams—the scientific and the social—oftentimes flowing parallel, sometimes converging, frequently commingling—are the distinctive feature of our Association. In paying tribute to Hansen the scientific investigator, we also do homage to Hansen the social benefactor, the man who talked with leprosy patients and painstakingly wrote down their family history and particulars of their environmental background. Professor Morten Harboe has brilliantly described this aspect of Hansen's work. If leprosy were indeed caused by those "little staff-like bodies," then leprosy should be controllable by the application of principles which by then were becoming known.

This partnership of science and compassion, demonstrated by Hansen, happened to be exemplified about a hundred years ago by the coincidental occurrence of two events. "The Mission to Lepers in India" came into being because a nonmedical, a teacher, saw the ravages of leprosy in the Punjab and determined to do something about it. The successor of this Mission—now The Leprosy Mission—has been the pioneer and the catalyst for numerous voluntary agencies the world over.

About one hundred years ago also, in far-off Molokai, a Belgian priest named Damien caught leprosy. His heroic story moved not only the Western world of social concern, but also the scientific world that

<sup>1</sup>Speech by Dr. S. G. Browne, Secretary-Treasurer, ILA, before he laid, on behalf of the Association, a wreath at the bust of Armauer Hansen, 13 August 1973.

<sup>2</sup>The speech by the rector of the University of Bergen, Professor A. J. Henrichsen, not being available at press time is planned as an editorial for Vol. 42, No. 2.

had long held that leprosy was inherited and not acquired. And here is a Belgian citizen, with an unblemished ancestry as regards leprosy, catching the disease and eventually succumbing to it.

The voluntary agencies thus early brought the essential component of compassion to the fashionable scientific investigations stimulated by Hansen—he himself exemplifying the double role.

Thereafter, of course, the same intermingling becomes increasingly evident. In the English-speaking world, the British Leprosy Relief Association (founded nearly 50 years ago) maintained the double ideal and inspired its filials and successors to do likewise. And in other countries, more recent demonstrations of massive social concern have been seen: ELEP, the Federation of European Leprosy Associations, working together for the good of lep-

rosy sufferers, devotes a commendably large proportion of its gathered funds to the furtherance of research into leprosy, recognizing that without more knowledge, the antileprosy campaign in the world may well falter and fail. Socially orientated, but scientifically motivated, such voluntary organizations—with governments and the World Health Organization—are playing a significant role in the continuing fight against a specific microorganism, a relentlessly progressive disease and a social evil.

Armauer Hansen calls us today—to reach out from the laboratory to the homes and villages where men and women, boys and girls, suffer from this scourge; to look back from the field to the laboratory, seeking scientific help and objective truth; and to look up for the inspiration that will sustain us in the arduous and demanding days ahead.