

✓ OBITUARY

Masataka Murata, M. D.
1884-1974

Dr. Masataka Murata passed away on December 20, 1974 at Fujisawa-shi, Kanagawa prefecture, Japan at the age of ninety. He, together with Dr. Kensuke Mitsuda, was a founder of the Japanese Leprosy Association.

Dr. Murata was born in 1884, grew up in Kohchi prefecture and graduated from the Law School of Chuhoh University in Tokyo in 1903. However, the leprosy affliction in one of his acquaintances (lady) shocked him and he determined to devote himself to leprosy work for the rest of his life. He visited Dr. Kensuke Mitsuda and was instructed to first graduate from Tokyo Foreign Language School (four year course) in order to learn German; secondly to attend the Daiichi Koh-tohgakko (corresponds to present day pre-medical college); and finally to attend the Tokyo University School of Medicine. During his medical school career, he resisted the professors who ordered him to write his compositions in German and insisted on writing in Japanese. Eventually his viewpoint was accepted. Soon after he graduated from medical school in 1917, he began his study of immunology and had additional training at the Institute of Infectious Disease in Tokyo. He often attended the Tama-Zenshoen Leprosarium to obtain leprosy patient sera for his serology studies. In 1926 he was promoted to be the director of Toshima Leprosarium at Nishinari-ku, Osaka, on the recommendation of Dr. Mitsuda.

When Dr. Murata arrived at the leprosarium it was badly managed. The patients there were ill-mannered, gambled and often escaped from the institution regardless of the guards who ill-treated the patients and who consisted mainly of retired police from

the Osaka city police department. Dr. Murata educated both staff and patients strictly but humanly and improved the medical affairs by hiring newly educated doctors and replacing the old administrative staff. He raised the basic allowance for patients' meals by 70% and let the patients themselves come to the conclusion not to escape and gave them increased autonomy. Under his directorship the leprosarium expanded both in facilities and in the total number of patients.

In 1928, he and Dr. Mitsuda founded the Japanese Leprosy Association. *LA LEPRO* (Esperanto), the official journal of this organization, was named by him.

He attributed much value to Esperanto as the international language as was shown by his Esperanto-written articles and he encouraged the staff to study it.

He had the highest regard for one of the administrative staff who was excellent in Esperanto but was suspected of being a communist. This and the too liberal ways of Dr. Murata's administration attracted the attention of the city police department, which investigated the leprosarium and arrested four staff members while Dr. Murata was absent. This investigation escalated into a struggle inside the hospital between communist sympathizers and the others, and Dr. Murata had no other choice than to discharge 20 communist patients from the leprosarium. Since he also rejected the order by the police department to rehospitalize the patients, he was summoned and interrogated for a whole day and through the following morning but was then released through the efforts of three professors from Osaka University Medical School. Normalizing the situation in two months, he thereafter resigned his directorship but comforted the patients who moved to retain him by installing Dr. Harada as his successor. Dr. Harada promised to retain Dr. Murata's way of management for the patients.

After his resignation, Dr. Murata lived

and continued his leprosy studies in his home at Fujisawa, a wealthy suburb, reserving the second story as his laboratory. He continued to be quite active in research until recently, as is indicated by his continuing publications. Dr. Murata's major research work was the development of Murata's reaction (precipitin test in syphilis), published in Japan in 1922. He modified his method in 1955 by the utilization of cardiolipin and lecithin instead of beef heart extract. This method was introduced to the world in the League of Nations "Report of the Second Laboratory Conference on the Serodiagnosis

of Syphilis" held in Copenhagen in 1928.

One of his research papers on leprosy serum was written in Esperanto and appeared in *LA LEPRO* 1 (1930) 107-141. In this paper he noted that although he could reduce the nonspecific reaction by increasing the ratio of beef heart extract to that of cholesterol, he could not nullify it since it is a nonspecific reaction. His observation was accurate and is compatible with the modern viewpoint.—(*Translated and adapted from LA LEPRO* 44 [1975] 46-47, by Eiichi Matsuo and O. K. Skinsnes. Original by Hosaku Sakurai)