

## Leprosy in Europe.

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### No. 1.—LEPROSY IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES.

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I attended the Conference on Leprosy, held in Strasburg in 1923. From conversation with representatives from European countries, and from their papers, I learned much of the leper problems in their lands, but the information was, of course, fragmentary and incomplete. I had already discovered that all books, dealing with the statistics of leprosy in Europe, were likewise either out of date or incomplete. I decided, therefore, to visit all the countries of Europe, and gain on the spot a first hand knowledge of the prevalence of leprosy, of the care bestowed on lepers, of the laws relating to them, and of their plans and expectations for freeing themselves from this terrible disease, that for centuries had been endemic in many of these lands. To this end I visited England, France, Belgium, Holland, Sweden and Norway in 1923, and Sweden, Finland, Esthonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Germany in 1926. In this paper my remarks will be confined to the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. My remarks on leprosy in Norway are from notes taken in 1923.

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### NORWAY.

On one of the main streets of Bergen, and near one another, are two groups of buildings, that give shelter to most of Norway's lepers. The smaller of the two is called St. Jørgen's (George's) Hospital, and is the original leper hospital, going back to 1547. Dr. D. Armauer Hansen, son of the Hansen who discovered the bacillus of leprosy, and who is the physician in charge of the lepers, kindly acted as my guide through the larger building used as a leper hospital. He took me into every ward. I had thus an opportunity of comparing the lepers of Norway with those of India. Here was the same terrible mutilation and the same running sores. The sad scene in each ward had, however, its bright side in the smiles and kindly greeting given to Dr. Hansen, and the equally kindly response, while giving his personal attention to their immediate needs. The lepers were well advanced

in years. Dr. Hansen was using Chaulmugra oil in the treatment of the disease, and some were benefited by it, but no noteworthy results have followed its use. I was shown the work-rooms where lepers were busy at carpenters' benches. Other lepers were making shoes, fishing nets and the like. The painting of the buildings was being done by the lepers. The women were employed in sewing and knitting.

Pastor Wilhelm Holdt, who was ministering to the spiritual needs of the lepers, was my guide over the other buildings, the St. George's Hospital. Here there were 10 aged lepers, nine women and one old man of seventy. This has been their home for many years, and it has been very humanely decided to let them remain here undisturbed for the few years that remain to them.

Dr. H. P. Lie is in charge of the leper problem for the whole of Norway. Lepers, who can afford it, may be isolated in their own homes, and Dr. Lie has the duty of inspecting such in different parts of Norway, and securing obedience to the regulations required of them. Under Norway's policy every year has seen a decrease in her number of lepers.

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## SWEDEN.

Through the kindness of Dr. J. Reenstierna, of Stockholm, recently appointed Inspector of Leprosy, I visited the Leper Home at Järfso, about 80 miles north of Stockholm. The Home consists of a single two-storey building, in neatly kept grounds. There were but 12 lepers in the Home, and all were aged. In all my experience I have never seen a leper home so clean, so bright, so home-like. The bedspreads were snow white. Plants, flowers and pictures completed the adornment. If smiles were wanting on the leper faces, as the good head nurse took me from room to room, the terrible facial mutilation, the blindness of some, and the humiliation of their diseased lives, were a sufficient reason. A local doctor was in charge, but no medical treatment for leprosy was given the lepers. Should anyone wish to visit this Leper Home, a hotel, with most reasonable charges, and a self-help table, will be found about a mile from the Home.

Of the other 20 lepers in Sweden, one was in the hospital at Stockholm, under Dr. Reenstierna's care, and 19 are in their own homes as permitted by Swedish law. Leprosy is endemic in only two of the provinces of Sweden, namely Halsingland and

Dalecarlie. As aged lepers pass away, leprosy is decreasing, and yet new cases have been frequently discovered, showing that reliance on the present policy is not wholly satisfactory.

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### FINLAND.

The Leper Home at Orivesi, formerly military barracks, is in an extensive enclosure, with fields, vegetable and flower gardens and a forest. Sister Matilda Hjon, of a Lutheran order, was in charge, with several assistant Sisters. Dr. Helme was the physician in charge. Sister Matilda had received word of my coming, and her cordial hospitality knew no bounds. She knows Finish only, and our conversation had to be in gestures and smiles, but a spotlessly clean guest-house in the enclosure, and a table laden with good things, were some of the concrete forms of her hospitality.

Sister Matilda clothed me in a doctor's white robe and cap, to protect me from leprosy germs, and we passed through all the rooms, which were clean, bright and airy. Here also the lepers are all aged people, soon to pass off from the stage of their sufferings. Dr. Helme has used Chaulmugra oil, as well as Dr. Paldrock's freezing method, but with little beneficial results. This is not surprising, however, as the lepers are all in advanced years. There were 22 lepers in the Home. Fifty-three are living in their own homes, as Finish laws allow, but they are without medical treatment for the disease.

The laws regarding leprosy in Norway, Sweden and Finland are practically the same. Pauper lepers are supposed to go to the Homes provided for them. Those having their own homes may remain there, subject, however, to the rules for their isolation.

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### ESTHONIA.

A Ford car took me over a rough road to Kuda, about 50 miles from Revel. Immediately outside of the leper enclosure is the home of the kindly physician in charge, Dr. Kuppfer, formerly an Inspector of Leprosy, when Esthonia was a part of Russia. He has made many successful experiments, and has written extensively on the subject of leprosy. There were 71 lepers living in the wholly inadequate buildings within the enclosure. Esthonia is as yet a poor country, and she has to do the best she can with the little money she has. At the Health Department, however,

I was told of an increase in the budget for 1927 for the better care of their lepers. The buildings, originally intended for some other purpose, were over-crowded. The rooms seemed dark and dingy. They looked untidy, and it seemed a dismal home, but there was a bright side, and that was the success of Dr. Kuppfer in his treatment with Chaulmugra oil. The Commission that deals with those apparently cured had just declared several as cured, and they had been given permission to return to their homes. Their smiles were in marked contrast to the sad countenances of those who still had to remain behind. As I left the institution a large group of lepers made an earnest, pathetic plea that I should secure for Dr. Kuppfer more Chaulmugra oil, as the State was providing him with an insufficient quantity.

There are three other leper homes in Esthonia. The one at Tarvast is connected with the Medical School at Dorpat. Esthonian law compels all lepers to go to one of the four Homes, whether they be rich or poor, but, as a matter of fact, leprosy seems to prevail only among the poorer classes, whose method of crowded living together is a condition favourable for the spread of leprosy. The number of known lepers in Esthonia was 226, and they were living in the four Homes as follows:—

Kuda ... ..	71
Tarvast ... ..	85
Muli ... ..	15
Island of Oesel ...	55
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A total of ... ..	226

### LATVIA.

In a pine forest, 4 kilometers from the centre of the city of Riga, there is a Leper Home with 120 lepers. There is another Home at Talsen with 90 lepers. A former Home at Venden has been closed. In Latvia also the law compels all lepers to isolate themselves in one of these Homes.

The buildings of the Home near Riga were formerly used as an electric establishment, and, while adequate as to space, lack what could make them a Home of brightness and hope. Dr. Schiron, physician in charge, was my guide. A fairly equipped laboratory was at Dr. Schiron's disposal, in which he has been able to make valuable experiments. A very kindly looking head nurse was in charge of the internal arrangements of the Home. The lepers have plots of ground which they can cultivate, and various occupations are provided, by which they can earn money.

## LITHUANIA.

Leprosy is not feared in this State, and there are no special laws for its regulation. Leprosy is endemic only in the province of Memel, formerly belonging to Germany. I was told, by the officers of the Health Department at Kovno, that there was a small Home at Nemel, with 15 inmates. It was thought that there might be altogether 21 lepers in Lithuania. I was unable to visit the Memel Home.

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## GERMANY.

At the Health Department I learned that there were eight known cases of leprosy in Germany. Of these five were in Prussia and three elsewhere. All these, however, are foreigners, there being one Chinaman and the others coming from South America. There were no German lepers.

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## SUMMARY.

In 1926 there were 702 known cases of leprosy in the countries bordering the Baltic Sea, distributed as follows:—

Norway ... ..	130
Sweden ... ..	32
Finland ... ..	75
Esthonia ... ..	226
Latvia ... ..	210
Lithuania ... ..	21
Germany ... ..	8
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Total ... ..	702

I have reason to believe that the above figures are reliable, for in every country I visited I had an interview with the heads of the Public Health Departments, and had their statements confirmed by my visits to the leper homes, and by interviews with medical men interested in leprosy. While the expectation that leprosy will gradually decrease in these Baltic countries, under present methods of dealing with the disease, is justifiable, it is however probable that the desired end could be hastened by the application of methods and policies in harmony with the more recent discoveries.

Leprosy is still endemic in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Esthonia, Latvia and Lithuania. With the transfer of Memel to Lithuania, Germany has no longer any endemic leprosy.