

***The Annual Meeting of B.E.L.R.A.**

SPEECH BY LORD HALIFAX.

It falls to me to say a word or two, as your President, before calling on others who can speak with much greater knowledge and more direct acquaintance with what we have in hand than I can claim. I will not stand in their way more than a few moments.

It will, I am sure, be a matter of sincere congratulation to all members of the Association that the loss that we, along with a great many other Associations in the British Empire, suffered by the death of the late King George V who took a deep interest in the work of the Association, has, as you know been repaired by the patronage that his present Majesty, King George VI, has been good enough to extend to us. I am sure that we can feel certain that the work of the kind that this Association does, which is so directly and so vitally concerned with the well-being of his people in the different parts of the Empire, will have His Majesty's warmest sympathy and encouragement. I think this is the first annual meeting at which we have had an opportunity of welcoming the new Chairman, Sir William Peel, late Governor of Hong Kong. He succeeds, as you know, to the post that was for many years well and successfully and untiringly discharged by Sir Edward Gait. He was succeeded for a brief interval by Sir Samuel Wilson who, owing to the pressure of other claims, asked to be relieved of this office, and I think the Association feels that it is very fortunate in having secured Sir William Peel as its Chairman.

I think that a great many people in this country are apt to think of leprosy and its consequences as something rather remote and outside their immediate avenue of thought. They forget that there were days when leprosy was, I suppose, all too common a disease in our own country; indeed, we have evidence very often when we travel about or visit different parts of the country and see the peep holes in churches enabling those who were afflicted by the disease to find relief for mind and soul by attendance at church services even though they were not able to get relief for body. In a great

* Held at the India Office on APRIL 15th, 1937.

many people, I think, their knowledge of leprosy is perhaps confined to rather dim recollections of the story of Gehazi. I am not sure that everybody in this room would be able to pass an examination on Gehazi, or the other ten lepers who stood afar off and were miraculously healed, but it is not after all so very long ago that leprosy was very prevalent in England—in the Middle Ages—and I believe that I am right in saying that in those days there were some hundreds of special houses set apart for lepers in our country. Now of course we know it practically no more, and it has become a more imperial problem with which this country must be vitally concerned. I believe that of the estimated total number of lepers in the world—something like five million—somewhere about half are held to be within the borders of the British Empire, and therefore it is no exaggeration to say that it is in every sense of the word a great imperial problem, and it is still one of the most distressing and most destructive of scourges to which the life of man is exposed, causing an immense volume of suffering both to mind and body. And how weighty this influence is anyone can see at a glance from the Report for 1936 which contains reports from all over the world. They tell the tale of what it means in their own boundaries. This great imperial responsibility is one that is laid upon us here in England as a direct consequence of all that stands at the back of our relationship with backward and native peoples the world over. We seek to pride ourselves, and justly, upon the fact that it has been the distinction and privilege of this country to be the means of conferring great benefits of all kinds on these backward peoples, with whom we have, under the hand of Providence, been brought in contact. Yet nowhere is an opportunity of that sort of service more directly given than in the field of leprosy. We shall have an opportunity of hearing something from Dr. Muir, the Medical Secretary, who can, I suppose, speak on this matter with as great authority as any other man alive to-day, and he will speak to us of the definite policy which is being pursued with regard to the work for which this Association exists. That policy consists of study in the first instance, treatment, giving advice to governments, and of joining hands, as we have been doing during the last six months with Toc H, to send volunteers out to a number of places, and lend their aid in the treatment and in the work that is being pursued. I think it is certainly true, and certainly full of encouragement, that there should be, and I am sure there are, a great many people, both men and women, to whom the appeal of the name of Father Damien

does not by any means fall on deaf ears in this 20th Century.

That is all that I want to say beyond reminding those present, and asking them to make it known to others, the great necessity that this work lies under of securing very much wider support. We need more branches and assistance from those branches.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, with your permission I am going to ask Sir William Peel, the Chairman of the Executive Committee, to present the Annual Report and address the meeting, and I am quite sure that we shall all give him, on the first occasion on which he does this, a most hearty welcome.

SPEECH BY SIR WILLIAM PEEL.

It has fallen to me as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association to present the Annual Report for 1936. I find myself somewhat at a disadvantage inasmuch as I only joined the Committee in November last, so was little associated with its labours during the past year. This fact however enables me to pay a very sincere tribute to the excellent work done by the Committee without my running the risk of being charged with self-commendation.

The general activities of the Association have progressed so favourably that we were advised by our lawyers that we should seek incorporation as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act of 1929. Steps have accordingly been taken to carry this into effect and we meet to-day for the first time as an incorporated body. This will of course imply no change in the objects and activities of the Association, but it will now be possible to hold and deal with property more efficiently; and, should occasion arise, the Association will be able to take action in a corporate form. Members of the Association will carry no liability beyond that of a sum not exceeding £1, should the unlikely event occur of our ever being forced to wind up our affairs.

I am here to-day in place of Sir Edward Gait, who last year presented the Annual Report. Sir Edward Gait had acted as Chairman since the founding of the Association, during which 12 years he guided its affairs wisely and well. I wish to express on behalf of the Association our gratitude and appreciation of his service. Sir Samuel Wilson agreed

to act temporarily as Chairman, but was unable on account of lack of time to undertake this work permanently. We wish to thank him for his service both as Chairman of our present Committee, and as Chairman of the Special Committee, which dealt formerly with the joint affairs of Toc H and B.E.L.R.A.

This Special Committee has now been amalgamated with the Executive Committee of B.E.L.R.A., as it was felt by both bodies that there was under the old arrangement a considerable amount of duplication of effort. Under the new regime things are working smoothly and more economically, and both at headquarters and throughout the country B.E.L.R.A. and Toc H are co-operating whole-heartedly.

I wish to refer to the appointment of Mr. Gilbert as Business Secretary of the Association. Under his supervision we are confident that the affairs of the Association as an incorporated body will be run on the most business-like and economical lines.

One of the important functions of this Association has always been to advise Governments, missionary societies and others taking part in anti-leprosy work as to the best methods of carrying out this work. With this in view Dr. Muir, the Medical Secretary, paid a visit to three of the British Dependencies in West Africa—Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. An account of this visit is given in the Report. Even in the few months since this visit action has been taken along the lines which he recommended, especially in Nigeria.

On the invitation of the Leonard Wood Memorial, a body which takes a leading part in anti-leprosy work both in America and in a world-wide sphere, our Medical Secretary was invited to pay a visit to the United States last November. He was able to advise them with regard to their future policy, and arrangements were made for him to deliver lectures to several scientific bodies and at many of their leading universities.

Dr. Muir, as General Secretary, will tell you presently something about these matters and about the general activities of the Association, but I wish to refer particularly to the work of the Leprosy Exhibition. This Exhibition ordinarily is held in a town for some five days, and short talks are given every afternoon and evening dealing with the different aspects of the leprosy problem. The public in this country generally has little cognisance of the disease, but the keen interest evinced at places where the Exhibition has been held is a definite sign that the problem has only to be

presented in an acceptable form to arouse support and interest in the Association's fight against this dreadful scourge. Arrangements have been made for the Exhibition to be shown at Enfield, Aylesbury, Bristol, Trowbridge and Sheffield during the remainder of this year.

The Indian Council of B.E.L.R.A. continues to carry on an active campaign in that country. In the School of Tropical Medicine in Calcutta its Research Worker, Dr. Lowe, is conducting research into the various yet unsolved problems presented by this difficult disease, and the various provincial branches are taking a leading part in field work in their respective areas.

The "Leprosy Review", of which Dr. Muir is Editor, has been published quarterly and letters of appreciation have been received from readers of this journal throughout the Empire, as well as from other countries. The Review is partly a scientific journal, but many of its articles have a wider interest, and it is being read in recent months by numbers of doctors and laymen in this country who are seeking to furnish themselves with more accurate knowledge of leprosy, with a view to interesting others and rousing the attention of the British Public.

Our Medical Secretary also acts as the Honorary Secretary of the International Leprosy Association, and in this capacity he has an opportunity of helping in the more general campaign against leprosy throughout the world. In this connection he is at present organising an International Conference to be held in Egypt in March of next year.

I have mentioned a few of the activities in which our Association is engaged. For further details I refer you to the Report*. In conclusion I appeal for sympathy and practical support. The terrible scourge of leprosy exists in our Empire to an extent that is little appreciated at home. Local Governments in many parts of the Empire are doing a great deal but their resources are limited. An immense amount remains to be done, and this can only be achieved with the help of people in this country. You who are here to-day give, by your presence, evidence of your interest in the work, and I would ask you to do your utmost to enlist the help and support of others.

* The Report will be supplied to readers on application.