

EDITORIAL.

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL LEPROSY CONGRESS.

The Fifth International Leprosy Congress was held at Havana, Cuba, from the 3rd to the 11th of April, 1948. The Congress was attended by 223 official delegates representing forty countries. One hundred and ninety-six scientific papers were presented.

There were special committees to report on Therapy, Classification, Epidemiology, Leprosy Control, Social Assistance, and on the use of the words "leper" and "leprosy." A new and important feature of the Congress was the photographic bureau, sponsored by Mrs. Perry Burgess. (The signal services of Dr. and Mrs. Perry Burgess were recognised by the Congress with the passing of an Amendment to the Constitution of the International Leprosy Association. whereby they both become full and regular members).

The utmost praise is due to the Cuban Government, to various Cuban members and to officials of the Association, both for the arrangements for hospitality and entertainment of delegates, and for the full and efficient organisation of the meetings. The arrangement whereby every speech could be heard simultaneously in four different languages by means of special earphones was particularly appreciated. The provision of daily agenda, the information bureau, postal facilities and refreshment rooms, were all excellently organised in the Valdéz Rodriguez School, where the working sessions were held.

The Report of the Committee on Therapy contains an excellent short and practical summary of the administration of Promin, Diasone and Sulphetrone, together with valuable advice on sulphone therapy generally. The benefit of adequate and regular treatment with hydnocarpus oil and its derivatives is also stressed. This emphasis on hydnocarpus treatment is timely and may help to correct the somewhat effervescent notion that the sulphones are the only therapeutic agents of value in leprosy. The recommendations of this Committee on research deserve careful study.

The remarkable feature of this report of the Therapy Committee, however, is the total omission of any reference to tuberculoid leprosy. Indeed the word tuberculoid is not even mentioned

in the report. In most endemic areas tuberculoid leprosy constitutes at least two-thirds of the incidence of the disease. The treatment of tuberculoid leprosy is, in comparison with the lepromatous type, relatively efficient and predictable. The presentation of a recommended regime of treatment should therefore have been a comparatively simple matter for any committee of experts. Such a recommendation would have been of inestimable value in the many places where tuberculoid leprosy is being inadequately treated at present. The omission of any reference to tuberculoid leprosy must be regarded as a serious defect in the report.

The Report of the Committee on Classification is even more unfortunate. The Committee presented a report to the Congress consisting of an introduction followed by a detailed new type of classification which had considerable practical defects. This classification was rejected by a general meeting of the Congress and, as a result, we are now left with the introduction. The truncated document gives us tuberculoid and lepromatous leprosy and adds a new "indeterminate" type—Symbol I. It is difficult to visualise the clinical entity represented by this indeterminate type. The tuberculoid type is stated to have a "strong tendency to spontaneous regression." Many leprologists will feel that their clinical experience does not support such a claim. In practice we are left with no real classification, and until the position is further clarified we advise readers to continue with the Cairo classification.

The report of the Committee on Epidemiology and Control has little to add to the recommendations of the Cairo Congress. It is marred by statements of the obvious, e.g. "The primary task of the epidemiologist is to determine the magnitude of the problem in his area" . . . "Infective cases of leprosy should be isolated" . . . 'The period of isolation depends on the progress of the disease and its response to treatment.' The report still shews insufficient realisation of the importance of child leprosy. The word "contact" is not defined. The claim of the report that healthy contacts can be usefully divided into lepromin positive and lepromin negative groups is not sufficiently supported by the available data. No mention is made of the increasing importance of special forms of control, such as village segregation and night segregation. The pressing danger to leprosy control of the free sale of sulphone is not specifically mentioned in the report. The financial problems of leprosy control are ignored.

The report has a useful and practical appendix giving leprosy indices.

From all this it will be clearly seen that the time is not yet ripe for the emergence of real leadership and authoritative guidance in the modern problems of leprosy.

Other mistakes made in this Congress require careful consideration for the future. The number of scientific papers submitted requires in future drastic curtailment on a qualitative basis. In order to get through the mass of papers submitted to this Congress, readers were limited to ten minutes, with a two minute maximum for each commentator. As a result papers were all too frequently gabbled against time, while discussion was stultified. Ten minutes is too long for a bad paper and too short for a good one.

A further problem which will require consideration in future is that of representation. The Fifth International Leprosy Congress was international, but not so in any representative sense.

One state in S. America, for instance, with an incidence of about three thousand cases of leprosy, had between four and five times the number of delegates of those representing the whole of Africa and Asia combined. This accounts for the decision to hold the next Congress in Madrid. Such a decision is in our view not the representative opinion of the International Leprosy Association as a whole.

When all mistakes are recorded and conceded, the Congress provided the means of a very free and helpful ventilation of ideas, from which something constructive may yet emerge.

No account of the Congress would be complete without placing on record the indefatigable work and guidance of Dr. Alberto Oteiza Setien (President of the National Organising Committee), Dr. H. W. Wade, President of the Association, and Dr. E. Muir, its Secretary.