

Obituary

MARGARET FITZHERBERT, OBE

(1906-1971)

Although it was only in 1959 that Dr Margaret FitzHerbert became really interested in leprosy, she carved for herself a unique niche in the esteem of colleagues and patients in the Princess Zenebeworq Leprosy Hospital, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She died on 27 October, 1971, at the age of 64. At her funeral in Addis Ababa, members of the Ethiopian Royal Family, Ambassadors and Cabinet Ministers came to pay tribute to one who had spent herself in selfless service for others in Ethiopia; also present were crowds of leprosy patients, beggars and students, all come to pay their last respects to a real friend.

Margaret FitzHerbert had qualified as a doctor (MRCS, LRCP) in 1935, from the Royal Free Hospital Medical School, London, but it was only after serving for 4 years on the staff of the Bible College of Wales that she resumed medical practice. She gained the specialist diploma in obstetrics (MRCOG) in 1948, and then responded to the appeal of Emperor Haile Sellassie I to found the first midwifery unit in Addis Ababa. The Emperor showed his recognition of her sterling work by conferring on her the Order of Menelik II. In 1966, she was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

In 1959, concerned with another area of human need, she joined the Sudan Interior Mission staff at the leprosarium in Shashemane, Ethiopia, and later entered government service as medical officer to the Princess Zenebeworq Leprosy Hospital in Addis Ababa. It was here that her life-work was abundantly fulfilled. She quickly became very proficient and skilled in the diagnosis and treatment of leprosy, and endeared herself to her friends, the patients, by reason of her deep sympathy and tireless devotion. When others might legitimately plead age or a "weak heart" as excusing them from exhausting journeys and long, tiring clinics, "Dr Fitz" was always avid for work and eager to take her full share and more of responsibility.

She was a good teacher, as students attending the various courses offered by the All-Africa Leprosy Rehabilitation and Training Centre would testify, but it was as a clinician that she excelled. A Christian through and through, she not only delighted in teaching (in Amharic) in Sunday School, but did much good by stealth, devoting her salary to helping fifty or more Ethiopian students through secondary school.

In the press account of her funeral, the following sentence occurs: "Something that she kept from the public was that in the last years of her life she herself contracted leprosy and was under treatment".

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II honoured her by making her an Officer of the Order of the British Empire. Thousands of people in Ethiopia feel and know that

they have lost a real friend. Her total assets at her death realized less than £100. She was poor, but she had made many rich indeed by sharing with them not only her worldly goods, but also her deep faith.

S. G. BROWNE