

Obituary

Dr Ernest Muir, the doyen of British leprologists, died on 1 November, 1974 after a long period of increasing weakness and failing sight. He was 94.

Ernest Muir was born in Banffshire on 17 June, 1880, a son of the manse. He was educated at Watson's College, Edinburgh, and at the Edinburgh Medical School, qualifying in 1903. Within a few months, he was working as a medical missionary in Tiberias, Syria, under the auspices of the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Association. He passed the clinical part of the Edinburgh M.D. while on leave in 1905, and completed his doctorate 5 years later with a thesis on Kala-azar, prepared while he was a missionary in Bengal. In addition to other duties, he assumed responsibility for the care of leprosy sufferers, little imagining at the time that this would be the introduction to his life's work.

On leave in 1914, he passed the examinations for the Edinburgh F.R.C.S., no mean feat for a busy physician. Back in India, he showed himself a most competent doctor, with broad interests and a humane, kindly approach to all sorts and conditions of man. When, in 1920, Sir Leonard Rogers invited him to become Head of the Leprosy Section of the newly-opened School of Tropical Medicine in Calcutta, Muir responded to the challenge, and began a career that was to make a lasting impression on the leprosy problem in India and indeed the world. Modestly, and with quiet determination, Muir initiated research into the preparation of derivatives of chaulmoogra oil, and into more productive fields of animal experimentation and histopathology. His department attracted many outstanding Indian doctors who later contributed much to leprosy research.

He was examiner in Tropical Medicine in Calcutta for many years, and from 1933 to 1935 was Professor of Tropical Medicine. For his services to India, he was awarded the K.I.H. gold medal and bar, and was appointed C.I.E.

His connection with the British Leprosy Relief Association dates from 1924, when he interested the Viceroy, Lord Reading, in the problem of leprosy in India, and advised the Indian Council of BELRA on the policy it should adopt in the disposition of the funds becoming available. On his retirement from active clinical work in 1935, he became Secretary, and subsequently Medical Secretary of BELRA with Editorial responsibility for *Leprosy Review*. In this capacity, he travelled to West Africa and then to the Caribbean, where he was for a time Medical Superintendent of the Chacachacare Leprosy Institution in Trinidad. Further journeys followed, during which he lectured and advised governments of many countries. One of his most notable initiatives during this period was the founding of the BELRA Research Unit at Uzuakoli, Nigeria, with the first objective of investigating the practicability of oral dapsone in leprosy treatment. On his return from the Caribbean, Muir was appointed C.M.G.

A founder-member of the International Leprosy Association in Manila, 1931, he was for many years its Secretary-Treasurer, and was Secretary-General of the International Congresses in Cairo (1938) and Havana (1948), and an Honorary



Vice-President. A careful investigator and writer, Muir will be remembered particularly for his work on diasone and dapsone. He strove to keep abreast of research in leprosy, and contributed a thoughtful paper on "Lepra reaction and the general adaptation syndrome" to *Leprosy Review* when he was 82 years old.

He was Vice-President of The Leprosy Mission. Between 1949 and 1951, and again in 1961 he worked on special assignments for the Mission at Purulia, West Bengal. The Mission honoured him at a party organized to celebrate his 90th birthday. "

Throughout his long life, Ernest Muir was actuated and animated by his deep Christian convictions. His kindly smile and genuine friendliness broke through the barriers of race and culture. Wherever he went, and whatever he did, he was a gracious and sympathetic doctor, combining a keen intellect with deep compassion for the leprosy sufferer.

S. G. BROWNE

Dr Ernest Muir, the doyen of leprologists and a saint among men, has passed away in London at the venerable age of 94. His long life was a saga of service and sacrifice and "incessant toil unsevered from tranquillity". To infinite compassion he united boundless scientific curiosity and advanced knowledge in leprosy as well as promoting kindness and fellow-feeling towards leprosy patients. He had the unique privilege of working in the dark night of leprosy for the coming of the dawn, and also to work in the bright days of better drugs, better knowledge and improved outlook. Indeed, he was one of the great early pioneers who saw fruits of their work.

After working as a medical missionary in the Purulia Leprosy Home, he worked in collaboration with Sir Leonard Rogers in leprosy research at the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine. As Medical Adviser of the Leprosy Mission and the British Leprosy Relief Association, he shaped enlightened policies. He was the Secretary of the International Leprosy Association, though he never aspired to be its President.

We in India owe him an immense debt, especially for his outlining forward policies of leprosy control through his well-known method of P.T.S. (Propaganda, Treatment and Survey), which he propounded in the dismal days of asylums when no one thought of controlling leprosy by planned work in villages.

In 1950 Dr Muir presided over the Third All India Leprosy Workers' Conference in Madras and his moving words still ring in my ears: "There is no section of the community which deserves by right more thoughtful care and consideration than those afflicted with leprosy; and, now that we have knowledge, if this care and consideration are withheld, judgement will surely fall upon those responsible".

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