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THE STORY OF HENDALA*

I would wish to associate my talk this evening on "The Story of Hendala", with the ancient and modern views of a subject not too well known, namely Leprosy.

Leprosy is a chronic, infectious disease caused by the *Micrococcus Leprae* discovered by Hansen of Bergen in 1871 characterised by the presence of nodules in the skin, mucous membranes, and nerve trunks. Research workers have not yet succeeded in cultivating the organism. It is not common at present in Europe except in Norway, but it is found in some parts of South Europe, in India, Burma, Siam, China, Japan, North East Africa, West Indies, Central America, Mexico, parts of South America and many islands of the Pacific.

In Ceylon there are about 1100 cases segregated in the Hospitals of Hendala and Mantivu, and about 1000 cases under treatment and home isolation. The cause of infection and how it is conveyed has not been clearly proved, but direct contact of persons and for a long period, has been accepted as one method of the transmission of the disease. It attacks persons of all ages, particularly children of the age of 5 to 15 years. Father Damian in the Sandwich Islands, whilst living and working with the lepers of Molokai, and Father Boglioli in New Orleans, both fell victims in the discharge of their priestly duties.

It is generally held that the surviving Crusaders brought Leprosy back to Europe with them from the East. The Jesuit Velly says that it was very common in France about the middle of the 8th century under Pepin, and Voltaire has endorsed this, saying that leper hospitals were already very numerous in Charlemagne's time, (768-814). At all events it is quite clear it was common from the 11th to the 14th century, and that in the 12th it had become a general plague.

The disease was by no means confined to the lowest classes. Robert the Bruce died of it in 1329, and when the Order of the Knights of St. Lazarus was founded for the care of lepers, it was

* A paper read by Dr. Frank Bartholomeusz before the D. B. U. Literary Circle on 25th January, 1943.

one of its leading rules that its Grandmaster should always be a leper, so that a supreme fellow-feeling for the stricken should be of the essence of its government. This one fact alone may show us how general Leprosy must then have become. The rule was clearly in operation at least until 1253, when the infidels having slain all the leper Knights of the hospital at Jerusalem, the Order had to petition Pope Innocent IV. for a dispensation to choose a Grandmaster who was of sound health.

In the Latin will of St. Francis of Assissi, the Seraphic Father Francis as he was called, he declares his belief that the tenderness he bore the lepers was the sole merit which began to draw upon him, a sinner, the mercy of God. At the same time he confessed that in his unregenerate state, it was all too bitter to him even to look on a leper. The laws, both civil and ecclesiastical, were nevertheless (for it was a terrible necessity) awful in their severity to the poor lepers. They were not alone cut off from their fellow-men, but even if only suspected of Leprosy, any legal act of theirs became null and void *ipso facto*, unless they made declaration therein of their horrible misfortune. In 1346 an Ordinance was made to exclude lepers from the city of London, during the time of King Edward III, so wide spread was the disease, and there were 100 leper houses established during this period.

Until they became so feeble as to be driven into a leper hospital, lepers were in France at least hunted from the society of men into wooden huts built for them. The leper was given a grey cloak, a hat and a wallet, together with a wooden clapper or a small bell with which he had to warn approaching people so that they should give him a wide berth. A dish or his hat, placed on the opposite side of the road, invited the compassionate wayfarer to drop an offering. The horror in which this disease had been held may be gathered from mediæval records. We learn from these, that a person on being recognised as a leper, shall be approached by the Priest and by him told of his condition and fate. He may make his last confession before he becomes an outcast, and afterwards he is led out into the Church-yard as one dead. The earth is cast over him with the words "Be thou dead to the world but alive to God"; then he is left alone to die. This sad and solemn service and its oath sufficiently show the outcast, outlawed condition of the European Christian leper of the middle ages.

Under the Mosaic law, Leprosy was considered a plague, and such a person was brought to the priest—vide chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus in the Old Testament. It was enjoined that if the priest considered the person was suffering from Leprosy, his clothes should be rent, the hair of his head shall go loose, he shall cover his upper lip, and shall cry "Unclean, unclean". All the days wherein the plague is in him he shall be unclean and he shall dwell alone without the camp. All the garments and linen of the leper were also pronounced unclean, and should the leper be cleansed by the

priest from Leprosy, he had according to the law to perform the sin offering and burnt offering in the temple.

Having briefly dealt with the ancient view of Leprosy, may I now take you over to the Leper Hospital at Hendala to which I had the honour of being appointed as Medical Superintendent in 1932. I am indebted to my friends Mr. R. L. Brohier, F.R.G.S., whose literary articles are so greatly prized for some of the information, also to Mr. L. E. Blazé, O.B.E., J.P., for the opportunity given me of examining records in his possession. The Institution at Hendala which has exercised a permanent influence up to the present day should rightly be associated with the name of the Dutch Governor Cornelis Joan Simons. The building was commenced during his brief rule of four years (1703—1707), but was left incomplete to be perfected by his successor Hendricus Von Becker.

Until the year 1914, a halo of romance appears to have been woven round the story of this building and the establishment of the Hendala Leper Asylum. In a haze of uncertainty the story was grounded in the belief that the Asylum had been built by the daughter of a Dutch Governor, who being herself a leper, wished to show her compassionate sympathy with her fellow sufferers by erecting at her own private expense a Hospital and Asylum for the relief of such unfortunates. Mr. R. G. Anthonisz I.S.O., the erstwhile Archivist and President Founder of this Union, dispelled this romantic story by the light thrown on the subject by the records which had hitherto not been translated. The cryptic monogram "H. V. B.", with the date 1708 sculptured on a gable over a part of the building, stands for the initials of Hendricus Von Becker, Dutch Governor of Ceylon during the year 1707-1716, during whose administration the building was completed. This sculptured monogram which was originally at the entrance of the bungalow occupied by the Medical Superintendent, was subsequently removed and placed at the entrance of the Administration block. The Dutch records prove beyond doubt that the cost of construction and equipment of this Hospital was borne entirely by the Dutch Government, who were for some time previously deeply concerned about the existence and spread of this dire disease in Ceylon.

The minutes of the Dutch Council of Colombo under the presidency of Governor Simons dated the 10 March 1685 state, that the Chief Physician to the Government reported that there had been several cases of Leprosy in the Hospital, a disease which was spreading in an alarming manner among the children of native women married to Europeans, so much so that it was feared the disease would soon attack the Europeans. As a result of this report a resolution was passed requiring the Wardens of the Fort of Colombo and the City, assisted by the Chief Physician, to hold house to house inspection in regard to this as a preliminary measure. Very little is known of Governor Cornelis Joan Simons during whose administration the foundation of the present Institution was laid, beyond what may be gathered from the Dutch records and from

isolated passages in different parts of Valentyn. Two important events however of permanent value to this Island have always been associated with the name of Governor Simons. These are, the compilation of the Thesavalamai or "the laws and customs of the Malabar inhabitants of Jaffnapatam", and the building of the Leper Asylum at Hendala. The former work was carried out under his orders by the Dissawe of Jaffnapatam, Claas Isaaksz, and the latter was commenced during his administration but left incomplete to be perfected by his successor in office Hendricus Von Becker.

Governor Simons seems to have been a noble gentleman of a humane and charitable disposition, greatly interested in the building and progress of this Institution. In his "Memoirs and Directions dated 16 December 1707" we find him commending the continuance of the good work he had commenced to his successor Governor Hendricus Von Becker. He says, "the Leper Asylum on which already twice the amount granted by their Excellencies has been spent has given me a great deal of worry, the more so because owing to my illness I was not able to inspect the place myself although I did so just before I was taken ill. The present condition of the unfortunate patients is described in the Report of the Commissioners who were assisted by the Chief Surgeons of the vessels lying in the harbour. It appears that our late Chief Surgeon had somewhat exaggerated the state of affairs. I hope this is true, especially for the sake of those who were summarily dismissed on his hasty report". To his successor Hendricus Von Becker is due the credit of having completed the whole work begun by his predecessor, and of having the Institution on a firm footing so as to ensure its permanence and usefulness.

Hendricus Von Becker, in his "Memoirs and Instructions" to his successor in office, Governor Isaac Augustyn Rumpf, dated 25th November, 1716, gives an account of the work he had accomplished with reference to this Asylum. He says, "the Leper Hospital commenced by His Excellency Cornelis Joan Simons but completed by me is a very large building, about 8 times the size required. Their Excellencies the Supreme Government have been justly displeased regarding this matter, and because the expenditure for its upkeep amounted yearly to a considerable sum, I proposed to their Excellencies, to break down part of it and sell the materials. Authority having been received, this has been done much to the benefit of this Hospital. With a view to its affairs being properly managed, I have appointed the Coopman and the Negotie Boekhauder, Jacob Bouer, besides the Head Physician of the Dutch Hospital and Dr. Van Der Stadt, as regents, and have provided them with instructions regarding the Hospital which are preserved at the Secretariat".

Hendricus Von Becker had been in Ceylon as a Captain in the Military Service of the Dutch East India Company sometime previous to his return here as Governor. He is mentioned in Governor de Heere's Diary of his tour in Jaffnapatam in 1697 as

one of the deputation which met the Governor at Negombo. He succeeded Governor Simons in the Government of Ceylon on 22nd, December 1707, and after 9 years rule left Ceylon for Europe on 7th December 1716 as Admiral of the Return Fleet. He was married to Anna Catherina Collardt and died at Amsterdam in 1722.

There is no certain information available with regard to the state of medical practice in this Island during the Dutch period extending from 1656 to 1795. It is reasonable to suppose that there were army surgeons among the Dutch as under the British, and that some of these were probably regularly qualified men from the Colleges of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Leyden, with the latter of which the name of the great Boerhaave will ever be connected. It is also interesting to note that the first European writer on Tropical diseases was a Dutchman, named Bontius. There are no records extant to show that any effort was made by the Dutch to teach the science of medicine systematically to the natives, but it appears that the Kings of Kandy often requested through the Government the medical aid of Dutch Doctors which the Dutch Governor of Colombo complied with. The mission of Dr. Danielsz as recounted by the late Dr. E. Lawson Koch to the Court of Kandy in 1739 to cure King Rajasinha of a bad leg is replete with interest.

Further records of the Dutch and early British periods are unobtainable, hence one has to conclude that Hendala continued to be the isolation centre and Hospital for all cases of Leprosy till the second Hospital at Mantivu was opened about 20 years ago to accommodate cases detected in the Eastern Province and those transferred from the Leper Wards of Kalmunai Hospital. In a brief article on Lepers in Ceylon Revd. Fr. Neut, Rector of St. Xavier's College, India, who visited Hendala in August, 1887, writes as follows: "The English Doctor", presumably Dr. Meier, "who lives there with his family, was delighted to see us, and ordered us to be taken round. There were 187 lepers, not a single bed was vacant, and many applications had constantly to be put off. The neatness and cleanliness of the place was remarkable".

In passing, I may mention that Dr. W. H. Meier who joined the Medical Dept. as an Asst. Col. Surgeon in 1872, left Ceylon in 1878 for study in the Calcutta Medical College, and five years later left India to complete his medical studies in Europe. On his return to Ceylon he was appointed to take charge of the Leper Colony at Hendala. Dr. Meier was the first and only L. M. S. Ceylon (Honoris Causa) He was a remarkable personality, bore a very strong resemblance to the late King Edward VII, and anyone seeing him for the first time might have considered him a Dutch Admiral, he was always immaculately dressed in white coat, trousers and shoes, had a ruddy appearance and a nautical gait, was greatly loved by his patients, and ruled over them for a period of well nigh 30 years. Dr. J. L. Vander Straaten in his book "Progress of medical science in Ceylon" records that Dr. Meier published a complete report on Leprosy which was sent by Government to England. Time will not permit me to give you in greater detail the rare