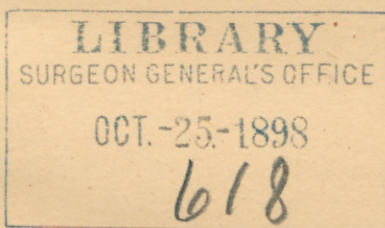


ASHMEAD (A.S.)

What a leprosy Congress should be.



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By ALBERT S. ASHMEAD, M. D.,
NEW YORK.

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What a Leprosy Congress Should Be.

BY ALBERT S. ASHMEAD, M. D., NEW YORK.

IN December, 1895, Dr. Goldschmidt and myself began to work for the formation of an international committee against leprosy. It was intended that every government should appoint an official delegate to become a member of a *permanent* committee. These delegates were to meet with a congress of leprologists, and representatives of the Church and Red Cross. After the congress had been held, it was thought that, if nothing else came out of it, this permanent committee would remain active forever after. Bearing in mind that the discovery of the leper bacillus has not done one thing for the solution of the universal leper problem; that all the influence of missionaries has been of no avail; that the disease seems incurable, we thought that no other hope remained but the establishment of the only system which not only promises success, but allows us a certain expectation of it, that is isolation. This can only be done by edicts of every government issued simultaneously. To obtain these edicts, it was necessary to sound every government and find out whether it would be willing to appoint an official delegate to our congress, not to be a mere delegate to that congress alone, whose function should stop with the congress, but to form a body active, after the dissolution of the congress. Such efforts demanded time. While we were engaged in this work, and when we had already received many assurances of sympathy, and promises of governmental assistance, all of a sudden, Dr. Ehlers, of Copenhagen, without any reasonable idea of what our work was leading to, and what our purpose was, thinking that we were starting a mere Leprosy Congress, one of those medical congresses,

of which the world has seen so many, with the approval of some Berlin men, sent out a precipitate invitation to all leprologists, to meet in conference at Berlin; and he expressly stated, publicly and in private correspondence, that *he* did not want government delegates in Berlin. Armauer Hansen also declared that he could not see what good such a committee could do. Neither of these men could understand what our real object was, and Hansen could not see why we did not issue our invitation at once. Had we intended to have a simple conference of learned men, and an ephemeral committee of official delegates, we could have issued our call long before Dr. Ehlers bethought himself of taking advantage of the necessary slowness of a very serious enterprise, and of issuing his hasty call for a very ordinary, and, by its very nature, fruitless debate. Even afterwards, when to placate us, the Berlin committee deigned to send out invitations through the German government to other governments, to appoint official delegates, even then they could not get hold of the true idea of *our* congress. Their official delegates will be appointed, without any view to permanency. As soon as the congress closes its debate, the delegates will return home, and nothing more will be heard of them. The *conference* with its leprologists and delegates will have burst like a soap-bubble, after having shone a few days in all the colors of the rainbow. Had these men joined us, waited and worked with us patiently, we should have obtained that permanent committee. At any rate it was an object worthy of all the energies of earnest men. The official delegates would have returned home, and each in his country, would have occupied a position, endowed with power to act in all matters of leprosy. Thus isolation, if ordered by the congress, would have been effectively declared to the world to be the only and sure means for the eradication of leprosy. These men, each in his own country, would have had authority for taking the measures suitable to their countries respectively.

When the Conference of Berlin has burst, as I said, like a soap-bubble, the necessity for another serious, earnest, practical congress will be felt, a congress like the one which has been delineated above, and which Dr. Goldschmidt and myself have proposed and worked for.

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