

OBITUARY

DR. BETHEL HARRIS FLEMING M. D.

December 13, 1901— November 25, 1972

An Appreciation

On November 30 the Nepal Medical Association held a memorial service to the memory of the late Dr. Bethel Fleming who had suffered an untimely death the week before while on furlough in America.

To appreciate the contribution of Dr. Bethel to medicine in Kathmandu, and Nepal, it is necessary to recall the practice of medicine when she arrived in this country. At that time there were only a few Nepali doctors at the Bir Hospital (Drs. S.M. Dixit, Y.M. Baidya, and T. S. Malla) with a number of Indian doctors including Dr. S.C. Das Gupta, L.M.S. as surgeon. For major surgery patients could either go to Calcutta, the Duncan Hospital in Raxaul, or summon a surgeon from India— if they could afford one of these alternatives.

In 1952 the Drs. Fleming began negotiation for a hospital and permission was granted by HMG in 1954. Immediately a 10—bed hospital was started in one half of the old cholera hospital (now the Infectious Disease unit of Bir Hospital).

Shanta Bhawan Hospital was started in 1956. Dr. Fleming personally recruited many of the early staff which included such popular and well qualified members as Drs. Edgar and Elizabeth Miller. She, and the staff she recruited, were all active supporters of the fledgeling Nepal Medical Association. Her outgoing concept of Shanta Bhawan included friendly and active association with the Nepali community—both high and low. Her example and influence prevented Shanta Bhawan ever becoming an isolated western hospital.

When Dr. Bethel arrived in Nepal there was a great scarcity of trained auxiliary medical personnel. In the Early 1930's, HMG had sent four young women to India for six months nursing training. At the same time, Dr. S.K. Sen, C.M.O. and Dr. S.K. Datta established a two year training program in pharmacology for grade nine boys which qualified them as compounders. With a further six months of first aid instruction they became dressers. The Civil Medical School operated from the ground floor of the present Bir Hospital and each year graduated 10-12 students during its two decades of existence. During the same period a woman Indian doctor was training young Nepali girls in a two year program (With a final examination) in ward nursing.

Dr. Bethel admitted the first student nurses to the new Shanta Bhawan School of Nursing in 1959. Until its integration with the Mahaboudha Campus under the Institute of Medicine last year it had graduated one quarter of the trained nurses in Nepal.

A versatile general practitioner in the finest sense, Dr. Bethel early recognized the need to deliver medical care to the villages. For some years she was director of the UMN Kathmandu District Clinics which had a weekly visit by its mobile team to Bungamati, Godavari, Chapagaon, Pharping, and Bhaktapur. The popular Kalimati clinic was also her innovation and also a clinic conducted at Swayambhu.

When she retired from the United Mission to Nepal her interest in the country, her many associations, and her dedicated personality, would not permit a life of idleness. She became very active in the Nepal T. B. Association for which she has already collected donations of almost one lakh to construct a thoracic surgical unit to be attached to the present Kalimati T.B. Hospital. A memorial fund has been established in America to further this work.

To those of us who had the privilege of her friendship, and who shared the warm hospitality of the Fleming home, we have suffered a personal loss. But in the larger sense, Nepal and our Association are also the poorer for her passing. The Association extends its sincerest sympathy to her bereaved family.