

Opening Address *

CHIEF J. D. MOSHESH, *Minister of Health, Transkei*

I, indeed, regard it a great honour to have been invited to open this conference of the Transkei and Ciskei Research Society. I confess that, having seen the list of professors, doctors and other experts taking part in this conference, I felt no little trepidation in accepting.

As a farmer in the Matatiele district of the Transkei, I appreciate the close and vital connection between man and the soil. The crops I harvest, and the animals and poultry I rear are dependent on the soil and its fertility.

As Minister of Health, I am deeply concerned with the total health of the people of the Transkei whose health and welfare are very largely dependent on the soil.

May I suggest that whenever you are bored you pick up a stone from the ground and look at it, and while doing so think deeply about it. If you think deeply enough you will never be bored again. We all know the scientific theory of the molten mass that was once flung from the sun, of how this mass cooled and became a globe consisting of rock and water and finally of the crumbling of this rock giving rise to soil.

It is indeed a staggering and sober thought to realise, as we gaze at this ever-expanding city of East London, that everything we see originated from just water, rock and soil.

Wasn't man himself created from the soil, for we read in the first book of the *Bible* that God 'Formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living Soul'.

We learn that from the very beginning man learnt to cultivate the soil and husband animals. From then on much of the history of mankind has been determined largely on how man has cared for the soil—as it contains materials for our health, it also contains micro-organisms which cause disease; as it nourishes plants and trees and fungi from which medicines have been prepared for curing disease, it also nourishes poisonous plants that can kill. And so it goes on.

Suffice it to say, it is the source of both good and evil. I assume, therefore, that this society has been formed with an express purpose of doing research into all aspects of life for the general welfare of mankind in these territories.

Now coming nearer home—according to the reports of your inaugural Congress in 1970, the aims of this Society are 'to draw together all those interested in research in the Transkei and Ciskei and to stimulate research in these territories'.

This Society fulfils a long-felt need in these territories. It has long been known that there are problems here peculiar to our people and our country. Up to now very little concerted effort has been made to stimulate research into these problems, and to correlate the findings of such research.

Your Society is in the enviable position of being able to communicate freely with workers in all the varied fields of research, to correlate the results of this research and to present a complete picture.

I can think of a few fields where you can be of great value. In ethnology and anthropology, for instance, you have a great and important job to do in recording and documenting the traditional customs of the Xhosa people; customs which are fast disappearing under the impact of Western culture. I feel it is imperative to record these customs for posterity before they disappear.

It is a well-known fact that one must know the customs and traditions of those people one wants to reach or communicate with. Thus, the documentation of Xhosa tradition and custom is both interesting and necessary. Interesting to understand a person's attitudes and actions. Necessary to devise ways and means to approach a person in order to amend or discard certain customs and traditions which are not conducive to development and progress. There are some customs and traditions which must be retained, perhaps in an adapted form, in order to comply with changed conditions, but at the same time there are those which are positively detrimental to the health and general development which must be discarded as relics of the past, antiquities which have no place in modern lives and in a developing society. Your Society can serve as the body which can evaluate these redundant, antiquated customs objectively and scientifically and supply the scientific reasons for their abolishment.

In the field of medical science there are many problems that need investigation. For instance, it is known that our people use many kinds of indigenous plants as food. The nutritional values of these plants as well as their possible effects on the health of people should be studied. In this field alone there are vast possibilities for research. Another interesting field is that of traditional medicine, and the use of herbal or other remedies. I feel that these should be thoroughly investigated, their active ingredients identified and their value or not, as remedies, established. I am certain that many of these remedies may be of great benefit to medical science and their active ingredients, once refined for controlled use, may become another weapon in the hands of medical science.

I can think of one plant used through the ages as an antibacterial remedy for infested wounds, the *ujoye* or *stinkblaar* (*Datura stramonium*). I wonder if any work has been done on this plant yet.

From ancient times man has been the product of his environment. The latter is the result of the complex interaction of soil, climate and man himself. In many cases man has, through his actions and endeavours, radically changed his environment for better or for worse. Due to, at least to some extent, a lack of understanding by man of the scientific principles underlying the sometimes delicate balance of nature, ancient civilisations have appeared, developed to great heights of achievement,

* Read in the Minister's unavoidable absence.

and disappeared completely or have been reduced to relative insignificance.

More recently, and with the advent and steady growth of scientific knowledge and hence a better understanding of nature and its complexities, delicate balances and its interactions with man, modern man has, generally speaking, succeeded spectacularly where ancient men have failed. Yet it is disturbing to find that large tracts of land belonging to developing nations lie relatively undeveloped and are subject to neglect and abuse.

I firmly believe that man's future destiny is intimately linked with the soil. We live on it and from it. Our constant aim should be to protect and cherish it, to learn to understand its weaknesses and deficiencies as well as its tremendous potential. The Bantu still have a long way to go to understand soil and to appreciate land qualitatively rather than quantitatively only. In this regard I feel your Society can also render valuable assistance. Agriculture is the primary industry in the Transkei, and will remain so for many years to come. I am pleased to see that some of the papers to be presented at this congress deal with subjects related to agriculture.

The population of the world keeps increasing, but the available area of land remains the same. The area available for agriculture, however, is decreasing, because with a higher population, more land is required for non-agricultural purposes. Thus, for instance, residential areas invariably encroach upon agricultural land. To compensate, the remaining land will have to be made more productive.

Land, however, must not only be looked upon in a purely functional way, but also in an aesthetic way. As our population increases, so does the size of each town and city. Are we going to allow the erection of more and more concrete jungles, towering blocks of flats where man's very soul is stifled, or do we want living surroundings that give us room to move around in and live in aesthetically pleasing surroundings? If we wish the latter we will have to adopt a course of planned population growth, in other words, family planning. In this field a tremendous amount of education of the people is required.

In the field of health there are also vast opportunities for research. There are disease conditions in people which are peculiar to or more prevalent in certain areas. In this regard I can think of oesophageal cancer in the Transkei, and must congratulate you on the work you are already doing in this field.

With the Transkei developing as fast as it is, it will be interesting to see what influence the Western way of life

will have on the disease pattern of people. Will we too acquire those peculiarly European conditions such as coronary heart disease or stomach ulcers? Will these so-called 'White man's' diseases become the lot of the Black man, or will they become modified by our culture?

The people in the Transkei and Ciskei have a great need for education in the field of health. There is a tremendous lack of knowledge concerning, for instance, the nutrition of children. Any doctor in the Transkei has seen more cases of kwashiorkor than he cares to remember. I personally feel that kwashiorkor is not so much a disease of poverty but one of ignorance.

Among the foods readily available to Xhosa mothers are many foods of a high protein value, foods that can, in conjunction with milk, which in bygone days used to be a staple food of the people, be given to growing children. In passing, I may mention that the rearing of calves in the Transkei also leaves much to be desired. It would seem that babies of all species are not given the attention they deserve. This is something that can only be overcome by better education.

One of our greatest needs is to educate our people in nutrition. With the wealth of food available, it is not necessary that anyone in the Transkei should suffer from nutritional deficiencies. The facilities for the production of food are available, the knowledge to do so to best advantage is available, but still lacking among those who must apply the knowledge. The production of a more varied range of foodstuffs must be encouraged.

Although there are undoubtedly still many areas in which knowledge is lacking, and although scientific research dare not stop for one moment in its endeavours to improve the well-being of man on earth, the duty of the researcher does not end with the collection of knowledge, but his main duty is to make the newly-found knowledge available to those who need it, to put theory into practice.

Application of science is subject to many obstructions, of which human attitudes, economic forces and political expediences are only a few. However formidable these obstructions may appear, I appeal to every one of you attending this Congress not only to collect knowledge, but to actively spread knowledge. I sincerely hope, Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, that you will have a very fruitful congress and that, by exchanging knowledge among yourselves, the effects will also spread out over the whole of Southern Africa, like the ripples on a pond, reaching and moving even those in the remote parts of our country.