

A LEPER HOME IN JAPAN

WHAT CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES ARE DOING

The Tokyo correspondent of the *Church Standard*, a well-known Anglican paper of Sydney, who is a non-Catholic, gives an interesting account of a visit paid last spring to an asylum for lepers, situated about 75 miles from Tokyo, and which is conducted by Catholic missionaries. After dealing with the extent and nature of this dreadful malady, and the efforts that have been made by Christian missionaries to mitigate in some measure the sad condition of those suffering from this terrible scourge, the correspondent goes on to say:—

The longest-established of these Christian homes is that maintained by the French clergy near Gotemba, just at the base of the beautiful 'Fusiyama' of foreigners. Here seventy-two lepers are now sheltered as if in their own homes, receiving food, clothing, medical relief, and the most tender sympathy.

La Leproserie de Gotemba.

The scene is one of singular natural beauty. The little farmstead lies on the gentle slope below the wavy line of green peaks that stand guard over a lovely lake on their further side. Opposite are the dark and broken ridges of Ashitaka-yama, and at the right the great cone of Fuji rushes upward, dominating the whole scene. You come down the valley from Gotemba till a little group of houses clustering round a tiny chapel surmounted by a cross makes you aware that your journey's end is here. Two great stone gate-posts flanked by a very short wall mark the entrance. A neat Japanese house just inside the ever-open gate shelters the porter, and beyond, an avenue of cherry-trees, in full bloom early in April, leads on to the home itself. The quarters are entirely Japanese in style, and anything less like an 'institution' could hardly be imagined.

There are, of course, separate quarters for men, and for women and children. The rooms—I inspected every one—are all commodious, clean, comfortable, and well-ventilated. There has not been the least attempt to force any European ways of life upon the poor lepers, the one great care of the Director being to supply them with what they may naturally crave. As for the condition of the sick, it must be remembered that they are in fact incurable, and that they are one and all perfectly aware of this. They are in all stages of the malady, and have all the mental characteristics of chronic invalids, and all the peculiarities of the Japanese. At times, no doubt, they are restless, peevish, sullen, or again thoughtless, or bright and cheerful.

Work as a Diversion.

There is a farm of considerable extent, and some attempt is made to do farm work. But one cannot expect to see a model farm. Rice they cannot raise. Lepers could not work in the slushy, watery, steamy rice-fields; it would be death to them in short order. But they raise wheat, and they raise vegetables for the table, and they love to grow flowers. There is a small herd of cows—enough to furnish milk for the little ones and for the very weak in the last stages of the disease. Japanese people do not like milk, or use it as we do. The women who are able, make the simple garments needed for the whole family, and mend them. Such men as can do it have carpenter-work given to them. They were making a rough sort of shed the day I was there. Of course, the stable-work has to be attended to, for cattle and horses must be looked after, and there is also a forge where repairs to tyres and implements can be made. One poor old man, whose eyes were almost eaten away, was weaving coarse 'waraji'—straw sandals. There is also a mill for grinding flour. Most of the work undertaken is given more as a sort of diversion than because it has of itself any serious value. Few can realise the irksomeness of an existence like the life of a leper—with an irrevocable sentence to misery and death, and without the slightest incentive to action. Work undertaken in such

conditions must, then, be for an end beyond itself. Hours of idleness spent in philosophizing are all very well for those who are weary of 'society,' but for the leper—! In his case the whole of life is beyond philosophy. His very toil may bring him ease. There are, however, some diversions that we should recognise as such. I was shown a little platform where plays are sometimes given, and in another place I saw the rough-and-ready scenery for these plays of the Leper Hospital! But could anything be more pathetically tragic than the thought of these poor victims of a death-in-life acting upon a stage before their fellows to beguile them into a momentary release from the consciousness of their doom? The well-known line of Virgil comes to mind: 'Sunt lacrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.'

And yet when we met the poor afflicted creatures there was no air of gloom or of depressed spirits about them. I looked upon them—indeed, I was asked to look, but I was half-ashamed of looking. It seemed as if I might offend by idle curiosity, or as if I were seeking some fresh new thrill in gazing upon a suffering so great that it ought to have been sacred from intrusion. The poor people I saw that day were cheerful and courteous, and it seemed to me that the 'Yamato damashu' (Japanese spirit or characteristic disposition) in the best sense of the word never shone out of human eyes more unflinchingly than when they raised their poor distorted features and greeted 'the Father' and me with bright and cheerful smiles.

And well they might brighten at the presence of the good priest, for, from these noble French clergy, the lepers have learned that humanity has not cast them out. Marked for death they are in truth, but in their sad state they have been treated as brothers and sisters, they have been given homes, and all the care and patient love and service that their hearts longed for.

Christus Consolator.

Up to this point I have not spoken about religion because I wanted to impress the fact of the humane-ness of this asylum upon the minds of those who may read these words. But religion cannot be left out of account, for the fountain-head of the whole undertaking is religion in its genuine character.

In the centre of the little quadrangle, under the leafy shadows of the trees, stands a life-sized statue of the Lord Jesus Christ, with arms stretched out towards those rooms where the sick are sheltered. It is Christus Consolator, and His look and gesture say, 'Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you!' And just beyond this statue is the chapel, bright and cheery, flooded with light, altars and walls adorned with colors and with flowers. This is the centre of the life of the community. If the sick learn the lesson of true humanity, it is because here they learn that the love of God the Father makes all men of one family in Jesus Christ.

Faith and Works.

The founder of the 'Leproserie de Gotemba' was Pere Testevuide, who, touched with sorrow at the condition of a poor leper woman, and unable to obtain the least succour for her in any hospital either public or private, made up his mind to open an asylum for such as she. He had no means to do it with, nor could he get any help from his own mission, and so he made public, in France, his desires, in the hope that Providence would bring the supplies needed, and he received funds enough to enable him to buy the ground now occupied by the Hospital. At first he gave shelter to six lepers, and lived in the same house with them, giving them every care both for body and soul. He offered himself freely, with the full knowledge that he might, like the devoted Pere Damien, become infected and die of leprosy. This danger did not actually befall him, but he died of an even more painful disease, cancer of the stomach, less than three years after the beginning. This was in August, 1891.

Archbishop Osof handed the work to his most trusted lieutenant, Pere Vigroux. There were then fourteen lepers in the hospital. Pere Vigroux had no fears as to means, and before he even knew how he was

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