

MY WORK AMONG THE LEPERS.

By Sister Rose Gertrude.

(From the Ladies' Home Journal.)

IF I have not before taken up the pen to comment on or answer the charges and attacks made upon my work in connection with the lepers on Molokai, and upon my personal motives and my own character, it is because knowing, as I did, that they emanated from unreliable sources, I believed they would not find credence with the great general public. I have all along considered these reports and attacks as beneath my contempt, and hence unworthy any public notice. But

"Magna est veritas, et praevalabit." And now, for the sake of the lepers whose tears cry to Heaven for vengeance, I will accept the offer of the editor of the Ladies' Home Journal to speak, almost in the language of the lepers themselves, and, without comment on my part, relate some of the events which took place since my arrival here.

When I arrived at Honolulu, in the month of March, 1880, to devote myself to the care of the lepers at Molokai, the Board of Health informed me that they had great need of a trained nurse at the Kalihii Hospital, and asked me if I would relinquish the idea of going to Molokai for the present at least, and remain at Kalihii, three miles distant from Honolulu. Dr. Lutz, the German specialist, who had come out to care for the lepers, was stationed at Kalihii, but had no one to help him in his all-important work, and had asked the Board of Health if I, as trained nurse, would not be the best person to work under his instructions. As my intention was to help the lepers in the best way I could, I assented.

The Hospital and Receiving Station consisted of several cottages, enclosed in about eight acres of ground, built on the hard coral rock, where nothing will grow but grass and alouha trees. The ground was divided into three parts; one for "suspects"—that is, persons whom the doctors are not sure having the disease—one for the lepers under Dr. Lutz's treatment, and the third for the persons brought in for examination, and the unfortunates waiting to be shipped to Molokai.

The Board of Health vested the entire control of the hospital, apart from the medical and surgical work, in their agent who also acts as a sort of policeman to catch the lepers, and bring them up for examination. He in his turn gave over the authority to the Luna—a sort of general overseer—one of the leper patients, a man of no education, who confessed himself that before he "got the disease" he was fond of drinking, and often "had the devil." This overseer retained all the keys of communication until the day I left, even of the "suspect" side which he ought not to have entered, as he was a confirmed leper. He kept the furniture of the hospital, went out into the town (which was also against the rules for lepers), made the people work, and, in fact, occupied a position very similar to that of the Master of a Work-house in England. Besides the agent, the president of the Board of Health made frequent visits to the hospital, going round with this Luna, and approving or disapproving everything he did, as the Luna told it to him.

Now, when I entered the Hospital, among the suspect patients there was a white man of respectable family long established in Honolulu. How he contracted the disease no one knew. In these islands there are many such cases, some of white people, some of half-castes, who have never to their knowledge seen a leper in their lives, and yet who develop the disease sometimes in its most malignant form. This man Api, as the natives called him, had been three years at Molokai, but had been brought down by the former President of the Board of Health to Kalihii, to be treated by Dr. Lutz, and had vastly improved during his stay in the hospital.

At last came the examination day. In the morning he was going about in unusually good spirits, whistling and singing, and telling everyone he was sure to be allowed to go home, as most of the symptoms of the disease had disappeared, and many suspected lepers, with so little on them as he, were allowed to go out and report at the Government Dispensary every Friday, in case fresh signs of the disease should break out. The examination took place in a little room set apart for that purpose; all the patients to be examined sat outside in the yard, their friends remained weeping and trembling without the gate, until the people had been examined, and then the decision in each case was made known by the policeman of the Board of Health.

That afternoon I waited in the Dispensary, making medicines and preparing dressings for the evening work, with an anxious heart. Api had talked so about going out, had said over and over again that he would rather go to a dungeon than go back to Molokai, where he had no occupation, no friends, no change, no society, nothing to make life bearable to a man of education.

Suddenly, hearing loud and angry voices without, I opened the door, and saw Api, the Agent of the Board of Health, and the native Luna, engaged in a lively dispute. Api had been pronounced a "leper" by the examining doctors, and was, therefore, either to be detained for treatment at Kalihii in the Lepers Hospital, or to return to Molokai. He was declaiming against the injustice of his detention when others were set free, and the agent and Luna were telling him that it was inevitable. He became more and more excited, poor fellow, he was so disappointed, and, moreover, he so keenly felt the degradation of being subject to the orders of men beneath himself in the social grade. The agent threatened to have him put in prison, the cells of which were about four feet by seven, unventilated except by small openings over the door, the abode of millions of mosquitoes. Api talked of escaping. In fact, in his bitter grief and anger, he hardly knew what he said. He was removed to the makai yard—so called because near the sea—where there were many lepers waiting to be sent to Molokai. The Luna set two men to watch him, and threatened to handcuff him if he did not remain perfectly quiet. That was Thursday. During the next day, Api remained quiet, in a kind of stupor. It was useless to try to comfort him. What was there to be done? What hope pointed out for one condemned to lifelong banishment in that drear island, where death reigns supreme, working silently day by day on his victims, setting a hideous brand on the living, and torturing the dying by prolonged agony and suffering?

Between Friday night and Saturday morning, the Portuguese negro and the native—both lepers—who were on guard outside the door of Api's room, heard him crying, and going to the Luna, they begged him to go and fetch the Sister. "I don't care," said the latter, roughly; "let him die."

"Let me go, then," urged the negro. "Api is sick, and we ought to do something for him. Lend me the keys and let me go and fetch her."

The Luna refused, and went off to bed. Of course the others could do nothing without the keys of communication, and they sat down again. Soon Api became quiet and left off moaning, so they hoped he had gone to sleep.

In the morning they waited in vain for him to open his door and call for his breakfast.

"Perhaps he is tired, he was awake so late last night," said one.

"I am going to wake him," said the native guardian of the makai yard.

"Perhaps he is ill."

"Let him sleep," said the other.

"Let us go and ask the Sister to come and see if he is sick."

The negro left to go to the Dispensary; the native opened the door softly to see if the white man was still sleeping.

He was sleeping—the last, long sleep, from which he awakened in eternity, his half-open eyes turned to the door as if to look for the noiseless shadow which would come to beckon him away!

On his face he wore the sad, weary expression of a hopeless outcast—an outcast from his family, from his home, and from the society in which he had been brought up; and outcast from the very church in which his mother had led him to pray in those far-off days when he was as clean of body as innocent of soul.

By his bedside were three bottles, the first containing his internal medicine, the second containing some French bonbons I had given him, the last was empty, but it bore the label "Tinct. Opil.," and it was drained to the very last drop.

We, in the hospital, wept for him remembering him with pity and regret, and felt that he might have been prevented from hurrying his soul so rashly into the unknown. And yet the brother of that dead man was a member of the Board of Health who allowed the doctor to be maligned by the Luna with impunity, and suffered the doctor to leave the hospital, when his treatment was becoming more and more successful, rather than deprive the Luna of his office.

Those first three months at Kalihii were months of incessant labor and difficult problems; sometimes when there were many lepers waiting to be examined or to be sent to Molokai, we had more than sixty inmates, all requiring to be treated. Some had arms or legs covered with loathsome sores; some faces half eaten away by leprosy ulcers; scarcely a wholesome patch on their body; and all these required daily dressing. Many had to be attended to two or three times a day. One old man had a pulmonary disease, and had to be watched day and night, for he had had hemorrhages twice, and could hardly be got to obey the doctor's order of keeping perfectly quiet.

At the same time, in the makai yard, there was an old Chinaman, emaciated and decrepit, who had evidently been a confirmed opium smoker. Whenever I left him he would lie on the floor and cry "Make" (die), "Make," while the Luna and some of the men teased him laughing at him, and threatening to cut off his pig-tail, as sometimes in his ravings he would tie it round his neck, as if he were going to hang himself. For three weary weeks the nights were spent in walking back and forth from the old native to Ah Kong, the Chinese; while in the rainy season the pools of water in the uneven ground were ankle deep. But by constant soothing, a judicious administration of Chinese tobacco, weak tea, and gradually diminishing doses of pills, I had the satisfaction of seeing Ah Kong improve no less in outward appearance than in the condition of his mind. Indeed, at the last, he grew quite merry over trying to teach us to speak Chinese, and correcting our pronunciation and accent. He afterwards went to Molokai, where he led an even, tranquil life; nor did he ever, I believe, return to his opium smoking. Here I may say that the few Chinese who came under my observation, were most docile, trusting, affectionate and grateful, as indeed were all the natives and half-whites, who were in or passed through the hospital.

During the six months some one hundred and two lepers were sent to Molokai, and therefore only stayed with us for a short time. But they were almost always most anxious to be treated by Doctor Lutz for the brief period of their stay, and were loud in their expressions of gratitude and affection when they went away. Indeed, those days of going to Molokai were the saddest it has ever been my lot to witness. For days beforehand, the friends of those going, gathered round the gates, and the tall, double fence which shut the lepers from the outside world, wailing and weeping as if there were no comfort for them. When the moment came for parting, the poor beings clung to us, faint with weeping, unable for the most part to utter a word of farewell, for the sobs that wrung their breasts. They realized that they were going to pass a bound whence they will never return, nevermore look upon the faces that were smiles to cheer them; nevermore hear the voices which spoke words of love and friendship to them; nevermore re-visit the home of their childhood; nevermore clasp in tender embrace those whom they loved more than life itself.

Ah! since it is necessary, perhaps on account of their very recklessness, to segregate these poor creatures, why not have—as the natives themselves are always petitioning—an enclosure on every island, surrounded by a double fence if needs be, but where, at least, they can look upon the faces of those they love, and assurances of undying affection from lips that have told them over and over again the same old story of love? But space would fail were I to tell of all that took place during those six eventful months. In that time some of the patients, formerly pronounced lepers, were cured; the condition of all was ameliorated, and hope sprang high in the hearts of these hitherto despairing people. Then came a time when, in several instances, the doctor's wishes and mine were put aside; some of our patients were made to work by the Luna in an utterly unfit condition; one, indeed, who had had a strong fever was thrown back that he nearly lost his life. Lastly, we heard from the patients that the Luna and the agent had been speaking against the doctor and myself, trying to prejudice the people and do us harm. We complained to the Board of Health, as the matter became more serious;

they seemed unwilling to take any steps in the matter. A native gentleman, representative of the people in the Legislative Assembly, took up the matter and brought it before the House. A committee from the House visited the hospital three days, and took down voluminous evidence which was printed in a report. They found that the Luna was unworthy of his office, and should be immediately removed, as also the agent of the Board of Health. This was not done. The President of the Board of Health was removed from his office.

For some unaccountable reason of their own, they upheld the Luna and the agent, and there was nothing left but for the doctor and myself to resign, it being impossible to work any longer under the then existing circumstances.

And so, with an aching heart, we left the people, with all the more sorrow that their lives had been so bright with hope before, as one of them said in his speech before the committee of the Legislative Assembly, "There never has been such a doctor before in these islands; there never has been a woman who has cared so for the lepers."

They had been successfully treated; some partially, some entirely cured. Through the kindness of my English and American friends they had clothes—for the only allowance of the Board of Health in that hospital was a mattress, blanket and, I think, one pillow—tobacco, bed-linen, writing-paper, stamps, everything, in fact, they needed, both those who staid with us, and those who left for Molokai, for they often came in without a change of clothes; and they told me they had no clothes given them till they have been at Molokai one year. And they were so loving, so trustful, so confiding, coming to ask for counsel and consolation in everything, little as well as great; we were as one happy family, seeking each to please and serve the other.

And the "might have been" makes the reality all the more hard to bear. More "might have been" cured; more consoled in their sufferings; specifics for the different forms of the disease "might have been" given to the world, and every good that "might have been" done, "might have" spread like the widening circles where a stone has been thrown into the sea; but weeping is of no avail; it is useless to cry out: Why does God let such things be? We can only

—say as we go, "Strange to think by the way, Whatever there is to know That we shall know some day."

The Editor of The Ladies' Home Journal takes great pleasure in stating that he hopes shortly to have the privilege of printing a second article by Sister Rose Gertrude. This article will tell in a graphic manner "What It Is To Be a Leper," and give an accurate insight into the life of the lepers, the treatment of the disease, how contagion is avoided, why leprosy is incurable under what circumstances there is a possibility of hope—in fact, the article will treat its subject fuller than any other previously published.

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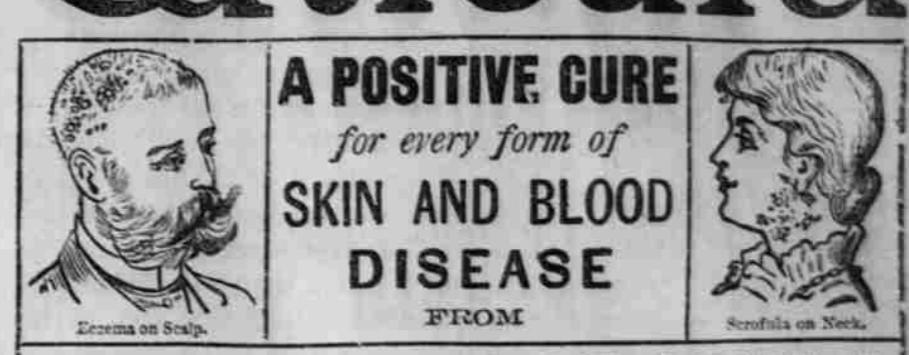
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