

Newspaper Cuttings

Leper get Free March in Manila. "Several hundred lepers broke out of San Lazaro Hospital today, marched through Manila streets to the Presidential Palace and protested against being held as 'prisoners.'

For hours the afflicted hundreds paraded through the streets. The police attempted to break up the demonstration but captured only eleven. The others went on to the grounds of Malacanan Palace, residence of President Manuel Quezon.

Palace officials, not knowing the intent of the marchers, summoned extra guards. José Vargas, Presidential secretary, met the lepers in front of the palace.

They presented a memorial asserting they were being held as prisoners while persons suffering from tuberculosis were allowed to run loose. They contended tuberculosis was more dangerous to the public than leprosy.

Biding their time, they overpowered a hospital guard early this morning, surged over the institution's walls and headed for the palace.

Mr. Vargas promised to present their views to President Quezon and they were herded back to the hospital.

The cry of the leper against rigid confinement is an old one in the Philippines. *More than a year ago the insular Legislature passed a bill that would have permitted the release of many of the 5,000 lepers from the Culion colony 200 miles south of here.* Frank Murphy, then Governor General, vetoed the bill but appointed a commission to survey the problem."

Manila drafts 5 Year Plan to curb Leprosy. "A five-year program of leprosy control, which includes the establishment of new leprosaria on Luzon and the Visayan Islands, is being worked out by the Department of Public Instruction, which has control of the public health service of the commonwealth government. The program, which will involve the expenditure of approximately \$500,000 to start with, will be submitted to the National Assembly for approval.

The new leprosy control program envisages the ultimate abandonment of the Culion leper colony, established thirty years ago by Dr. Victor G. Heiser, then director of the Philippine Bureau of Health and the father of anti-leprosy work in the Philippines.

Several reasons have been advanced in support of the plan, the chief ones being that Culion is overcrowded now and any expansion project would cost too much; that Culion is not easily accessible from other parts of the Philippines and lepers segregated there are completely removed from all contact with their relatives.

The major phase of the new leprosaria department program seeks the construction this year of a leprosarium in the province of Bulacan, near Manila, which is to be the central Luzon leprosarium. Later on another leprosarium will be constructed in the province of Abra, which will be the northern Luzon segregation station, and a third one in the province of Cagayan."

Leper on Strike in Japan. "As a consequence of the leper strikers beating the superintendent the police who are doing duty on the leper island have been supplied with rubber gloves and masks to enable them to restrain the strikers. Some of the patients who are suffering

from their refusal of medical treatment have puzzled the authorities, who are endeavouring to effect a settlement.

[An earlier message stated that 1,100 lepers were hunger striking in their colony, an island in the Inland Sea. The lepers were demanding better pay, self-government, and the dismissal of the superintendent.] ”

A Leprosy Problem. “ For more than 20 years there has been an agitation at Broome for better handling of the leprosy problem. In a special article in the ‘ West Australian ’ it is stated that the residents have recently expressed considerable alarm at the spread of the disease, and indignation at what they consider official negligence in not dealing with it more promptly. The inaction, they suggest, is due in part to the Health Department and the Aborigines Department each attempting to throw the responsibility on the other. The majority of the cases of leprosy have been among natives, but there have been other cases among white people to give ground for the alarm of the townspeople.

Leprosy in the north was first investigated in 1924 by Dr. C. Cook, who reported: ‘ Leprosy has spread amongst the blacks and is already amongst the whites, and even if matters are remedied immediately further cases must be expected to appear.’ He recommended an immediate inspection of natives by a medical officer, and other suitable action, but nothing was done. Ten years later, in 1934, leprosy formed one of the most sensational subjects dealt with by the Royal Commissioner on Aborigines (Mr. H. D. Moseley), who found it ‘ amazing that so little action had been taken since Dr. Cook’s report,’ and declared that it was essential that the matter should receive urgent attention. In the course of evidence before the Moseley Commission, it was stated that over 80 native lepers had been detected in the Kimberleys during the preceding year. Since then a medical inspection of natives has been commenced by Dr. A. P. Davis. His first progress report, issued last April, showed that 19 more lepers had been discovered in the Broome and neighbouring districts. A contract for £13,687 was let this month for the erection of a leprosarium on a site near Derby.”

Leprosy in F.M.S. “ Faced with the threat of a rise in malaria in Pahang last year, the F.M.S. has just recorded also that the number of new lepers admitted to the Settlement at Sungei Buloh, Selangor, was ‘ rather alarming.’

At the beginning of last year there were about 1,320 lepers in the Settlement. By the end of the year the number had increased to 1,600 and there are now nearly 1,800 cases. It is calculated that the admission rate now is 1 in 5,000 of the population.

This figure is given by the Hon. Mr. T. S. Adams, British Resident of Selangor, in his 1935 report on the social and economic progress of the people of Selangor. It is pointed out that the admissions represent not the occurrence of leprosy in a permanent population, but to a considerable extent the residue of lepers left by the population that flows through Malaya.

At least 70 per cent. of the lepers in Sungei Buloh, says the report, were born in China and India.

The report makes no reference to steps being taken to combat the rise, but it is understood that a more stringent watch over immigrants at Colony ports has been suggested.”

The Leper Mass. "From within the monastery has come a procession of slowly moving figures. It is past midnight and the people of the village are not stirring from their darkened houses. The monks do not have far to go. The village is small, the houses few.

Before one of these marching figures pause. A hand reaches forth in the darkness and knocks three times upon the wooden door. There is the sound of someone slowly fumbling with a latch, and then the door is swung open. As the damp mist pours into the house, the priests enter, one bearing aloft a crucifix. There is but one room, small and unkempt. Rushes cover the clay floor; and because they have not been changed for months, all manner of filth and refuse mingle with the rotting covering.

Pressed against the side of the house stands a man staring dumbly, with frightened eyes, at the monks. Crouched down upon the matted straw bed, with three half-naked and dirty children beside her, a bedraggled woman sways back and forth. Her gaze is fixed upon the glittering cross. Both of them know why the monks have come.

Weeks before, the man noticed the faint swelling in his limbs, the suspicious thickening of his skin. It was then that fear crept over him. One day there had come the order that he must receive the medical examination for leprosy. Crude and unscientific, it was long and complicated, taking several days. Finally a messenger came to his humble dwelling and gave the verdict. He was a leper.

Henceforth in the midst of all things which live, he would be as one dead. Forbidden to stir from his house, he was required to wait until the religious authorities could arrange his removal. They had come at last. Come to take him to the church. There the Leper Mass would be said. When it was over, he no longer would have wife or child. All civil rights would be gone. By this ceremony he would become separated for ever from the world and its activities.

A large wooden rattle is placed in his hand. He is told that he must never be without this rattle. Whenever he sees someone in the distance approaching, this instrument must be sounded, as a warning that a leper is nearby. A small wooden bucket attached to a long stave is the next gift. Whenever he wishes food or wine this bucket must be presented for the food to be dropped within.

They turn to leave him now. It may be he will enter one of the many leper houses of the church. Perhaps he will live in a cave or small hut in the forest. It matters little. For him this world has vanished. In the midst of men and women he, a living man, has been pronounced dead.

He is left alone. In one hand he holds the long stave, the other clutches the wooden rattle. The world has vanished; ahead lies loneliness, perhaps long years of sorrow and pain, and at the end a horrible death

What this man thought as he stood there, we can never know. For though this happened thousands of times, it all took place long ago. The year was about 1200, when the lepers in England were a third of the population. So very many were there, and the Leper Mass was so common, that no one ever paused to question how the leper himself felt.

Seven hundred years were to pass before science would even hint that it had cured its first leper."

[Leprosy possibly included other disfiguring diseases, such as syphilis, in these days. Ed.]