

Among the Lepers

(By E. DUGGAN.)

In their quaint French habits of black and bright blue two little Sisters have come to our country from the island of Makogai. They are here on a health trip, ordered away for a short rest from their great toils. They have brought with them many photographs and New Zealand has taken a keen interest in their coming. Before their arrival in Wellington reporters interviewed Rev. Dean Regnault, S.M., of the Mission House. Dean Regnault is the chaplain of the Third Order of Mary here and these are Marist Nuns.

They are from Switzerland and from France. From those far countries they have come to a little island called Makogai to tend the lepers. Everyone has heard of Damien and Molokai. Makogai is another Molokai in the south. It is under the British Government. Our own Government in courteous recognition of an heroic Order has granted passes to these—our guests.

They have brought photographs of Makogai and of their work. Those photographs are the most pitiful things in the world. Sores, warps, decay, dirt, stench, these are their daily life. One sees lepers in all stages of decay. Some have mere stumps for limbs. Some have a limb cut off. The Sisters assist at these operations and give the anaesthetic.

"Have you many Europeans?" a listener asked them. "We have all nationalities. We have Hindoos, Chinese, Europeans, and Fijians."

"And what language do you speak?" "We speak English, French, Hindustanee, and Fijian, and sometimes a salad of them all."

Concerning their own deeds they are reticent, but one gets the general nature of the work. Their organisation is so good that the visiting American Doctors who had seen similar leper settlements all over the world declared that Makogai is one of the best of its kind in the world. One of the Sisters rides each morning round the island on her errands of mercy.

"Are they grateful and happy?" one asked them. "They are very happy—but grateful? they just do not think about it—they take it for granted. But they are so happy altogether that they do not wish to leave. One man was told that he was discharged and that the Government boat was coming to take him away, and he hid in the bush till it was gone. He felt his own township could not forget that he had been a leper, and in Makogai, no one could reproach him with that."

"They are very happy," one of them went on. "You see they have their own ducks and fowls and they trade among themselves. They have picnics and they love the cinema. They are not troublesome to manage, except as regards cleanliness. They find it hard to be clean, and it is very hard to make them try to be clean."

They spoke a little of the lepers from Quail Island, in whom the New Zealand Health Department here takes still a kindly inter-

est. There is one white man amongst them, and he bears his cross with the greatest fortitude. He is now almost blind and is a bad case.

They are a township in themselves, a township of the lost and the unclean. The Sisters still use the old word to express it. They speak of a man untouched by the disease as a "clean" man.

They spoke a little, on being questioned, of the chances of infection. They made no secret of the fact that the disease is one to be feared. "The more one sees of it the less one would like to catch it. Father Nicouleau? Yes, he sang the *Magnificat* when he learned he had it. He felt his work was among the lepers and he did not want to leave them when he was old."

"And you have all nationalities and denominations?"

"Yes. We have a great many Wesleyans. Their clergyman visits them. The friends and relations come at times and give the patients gifts."

One of the photos they brought showed the little chapel with its garden of blowing lilies. "Eucharist lilies. They grow on the island."

There are flowers everywhere, thank God, even in tainted air.

But the next picture was not so pleasing. It was a dilapidated looking little resthouse where the Sisters who are on leave from their dreadful duties go to rest. They have to take a month's leave. The most ardent could not stand unbroken service.

Only two at present can retire at a time, so small, so poor is that rest-house. The lepers are housed well in their compounds, but the nuns, their helpers, have but this old house for rest.

They have a sure faith that New Zealand will help them to build a rest-house for their sick or weary nuns. There are wide hearts in this country that will not read these things unmoved. Leprosy is not a mere story out of the Bible. It is a living plague. And these, in their serried ranks, are the simple soldiers of a valiant host who fight it in the name of pity. Rev. Mother of the Sisters of Mercy, Hill Street, Wellington, and Very Rev. Dean Regnault, S.M., Marist Mission House, Thorndon, Wellington, will receive donations on their behalf. In such a cause there is no need to beg. Everyone with a coin to spare or many coins will realise that it is a privilege to be able to help in this work of love and pity.

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ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

READER.—The proverb is an ancient Latin tag:

Audi, cerne, tace, si vis vivere in pace.

Literally it means: Keep your ears and eyes open and your mouth shut, if you want to live in peace. Good advice it is too. Here is another old line which might have been written of Prohibition America: *Furtivus potus plenus dulcedine totus.* Vulgarly, Sly grog touches the spot.

CURIOS.—The long German words are compounds, as for example *Wahlverwandschaften*, which means elective affinities. Greek also gives similar long compounds. *Orthophoitopsukophantodikaitalaiporos* used to be a well-known crux in our school days. English does not do badly with words such as, *anticonstitutionistically*, *antidisestablishmentarianism*. And if you go into scientific terminology even hydraulic brakes will not pull you up in a hundred feet. For instance: *Unhypersymmetriocantiparallelepipedicalisationalographically*. Space forbids us mentioning another word.

INQUIRER.—There are two golden rules if you want to avoid colds. We are assured that both are infallible and invaluable. The first says: Wear no hat; wear light clothes, take a cold shower every day, and if the water is frozen break it and rub yourself down with a lump of ice; keep all your windows open, and do not let the rain keep you indoors. The other rule is: Keep warm; wear flannel or woollens next the skin; keep your head well covered; avoid draughts. If you want to be on the safe side try and observe both at the same time.

WAGER.—You are wrong we are sorry to say. Orion is not called after an Irishman named O'Ryan. The original was a famous hunter who was placed among the stars after Diana had killed him by shooting him with an arrow. He made love to her and she shot him by mistake. Probably she was aiming at somebody in another direction when she hit him. Your friend is right and wrong. There was a man called Arion, but he was a poet not a heretic. The heretical gentleman was named Arius.

AOTEA ROA.—When a secret is known to a person through consultation, as between a doctor and a client, for example, it must be kept. The natural law obliges persons who obtain such knowledge not to reveal it, even if asked in a law court. Hence, a doctor, a parish priest, a lawyer, ought to refuse to reveal secrets entrusted to them in virtue of their office. As to the second question, a person is bound under pain of sin not to open or read another person's letter. By the natural law a letter belongs to the person who sends it until it has actually been delivered to the person to whom it was addressed. Vide *Bucceroni*, Vol. I, p. 578.

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