

Where All Hope Is Abandoned:

A Visit to the Home of the Lepers

BY THE BRANCHCOMBER, IN THE HALIFAX DAILY MOBO.

The world is full enough of sorrow and pathos; the heart in tune may find it everywhere, and its variety is infinite. It is not necessarily the sorrow for the dead, which is acute; sorrow for the abandoned living may be more bitter by far; and to me, at least, there is less pathos in the sight of the dead child in its little coffin of white, gone before the Judgment Seat with its unspooled soul, than in the sight of the cultured man of fifty working in the menial position who has fallen in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world. The dead—well, they are dead, and to some of them nothing in their life became them like the leaving of it. To you, perhaps, Death is the unity figure, relentlessly trailing us down—or lying in ambush always just ahead; but to some, it is the white-robed image of Peace, which we are forbidden to urge to our threshold, but which, when it comes, is the welcome of visitors.

I heard a story the other day of an old lady in this city, who spent the greater portion of what must have seemed to her a needlessly long existence, in a never-ending struggle to keep body and soul together outside of the poorhouse. For years she had known nothing with a semblance of pleasure and enjoyment, and her only bright days were those when she saw the chance of a little more work than usual. She had not lived, and those of an older generation have a tradition that life, even a life of suffering, is something which must be accepted and clung to so long as it clings to us. At last,

however, its hand was growing feeble, and the old lady was contentedly unloving her grasp, and the worn fingers with their swollen joints and calloused flesh were lying quietly by her side. Her spiritual adviser was sitting at her bedside, trying to prepare her mind for the change so soon to take place, and dilating upon the pleasures and glories awaiting her in a better, or at least, a more refined existence; of the stinging and praising, the harping and triumphing in which she would soon be a participant. She shook him by saying that she didn't want anything of the kind. "What!" he said, in injured amazement, "do you not want to go to a better world?"

"Yes," she said wearily, "I suppose I do, but I think now I'd like to lie quietly in the grave for about fifty years first and get a good rest." Of all God's creatures, (and when looking at them you sometimes are compelled to wonder if they can be God's creatures) those who must long the most to be delivered from the body which they are doomed to inhabit, are the lepers. Their constant cry, we should imagine, would be for a speedy delivery from the body of death to which, like the Roman prisoners, they are chained. Yet even they, the most loathsome beings on earth, have had interests and loves and hopes and fears; but now how little hope, and what a tormenting, never-ending fear! Many of them have left behind them in the world from which they are henceforth forever shut off, wives or children or sweethearts, to be reunited only in a land where, let us hope, the

fruition of their loves may not be denied them. In the rear of the Lazaretto at Tracadie there is a little footpath winding its way through the fields to the seashore. Looking at it from the Lazaretto and thinking of the poor weary feet which had worn it there in the years, I thought it the most plaintive and touching inanimate thing I ever saw. Along his path the lepers limp or grope their way to the seashore and in the sunny mornings they sit on the beach and look away out to sea, and wonder if God has forgotten to be gracious. They may go no place else; and indeed they do not try to. They have not, of course, as had the lepers of the Bible times to cry out as they walk, "Unclean! Unclean!" because no one goes near them and they never attempt to leave that beaten path or go back to the world again. This is the entire round of their life; down to the seashore in the morning; back to the chancel-house in the evening; no hopes, no ambitions, no loves, no hatreds—only waiting for Death, which seems pitifully slow in coming; having stopped maybe, in the uneven stride, to breathe on some young life with everything in the world to live for.

But sad and terrible as is the position of the lepers now, it was much more so before any systematic attempt was made to collect them under one roof and minister to their most urgent wants. With the exception of a small colony mostly Chinese in British Columbia, all of Canada's lepers are in this Lazaretto at Tracadie, a small village in Gloucester county in the

northern part of New Brunswick. The origin of leprosy in New Brunswick is based on tradition. It is said that many years ago, two sailors came from the Levant, and landed at Caraquet, not far from Tracadie. They were suffering from some disease at the time of their arrival. Two women in Caraquet washed the clothes of these men and were attacked by the same disease, which was afterwards diagnosed as leprosy. Previously to the disease appearing on them they had moved to Tracadie, married and had children. These children in turn married, and nearly all had the disease one after another. Many of their neighbors contracted the disease, and the scourge was spreading rapidly, when the attention of the Dominion government was called to the matter, and a Lazaretto was built on Sheldrake Island, near Chatham, N. B. In 1844 this building was destroyed by fire, and the present, a substantial stone structure, was erected at Tracadie, and the lepers removed thither. Segregation was formerly not enforced as strictly as it is now, and the spread of the disease was undoubtedly due to this fact. For the past ten or twelve years, leprosy persons have been promptly removed to the Lazaretto and the disease is rapidly dying out in New Brunswick.

The number of lepers at Tracadie has been reduced from 40 to about half that number, and in a few years more will probably have disappeared entirely. There are patients there from various parts of Canada, but in no other locality has it ever been widespread. The Lazaretto is supported by the Dominion Government and all demands for the comfort of the unfortunate inmates are promptly complied with.

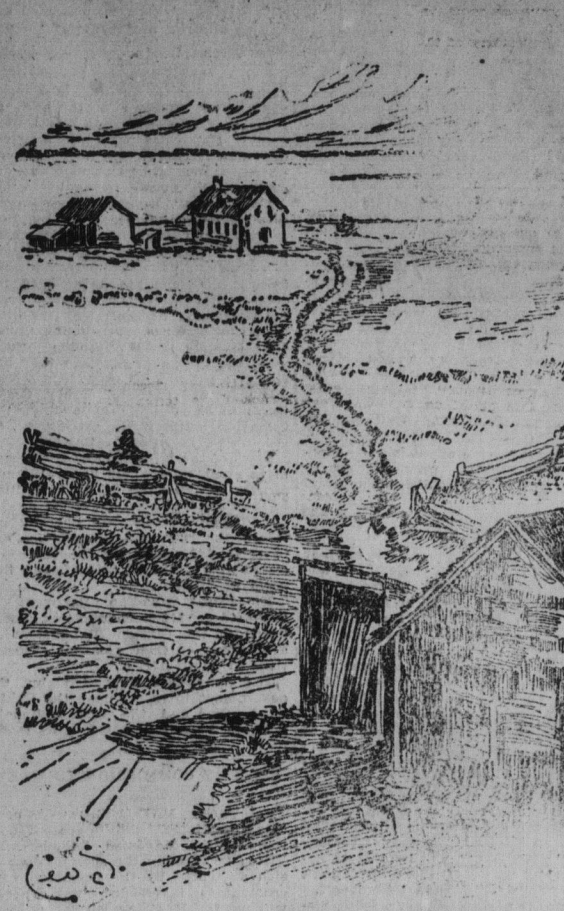
Some years the whole world was carried away with admiration of the noble self-sacrifice of Father Damien, who went to the Sandwich Islands to give the rest of his life to the work of administering to the wants of the lepers there. He felt a victim to the disease himself, and few men in our generations have received so much of popular adulation. It was all deserved, yet his sacrifice was no greater, his life no more heroic, than that of the gentle sisters of mercy who have devoted their lives to the lepers at Tracadie. They, too, have said Good Bye to the world forever and given themselves to this loathsome community; they must live and die there and it may be, die of the disease, whose every horror they have seen. The Lazaretto is visited daily by Dr. A. C. Smith one of the chief authorities on leprosy of this continent, who has made it a life study, and to whom it is still, as it is to all others, the mysterious disease. At the last meeting of the British Medical Association, eminent physicians, men of wide experience with patients afflicted with leprosy took exactly opposite views as to the disease and the danger of contagion. There seems to be a growing opinion, however, that it is only an aggravated form of tuberculosis. But this is certain that it is hopeless and incurable.

It often begins with a sense of lassitude which lasts about six months; then raw-colored patches appear on different parts of the body, and ulcers form; the skin becomes numb; the throat fills with tubercles, the fingers and toes rot off; the eyesight is destroyed, the body wastes away and death brings relief to the most disfigured, loathsome sufferer.

The lepers, during the progress of the disease, are subject to many ills incident to their malady and respond well to treatment. Even operations for the removal of dead bones are quickly recovered from. Many sad stories are told of those who contracted the disease and had to leave everything in the world at a moment's notice and hurry away to the Lazaretto to wait for death. I talked with one, an English woman from Annapolis County, who has been in the Lazaretto for about four years. When I went in, she was writing to the husband and two little children whom she had left behind her in the world. "I expect they get on very badly without me," she said sadly, "and I am always praying that the children may not develop the disease." This victim can only account for the presence of the disease in one way; she lived for a time in the West Indies, and used to have her washing done by a young girl who afterwards developed leprosy and died of it, although she had no symptoms of it at the time when contagion must have taken place. As yet, the disease has not made much progress in this victim. Her hands and face are swollen and discolored, and her eyesight is beginning to fail; but there are no ulcers.

Some years ago, three healthy persons came from Miramichi, N. B., to work in the lumber camps. They worked in the same camp with a leprosy individual and contracted the disease with the one and invariable result. There are some romantic stories told in connection with sisters who have devoted their lives to nursing in the Lazaretto. One is of a French lady, a daughter of a nobleman, whose lover died of some malady shortly before their wedding day. She, it is said, sold her property and vowed to devote her wealth and the rest of her life to the most terrible form of suffering she could find. With this aim in view, she came to Tracadie to nurse the lepers and lived among them for some time. About four years ago she was sent to a similar institution in Louisiana.

There is a local story well known and the saddest of all. A young girl in Tracadie was engaged to be married to a seafaring man; he sailed away on one of his voyages and they were to be married on his return. While at sea, he developed leprosy and was segregated from the others, being put in the hold of the vessel. Word was sent to the parish priest to break the terrible news to the young girl, which naturally he was loath to do. The maiden, watching eagerly for the ship and her lover, saw it coming one day, and ran



VIA DOLOROSA—THE LEPROS

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