

“ASYLUM IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS”

To the EDITOR:

I am interested to see, on page 244 of the second number of the JOURNAL, mention of my leper colony under the heading “Asylum in the Solomon Islands.” However, I am afraid that the news agency muddled things badly. May I put the true account here?

I went out from England in 1928 to the British Solomon Islands, and at a place called Fauabu, on the island of Mala, founded a hospital which was named the Hospital of the Epiphany. It is a general hospital, not a leper colony. I started from nothing, and when I left the Solomons in February, 1933 to return to England—not because of my own health, but that of my wife—this hospital was nearly completed; when finished it will have 72 beds.

In 1930 I found so many lepers coming up to the hospital as out-patients that I felt bound to make provisions for them; and on a site called Qaibaita, less than half a mile from Fauabu, I started the Leper Colony of St. Francis. When I left there were 75 lepers in the Colony under treatment, and about 20 others used to come up as out-patients twice a week for injections of alepol. Although the colony started in a small way, and its size depended entirely on the staff we were able to get to look after them, there was every possibility that the work could develop and improve. I had a lay assistant who came in 1932 to help; at the general hospital I had two fully trained nursing sisters, one of whom was a midwife, but these did not do work at Qaibaita except for special things.

When I left a successor had not been found, but the Mission under which I was working (Melanesian Mission, Anglican) now has obtained the services of Dr. F. A. Macpherson, of California. I have learned from him that he is closing the leper colony as he and Dr. Lambert (Rockefeller Foundation) of Fiji, consider it ridiculous for a Mission to tackle the problem. I may say that the only other lep-

rosy institution there is a very small colony run by the Methodist Mission (Dr. E. G. Sayers).

The total population of the Solomons is about 80,000, and there may be several hundred lepers, but no leprosy survey has been attempted. In a patrol in the bush that I made last November I found 27 cases among 400 persons seen. Nothing is done by the Government for lepers; they sent all their cases to me and gave us a per capita grant. The work at Qaibaita offered great possibilities, and was commended by Dr. Hatherington, the Government Senior Medical Officer only last November. It is difficult to know why it is to be closed now.

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