

Obituary

Dorothy Paul Wade 1897-1971

The death of Dorothy Paul Wade at Culion, Philippines, on 14 October 1971, signals the loss of an individual who strove against shyness and illness for years in order to help establish an enduring enterprise in behalf of persons whose misfortunes were largely ignored.

Dorothy Paul was born in New Orleans on 23 February 1897, and developed into a talented poet, whose works appeared in *Harper's* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. In 1915, she married a young Dr. H. W. Wade of Tulane, who became Professor of Pathology and Bacteriology in the College of Medicine and Surgery of the University of the Philippines in 1918, and at the request of General Leonard Wood, Pathologist and Acting Chief Physician at the Culion Leper Colony in 1922.

Appalled by the medical and social condition of leprosy patients, this triumvirate became determined to secure financial assistance from the United States. Because of prior political experience, General Wood decided it should be done without a professional fund raiser. His appeal through American newspapers netted a few thousand dollars. Dorothy Wade conceived that something might be accomplished through her membership in the Author's League and General Wood offered to support a trip to the States with proceeds from his appeal.

Properly told, the story of the trip Dorothy Wade undertook in 1925 would become a legend. The frank advice from a prominent citizen from Boston was to "find a fund raiser." George Howard Lorimer commissioned Elizabeth Fraser to write a story which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Among others, William Howard Taft and Cameron Forbes (once Governor General of the Philippines) lent their assistance, but money came in mere dribbles. At last Dorothy capitulated about the professional fund raiser.

A Perry Burgess of the firm of Ward, Wells, Dreshan and Gates agreed to an

interview by calling at her hotel, because that would make it easier to get rid of her. He was confident that he had no interest in leprosy, and that he could quickly dispose of "this missionary woman" and her proposition. He later reported: "I set out blithely on the four-block journey that was to change the entire course of my life." He never ceased to be amazed by the charming, cultivated young woman from New Orleans, by her vivid picture of the lot of a person stricken by leprosy, and by her explanation of the great need for ferreting out the facts required to deal with this disease. Burgess recorded his shock as follows: "I came away from that meeting sobered by the knowledge of this desperate need and determined to do whatever I could in the task. I wanted to do it more than I had ever wanted to do anything in my whole life. Never in my years of preaching had I known the driving purpose, the burning conviction, that I felt at that moment. This was something I had to do!"

The interval prior to the initiation of fund raising was one of severe hardship for Dorothy Wade. A diversion of General Wood's promised support to a girl friend of a colonel on Wood's staff necessitated residence in cheap accommodations (including a gangster's hang-out), and the sale of valued jewelry to maintain cohesion between body and soul.

The fund campaign, initiated in 1927 under the auspices of the American Committee for the Eradication of Leprosy, required endless travel and speaking engagements. Perry Burgess developed additional connections and managed all the arrangements. Dorothy was the prime figure and the speaker. She was invaluable in helping to secure a board of prominent laymen such as Chief Justice Hughes and the Eversley Childs funds to construct a leprosarium and skin clinic at Cebu. By the time Dorothy could return to her beloved Islands and Dr. Wade, five years had elapsed. Meanwhile, General Wood had

died of a brain tumor (1927) and the embryonic organization had been named the Leonard Wood Memorial for the Eradication of Leprosy. At Burgess's request, and because of the effects of the Great Depression on resources and the payment of pledges, Dorothy returned to the campaign in 1931 for a further two years.

To many it has seemed an enigma that Mrs. Wade's public role in the affairs of the leprosy world declined while Dr. Wade's was expanding. In that era the responsibility for action fell on men more readily than on women. A sensitivity to sunlight and to many foods made travel a travail for Dorothy Wade, while shyness made a small circle of close friends a natural mode of existence. These facts did not diminish her concern for leprosy patients and the LWM. When Dr. Wade was weighing issues in private conversation he often introduced his pathway toward a conclusion by saying, "Dorothy thinks" or "Dorothy says." One

may suspect that Dorothy found it easiest to exert her (share of ??) concern and interest through an extremely able, respected husband. Leprosy workers everywhere were thus denied the excitement of knowing Dorothy's wit, charm and perception. Because of isolation in a lonely outpost, only a few fortunate friends shared the conversation and fun in the cool shade of the Wade veranda, the formalities of the Louisiana feasts, and the evening watch of the moon rising behind the stately island of Coron until the sea was bathed in its beauty.

The history of Dorothy Wade does not suggest that humanitarian goals were attainable during her active years more readily than they are today. Tolstoi held that great needs bring out the greatness in key persons at critical junctures. Dorothy Wade's life is a testimonial in support of this proposition.

—JOHN HANKS