



A NOTE ON LEPROSY WORK IN KOREA 4

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The most thickly populated provinces of Korea are those in the south, which fact may be the reason leprosy is so prevalent in this part. In the South Kyung Sang Province alone there are probably between 6,000 and 7,000 cases in different stages of the disease, and it is estimated that there are twenty thousand in all of Korea.

The Fusan Leper Home—the first in Korea—was opened in 1909 with about 30 inmates. This was only two years after the first laws regarding leprosy were promulgated in Japan proper, at which time it was decided that asylums should be provided for the compulsory segregation of the lepers wandering about the streets of that country. In those days there was no treatment for the cure of the disease, and it might well have been written over the gate of an asylum "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." For the patients in the Fusan home the Mission to Lepers provided food and clothing and a place to live until the end came, and 25 per cent of them died every year.

An asylum where there were so many deaths had no great attraction for the leper, who though an outcast is often physically strong. He preferred the freedom of a beggar's life. It was then, and is even now, a common sight in towns and villages to see one going around the kitchens, carrying a tin into which the house-wife seldom refused to drop some rice, that being the quickest way to get rid of him. People of this class usually carry on their backs large baskets in which they gather rags and other things they rake out of garbage boxes. They sort out the rags, wash them and dry them at their camps, and then sell them to the rag merchants. They have especially rich harvests at the time of the semi-annual house-cleanings, when the police and sanitary inspectors inspect all dwelling houses and shops, requiring all furnishings and goods to be turned out and every nook and cranny swept clean before they are replaced.

At the moment of writing a leper camp on a piece of vacant ground not far below my house is being burned by the orders of two

policemen standing by. While the huts burn the lepers gather into their baskets what personal effects they are allowed to save. This has happened in the same place several times during the last two or three years, but after the police have seen the place cleansed by fire and are gone, more sticks and mats are gathered and the camp is again set up as before. What else is left for these people to do?

There is now, however, more hope for the lepers in this country. Last year the Korean Government made a special drive among wealthy people for funds, and added a considerable amount from the Government, with the result that nearly a million and a half yen was provided for additional accommodations for 3,000 patients at the Government leper institution on Deer Island. The Government has in many ways shown its appreciation of what the three mission institutions are doing, and we have received personal gifts, as well as donations in money for the work from the Emperor and from the Empress Dowager. The Fusan institution is receiving about 21,000 yen from the Korean Government every year.

It is now eighteen years since we began in this hospital the giving of weekly intramuscular injections of chaulmoogra oil with one per cent camphor. For the past few years we have been giving the injections twice a week. Hookworm infestations and other ailments are treated, and often amputations are performed, to prepare the patients to respond to the special treatment. We have a trained Korean doctor, and also a good staff of nurses and hospital assistants who themselves have been lepers and are receiving regular training from the doctor.

The number of our regular inmates has now reached almost 600, but we give treatment to at least as many more in outside places. We are also responsible for 22 children of leper parents. Sixteen are in the untainted children's home, two are partly supporting themselves as boarders at a boys' higher school, and four others are in the Salvation Army's industrial school for boys, where they are learning trades.

The results of the treatment in the hospital are best shown, we think, in the death rate, which for several years now has been about 2 per cent instead of the 25 per cent we had before the oil injections were begun. The fact that we are now getting early cases is part of the explanation. We are discharging between 60 and 70 patients every year. As in tuberculosis, negative results in the search for the

specific bacilli do not insure that there are none left in the body, so we are slow in pronouncing any one absolutely cured, but the manifest results are very gratifying in a disease which for thousands of years was considered quite incurable.

About a mile away from us there is a leper village which was started sixteen years ago by the first patients whom we discharged as symptom free. They support themselves partly by farming on land for which they pay rent. Some of their friends who were not willing to have them return home helped them to set up for themselves, for although free from symptoms they usually have deformities that mark them as lepers and it is difficult for their friends to believe that they are no longer infectious.

They have welcomed to their village others who have not had treatment and, forming a Lepers' Association, they have built a dispensary where injections are regularly given by those of them who learned the art while acting as nurses in our hospital. They are under our direction and we supply the prepared drug free. We also send a hospital assistant to four other places in the country where lepers have gathered in villages of their own, to give them injections and other simple treatment.

ADDENDUM

Since the foregoing was written notification has been received that the leprosy law of Japan, which heretofore has applied there only, is to be applied in Korea. In this connection our mission leprosy institutions are to be registered and the rules for the isolation of infectious diseases applied.

A necessary corollary of the new ruling is that enough accommodations for the patients must be provided. We have always reckoned that there are 20,000 cases in Southern Korea alone. With the recent expansion of the Government leprosarium, and with a total capacity of about 2,000 in the three mission hospitals, not more than 6,000 cases can be hospitalized in the country.

From the viewpoint of eradication, compulsory segregation of all lepers would seem to be ideal, but so far it cannot be said to have been a thorough success anywhere. The director of one of the well-known Japanese leprosaria is known to have stated that he would prefer not to have any patient sent to his institution by compulsion.

In Korea, hitherto, no compulsion has been attempted or considered practicable. Each leprosy institution has always been full to capacity, and more applicants have been waiting at our gates than it was possible to admit. As a consequence of this condition, in our own hospital we have been discharging not only patients that had become symptom-free, but also others that had not improved to that stage when they have wished to give up their places in favor of members of their families more in need of treatment than they. Those so discharged have while hospitalized learned enough of the benefits of treatment to induce them to continue treatment, by mouth if they cannot get injections, after they leave.

To meet the needs of others in this region, who cannot obtain admission to a hospital, we have been sending hospital assistants to five places in the country districts where there are accumulations of lepers. In this way we have been able to reach fully as many more as in our hospital, where there are 600 patients.

Among our inmates there are a number of men more or less skilled in trades who have improved so much that they are able to do a good day's work at housebuilding. Others not so skilled do pick-and-shovel work at grading, making roads, and so on. These people are given a small remuneration. The women, besides doing house-work and the making, washing and mending of clothes without remuneration, earn a little money for themselves by weaving a kind of cord largely used by Koreans; after disinfection this is sold in the ordinary market.

We consider such manual labor to be an essential part of the treatment. Personally, I believe that one reason for there being two male lepers to every female is that the men give in to the disease much more readily than do the women, expecting to be taken care of by their women folk, whereas the women keep going as long as they are able and thus keep the disease at bay longer. We have always noticed that they respond to treatment more quickly than men, and during the past year the death rate among them was only 1 per cent while it was 3 per cent among the men.