

LEPROSY IN MACAO
SOME COMMENTS BY THE PORTUGUESE DOCTORS
IN MACAO*

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HISTORICAL SKETCH

Ours was the first among the nations of Europe to set up institutions for rendering assistance to lepers in the Far East. In 1569, but 12 years after the establishment of the Portuguese in Macao, an asylum for lepers was established within the territorial limits of the city of Macao, with a hospital and a chapel, maintained out of funds of a pious institution the "Holy House of Charity". This was not an establishment erected from medical or hygienic motives; it arose out of the traditions of the Portuguese people, in keeping with their spirit of kindness and the religious fervour displayed by the nation at the time.

The good work dated actually from earlier times, begun by the queens of the early kings of our country, who as founders of hospices for lepers (Lazarettos), took thought for the sores of these unfortunate members of humanity and distributed alms among them. One of these was Queen Isabel, consort of King Diniz, sixth king of Portugal, who was generally called by the common people the "Sainted Queen", even long before the Church of Rome canonized her for her piety.

In 1498, Queen Leonor established the "Service of the Holy House of Charity", that wonderful institution that preceded the Red Cross and other organizations by several centuries, keeping up their work of charity at the same high standards of efficiency, during all these years, a happy formula for the social cooperation of the rich and the poor, by the great and the humble of every city to meet on equal footing to carry out the fourteen Acts of Mercy in one supreme objective to help and console the unfortunate, in physical and moral suffering, wherever they may be found.

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The Institute of the "Holy House of Charity" at Macao established in 1569, as part of their work, the Hospice for Lepers at Macao and kept it going during several centuries. From the regulations of the Hospice it is known that they were drawn up in 1627, and from them can be seen, considering the little general knowledge of the principles of social medicine and prevention prevailing at the time, surprisingly sensible precepts of hygiene laid down, among others one forbidding the sale, in the streets of the city, of vegetables grown in the farms of the lepers as well as animals reared there. Each Saturday it was also compulsory for one of the Directors of the "Holy House" to visit the leper farms and distribute among the inmates the alms collected for them during the week, giving advice and instruction and also ascertaining who among them needed eggs and meat so that they might be supplied from the funds of the Hospital for the Poor, which was also maintained by the "Holy House".

At the beginning of the 17th century the total number of lepers of both sexes in the Institution amounted to about 70. They lived as in an asylum, the sexes living together, but on the lines of a small agricultural colony. With the passing years the numbers in the little colony tended to increase, not as lepers but as healthy people who lived there, in close contact with the victims of the disease. Such a situation was anything but hygienic and this was complicated by the demands made for increased territory on the peninsula of Macao for the expansion of the city. It became necessary therefore for the leprosarium to be removed.

In 1880 the Government of the colony set up some humble buildings at Pac-Sa-Lan, on the neighbouring island of Dom Joao, to which place the lepers were taken and there confined. In 1883 a typhoon destroyed the dwellings and these were replaced at once by more substantial constructions which exist there at the present time. The buildings of the old leprosarium at Macao (in the district of St. Lazarus) were only destroyed on the occasion of the bubonic plague epidemic, in 1894, when it became necessary to demolish all the buildings which were likely to prove permanent centres for the spread of the plague.

The first legal measure, in modern times, regarding leprosy dates from the 28th June, 1882. This ordinance was altered by another dated the 25th May, 1889. These two ordinances stipulate that lepers found in Macao have to be examined by medical officers and if found to be afflicted with the disease to be isolated

at the leprosarium of the Island of Wong Kum (Pac Sa Lan) if natives of Macao, or repatriated if not native born.

Recently, in 1930, a new leprosarium for the segregation of women lepers at Ka Ho in Colowan Island was built, consisting of five excellent, comfortable dwellings, and the station would probably have been completed by the construction of the further portion planned for men but for an unfortunate circumstance which though seemingly unimportant was difficult to overcome. The contractor for the construction of the dwellings at Ka Ho contracted this disease and left, thereupon, for some place in China, and no other contractor was prepared to undertake the other new buildings, although there are sufficient funds. It will be necessary for us to wait some little time now before building the leprosarium for men at Ka Ho; but its completion will mean the doing away with the great inconvenience of having to render medical assistance to the two distinct leprosaria at present existing a considerable distance from each other.

PRESENT ORGANIZATION

Leprosy does not present a serious problem to the health of the city of Macao. For a population of more than 150,000 inhabitants, the most careful search and permanent vigilance by the police has not resulted in the discovery of more than 50 to 60 persons afflicted with the disease, the usual number of persons in the two leprosaria. This represents a ratio of 1 leper to about 3000 inhabitants, which is not an alarming figure. The greatest number of examinations for leprosy is of emigrants from neighboring Chinese districts.

It is really difficult to escape the tight meshes of the nets of the local police service, and when discovered a suspect is sent to the Bacteriological Laboratory where he is detained for a few days pending the results of the examination. If the results happen to be negative the suspect is given his liberty, but if they are positive two possibilities present themselves. In the case of an emigrant he is repatriated but when he happens to be a native of Macao, or has become a resident of the colony over a number of years, he is sent to one of the two leprosaria—to Ka Ho, in Colowan Island, in the case of a woman and to Pac-Sa-Lan in Siu Wong Kum Island, in the case of a man.

We have had to sacrifice, in the interests of social hygiene, direct medical assistance to the lepers in the colony. The physi-

cian can visit the leprosarium at Ka Ho but once a week, and less frequently the lepers at Wong Kum. The usual treatment by the use of chaulmoogra preparations and the application of antiseptic bandages to ulcers, is left in the hands of the more intelligent and educated inmates, to whom the necessary instruction is given. We are preparing to build a small edifice, attached to the Bacteriological Laboratory, where some of the sufferers from this disease may be treated in the city of Macao so that cures might be effected or great improvement brought about.

For the purposes of social hygiene the present two leprosaria are quite sufficient for existing needs, and the lepers are kept at a considerable distance from settlements of healthy persons. They are free to move about as they please within the precincts of the leprosaria, and there is every necessary comfort provided for them in the dwellings erected for them. Every week supplies are taken to the lepers and they are provided with more than they actually need in the way of food, including rice, fish, vegetables, meat, sugar, etc., and even tobacco, as well as the proper clothing for the respective seasons of the year. The average daily cost of upkeep is about HK\$0.24 per inmate.

The expenses incurred by the Government of the Colony in respect of the food for the lepers has been as follows during the last seven years:—

1927-1928.....	HK\$ 3,085.44
1928-1929.....	5,602.86
1929-1930.....	15,666.00
1930-1931.....	7,000.00
1931-1932.....	7,000.00
1932-1933.....	6,992.48
1933-1934.....	6,298.75

There are five dwellings at Ka Ho, with a chapel annexed, in which the Sisters desired to take up residence. All the buildings are provided with bath-rooms, W.C.'s on the European principle, kitchens, and have running water; sewage empties into the sea. The buildings at Pac-Sa-Lan, although it is expected that the lepers will be removed to Ka-Ho, have been recently improved and the inmates have sufficient comfort.