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## WHERE SCIENTISTS LOOK TO THE MISSIONARY

## THE PROBLEM OF LEPROSY IN THE PHILIPPINES

By REVEREND THOMAS B. CANNON, S.J.

Director, Philippine Bureau

Leprosy, the "Living Death", has long been recognized as the world's most dreaded disease. It was old when Christ walked the hills of Judea; and as yet no real cure has been found for the disease, once it has taken root. Recently, however, the minds of many have been quite confused regarding the subject of leprosy: the partial success of the chaulmoogra oil treatment given to lepers in the first stages of the disease; the discharging of over 3,000 Culion lepers as "negative" in the course of the last 35 years (not 10 years as erroneously reported); the Philippine government subsidies to Culion; and the magnificent work of the Leonard Wood Memorial for the Eradication of Leprosy,—all these factors have led to the consideration of leprosy, in many quarters, as simply a scientific problem.

Leprosy is a social as well as a scientific problem; and it is, above all, a religious problem. And these problems overlap. It is an old saying among doctors that medical skill cannot avail if there is no will to live. These poor social outcasts have nothing in this world to live for; and it is only the hope of eternal life that gives them courage to drag out their miserable lives to the end. If they had no hope of seeing God face to

face forever, suicide would be their only logical resource. They would be justified in ending a life without hope. But their religion means much to those poor lepers; they see things differently than we, often much more clearly; for they are as it were continually on their deathbeds, and when one comes to die, he understands better the meaning of life.

For centuries the Church was the leper's only friend. And today, though other friends have arisen to defend and labor for the leper, there is a work being done by Catholic Missionaries among lepers that all the scientists in the world could not accomplish. We do not wish to detract from the meed of praise due to the scientists; in their work lies the hope of leprosy's cure. Too much credit cannot be given to those who continue the work of General Leonard Wood, late Governor-General of the Philippine Islands, doctor, soldier and statesman extraordinary.

But the fact is that research aims at the *future* possible cure of leprosy; and the leper hospitals and medical facilities are taxed to the utmost taking care of *advanced cases*. While all other work for the lepers is left to the missionaries: minor medical care, which includes all except the ab-

solutely helpless; living conditions, and very often food; whatever small comforts, whatever entertainment, whatever recreation the lepers enjoy—all this comes from the missionary. All in addition to the purely spiritual work.

Doctor Victor Heiser, famous author of *An American Doctor's Odyssey*, who was for years Director of the Bureau of Health of the Philippines, in a recent letter to the Director of the Jesuit Philippine Bureau, bears witness to this indispensable work done by the missionary among lepers, a work without which all scientific efforts would be impossible.

This is a plea for a correct understanding of the situation,

made in view of the extent of the work of Jesuit missionaries among lepers in the Philippine Islands. Five leper colonies are now entrusted to the spiritual and charitable care of Jesuit missionaries: Culion, largest in the world (7,500 lepers); Zamboanga Leprosarium; the Bukidnon Leper Colony; the Lanao Leprosarium; and most recently, the Central Luzon Leprosarium. 93% of the lepers who died on Culion since 1905 have had all the Sacraments on their deathbeds; and considering that — a most remarkable achievement—one chaplain has remarked that the Island of Living Death should be renamed "The Island of Deathless Life!"

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## HEALTH INSURANCE

"It is hazardous for adults to have too much done for them. History shows again and again the deterioration of human moral fibre under such circumstances. If people have not realized that modern medicine costs more, but is worth far more than it costs, let the state aid them in the realization of the fact. Let the state encourage them to save against the costs of illness as they have saved for life insurance, motor car insurance, and fire insurance.

"There is a place for government in medicine. It is the place of government to govern; to decide the rules under which the game shall be played. It is not

the place of government to make the rules, play the game, and umpire all at the same time, and besides to make the people pay—and most often pay excessively—for participating in the spectacle.

"But the great danger to the people is the delegation of more and more of their lives, more and more of their responsibility for controlling their lives, to governmental agencies. That way lies the devitalization of the democratic spirit; the destruction of the appreciation of freedom, the degeneration of the human character, the death of the American democracy."

—Dr. Rock Sleyster.