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Our Guiltless Scapegoats, The Stricken of Molokai

I have just come through a happy experience. I am just returned happy from a few days' stay in the Molokai Settlement. Eight years ago, at which time I spent a similar few days in the settlement, there were almost a thousand patients. Today there are only a trifle over six hundred. I understand that the apprehension and segregation of lepers throughout the Territory is more thorough and rigid than ever. Therefore, there is only one possible conclusion: leprosy, in the Territory of Hawaii, is being successfully stamped out.

It is the one way. Europe, in the Middle Ages, was overrun by lepers. And Europe, in the Middle Ages, by the simple policy of segregation, succeeded in stamping out leprosy.

From what history tells me occurred in the Middle Ages, and from what I have observed in my two visits to the Molokai Settlement eight years apart, in which the figures show me a rough diminution of thirty percent of the patients, I can fairly and conservatively say that there is little doubt, fifty years from now, that the Settlement will contain no leper, because no leper will live in the entire Territory of Hawaii. In line with this, I may add that whereas, eight years ago, the steamers conveying patients to Molokai made four trips yearly, to-day they make but one trip yearly.

Out of the foregoing I dare to forecast that fifty years from now the eight thousand rich and beautiful acres of the settlement will be clean for the clean, because all these Islands will be clean—that those eight thousand acres will be inhabited by clean and happy farmer folk, and that Kalaupapa and Kalawao will be happy villages of prosperous farmer folk—and, for the travel-lovers in that day, will be accessible a scenic adventure more wonderful than the world can show anywhere else. I have seen my fair bit of the world, and I assert that I have beheld nothing scenically to compare with the scenery of windward Molokai, from the magnificent descent of the Pali at the back of the Settlement, two thousand feet of it almost in the sheer, to the unbelievably stern and rugged, Doré-esque coast extending from Kalawao across the tremendous faces of the cliffs, and across the rifts of valleys of Pelekunu and Wailau, on to Halawa— sixteen miles of it.

One thing, now, in the immediate present. Governor Pinkham suggested the idea to me, and my mind has reveled in it ever since. The United States has proven itself notoriously, stupidly, and cruelly ignorant in its treatment of its sporadic lepers. Such an unfortunate is a myriad times more horribly treated by the communities in which it happens to be manifest than ever were lepers treated anywhere else in the world. A city of fifty thousand to one hundred thousand inhabitants will discover one leper. It will segregate that one leper in some miserable pest-house in its bleakest suburb, and will pay the salaries of at least two physicians who dare not come within half a mile of the patient, and who will hire some underling to thrust food at it at the end of a long pole. The expense of the community for this one leper is huge, the treatment of the leper is ferocious, and neither community nor leper can possibly be happy over the situation.

And now to the idea suggested by Governor Pinkham. Why not let enlightened Molokai receive such sporadic waifs from the mainland, treat them decently and scientifically, as she treats her own unfortunates of the Territory, and let the communities, cities and states of the mainland pay for such treatment of their own outcasts.—This, of course, to obtain only against the time when the last leper shall have ceased to be in the Territory of Hawaii.

I have studied leprosy many years, in the books, in the settlements and lazar houses of the world. I am happier to-day upon the subject of leprosy than ever before. The future stamping out of it is assured. Oh, believe me, I do not minimize the frightfulness of it. I know the frightfulness of it. I accentuate the certain passing of it by means of rigid segregation.

Before I finish, I insist that I must take my hat off in salute to two great, courageous, noble men: Jack McVeigh, Superintendent of the Molokai Settlement, and Dr. Will Goodhue, Resident Physician. My pride is to say that I have had the vast good fortune to know two such men. McVeigh, sitting tight on the purse-strings of the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year appropriated by the Territory, sitting up nights as well, begging money from his friends to do additional things for the settlement over and beyond what the Territory finds itself able to-day to appropriate, is the one man in the Territory to-day who could not be replaced by any other man in his job. Dr. Goodhue, the pioneer of leprosy surgery, is a hero who should receive every medal that every individual and every country has ever awarded for courage and life-saving. I say this. I know this. I know of no other place, lazar house or settlement, in the world, where the surgical work is being performed that Dr. Goodhue performs daily. I have watched him operate, many and many times. I have seen him take a patient, who, in any other settlement or lazar house in the world, would from the complications of the disease die horribly in a week, or two weeks or three,— I say, I have seen Dr. Goodhue, many times, operate on such a doomed creature, and give it life, not for weeks, not for months, but for years and years, to the rounded ripeness of three score and ten, and give to it thereby the sun, the ever changing beauty of the Pali, the eternal wine of wind of the northeast trades, the body-comfort, the brain-quickness, the love of man and woman—in short, all the bribes and compensations of existence.

Still another last final word. What is the matter with the United States? What is the matter with the Federal powers that be? What is the matter with the leprosarium built in the Settlement at a cost of three hundred thousand dollars, and which lies idle with not a patient nor a doctor in it year after year? Never was there such a leprosarium in all the world. It is dry-rotting from lack of use. It is fully equipped to the last word in twentieth century hospital equipment. Why not let Jack McVeigh grab the plunder and use it for his people? I have stood beside him in the Federal leprosarium, when he wept over the blankets (hundreds of them stored in the original cases of shipment and stored for years), lying there and deteriorating—to say nothing of the pillows, the iron beds, the washstands, the thousand and one hospital necessities and comforts, the entire magnificent equipment for the amelioration of hurt and ailing humans, that is dropping into nothingness from lack of use.

And in all solemnity I take our Savior's name, and say, in Christ's sake, why should this immensity of comfort and beneficence be denied our brothers and sisters in Molokai because of Federal politics, because of Federal politicians, because of hopeless and undue red-tape bone-headed bookkeeping, because—my dear and gracious God, because some men, far from Molokai and Hawaii, play the political game to their own good food of belly and swift motion of chauffeur-driven limousine, with all the connotations of such rotund existence, forget, that most of all, we of the clean world, must in utter sacredness serve our unfortunate ones, our guiltless scapegoats of our generation, our brothers and sisters in Molokai.