

LIFE ON A LEPER ISLAND:

This is Mokonai Island - a colony of lepers - a haven, not of fear and horror, but of hope. Today is a big day for the island's 700 patients -- a tragic number of whom are children -- their annual reunion with loved ones from other parts of the Fijian group. Cinesounds cameraman, the first newreel observer ever permitted on a leper island, Mokonai is an island hospital for natives from all the South Pacific, including New Zealand. Many of its patients are Indians. They are isolated so they may be treated and perhaps cured. Once a year -- only once -- friends and relatives visit them -- a day of joyful but tearful reunions, for no one knows what the next 12 months may bring. The disease is not highly contagious as was once believed.

Leprosy, detected early, can be arrested, and on Mokonai there's no room for self pity. Its 700 lepers live and hope, looking forward to the day they can go back home. They live in the matchless beauty of an island paradise. The sexes are segregated and all are encouraged to work on a communal basis. Women and girls do laundering and mending to avoid the boredom and depression so fatal to physical improvement. They work under the guidance of missionary sisters. In the islands before Christianity came lepers were often clubbed to death by their friends and relatives.

Men cultivate the soil, paying for their washing and mending with fruit and vegetables. Some are fishermen, building their own traps and then spearing fish to eat or to sell to the hospital. Sports days are held regularly for those not severely weakened by disease. And what better proof could you have of these people's courage and hope than this? They play in the Great Shadow light-heartedly, valiantly.

Medical superintendent of the island hospital is Doctor C. J. Austin and the weapon with which he fights leprosy grows within easy reach -- the berry of the chulmeogra tree. Oil is extracted from the berry by pressure and is then filtered and bottled. Sisters of the Society of Mary allow the chulmeogra oil to stand in the sun for two days to complete filtering. First it is cloudy, then after sun treatment, it becomes clear. In the central leper hospital itself are the advanced cases. Constant treatment with chulmeogra oil injections has resulted in an average of 40 patients being discharged from the island each year. The leper, once shunned as an object of horror and dread, is being given a chance, thanks to the devotion of Mokonai's nursing sisters and the practical support of the Governments of Fiji and New Zealand.

At night in the colony they go to the pictures in a modern theatre and the sisters who have treated patients by day become cinema operators. Services are held each Sunday in the islands two churches -- one Methodist and one Roman Catholic. These used to be called "untouchables". Now they live together content in the knowledge that someone is trying to restore them to normal life. This great day is done and they say farewell with a traditional dance. MUSIC. The ship is ready to sail. Mokonai's brave, hopeful colony says goodbye until next year -- thinking perhaps that next time they, too, may sail away.

The Darkness of Despair has turned to brightness beneath the waving palms of Mokonai -- Island of Hope.

*L. J. ...
Canning*

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