

# HONG KONG CATHOLIC WORKS OF MERCY

First of a Series

## Friends Of The Friendless

By RICHARD CORE

The lovely Home for the Aged at Kowloon Pass under the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor, is not the place to go if you want to enquire about becoming a nun. At least, Ah Lam, age 20, is not the person to see.

Ah Lam is a happy young man who drives the Little Sisters' van around the Colony on the daily trips to beg food for the old folks in the Home. Ah Lam was only recently employed as a driver, and out of sheer admiration for the Little Sisters, he has taken up the study of Catholic doctrine on his own initiative.

### Peaceful Old Age

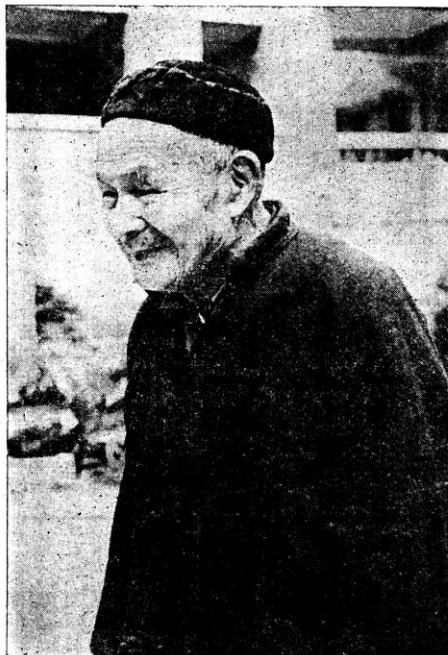


Photo By Constantine Burns

Two young ladies stopped at the Gate one day last week and as Ah Lam was sitting hard by, they told him of their wish to enquire about becoming nuns.

"Are you Catholics? That's the first requirement," Ah Lam pointed out with magnificent nonchalance.

"We are," they replied.

"Do you love God? That's most important too."

"We do very much," the girls answered.

"Do you practise the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity?" went on the self-appointed Mother Superior. "You can't become sisters if you don't."

When the reply was in the affirmative, Ah Lam graciously bowed and legged it off to find the Sister Superior.

Ah Lam has been briefed since on the exact nature of his driving job but something of his casual, good natured charm will greet you if you should visit the Little Sisters' Home.

It is tucked at the bottom of Kowloon Pass, a picturesque and neatly maintained set of buildings and grounds which are conducted by 19 members of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

This group of devout and tireless sisters have dedicated their lives to the proposition that Our Blessed Lord wishes to draw all souls to Himself and that His first preference is for the souls of the poor, old abandoned people.

The aim of the Little Sisters, is simply defined. They attempt to obtain for the aged a little peace, calm and comfort in their declining years. The Sisters afford for them freedom from earthly cares in order to give them time to occupy themselves with the spiritual well being of their soul.

You will find here gentle souls like Wang Kam who admits to only 61 years. He possesses that pleasant garrulity which is an unquestioned prerogative of old age. Wang Kam's travels aboard ship, have taken him all over the world; and his stories indicate that he may have kissed the Blarney Stone once upon a blue moon.

Ling Shih who calls herself Ah Tsat would make you believe that she is younger than 67 winters of life. Her itinerary, she says, started in Hupeh Province. She lived for years near Swatow, then moved to Thailand and during the War she lost all contact with her seven children and her husband who were widely scattered.

There is no poor-mouth, wheezy nostalgia in the old folks' talk. It is apparent that if they have lost a spouse in marriage somewhere along the line, they have at the Home found remarriage to a congenial life of work and prayer, to quiet laughter and contentment with the Little Sisters.

One of the Irish Sisters tells of a recent incident in her soft-spoken brogue. It concerns one of the elder patriarchs who returned one day before Christmas in a state of high excitement.

"Sister, I went down to the market place today and found my wife!" he reported jubilantly. "I haven't seen her since before the Japanese War. She's in the cabbage business. Sister, I'm leaving for good today to

### A "Little Sister" At Work



Photo By Constantine Burns

join my wife selling cabbages!"

Most of the old people who are sent to the Home by parish priests eventually become Catholics. A few like old Chow Bing who is nearly 72, however, still cling to Confucianism.

For many years he was an official in a German shipping firm in Malaya, but now he has neither family nor friends. He is unlike Lai Yung, for example, who finds great consolation in the daily prayers in Chapel in which all participate.

Lai Yung is a sweet old lady who years ago taught many of the now successful Chinese and British merchants their ABC's at fashionable Hong Kong schools. To illustrate that her knowledge of the English language hasn't failed, Lai Yung gives off an unforgettably charming rendition of "It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary."

Not all of the aged at the Home can still work on account of feebleness and declining years. The greater part of them, though, are eager to spend some part of each day working with their hands.

Old men like Wang Kam, of course, are exceptional. He has a way with vegetables and flowers, but his chief forte is fixing chairs, mending pots, knowing what to do when the electricity fuses blow.

The elderly women do here what they would if they had a home of their own—sew, spin, clean—the never ending tasks of a woman's day.

The Little Sisters of the Poor first came to Hong Kong on February 3, 1923. A building had been prepared for them at the foot of St. Joseph's Mount at Kowloon Pass.

His Excellency, the Vicar Apostolic of the Province, Monsignor Pozzoni, assisted by Mr. J. M. Alves, a Papal Chevalier and President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul were mainly responsible for the advent of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Nuns characteristically evidence a modest distaste for giving out publicity details about themselves. Mother Superior here is Sister Marie Theophilus, a demure and pleasant nun who simply mentioned that she has been in the Orient a great many years and that the last time she set eyes on her hometown of Evanston in Indiana, U.S.A., was back in 1919.

Sister Marie Theophilus' capable 18 assistants who conduct work for the aged in Kowloon are Chinese, Irish, French and Italian.

### Laughter and Contentment



Photo By Constantine Burns