

Hong Kong Catholic Works of Mercy

Third of A Series

"SUFFER THE LITTLE ONES..."

By Richard Core

Take any group of professional men and send them off to visit the nursery section of any orphanage. Deep under their gleeful oo-oo's and ah-ah's while chucking the 'little people' under the chin, they are unconsciously looking for items akin to their profession.

A fireman's gaze takes in fire hazards and escapes; an electrician appraises wiring and gadgets; a dietician soon gets nosy about the matter of infant feeding; and a visiting prelate is apt to consider the rows of babies as so many seraphic infants niched into his cathedral walls.

On a recent visit to the Canossian orphanage at Pokfulum Road, this scrivener, however, became so entranced over a late mechanical model of a bevy of Donald Duck in the midst of a bevy of fat-faced babies that he completely forgot the purpose of his

An alert nine-year-old school boy on a cold February morning a year ago knocked at the door of the Home. Inside his jacket he held a half frozen infant wrapped in newspapers. He said he found the baby in some alleyway while on his way to school.

DONALD DUCK IS A GREAT SUCCESS!



Photo by C. Burns.

coming.

"Is there something I could do for you?" one of the Sisters asked the undignified scribe bonelessly sprawled on the floor.

"Yes, I—I'd like to buy that duck. Wrap it up! Oh, excuse me, Sister! You see, that is...

While it's embarrassing to be caught out of character, it isn't difficult to realize at once that the spick-and-span Canossian orphanage here is a modern baby-land—small, but with an immense heart.

Since its inception in 1891, an army of tiny tots numbering almost 110,000 have been brought to the Canossian Home. A lack of present-day medical facilities in years gone by was such that a great number of the children died in infancy.

Generally the babies are from families too poor to raise the child. Undernourished and half dead with disease upon arrival, many are so far gone that even the expert, up-to-the-minute medical care afforded by the Sisters is to no avail.

Many of the babies are crippled; many are blind; and few come to the Home in a state of even mediocre health.

One morning the gardener at the Pokfulum Road branch of the Canossian Home for Children, was poking about a bed of flowers along the terrace. He discovered to his amazement a little abandoned child squeezed into a flower pot.

The Sisters encourage parents or relatives to take home the child after a period of months or even years when it is apparent the infant has reached a point of good health. Since the people are extremely poor, this is not frequently the case.

Not long ago a young woman in the late stages of tuberculosis trudged up the driveway to find Sister Giacomina who is the superior here.

"I am going to die very soon," the girl told Sister Giacomina. "But I won't die in peace until I know my child is in good hands. Will you take him, please, Sister? I really don't think he has much longer to live either because he is so sick."

The woman lived only a few days, but long enough to receive a short instruction in the Faith. The child died three days after the Mother's death, bearing the baptismal name of John.

Very often it is the Police or a welfare group that bring in the babies to the Sisters. Many and varied are the reasons. A short while ago a woman came along and said that her child's birthday coincided with her own, and she wished to leave the child with the Sisters because her life would be plagued with bad luck if she had to raise the baby herself.

The spotless nursery at the orphanage is complete with a galaxy of mechanical toys,

trundle beds and colourful pictures which are the everlasting fascination of a cooing child. It would appear that there are few patrons of this sort of Catholic charity, but the infants at the Pokfulum Road Home have a warm clientele of friends in the children at St. Francis School in Wanchai who regularly bring them gifts.

The other branch of the Canossian Home for Children takes care of children from four years old on upward. The prevailing passion for male descendants is such that no male child is found in either place.

The girls receive six or seven years of elementary Chinese education. Part of that time is devoted to specialized training. For some a period of several months is assigned to work and observation in the kitchen.

Many of the girls learn how to keep house by serving an apprenticeship working in the Boarding School hostel connected with Sacred Heart School. More are delegated to help in the nursery where the Sisters teach them how to care for infants. At some time in their course of training, each girl works in the Cathedral Sacristy learning fine needle work and embroidery and caring for the altar effects.

AN APTITUDE FOR STUDY IS ENCOURAGED



Photo by C. Burns.

Sau King who is only 10 is one child who is a big sister to the others. She manifests an almost maternal thoughtfulness in watching over her companions. Clever and a hard worker, Sau King already shows signs of success later in life.

It is plain to see that girls of Sau King's caliber are much in demand as top flight amahs wanted by well-to-do Chinese families later on.

The girls say they aren't too keen on getting married in the old Chinese contract fashion. They make out better when they leave the Sisters and work in families where they are in a position to look about and do their own selecting of a spouse in the modern manner.

Youngsters who display an aptitude for study are afforded every opportunity to improve themselves. The Canossian Sisters today can count a vast number of their former charges

PREPARING FOR LIFE

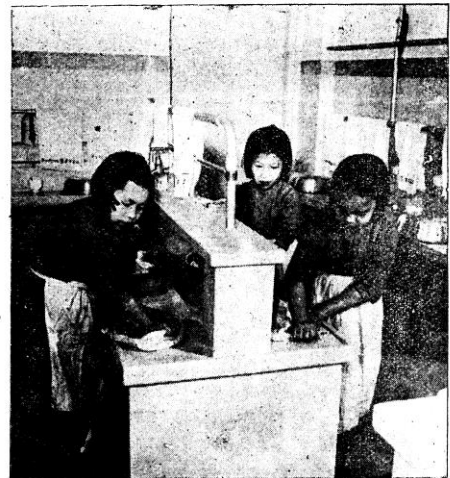


Photo by C. Burns.

who have reached successful positions in the Hong Kong teaching profession.

Those who are crippled and defective from babyhood, of course, aren't so fortunate. But the girls are happy and content to remain with the Sisters.

On Chinese New Year's Day, they staged impromptu theatricals and a gay party for the younger children, the priests and sisters. They know they have a real, warm lasting home and their happy faces prove this fact.

The staggering question one inevitably asks in such immaculate and well ordered surroundings is this.

"Where in Heaven's name does all the money come from to support these charities?"

The answer is pretty much in the question itself. Support of the girls comes from Divine Providence.

"In a period of great need, like the recent War," Mother Angelica remarked, "God always sends us some one to help."

Sister Linda who is the superior in charge of the older orphans recalls how Mr. Aw Boon-haw, the well known Hong Kong philanthropist, appeared out of nowhere in the difficult days of 1942. Mr. Aw Boon-haw is this. (Continued on page 7)

YOUNG SEAMSTRESSES



Photo by C. Burns.