

Hong Kong Catholic Works of Mercy

(Eighth of a Series)

Afternoon Meditation

By Richard Core

A noted newspaper magnate once maintained that any man, no matter how wanting in human qualities, was not wholly bereft of good traits, so long as dogs liked him. Fired for a drastic error, one of the publisher's correspondents paid a visit to the wealthy man's home.

His pockets stuffed with fresh meat scraps, he humbly applied for the return of his job. The publisher's dogs, it is superfluous to add, swarmed round him and on the basis of their fraudulent affection, the correspondent was rehired.

Knowing the serious damage mistakenly inflicted by the American Air Force on the St. Paul des Chartres buildings and personnel in April, 1945, one recent afternoon this correspondent gingerly approached the

A man blessed with the 'long range view of things,' Mgr. Fourcade lost no time in planning a cherished hope to see in this part of China the white coils of the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres, already familiar ob-

In the years before the War, the Sisters provided for over 300 orphans although actually the total number of girls babies received annually is between 1,000 and 2,000.

In the warm weather in particular the Sisters not infrequently receive daily as many as seven or eight children who are abandoned by impoverished parents when the children are sick unto death.

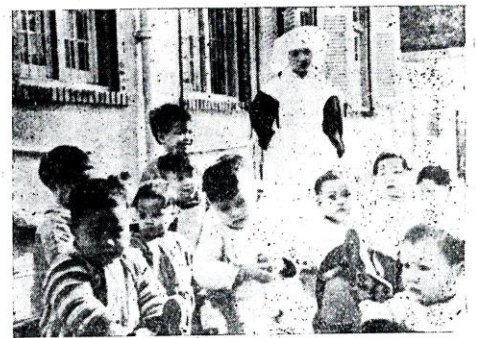
"Despite our best medical aids and attention," one Sister remarked, "when the weather is warm and sickness is running high in the City, it isn't unusual that those babies who come to us in the morning are so deathly ill that they go to Heaven in the afternoon."

The spacious, modern building for the orphan children which was built entirely from the ground up in the post-war period was completed in August of 1949.

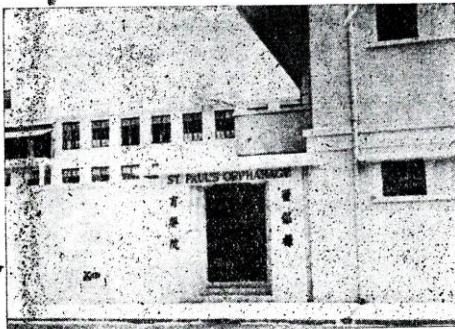
Without boasting and with charming naivete, one Sister's remark warmed the cockles of this man's ink-stained heart.

"God gave us the money to rebuild what was destroyed,

THEY HAVE A HOME NOW



St. PAUL'S ORPHANAGE



place for a story not unlike a Caspar Milquetoast walking on egg-shells.

With his mouth lined with prayers, he hoped that the kindly nuns here wouldn't shoo him away despite his past affiliation with those same planes and men responsible for the damage. In fine, he accomplished the purpose of his visit.

The approach wasn't exactly fraudulent, inasmuch as the gracious Sisters here aren't the type to cultivate rankling injuries on the Christian premise that many acts of nature and mankind happen for some unknowable reason according to the Will of God.

When Mgr. T. A. Fourcade, of the Parish Foreign Missions, was named pro-prefect of Hong Kong seven years after a mission was established in 1841, he planned against the unforeseen future, letting God take care of the unexpected.

Four sisters formed the initial contingent to arrive on September 12, 1848. In the early days of their activities, the Sisters carried on their work from their headquarters in Wanchai.

Later a former cotton-mill complete with factory and godowns encircled by low hills overlooking Causeway Bay was procured.

It took quite some time for time to transform the site into the present half-dozen acres of terraced grounds lined with bush and tree, embracing the hospital, boarding school, novitiate, and orphanage as it is today.

American bombers trying to touch off Japanese gasoline and ammunition dumps on Caroline Hill on that fateful day of April 5 never realized that their error would cost the lives of four sisters and nearly 60 orphan children.

HULLO!



"Sister said, 'The new orphanage was built and paid for without any outside help. There's no use in banking or burying money when it can be put to good use!'"

Bless her forever!

Rare is the person or society today without manifold problems. The good nuns here have theirs.

The increased numbers of students in their St. Paul's grant-in-aid School, increased numbers of sick filling their Hospital, etc., have not been adequately met with an increase in the number of vocations to the sisterhood of their religious Order.

"What do you think the reason might be for this, Sister?"

"Maybe, I'm wrong," the same Sister warmly scored again with a mellow and understanding heart, "Maybe I'm getting along in years. Maybe I shouldn't offer to answer that question."

"Are you afraid of becoming nostalgic, Sister? A laudator temporis, unwilling to be guilty of the odium arising from comparing years and people?"

She looked with hesitation.

"You mean, don't you, Sister, that young girls today don't appear willing to make the old sacrifices demanded for such a life? They are too interested in the pleasures of living?"

Sister gave no answer apart from the meaningful look in her eyes.

Sister related the story of a wrinkled, pleasant woman who is now 72. Her name is Tam Ta-ku and she came to the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres many years ago. What worldly possessions she owned, she turned over to the Order spontaneously.

Along with another Catholic woman, Ta-ku adopted a little infant whom she insisted on rearing as her own children. When this girl was eighteen years of age, she became a Carmelite nun in Hong Kong. Today that girl bears the religious name of Sister Maria Teresa who lives in the Convent at Stanley where she has been a cloistered nun since 1938.

The second child in her early years also evidenced the wish to become a religious. An orphan, she was without the required dowry necessary to be received.

Mother Superior one day informed the girl that she would be the recipient of the first donation received, sufficient to provide for her reception into the Convent.

The girl left the office of the Mother Superior and went over to the Chapel to pray. It was

actually during this period the afternoon mail arrived, containing a cheque out of a clear sky. Thus was made possible the religious life of a fervent now known as St. Eph. Sister is an expert catechist, a heart of gold, who has usually comforted the lives of hundreds of people ebbing their last breath in St. Paul's Hospital during the past several years.

Sr. Ephren may be found each day teaching her speciality — catechism — to the school children and orphans. It is a special work of love for which Sister Ephren has displayed rare proficiency and warmth.

It would be a gross presumption to attempt above more than a skeleton outline of St. Paul's century-old orphanage. The oldest, yet it is modern in every sense in its ministry of mercy in Hong Kong.

St. Paul's educates the girls in practical sciences and duties of womanhood, thus sending them later into society as well-rounded, Catholic young women prepared to encounter life's problems.

Visiting this institution was an experience not easily forgotten; the personal element perhaps cannot be overlooked.

In a sense, it was like coming in to an expansive garden for an afternoon's meditation: on kindness, on love, sacrifice, forgiveness — all those little, important things that seem to be disappearing from the world we know.

PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

