

Hong Kong Catholic Works of Mercy

(Twelfth in a Series)

Sound Not A Trumpet

By Richard Core

Our Blessed Lord's admonition "to sound not a trumpet" in the street while dispensing alms deeds is well complied with by the Canossian Sisters who run a hospital in the centre of Wanchai's labyrinthine ways. This unpretentious institution is so inconspicuous that even a postal carrier and a taxi-driver had difficulty in directing the writer. But, of course, if you're lucky to see the direction sign on Queen's Road, East, you'll find it easily on a hill overlooking the thriving section. This scribe didn't and therefore wandered around for over a half-hour like a lost scul.

Among the little band of Canossian Sisters sent from Italy who arrived in Hong Kong on April 12, 1860, was Mother Maria Stella. Manifestly devoid of educational and religious facilities, the poor districts of Wanchai aroused her interest.

Together with Mother Stella Galli, Superior of the pioneer group, she founded a branch of the Canossian Sisters here on May 7, 1869. A godown was all that the nuns could afford to rent at the time. From these lowly beginnings the activities of their work were enlarged.

With the establishment of a refuge for wayward girls, Mother Maria Stella concentrated her full attention on the specific needs of the district. During her tenure as Mother Superior here, Sister Maria Stella each day visited the poor and sick, personally administering medical attention to them.

The rapid rise in the Colony's population by the year 1870 brought a corresponding increase in the number of poor people residing in Wanchai. Greater hospital accommodation was imperative and plans were made.

A number of apartment houses were rented and renovated for use as a hospital. They bore the aggregate name of St. Francis Hospital. Monsoon rains in 1873 brought about their untimely destruction, forcing the Sisters to continue their hospital efforts in other rented localities of Wanchai.

Meanwhile, construction on a new building, ear-marked for a hospital, got under way. It was completed and in operation within eight months. Chinese inhabitants of Wanchai in 1882 helped to raise funds by public subscription for an extension of the building. The year 1895 saw the opening of an additional section, accommodating Europeans. A second hospital-benefit drive in 1909, aided by an allocation of funds from the Turin Mission Association in Italy, made possible a permanent new wing of the Hospital.

It was not, however, until 1918 that the buildings and services attained their present stature as a general hospital prepared to meet any and all emergencies.

During all these years, nevertheless, the Hospital was always pushing ahead on the upgrade; the conduct of medical work was ever hampered by inadequate financial support.

In the first fifty years of its existence, St. Francis Hospital provided gratis medical services for more than 20,000 poor folk. During this same half century, the Hospital was never without at least 150 bed-patients who were too poor to provide even nominal hospitalization fees.

The fortunes of the late War here as elsewhere in the world, turned things topsy-turvy. The Sisters sold just about everything on the premises except medicines, instruments and beds in a money-raising effort to provide food for the destitute. For many a day the Hospital's bank-book was an inelegant blank as to resources on hand. It finally had to close its doors for lack of funds.

a bed was snapped up and put into service. The Hospital verandahs were filled.

In a round-the-clock effort to alleviate the sufferings of the patients, the Canossian Sisters worked unceasingly, cleaning the wounded, giving injections, comforting the dying. Bed-sheets, curtains, and clothes were ripped apart and utilized for bandages. The cries of the suffering and dying, turned the place into a forty-eight hour night-pare.

Some of the Sisters worked in the Hospital, others walked the streets carrying first-aid kits and administered medical assistance to other casualties wherever found.

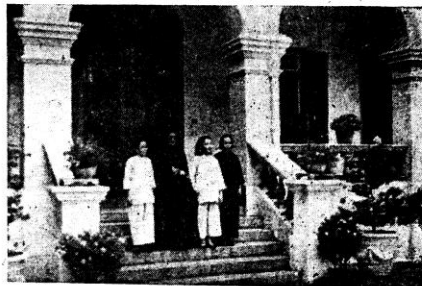
Perhaps the most remembered case was a wounded Chinese boy. Suffering from a badly crushed foot, the boy developed tetanus and his life was further jeopardized by pneumonia. It was decided to amputate the

Francis Xavier



Among the hundreds of other war-time casualties was a Chinese boy who is now a promising young businessman employed by a large firm in Cheshier Hill, N. S. Wales, Australia. He was picked off a Wanchai street where he lay in the gutter dying. Fully cured when he left the Hospital, he was found employment by the Canossian Sisters. He regularly writes to the Sisters here for young Francis Xavier is a Catholic boy not likely to forget the merciful acts of kindness dispensed to him by the self-effacing souls who conduct St. Francis Hospital in Wanchai, Hong Kong.

On The Hospital Steps



The day on which St. Francis Hospital reopened, however, was far from a joyous one. The Hospital was thrown open to the public on January 21, 1945. That same day a flock of bombers, swinging in from the north, skip-bombed the Japanese naval installations at the dock-yards. A number of bombs overshot their target area, flattening parts of the thickly settled Wanchai district.

One of the first of the casualties admitted was a Japanese military stretcher-case. The man was critically wounded and died during the night. Wounded Chinese and military personnel were brought in in a continuous stream. Any article resembling

leg. The attending surgeon despaired for the boy's life. However, the Canossian Sisters assaulted with prayers Blessed Magdalen Canossa, foundress of their religious order, asking her intercession before God to spare the youngster's life. Several weeks later the boy hobbled out of St. Francis Hospital on crutches to the amazement of all save the Sisters themselves.

In 1948 a little blind girl was brought into the Hospital. Several years before when she was still a baby, a faulty solution applied to her eyes by an unlicensed quack effected total blindness. When older she went about the streets playing the violin as a beggar. Depressed and unhappy, she wanted to die and often tried to kill herself.

When she was picked off the streets by a Government welfare society, one of the staff surgeons at St. Francis performed an operation that partially restored her vision. Taken into custody by the Canossian Sisters, she reportedly gave a classic word-description of the colorful animate and inanimate world she saw while en route to the Sisters' Home for the Blind near West Point.

A Catholic now, the girl has lost her bitterness and is anxious to impart to her friends what she sees of God's creation—something to which the average person scarcely averts.

Well Cared And Happy

