

Go away, go away!

Leprosy Is Going

FOUR YEARS AGO, 12 men bearing the old stigma of leprosy began a new life in an isolated valley in the Philippines.

Led by a young American missionary, they faced a challenging future: to prove that former leprosy victims can support themselves and continue to live as members of normal, happy families.

Many other former patients who had tried to establish homes in this wilderness had given up the attempt. Plagued by drought and then flooded by rain, frustrated by their inexperience and the outside world's seeming indifference, those first settlers finally returned to a life dependent on the sanitarium colony 17 kilometers away.

The discouraging memory of this defeat had made it difficult for the missionary—Harold Baar—to recruit new volunteer settlers from cured or “negative” cases at the sanitarium.

But Dr. Casimiro B. Lara, who was then chief of the sanitarium, fully supported Baar. For he knew after many years of service how important it was to restore former patients to their normal place in society.

Twelve men eventually agreed to attempt the new mission. They swore to themselves that they would succeed.

Wisely, they first organized themselves into an executive body. They called this the “Culion Agricultural Laboratory Farm (CALF) Board.”

They named Baar their project coordinator. A Catholic priest who offered his garden as an experimental plot agreed to become their adviser.

From dawn to evening, the men dedicated themselves to the backbreaking tasks before them.

They cut and cleared a trail through the choking thickets so as to allow the first jeep to reach their settlement. Not long afterwards, the national

Government took steps to assist in the project's success.

Meanwhile, with help and advice from the missionaries, the volunteers tested varieties of seeds on the soil. They discovered which plants would grow and multiply. They learned to rotate crops and to grow only those suited to the changing dry and rainy seasons. And they kept the rough road open and cleared of landslides caused by seasonal downpours.

As months passed and the men labored, help started to arrive. Asia Foundation donated vegetable seeds from its Seeds for Democracy program.

The Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE) sent garden and carpenters' tools. And a farm machine manufacturer willingly donated a plow and a harrow to new settlers as they arrived.

In the first year, the men selected and surveyed a 250-hectare area in the valley. They laid it out into farm plots of four hectares each.

Patag Village today has grown into a community of 19 families. It is rapidly building itself to become part of the political and economic life of the Philippine Republic.

The villagers have elected a Barrio Lieutenant (village head) who shares his authority with two policemen.

Patag's community spirit is kept alive by many self-help projects. The villagers "pay" taxes one day a week by donating their labor for the construction of a park or playground, the repair of a road or some other civic undertaking.

The men also are busy producing hollow blocks of rammed soil mixed with cement. Two blockmaking machines recently donated by CARE can produce as many as 400 blocks a day. Two teams of five men each operate the machines with increasing skill as the days pass.

With some of the blocks the men have produced, the community already has constructed a generator shed and a permanent piggery. The blockmakers also have entered into a contract with sanitarium officials to build a two-story recreation building for the colony.

Baar and his associates foresee other industries thriving at Patag before long. They point to shell craft, basketry, leather craft, fishing and weaving as "promising potentials." So far, the community already has started a modiste and tailor shop, barbershop and a general store.

Life in Patag is exemplified by the family of Hipolito Miano—one of the 12 volunteers who set out to build the settlement four years ago.

Hipolito's wife was among the first women to volunteer joining the new pioneers at Patag. Soon after her arrival, the Mianos welcomed a son—the first to be born in the community.

The newcomer seemed a good omen for the family's future.

A working carabao, along with Leghorn hens and a Lancaster rooster, were "advanced" by the village board so that the family could get a good start in farm life.

As Hipolito's farm began to produce, he started paying installments for the carabao which he now owns in full. He replaced the original poultry stock with one-month-old chicks. He began selling part of the farm produce to people in the outlying colony.

Meanwhile, the Government's Magsaysay Cattle Dispersal program reached out to Patag. And today, the Mianos proudly own a sturdy young heifer.

Hipolito's day begins early. Leaving his wife and four children in his palm-and-bamboo house, he heads for his

four-hectare rice plantation. He plows and harrows his fields or weeds the paddy and vegetable beds. Once in a while, he cultivates his banana and pineapple plants.

His wife helps with the farm chores. She also sews for the neighborhood to help increase her family's income.

The Mianos go to church on Wednesdays and Sundays in the village chapel. They spend some of their leisure watching or playing games in the community playground or park.

A rural health team visits Patag Village each week. It gives doses of "DDS"—the miracle drug Sulphone—to help safeguard the villagers from acquiring leprosy over again.

Except during the rice planting and harvesting seasons, Hipolito gives "bayani"—cooperative labor—for community projects every Friday of the week.

Today, he proudly wears a Special Policeman's badge. He says that it reminds him constantly that although his community's "first fight" has been won, "we must continue to be industrious and responsible citizens."

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