

GANDHIJI AND THE SICK

By V. R. Narayanan Nair

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed—

St. Matthew 8: 2-3

THESE WORDS from the Holy Bible come vividly to mind when one reads about Gandhiji's daily attendance on leprosy patients at the Segaon Ashram in 1939. Among those smitten by the dread disease was Parchure Shastri, a teacher and Ashramite for whom Gandhiji had great regard. Gandhiji would make it a point to visit Shastri and the other inmates of the Leprosarium every day. With his own bare hands Gandhiji would massage their deformed limbs, ask them, in tones of warm sympathy, about their progress under treatment, make them feel that they were not shunned because of their affliction and fill them with hope of relief and recovery.

Such was the man. He was truly Christ-like in his deep compassion for his suffering fellow-beings, and in his readiness to share their pain and suffering. What else are the attributes of the "Angels in White?"

Gandhiji's interest in matters relating to health and healing started early in his life. His mind, from early youth, dwelt on problems of good health, wholesome food and necessary moderation, if not abstinence, in the matter of sex. Among his early experiments in London were those in which he sought to evolve, for himself first and later for others, a way of living that would facilitate the development of a sound mind in a sound body dedicated to service of

humanity. This, to Gandhiji, was the essential purpose of life.

Gandhiji had a passion to tend the sick and serve the poor. He valued life close to nature for its simplicity and himself evolved and practised simple rules of health. He had deep and abiding faith in the virtues of vegetarianism which led him to carry out dietetic reforms based on pragmatic results obtained from personal experiments.

He was a co-trustee, with Mr. Jehangir Patel and Dr. Dinshah Mehta of Dr. Mehta's Nature Clinic in Poona, meant for the poor. Realising that hospitals in towns would not benefit the great mass of people living in the villages, Gandhiji organized a clinic at Uruli-Kanchan, where his favourite methods of nature cure were tried out. The methods of treatment as recommended by Gandhiji consisted of regulation of diet fast, sun-bath, fomentation, mud-bandage, massage and non-injurious indigenous herbs. The whole idea was that medical treatment should be inexpensive so as to benefit the poor and sensible in that it should aid the human system to develop its own curative forces.

Allopathy

Gandhiji had, very early in life, lost faith in modern medicine. He was convinced that for good health all that was necessary was to live according to the laws of nature in regard to diet, fresh air, exercise,

clean surroundings and pure heart.

Gandhiji's deep concern for human suffering and his readiness to minister to those who were sick or in pain found early expression in his life, when, in South Africa, he served in Ambulance Corps during the Boer War.

He adapted the lessons of first aid and nursing he learnt then to his own pet ideas of medical treatment and nature-cure later in his career.

Treatment

How Gandhiji nursed his second son Manilal during a severe attack of pneumonia when the boy was ten has been told in his own words. Gandhiji says, in his "Experiments with Truth," that the allopathic doctor who was called in to treat Manilal had recommended a diet of eggs and chicken broth, but this was unacceptable as the family was strictly vegetarian in food habits.

Gandhiji tried Kunhe's nature cure treatment. He gave Manilal hip-baths, never keeping him in the tub for more than three minutes, and kept him on orange juice mixed with water for three days. But the temperature persisted, going up to 104°F. At night Manilal was delirious. Gandhiji records:

"I began to get anxious. What would people say of me? What would my elder brother think of me? Could we not call in another

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