

A Village in Madras

by Sister M. Andie

Sacred Heart Maternity Hospital, Kulumur

KULUMUR is a small village of 2,000 inhabitants in the very north of the district of Trichy, 13 miles from Auyallur. It is a village exclusively agricultural, no shop, no market. For any purchase, salt or any food, we must go $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Sandurai where we can find a small railway station on the line between Madras and Trichy, and the terminus of a bus line. But to reach Sandurai is very often a big problem as there is no road, not even track—during the dry season the bullock carts and people follow the dry bed of the river, but during the rainy season the river becomes a torrent, dangerous to use.

Perhaps this is the reason why the people of Kulumur remain a little backward and seem agreed to remain so! Some fifteen years ago when the railway line was to be built it was proposed that it should pass Kulumur but the inhabitants refused! With a railway station the village would become more important...some strangers would come...how then could the grain be put out to dry in front of the house, where the passing people would walk? "So Kulumur remains exactly what it was in the time of their grand, grand forefathers... Ten years ago the Panchayat Board paid the expenses for two wells in the street of the *Harijans*; these wells are well built and cemented, but the people do not like the well water; they prefer the water of the ponds where people and cattle bathe together...so the children filled up well with the refuse of the street. Last year as the dryness of the season was very acute, the 14 feet wells were cleaned, deepened again, and allowed to be a "well". In the street of the caste people, each family possesses one or several portions of land which produces

varagu—groundnut etc. The soil is poor, sandy, and the black soil is not deep. Water is very scarce—only with the rains do we have sufficient water—one big man-made pond, a *veri*—keeps the rain water a little longer, but it is dry $\frac{3}{4}$ of the year. So cultivation can be made only during the rainy season. As the needs of the people are modest, we can't say that they are very miserable. But it is not the same case in the *Harijan* quarters. Their streets are well segregated from those of the shoemakers, and the *Harijans* are very disdainful of the others and believe they are superior to them. Anyhow, both are very poor and even miserable. Most of them do not possess anything even the hut where they live, not the fields where they work but is the property of their masters: *Panais*. They are not paid in cash but in grain, and that only at certain times when the crops are harvested. In between they must live on what they have earned during the harvesting. Our poor people are not thrifty at all; the men found some "coolie" work but they are paid only 75 nP. per day. To support wife and children with this is very hard!

To uplift them a little, a school was opened for the *Harijans* 10 years ago; there are more than 250 pupils attending the 8 classes today but very few *Harijans*! "Why should the children go to study when the father did not?" And "if the children go to school, who will look after younger brother or sister?" And "who will keep an eye on the goats or the swine which are living in full liberty as the children themselves?" "Some children from the caste streets are coming, but the biggest contingent comes from the orphanage where 160 boys and 40

girls of all castes and creeds are happy to receive instruction, food, shelter, clothing, etc. A *breche* is functioning for the smaller children who are not able to go to school, but need to be cared for, and so the older brothers or sisters are free, but even this is no inducement to the *Harijans*.

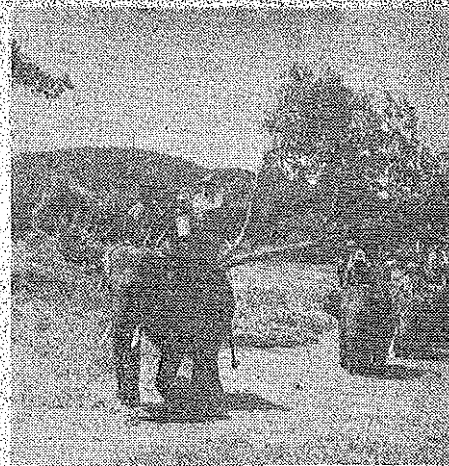
One dispensary is 16 years old, and 8 years ago we put up a *pakka* building with a small ward for nine beds. Soon it was over-crowded and we have now completed a bigger ward for maternity cases with 35 beds. People from the neighbouring villages, and even from as far as 15 and 20 miles, are coming in. We have a big crowd daily in the dispensary. The *Harijan* people who come when they have scabies or infected eye, do not come when they have a serious illness! The native doctor is much better!!

Anyhow, slowly, very slowly, we can find some improvements. Some pregnant women have consented, after several abortions, to have treatment from the hospital; one after 5 abortions, another after 7 abortions are very proud to have, at least, now, a nice, chubby baby in their arms—many others now are under treatment, but for this they must repudiate the fear that if a pregnant woman received one hypodermic injection, certainly the child will die in the womb.

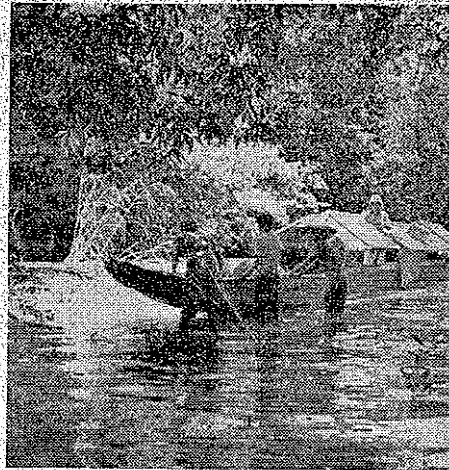
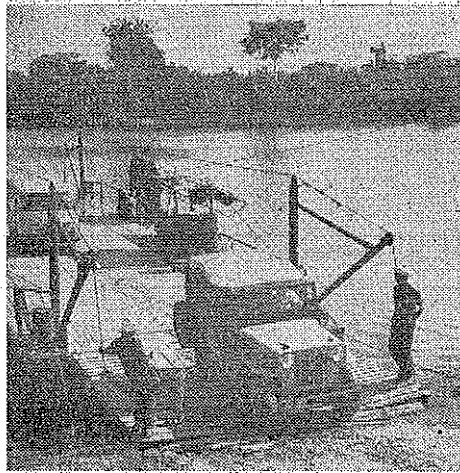
Daily our nurses are visiting the neighbouring villages and slowly teaching the people the principles of hygiene. They encourage them to come to the hospital, to undergo treatment before an ailment has become incurable. Some women have told us "We did not know it was so easy to give birth to a child in a hospital" and this was our best reward.

"Take heed to the limits of your capacity and you will arrive at a knowledge of the truth." —Avicenna

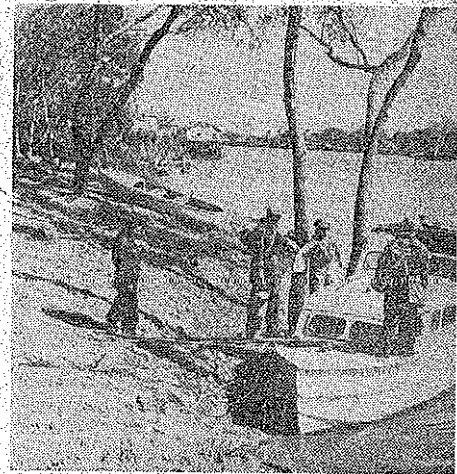
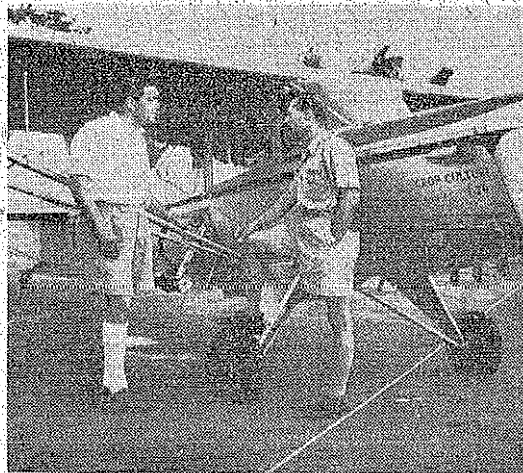
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