

CANADIAN LEPROSY.

The Leprosy Settlement at Gloucester County, New Brunswick.

One has not to go so far as Molokai to witness that awful blight of the flesh, leprosy. Here in this out of the way spot of New Brunswick, on the shores of the great ocean, are sights to make the soul sick, writes a correspondent of the *Cleveland Leader*. Here are literally immured a score or more of wretches touched with a foulness which, for no fault of their own, excludes them forever from the world. It is true they are treated with more consideration than the lepers of Scriptural times, who dwelt in the open sepulchres about Jerusalem, subsisting on the fragments that accidental charity dropped on the ground in the wilderness. Nor is heard from them that terrible cry of a lost soul in the Dantean hell, "Unclean, unclean." No; the lot of these unfortunates is made as endurable as the ghastly malady of which they are the victims will permit. The Dominion Government has erected a commodious hospital on the banks of the Tracadie river, overlooking the gulf into which the slender streamlet falls. It would be difficult to find anywhere a lovelier combination of "streamlet and hill" than this. Would that one could forget the hopeless fate of their fellows. But alas! they are, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." All that makes life worth enduring has been withdrawn from them.

Nevertheless it is pleasant to know that their lot is more endurable than it was years ago. When the lazaretto was established, about forty-five years ago, the poor creatures were lassoed like beasts, drawn by ropes, and beaten with long poles to force them toward the lazaretto. No one would touch them. They were torn from the bosom of their families, although in many cases they were the sole support of wife and children. The cottages which then constituted the hospital were filthy and unclean for. Males and females were cast together, and the contamination of immorality was added to the other horrors. Their food was laid down on the ground, to be eaten where and when they choose. To the people in the surrounding country the name "lazaretto" was clothed with all the horrors of gehenna. Little wonder, then, that when a member of a family was attacked with the loathsome disease his relatives took every precaution to conceal his condition. It may well be supposed that this secrecy tended to spread the disease. The condition of the lazaretto at length became a public scandal, so much so that in 1858 it reached the ears of Sister St. John (Miss Viger), of the Hotel Dieu, Montreal. She volunteered to go and care for these poor outcasts. Other volunteers were asked for, and every sister in the house tendered her services. Seven were chosen, carefully instructed in the treatment of leprosy, and then they started a mission compared with which the task of cleaning the Augean stables was a light one. They found the lazaretto a veritable abode of the damned. But the sisters cheerfully set to work, and in a very few years everything was transformed. The provincial government of New Brunswick, glad to have the scandal removed, provided all necessary funds for meeting the expenses of the institution. From being a loathsome charnel house it was transformed into a home. The inmates and the house itself are kept scrupulously clean. Hired attendants do all the work. The inmates have no tasks imposed on them.

Their path to death is smoothed and relieved of cares. They have a small farm with which they may do what they choose. They have boats, in which they may fish and trawl, or simply idle away the summer days. As to the origin of the disease, some find it in the deterioration caused by generations of intermarriage. The county of Gloucester, which is the seat of the disease, is settled by Canadian-French. The little community married and intermarried until nearly everybody was related to everybody else. One story is that 140 years ago a bark from the coast of Syria was wrecked in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, just off the shores of Gloucester county. The rescued sailors stayed for some considerable time with the Acadians, and from these the latter contracted the first case of leprosy. Another version has it that a stranger hailing from Quebec was afflicted with the horror, and left it as a legacy to his entertainers, while still another story is that the disease was contracted through some of the people eating putrid fish.

The disease is called leprosy, although it is probable that it is in many respects different from the leprosy which whitened the skin and rotted the bones of the Hebrews of old. A recent authority thus describes its symptoms: "The first indication of the disease is the appearance of tiny tubercles on the skin, and especially on the face. These increase from the size of a pin head to that of a hazelnut. The nose and the lips become thickened and swollen, so that the mouth is distorted and the features unrecognizable. The eyes droop, and eyelashes and eyebrows and sometimes the hair drop out. "After a time the tubercles break, ulcerate and discharge, the disease even attacking the cartilage and bone, and piece by piece joints and flesh fall off until death gives the sufferer freedom from his terrible lot." The average duration of the disease from the time the first symptoms are discovered until death ensues is about ten or twelve years.

The lazaretto was taken charge of by the Dominion Government in 1853, and Dr. Smith was placed in charge, who keeps a sharp lookout for infected persons. In a conversation had with the doctor he said: "I am not yet satisfied that the disease is incurable. I discharged one man from the hospital several years ago, and he has had no return of the symptoms. Last year I discharged a girl, who had been admitted to the lazaretto just as soon as the first symptoms of infection developed themselves. Still, though these two are apparently free from the malady, I do not regard the cases as permanently cured, and I still hold them under close surveillance. Of late the disease has been dying out in Tracadie, its original seat; but out of the five new cases taken in last year one was from Cape Breton and four from the parishes which adjoin Tracadie. I have traced a new focus to the disease, situated between Shippeagan and Caraquet, and from this centre I have traced it to other settlements."

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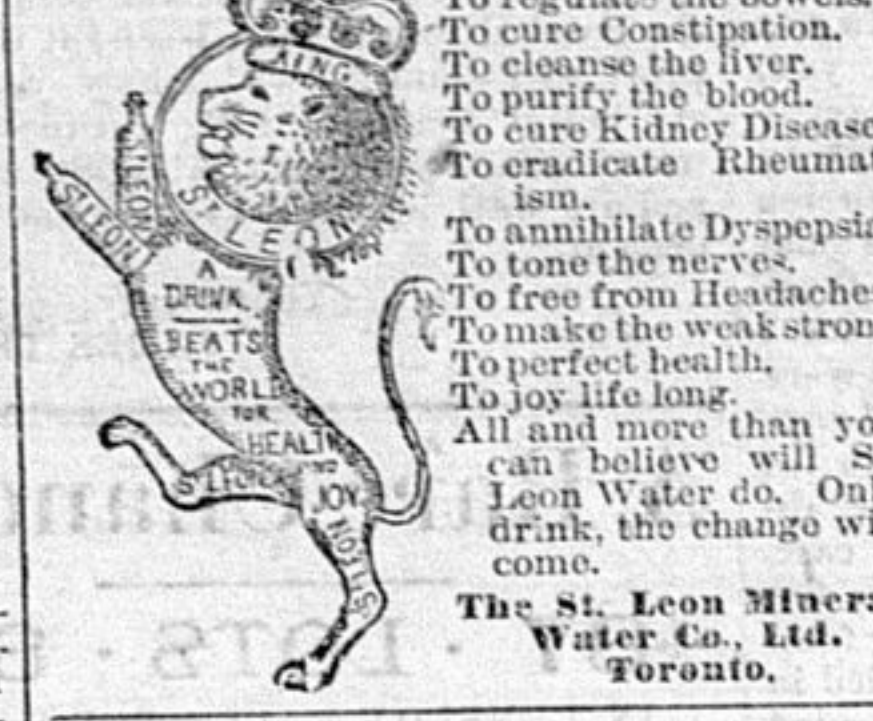
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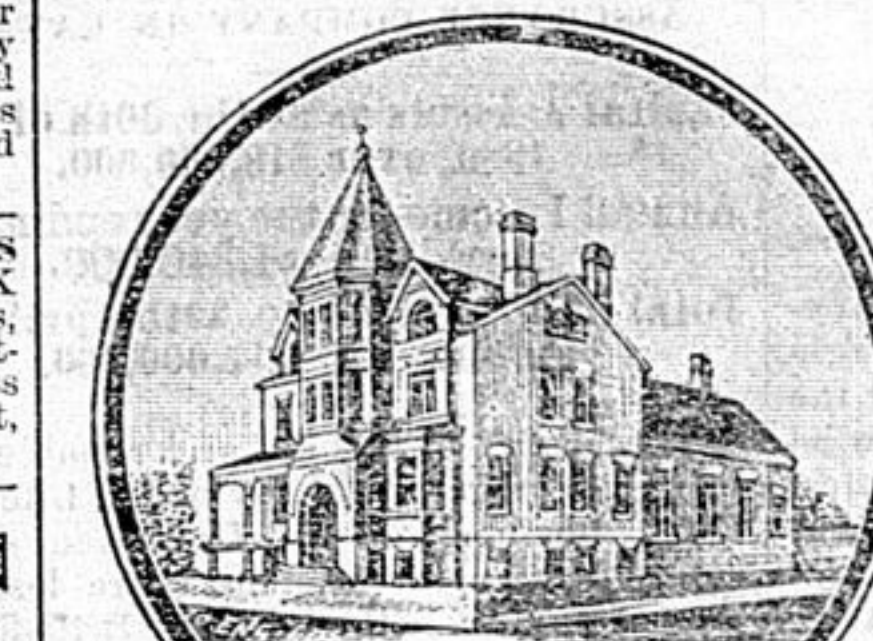
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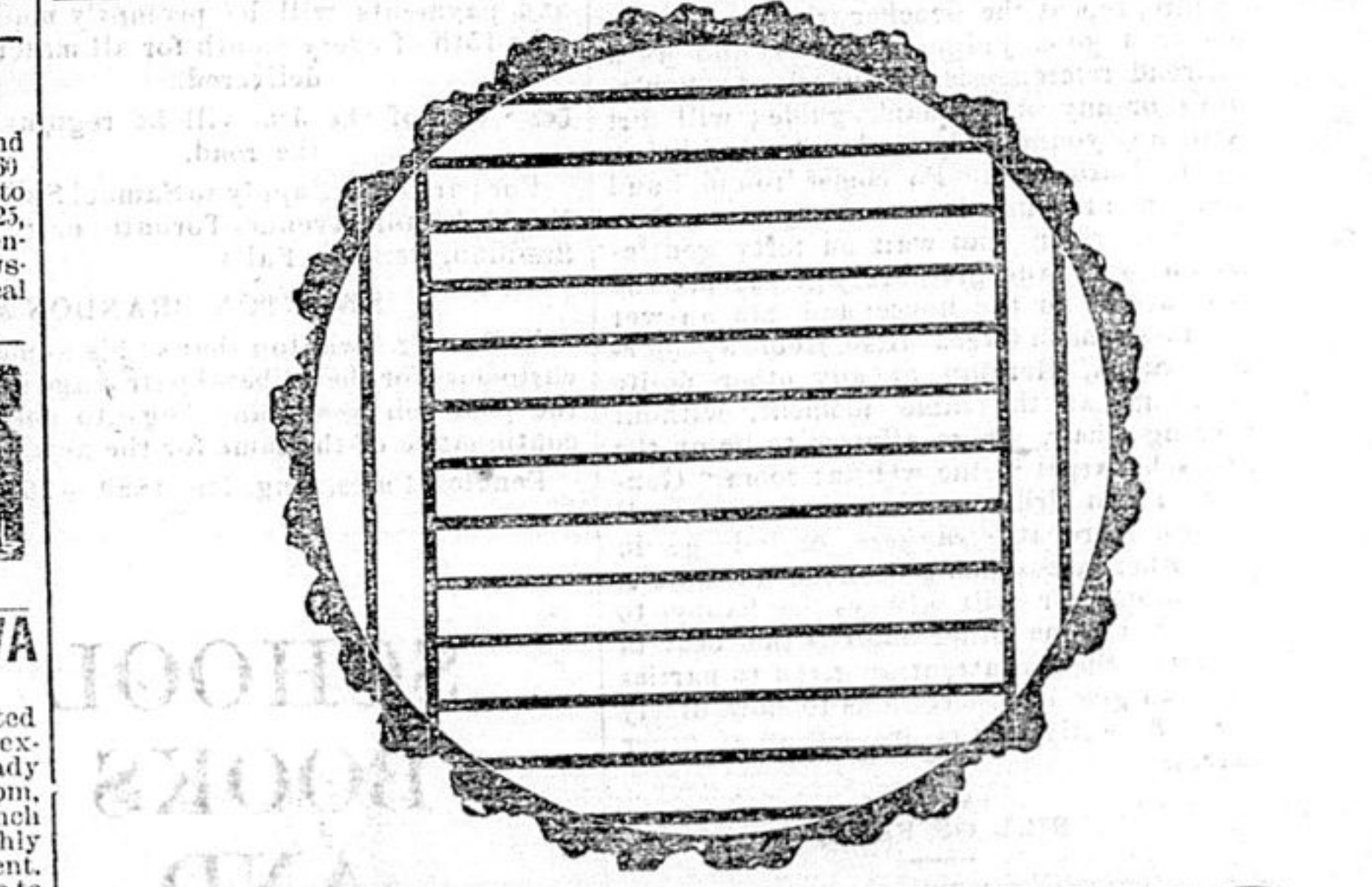
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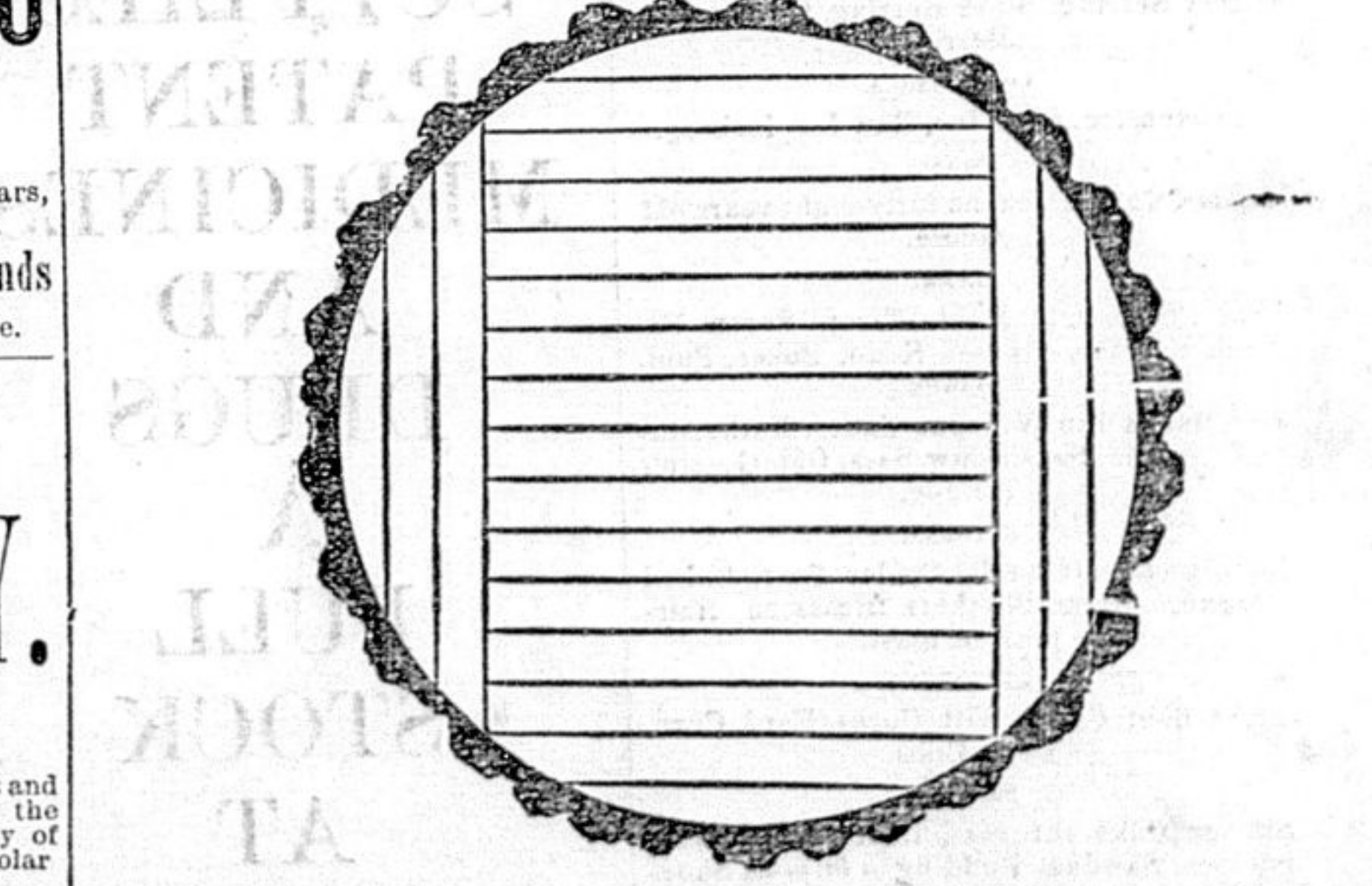
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