

Mercy ON MOLOKAI

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 – 1894) was a Scottish novelist, poet, essayist and travel writer. His best-known books include *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

A celebrity during his lifetime, Stevenson now ranks among the 30 most translated authors in the world, just below Charles Dickens.

Stevenson was particularly moved by a visit to Molokai, an island in the Hawaiian archipelago. It is 38 by 10 miles in size, with a land area of 260 square miles, making it the fifth largest of the main Hawaiian Islands and the 27th largest island in the United States.

Molokai is known as the long-time residence of Father Damien de Veuster, a Belgian priest and canonized Roman Catholic saint who cared for sufferers of Hansen's Disease, also known as leprosy. Historically, a small north shore colony on Molokai, Kalaupapa, was a refuge for sufferers of Hansen's Disease, but there are no active cases of the disease on Molokai today. Those who continue to live in the settlement are patients who chose to stay after the segregation policy was lifted in 1969.

On his tour of the island, when Stevenson first saw the terrible devastations of leprosy, he was almost turned into an infidel. But when he saw the miracle of Christian pity (and pity means to show mercy) and compassion in the leper hospital, and the example of Father Damien, Stevenson's faith emerged triumphant. He wrote in the guest book there:

*To see the infinite pity of this place,
The mangled limb, the devastated face,
The innocent sufferer smiling at the rod,
A fool was tempted to deny his God.
He sees, he shrinks. But if he gazes again,
Lo, beauty springing from the breast of pain!
He marks the cisterns on the mournful shores;
And even a fool is silent and adores.*

The associates of Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home are engaged in a great mission, too. Clearly, not everyone can work in a nursing center or serve the frail and infirm elderly, because they may be easily troubled by the difficulties others are experiencing.

For our associates, however, they see an opportunity to extend help, to offer mercy, and show compassion as servants of our Lord.

And that is a beautiful picture, indeed.