

CHILDREN WHO WANT.

WORK THE SHEPHERD-ST. MISSION ACCOMPLISHES.

FEEDING THE HUNGRY AND CLOTHING THE STARVED.

SAD TALES OF SORROW AND SUFFERING AT PRESTON.

(BY OUR COMMISSIONER.)

"Remember that if the opportunities for great deeds should never come the opportunity for good deeds is renewed for you day by day."—Old Maxim.

Christmas is the special season of those charitable opportunities which can lessen the sorrows and the sufferings of the poor and make the heart glad with the unspeakable pleasure of acts of mercy silently done. A year ago, when helping to serve out hot and nutritious soup and bread in the Shepherd-street Mission Room, Preston, to a crowd of hungry ragged children, who had come into the warm room shivering, their ragged garments sopping wet through with the biting sleet showers, I was attracted by a little chap whose arms were blood raw with the frost, and whose teeth were chattering with the cold. We placed him near the stove, and got him a big basin of soup, which he drank greedily, and the junk of bread speedily disappeared. In a few moments I saw him crying, and asked, "Now, my little man, whatever is the matter?" He said he was hungry still, and wanted more. I said to him, "What had you to your breakfast?" and he replied, "Please, sir, we've gotten no breakfasts at our house." We gave him all he wanted, and took him to the ante-room the starved little ones—who come for daily dinners—know so well, and rigged him up with a little knitted jersey, quite a swell overcoat, and a cosy cap, and he toddled off to school as proud as Punch. On a

second table was an equally pinched, friendless-looking brother of his who had a double dose of soup and bread, and then we found three sisters, one with a particularly sweet-looking face. Not one of them had had a bite before they came to that unsectarian temple of hospitality, which is kept going out of the generous gifts of the kind-hearted people of this town and district. The girls I have referred to were wretchedly dressed, and two of them were made snug and warm out of the bundles of old clothing in the big basket.

The sorrows of these starved children so impressed me that I went on Christmas Eve to the little cottage in a poor part of the town in which they lived. I knocked at the door, which was opened by a little girl, who said, "Daddy, it's the gentleman wot give us them clothes." There were eight children in front of a mere handful of fire, looking sad enough, and the father was seated gloomily with head bent, in a chair, at the corner, as if desolation sat upon him. They had not a bite of food in the house, but a little procession to a neighbouring well-lighted provision shop soon remedied all this, and one of the girls said, "We had been saying that Santa Claus never came to our house." There was a merry party in that poor home ere the children went to bed and the bells rang in Christmas Day. All the eight children were at the Shepherd-street Christmas morning breakfast, and each took a parcel home enough to keep the whole family going for a day or two.

With the end of the asperities of winter the dinners ceased.

350 TO 400 FED DAILY.

The scene shifts to a week ago. The dinners to the children began again, and we found poverty and hunger among the poor to an extent that was little anticipated. From 350 to 400 children are fed daily. I inquired about the family to which I have referred, and found to my sorrow that the two little boys had, since I saw them, passed beyond these voices, and the little home had known a terrible sorrow. Gone from hunger and their world of sadness to the eternal rest. Yet

The sunshine from the heavenly shore
Around them, as a glorious robe,
Shall shine for evermore.

Here is one of the tragedies of the slums, a pathetic illustration of the want and sorrow which Mr. Williamson, and those so earnestly associated with him, are striving with the small means placed at their disposal to assuage.

One often feels puzzled, in contemplating this humanitarian work in which every penny of the moneys subscribed is expended in giving relief, to know what fresh phase to present in our annual appeal for help. There is nothing like dealing with dry facts, letting the children speak for themselves.

The other day over 400 of the children of want

and suffering were fed, and I went among them, after they had had their dinners, and asked particulars as to their homes. These I supplemented by a reference to some printed application forms for clogs, on which full particulars are given by clergy and ministers of all churches, of the number of family, the nature of employment of father and mother, and the total income. In quite a number of cases I found there were eight children in the house, and many of them had had no food at all prior to coming to the mission room. Many of the children had simply gone to school with a bit of dry bread. However good trade may be, there are always cases of sickness and terrible poverty among the poor, many of whom will suffer any privation rather than go with their children to the workhouse. In some cases the father was dead; in others, the mother had been called hence, and the elder girl had to be the mother of the house; and one wondered, looking at the care-worn face, how she managed it all. I could wish for nothing better than that people should go down to Shepherd-street at half-past twelve o'clock any day, and see the grand work that is being done for the hungry, ill-clad lads and lasses.

STARVATION BEFORE THEM.

I will cite a few cases. In the very first I come to the father is a labourer only partially employed; the mother is ill; there are five children, and the total income, this winter, has never exceeded seven shillings a week! But for the mission dinners these children would starve. Take the very next case. There are seven of a family. The father fills coal bags, the mother has no employment, and the average weekly income for some time past has been five shillings per week. How are they to live? All the children come to the daily dinners. Case number three. There are six of a family, the children in rags, the chill winds penetrating their bodies. The father is out of work, so is the mother, and one little lad is doing odd jobs, earning three shillings per week, the total income to pay rent and provide food and clothing! But for the charity of the friends of the mission the children would have absolute starvation before them. Come forth with your gifts ye who love your fellow men!

I ask a pinched girl with a ragged wrap to cover her frail frame how many there were at home. She said, "Please, sir, ten, with my dadda and mamma." "What does your father do?" "He's a joiner, but is out of work," she replied. "And your mother?" "She's out of work, too." One lad was working. He earned eight shillings a week, which was the total income. "Are you ever hungry?" I asked, and she sadly replied, "Oh, yes, sir; we are often. It hurts me inside sometimes when I want bread and can't

get any." Both food and clogs have been given in this case. A little lad stands up. He tells me that there are five in their family, and that his father, a labourer, is out of employment; his mother is out of work, there is not a penny of income, and they all suffer the pangs of hunger.

The woe-begone little children did enjoy their food, for they were as hungry as hunters, and pinched looking. It filled one with sadness to look at them. I select another case—five of a family, the father, a labourer out of work, the mother nothing to do, the children too young to work, and not a penny of income. A little ragged toddler told me there were eight in their family. "My dadda is too ill to work, and mammy is ill in bed. A l we have coming in is ten shillings from the poor office. We get what crusts we can, and are almost always hungry." Still these sorrows of the poor go unheard by you who fare plenteously!

Here is the wan child of a dock labourer. "Come and let us have a little chat," I said. She told me there were seven at home, and they were very poor and hungry, the only amount "addled" in a week being at times three shillings. The sad little sonnie of an ironworker told me that there are nine of a family; the father is out of work, but the mother goes out and earns about ten shillings a week. Case after case.. of suffering I could recite. A newspaper seller with a family of five, earns 7s. 6d. per week. The dinners are a blessing to this family. A knocker-up has a total income of 14s. a week, to pay rent, and find clothing and food for eleven children. Imagine! A poor widow has six children, and not a penny of income. But for the b'lessings of these dinners she would be in the workhouse, and the little ones pauperised. The last case I inquired into was one in which there was a family of 12, the father and mother out of work, and two children employed, the total income being 11s. a week.

WILL YOU HELP?

Let these terrible facts speak for themselves. It needs no sentiment to enlarge upon them. Let all the people of Preston who are able, give according to their means, and enjoy their Christmas with the knowledge that they have done something to provide clothing and food for the poor little ragged, hungry children of Preston.

To-day we open a "Daily Post" fund to assist in providing food and clothing for the poor children, and shall be glad to announce subscriptions. The proprietors of the Embee Hall have kindly promised us to give a cinematograph entertainment on the afternoon of Tuesday next, and an entertainment and concert by the Lyric Choir on the evening of that day in aid of our fund.