

# HEARTH SHADOWS.

## FEEDING PRESTON'S HUNGRY CHILDREN.

### Work of the Shepherd Street Mission.



#### READY!

(BY OUR COMMISSIONER.)

The sorrows and sufferings, the hunger pangs of little children who have done no wrong, who are in no sense responsible for their misery, call out for compassionate attention these bitter winter days. Christmas is coming! The church bells will soon "ring out the old, ring in the new!" How the seasons roll on! Yet the same merciful obligation rests upon us all year by year. We have pleasures. We have enjoyments. But the sweetest, most satisfying pleasure of all is to bend the head, and, looking kindly into the wistful, upturned face of the hungry child be the human minister to her bodily needs.

We have many organisations, many aunts, many good people doing noble acts in a shy and quiet way. But there is nothing to surpass the humble work of Christian heroism which, without fee or material reward, is being performed day by day in the Shepherd-street Mission by Mr. and Mrs. Williamson and a little band of helpers, who, away from the ken of "respectable folk," are patiently engaged in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and speaking words of hope and comfort to the suffering children of the slums and alleys. Between 30 and 40 little children, some deserted, some neglected, even despised by inhuman parents, some parentless, are being looked after with affectionate solicitude within Mr. Williamson's home. Brought in, often mere skeletons, they are watched through the "vigils of the night," until they are brought to strength, and then you have the joy of seeing them putting on flesh and blossoming into ordinary lads and lassies. They are comfortably clad, from clothes sent to the mission, given ample food, sent to the day school and the church to which they belong, and brought up to go out into good and suitable employments.

This is only a small part of the work. The Shepherd-street Mission, or the Mission of the Good Shepherd, is the centre of a great benevolence whose supporters we have found in men and women of all ranks and conditions. A great many thousand suppers were given last year to hungry children, the sum subscribed in generous answer to "The Lancashire Daily Post" appeal being just sufficient to fill the two great mission boilers, so kindly given last year by Dr. R. C. Brown, every night, and send the starving little ones home to beds whose coverings are often enough old, worn sacks, with their cravings satisfied, to sleep until the morrow. And when the morrow comes, the cupboards are now and then bare; the child gets from its bed, and in case after case I have inquired into the mother has had the heartbreaking pain of sending

her little ones to school, through freezing blasts like those we have to-day, without bite or sup.

#### SCENES AT DINNER TIME.

This sad fact has induced the few workers who voluntarily go day by day to the Shepherd-street Mission to change the system. For many winters past suppers have been given the poor children. But it is a long, exhausting time to wait, with strength inadequately kept up off a few crusts or chips, until the shadows of the night veil the pinched little bodies, before they are comforted with a full, satisfying meal. This winter the poor children are being given a good, nutritious dinner between twelve and one o'clock.

I went down to the Mission Room yesterday. The boilers were filled with rich pea soup and meat, boiling and bubbling, and filling the room with an appetising aroma. The hospitable song they sang beat out and out the merry chirrup of the cricket on the hearth. The Town Hall clock booms out twelve. Clean pint pots are filled to the brim with the steaming soup, a thick slice of bread besides each vessel.

The elementary school doors are thrown open. Out come the children. Some run off to good homes and good dinners. Others, poorly clad, and hungry, run eagerly to the Shepherd-street Mission Room, to get as near the front of the long lines of children as they can. It is a bitter day. There is snow on the ground, and as you look at the eager, expectant faces of the children you are filled with pity. Most of them are very scantily clad, and shivering. No time is wasted. Mr. Williamson opens the doors, and in they troop into a well-lighted, comfortable room. Taking their seats they warm their hands against the hot mugs. In a few minutes the tables are filled, heads are bent, eyes closed, and the children, with clasped hands say "grace." Whilst they were at dinner I went among them. Let their sorrows speak to our readers.

One little girl with bonny blue eyes, with scanty rags about her said, "We are six at home. My daddy and mamma are both out of work. We are often hungry. We haven't much in the house, and had only dry bread and a little weak tea without milk to breakfast. We don't get no meat except at the Mission Room."

Another pinched looking girl said: "There are four children at our house. My father is a labourer, and has been out of work since last Christmas." I asked "And what food do you get at home?" and she replied, "A little dry bread, sir." "And are you often hungry?" I asked, and she dropped her head and said "Yes, sir, many a time."

#### SOME SAD CASES.

A big, badly-clad lad said, "There are seven children in our house, four little ones and three big ones. One boy is working. Father is out of work and my mamma goes out once a week washing. Six of us children come here, or we shouldn't get our dinners."

In another case there were nine of a family, and next to nothing coming in. The children would have been utterly lost but for the clothing, clogs, and food supplied by the Shepherd-street Mission. "We all go to bed without supper, sir," she said.

A most painful case was that revealed by a woe-begone looking lad. "There are eleven of us, sir. My father has been a long time in the hospital. Mother can't work. An elder brother works at a brickwork, but they've had to stop with the snow. We have to go to school sometimes without any breakfast, sir." "What had you this morning?" I asked, and he sadly said, "Nothing at all, sir." "Then," I added, "get on with your dinner, my lad, and have as much as you can eat."

Still another case where the father was in the Infirmary. Sicknes comes to all, rich and poor: It was another case of semi-starvation.

"I have no mamma now, sir," said a really good-looking girl. "She's buried in the cemetery. Daddy only can get work now and then. There are nine children, but four of us has been taken by our aunts. Only one at home is working. I cleans up, sir. We had no breakfast, but we all went to school."

A weeny girl said her father was out of work, and her mother went out trying to sell steel shavings. They had very little to eat, and were very grateful to be able to get their dinner at Shepherd-street.

A girl about 12 years of age told me that her father was out of work, that they picked up crusts, had dry potatoes to dinner on the Sunday, and went to bed supperless. How the poor help the poor! A ragged lad said his granny did her best for them. He had no mother. On Sundays a few potatoes were sent in by a neighbour and they ate them to salt.

I felt that the conduct of the uncle of one of the families of poor children was truly heroic. The father was dead, the mother ill, and the uncle sent every week 5s. and what scraps of food he could spare from his lumber table.

Can you not do something to assuage these sorrows? I ask our readers once more to answer with that generosity which up to now has never failed, and which will yield to them this Christmastide the whole, some satisfaction of having, according to their means, hearkened to the cries of these poor, hungry children.

"The Lancashire Daily Post" fund opens to-day.