

Preston Herald Saturday
November 2nd 1889

RESCUE WORK IN PRESTON.

SHEPHERD-STREET MISSION.

A purely undenominational organisation to help destitute persons and neglected children—these few words describe the objects, ends, and aims of Shepherd-street mission. There are few inhabitants of Preston but know that Shepherd-street and its environs form one of the poorest and perhaps the most degraded portions of the Proud Town, so that any attempt to carry knowledge and temperance and substantial assistance where ignorance, brutality, drunkenness, and squalid misery have prevailed must enlist sympathy for those who have sufficient self-sacrifice in their natures to take part in such a work of rescue. This rescue work is what the members of the Shepherd-street Mission and their friends have devoted their energies and finances to for the last thirteen years, and they have done it in a quiet, unassuming way, without any of those sensational methods which have grown into so much favour among followers of religion. There are no bands of music, noisy drums, flaunting colours, or exciting harangues, used to further the aims of the mission; all outside show is tabooed, and reliance is placed on nothing else but plain teaching and preaching to fallen men and women, with timely assistance where such is required. That the workers are respected for their endeavours has been frequently proved. The distributors of tracts in lodging-houses—where are gathered all sorts and conditions of men—and those who venture with words of hope into domiciles which must be nameless appear to have a halo of protection around them such as can only be secured by the wearers of the Red Cross on a battle-field. Even one of the lowest of men, an ordinary loafer, has been known to protect the mission workers against interference with the gallantry of a knight errant, while the lowest of women show the greatest respect and gratitude to those from whom they receive no words but those of pity and kindness in a career so terrible in its results. "It is surprising," says one of the visitors, "How you can talk to these people if you go in a right way, but you must not go in a commanding sort of spirit. Some years ago a lady—a novice at mission work—entered one of these dens, and opening the cupboard door rather unthinkingly inquired how they could afford to buy such superior provisions. She was at once ordered out of the house, and told never to enter it again. If they discover that you are earnestly endeavouring to help them and to be their friends, they will never say a wrong word to you, or molest you in any way, but will listen respectfully and quietly to all you have to say." Such is the power of kindness over the very lowest and most vice-stricken of human beings. It is about thirteen years since this mission work was originated, in all honour be it said, by some of the young men who attended Lancaster-road Congregational Chapel. About a dozen of these earnest youths commenced their task by distributing tracts in such neighbourhoods as Spring-gardens, the Old Vicarage, Back-lane, Water-street, Shepherd-street, Leeming-street, Library-street, Rose-street, &c. This method was followed for some time, and then a free tea was given to as many of the poorest and most degraded class as cared to come. Gaining courage as they went on the missionaries began to hold meetings in a house in Rose-street on Sundays, after ordinary service time; and the one room became so crowded that a wall had to be taken down to provide more accommodation. Determined to still further enlarge their sphere of operations, they, with the aid of some willing friends, were enabled to rent those old well-known premises in Shepherd-street, which were occupied for three years or more as a Sunday school for poor children and a mission-room. This place became uncomfortably crowded, and had to be enlarged by the removal of a division wall. At last these premises were wanted for other purposes, and the committee were enabled to purchase the present premises, which, if we mistake not, were one time used as Preston Grammar School, and then as the home of Dr. Shepherd's Library. Latterly this building has been converted into dwellings, but was easily altered to its old form, and now there is a moderately large room upstairs, with classroom on the lower storey, where the children meet on Sunday nights while service is being conducted upstairs. For the last six years the work has been carried out on thoroughly undenominational lines. For several years two gentlemen on their sole responsibility took upon themselves the providing of all the funds required, but in May, 1887, it was found that some other arrangement would have to be made, and a committee was formed, as widely representative as possible. On it there are now to be found members of the Church of England, Wesleyans, Society of Friends, Congregationalists, and it is needless to say that everything goes on in a very satisfactory manner. Lodging-house meetings were inaugurated some twelve years ago, and now every Sunday night, previous to Divine service in the churches, the residents at six lodging-houses simultaneously hear the Truth preached, the various speakers being selected from members of all denominations. These lodging-houses are situate in some of the streets previously mentioned, and at first the inmates were very suspicious about being interfered with in their usual Sunday avocations, but now they anticipate the meetings with pleasure, and give a hearty welcome to the visitors. Occasionally a meeting may be missed, owing to the inability of one of the speakers to keep his engagement, when they take no pains to conceal their disappointment. As a rule the motley gathering to be found in the large room of a lodging-house is very civil and orderly; sometimes one or two may have had a little too much drink, which will make them inclined to interrupt, but in this case no scruples are made by the other inmates about ejecting them until the proceedings are over. It is no uncommon thing to meet in the lodging-houses men, and women too, who have been in far better circumstances—there are occasionally men who have been Sunday school superintendents, and teachers, local preachers, professional men, and tradesmen. Some of them are well educated, will ask rather puzzling questions, and can talk on almost any subject. A man who now attends the meetings occasionally was formerly in a good medical practice, and is most respectably connected. A man now working for a neighbouring Corporation, and conducting himself most honourably, was found by the mission workers living in a common lodging-house, working wherever he could,

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respectably connected. A man now working for a neighbouring Corporation, and conducting himself most honourably, was found by the mission workers living in a common lodging-house, working wherever he could, drinking all the money he could get, and separated from his wife and family. A middle-aged woman in an East Lancashire town got drunk, quarrelled with her landlady, soon found herself committed to Preston gaol for seven days, and on the ensuing Saturday night was living in a common lodging-house in the latter town. However, on the Sunday she heard of the mission, sent for some of the workers, requested the loan of a shawl, and next morning looked out for work. Employment was found for her by Wednesday, and she has been most respectable ever since. No doubt she would have gravitated to a still lower grade if it had not been for the timely assistance afforded. Only the other week a woman was found lying in bed in a fireless room. She had not a stitch of clothing to put on her back, and her two little children were in a similar plight—all because the husband and father had deserted the family some months ago and gone to America. Of course, clothing had to be provided and temporary aid afforded. There are many more cases, full of harrowing details, which people have no conception of who have never been brought into contact with that class which a lately-deceased statesman once described as the "residuun." It may be judged that the mission is in want of much more assistance than it receives. In the first place about £300 is required to clear off the debt on the new premises. Then there is an almost continual demand for cast-off clothing of all descriptions, but more particularly children's shoes and stockings, for sometimes it has been painful to see young children sent out with but the scantiest of clothing. As may be judged, the work is very difficult, harassing, and in many cases disappointing. Great circumspection has to be used in the giving of money and clothing, or everything will go for drink. Even when bread has been given in relief it has been known to be sold so as to get a copper for drink. It will thus be seen that great care is required. There is a fair amount of rescue work accomplished, and more than one girl has been prevailed upon to return to her friends. We believe we are within the mark in stating that the Ashton Home had its inception in this mission, but the committee found they had too much on their hands, and the work had to be carried on by others. At the rooms in Shepherd-street school is held every Sunday afternoon, a children's service at night, and a service for adults at seven o'clock; every Thursday night a temperance meeting is held; on a Sunday morning, from half-past ten o'clock to twelve, lodging-houses are visited and tracts distributed. About a dozen ladies and gentlemen assist in the distributing of tracts, and on the plan there are some fifty gentlemen who have promised to address the various meetings. Several children have through the agency of the mission been removed from their squalid surroundings, and by the help of Mrs. Birt, of Liverpool, sent out to Canada. One boy there now, in a good home, was in Preston shamefully treated by his mother, and she did not care what became of him. He says in one of his letters, "I like this country (Canada) better than England, because in England I was starved." Such are a few of the details of the great and useful work which is being steadily carried on among the poor and the outcast of Preston, and it rests with the more prosperous classes to say whether the noble and humane mission shall in the future suffer either for want of funds and material, or for volunteers to carry on the undertaking.

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