

SAMARITANS IN THE SLUMS

FEEDING THE HUNGRY IN A PRESTON MISSION.

TOUCHING TALES OF WANT AND WOE.

(BY OUR COMMISSIONER.)

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It drippeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

For I hunger and am needy and poor. O, help me!
Make no delay.

She was pale and thin, with sweet, sad eyes. She had neither dresses rich nor dresses rare, nor picture hat with ostrich plume. She was in rags, wearing a battered wreck of an old straw hat. The worn and broken wooden soles of her clogs had let in the icy slush of the street which saturated the rags around her feet. She had hold of the hand of her brother, a puny lad, with tatters about him, bare feet, and legs as blue as steel with the biting snow broth.

They were intently watching the Shepherd-street Mission door, against whose panels they pressed anxiously, waiting for the opening by Mr. Williamson and his little band of good Samaritans, men and women, and youths also, who humbly and unnoticed do the work of the Good Shepherd, counting themselves as nothing, not taking a penny, but ministering to the needs of the poor and the orphan day by day, night by night, all the long year through.

BLOW, BLOW, THOU WINTER WIND.

The long procession of 300 children behind the pair of wretched little outcasts against the door was not so lively as when I was last in the slums. It was a Siberian wind. The guttersnipes were sliding through the slush as I came along. "Blow, blow, thou winter wind. Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude for benefits forgot." But the teeth of the north wind bite keen, and to 300 draggled and despised, sad and sorrowful lads and lasses, whose total birthright would not fetch the bid of a "mess of pottage," that wind means almost the chill of death.

If these children of the slum, these barelegged bantlings, were to look for relief to the curmudgeon "Sams," who never, in any feature, recall the good Creator to His creatures, they would fall like the leaves in autumn. It has been the kind-hearted men and women in mansion as well as in cottage in Preston and for miles around who have, especially last year, made glad the hearts of these weary-limbed, hungry waifs, whose grimy faces and wistful eyes haunt you when you've left them.

By the charity of masters and men, mistresses and servants, and the men and women of the mills and workshops, the railway station, and every hive of industry round about between 300 and 400 hungry little ones were fed last winter almost every night, and we found hundreds with clogs or boots. Beyond question many lives were saved.

I was among the ragged children the other night, and I am asked to offer their gratitude to those ministering angels, who last Christmas, from the fireside nook of hall and cot, remembering their own blessings of good homes, heard the cry of the hungry children, and gave them bread, each according to his measure. There is no sorrow like unto their sorrow.

FROM FULL HEARTS.

Those who, of Fortunatus's kin, are softly ushered into a prospect bright and burnished, cannot omit, at this season of sympathetic duty, to think mercifully of the puny children sent to suffer in the back slums of life, and to crown their Christmas with the glorious satisfaction of having filled the hungry with good things. Often enough are some of these poor, starving archins glad to gnaw at the marrowless bone for which no dog would quarrel. The very thought of that hunger of children, which is one of the tragedies of slum life, fills one with a pain unspeakable.

Last Christmas a country working man wrote to me, "I've five children all ill in bed, but, thank God, they have food, and they want to think of the Babe of Bethlehem, and do as He would have them." Some money was enclosed. Another letter said, "Why, I've been thinking if our Jack and Ellen and t' other children were crying for food and nothing in the house, sobbing their little hearts out, why I should go mad. We send you five shillings, and God bless the poor."

Gifts like these were surely registered in the High Court of Heaven.

Ding dong! Ding dong! There goes the mission bell. The coffee is piping hot, the big currant buns are stacked. The doors are open and the hungry army tumbles over one another in the rush to get to the seats, where they sit in eager-eyed expectancy. In the blaze of the gas I went round among them, and with all the half-famished pallor, and the tatters hung together with strings or fastened with safety pins in cases, I never, in my life, saw a bonnier lot of slum children, girls with sweet gracious eyes, and calm resigned patient look. Mr. Williamson announced that if only the good fairies will send him 1,000 toys he will give each child a toy on Christmas morning. The little faces beamed and glowed, and they burst forth into cheers. I felt some responsibility when Mr. Williamson turned round and asked me if I would help to get the toys. I said, "Oh, we will find the toys somehow," and then wasn't there a row!

SOME SAD CASES.

When the coffee was poured out from the pails into the basins and mugs, and the kiddies were eagerly devouring the supper, I went among them and inquired into their circumstances. The first little girl said, "There's my daddy and my mammy, our baby and us two," pointing to a little toddler by her side. They had had potatoes to dinner, and nothing since until that supper, which they discussed with keen relish.

Next to her was a sad-faced lad. I said, "Well, sonnie, how many are there in your house?" He looked blankly at me. "Please, sir, he's deaf and dumb, and I've browt him," said a little brotherly chap by his side.

Then I came to a clean-faced little girl wearing an old glengarry, ragged, and wan. She said she was one of seven. They had had onions for dinner and a few "tatoes."

It was a case of "We are seven" in the next inquiry I made.

"Are you poor?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," she replied; "very."

I inquired, "What had you for breakfast?" and he answered "bread," and it was the same for dinner, with the addition of some tea "made from leaves my auntie gave us."

A hoarse, pale little lassie told me plaintively that he had no father, that her mother was out of work, but that she earned 2s. a week or so. They had had bread for breakfast and meal and water for dinner.

And what for tea?" I asked. Dropping her eyes, he said, "Please I've not had no tea, sir."

POOR OF PRESTON.

THE FEEDING OF HUNGRY CHILDREN

EFFORT TO RAISE FUNDS FOR WINTER SUPPERS.

A committee of Preston gentlemen has been formed, under the presidency of Councillor Ord, Mayor of Preston, to arrange for a great public entertainment in aid of that portion of the unsectarian mission of Shepherd-street which provides free suppers to hungry little children.

These waifs of the courts and the alleys, suffering for no sin of their own, are all sent away from the mission room well fed, and never a question asked as to what church they belong. The number of poor hungry children in the town is great despite the prosperity, and the struggle to find the money to pay the costs of the free suppers is great. The present movement is the result of the Commissioner's article which appeared a year ago in the "Lancashire Daily Post." Some Preston gentlemen have determined, now that the cold weather is coming, to carry out the spirit of that article in a practical fashion, knowing the generosity of Preston people when once the claims of the poor are placed before them. They approached Mr. Broadhead, proprietor of the Hippodrome, who promptly said he would certainly help the poor of Preston to his utmost, and he offered his Hippodrome, the services of any of the artistes engaged for that week, and his full orchestra free for a great entertainment on the afternoon of Saturday, December 22nd. Some of the best artistes in Preston and North Lancashire have offered their services free to Mr. J. J. Jackson, who has charge of the musical arrangements.

We hope the people of Preston will rally to the help of the poor of Preston on the 22nd. There is no big football match here, and the Hippodrome entertainment for the poor should be the event of the day. Mr. J. W. Makinson, of 59, Holmrook-road, is the hon. secretary of the committee. If a good sum is raised, part of it will be devoted to the erection of a night shelter for poor women.

The only question asked is, not your creed or your church, but "Are you hungry, destitute, and friendless?" and if you are your needs are ministered to by those good Samaritans who are sacrificing their lives to this splendid Christian work in the slums of Preston. Shall they ask in vain?

The annual collection on behalf of Shepherd-street Mission, Preston, at the Elswick Sunday School, amounted to £6 15s.

SHEPHERD-STREET MISSION.

Shepherd-street Mission yesterday was the distributing centre of Christmas fare to many Preston homes. For years, and long before Mr. and Mrs. Williamson's varied and noble work received that public attention which it richly deserves, Christmas breakfasts had been provided for as many of the poorest children of the town as the funds, contributed by generous friends, would permit.

Yesterday morning between 1,100 and 1,200 children, the majority ill-clad, and displaying in pinched face and attenuated form unmistakable signs of privation and hunger, clamoured round the door of the hospitable mission. Tickets which Mr. Williamson had personally distributed to the homes in all parts of the town, and, of course, irrespective of creed assured the bona-fides of the applicants. Limited accommodation necessitated several sittings, and to obviate long periods of waiting out of doors, appointed times were made for a certain number of children, who were seated in batches of about 250. The breakfast, which was applied in a bag, consisted of a meat pie, a lunch bun, pieces of raisin and currant bread, bread and butter, and an orange, while of hot coffee the little folks drank to their fill.

Prior to each sitting, and before grace was said, Messrs. Nicholson, Wood, Gregson, Grierson (Walton Hall), and Ryding addressed a few appropriate words to the children, reminding them of the real meaning Christmas Day.

and want for tea. I asked, Dropping her eyes, she said, "Please I've not had no tea, sir."

A girl, 10 years old, with big, expressive eyes, said her mother was dead, and she looked after the household of five. Poor little Cinderella!

In quite a number of cases I found that the chip shop was a positive blessing for a pennyworth of chips have provided the dinner in many houses. One lad said he had had chips twice that day—for breakfast and dinner, and he had had nothing since, waiting for the Shepherd-street supper. There were as many as eight and ten in many of these poor houses, and when I asked, "What had you for tea?" the general reply was, "Please, sir, nothing."

There was only 7s. a week coming in one house with eight of a family, and in a family of nine I found the father did not work, and the mother and "our Dick and John" brought in about ten shillings.

"There's ony me and mamma in our house," said a fine little lass, "and cousin Kate sends us bits," and in the next row a tallish girl said, "There's six of us, and only mother working."

"What does your father do?"

"We have no dadda," she sadly replied, and a boy hard by her exclaimed, "An' I've no dadda neither, sir."

"Eh, but I have," chirped in a lassie proudly, "an' he works on th' market on a Setterda night, but he can't addle much."

CHRISTMAS OPPORTUNITY.

The next row I come to I pat a little pale boy on the head, and he smiles. "And where do you live?" I asked, and he said, "My mammie is in Leeds with another brother. My daddy and me's in a lodging-house. Daddy's paralysed, but he can hop on his crutches, and he goes out singing hymns. I can't go to school, and I don't go out with daddy 'cos I've had fits."

"And are you a good lad?"

"My daddy says I am."

I had a perfect catalogue of heart-breaking stories, including one of a family of five where the father was dead and the mother is almost blind, and one little chatterbox told me the wonders she did with "a pennoth o' bits o' bacon." I softly touched the speaker's head. I had heard enough.

The most miserable of men is he who has a full purse and an empty, tuneless heart. It is so easy to offer sympathy, but remember that sympathy without relief is like the mustard without the beef. Will you listen in vain to these sorrows? Will you pass these hungry little ones by like the Levite, or will you be the Good Samaritan, and go to them and kiss their little wistful faces and help them? If you do, you shall have on Christmas night, as James Douglas has so well said, the very bliss and vision of the angels.