

# RAGS AND TATTERS.

## SAD STORIES OF POVERTY AT PRESTON.

### WORK OF THE SHEPHERD-STREET MISSION.

(BY OUR COMMISSIONER.)

I heard the bells on Christmas Day,  
Their old familiar carols play;  
And wild and sweet,  
The words repeat,  
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

—Longfellow.

Aye! Good will to men! Good will to everybody.  
Good will to the poor. They need it most of all,  
don't they?

The world has its cares and crosses, its woes and losses. It has its healing balm of human sympathy. The Infant Redeemer whose birthday we hail with jubilant honour, opened out the rich well springs of a Christian race, and taught us that charity which is not puffed up. The strife of life, the whirl and swirl of trade, all stop. And in the silence, men, under the banners of the churches, bow reverent heads, and think, thankfully, of all that the Christ-child taught. The helpers of the broken, those who succour the poor and the fatherless, and clothe the naked—these are the men who give what immortality we can yield to human affairs!

Fishergate glitters with a blaze of lights. The windows are full of Christmas gifts. The benches of the butchers groan under huge barons and succulent quarterings; well-dressed men and women briskly move up and down with the holiday look upon them, and great motor cars pass swiftly with the Vere de Veres in costly furs, snuggling in stately trappings. It is the upper crust of life. Well-dressed, well-fed, with barely a sorrow or care for the morrow. It is Fishergate, with proud shops and proud people, radiant and beautiful.

#### FROM COURTS AND ALLEYS.

It is a frightfully cold night, this. The air almost benumbs you, and as you step from the glare and glamour down into the dim shadows of a narrow street you understand so well the words: "Blow, blow thou winter wind; thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude."

I hummed the old glee as I went along, nestling my chin in my big coat collar, and stamping my feet on the cobbles. Then I have to shelter, for a cloud bursts, and rain and then hail descends, smacking faces, and bounding off roofs.

It is all very nice to be by a roaring fire, with a full pocket and a contented mind. But here! It is of the earth earthy.

I must get on. I pass hard by the spot where the generous-hearted Horrocks, fresh from Edgworth, laid the first foundations of his fame into Avenham-lane, the freezing wind shrieking out the gale. Past the house—now a model lodging-house, owned by a Preston philanthropist—where the spinning jenny was invented by Arkwright.

Then I stop. Let the wind blow. I listen in a porch, and hear a sweet voice like the angel of the night, singing to weary pilgrims, "We thank Thee, Lord, for this our food." It is the Shepherd-street Mission Room filled with the ragged children from the courts and alleys of Preston.

Here is a work going on, day by day, night by night. Mr. and Mrs. Williamson, like the Apostles of old, work without money and without price, without fuss or demonstration. They don't send up any rockets over a good deed done, but do the work with retiring modesty. They, morning and night, pray that men's hearts may be stirred to send what they can afford, however small, to find food for hungry children.

#### WHAT HUNGER FEELS LIKE.

And the responses to those high appeals are wonderful. One grand old Preston doctor, who lives in Winkley-square, takes, in his carriage, every day, the little odds and ends left from his table to help to make up the soup for the score or more of orphan or deserted children Mr. and Mrs. Williamson are rearing in the house at the top of Oxford-street.

There are some big hearts in Preston, and many a widow's mite, which will be fully accounted some day, comes to help to keep the wolf of starvation from the doors of the poor.

Hungry! Do you know what it is to be really hungry—when the skin crumples on the ribs, and there is the pale, snowy look of emaciation?

I had entered the mission room, passed a few jokes with the children, who know me pretty well, and I asked a wan, sad-faced, sore-eyed lad, with rips in his jacket and tattered trousers, and a dirt face, had he ever been hungry.

"Yes, sir; many a time."  
"What does it feel like to be hungry?" I asked.  
"Last time I was that way I had pains in my stomach, and I felt I could have tekken anything, and I bit at a shank bone."

I thought that was as realistic a description of hunger as I had ever heard.

I tried a girl this time—a begrimed little lassie, with sweet, innocent, eyes, that lacked the lustre of the Fishergate girls. She said to be hungry "was awful, and you feel sick and tired, and want to lie down."

#### AN OASIS IN THE DESERT.

There are lasses and lads here from all churches. It is not a matter of religion, save the ministration to human wants. Not a child is asked to which church he goes. If he is hungry he is fed five nights a week. The soup and coffee are made hot in boilers just put down and paid for, by Dr. R. C. Brown, in a sweet and clean newly-covered shed, at the back of the room.

This supper room, is an oasis in the desert. Not far away are common lodging-houses and dens of infamy, slums and alleys with dirty, dim, and tarnished cottages filled with big families, for lots of these poor people have eight or ten children.

In a visit I paid to the slums the other day I heard such testimonies of gratitude to Mr. Williamson for keeping children from starvation and practically rearing them, that I wondered whether any other gentleman could equal this. I say I wondered.

Here is a case in this very supper room. Close to the porch was seated a woman, with a sad yet comely face, a child on her knee, and two by her side. She is the wife of a Preston joiner who has been out of work for nine weeks. The family has been on the verge of starvation. She had left two children at home, resting, for they had been out at work all day. The total earnings in the house to keep father and mother and five children is 7s. 3d. per week, and 3s. 9d. is paid for rent. I asked the woman how they lived, and she said on bread and bits. I solemnly believe she was denying herself so that the children might have food.  
"What have you in the house?" I asked her.  
"What had you for tea?"

goes out cleaning sometimes." "What had you to tea?" "I've had no tea. I had some bread to my dinner."

"There are five in our house, and two working—me and Billy, and he's learning to be a moulder."

"We are very poor, sir."

Another child said, "There are five of us. We have no father. We never have our teas. We gets it here." A womanly little lass has to look after her mother, who is at home in bed very ill, wasting away. The children do their best, and have a good friend in Mr. Williamson. One little cherub, who was perspiring after "filling his programme" with the hot soup and bread, said his "feyther worked for his grondfeyther, fettling squeezers."

In one house where there were eight children the income is 9s. a week!

Four lads and lasses of one family sat in a row—a quartette grimy and ragged. They had had their late bite at 12.30, and they did rest to! One child from a house of seven said her father was blind in the hospital, and another's father was in the asylum.

Will it be credited that there are children in Preston who go to school without breakfast or without dinner? There are some in this supper room here who have to do that sometimes—an unspeakably cruel circumstance in this rich and boastful age.

Poor little hungry Prestonians! Thank goodness there are men and women and youths and maidens in Preston who, when the Christmas time comes round, seek that self-satisfaction which comes to all who give to the needs of the poor.

Shall these little divinities of the Preston slums cry out downhearted? Never.

### SHEPHERD-STREET MISSION WORKERS.

The Assembly-room of the Public Hall, Preston, was filled on Saturday evening with the workers on behalf of the Shepherd-street Mission, many of those present being from outlying places. Tea was provided for the company, and at the subsequent meeting Mr. C. E. Grierson presided, supported by members of the committee.

Mr. Gregson read a lengthy report on the work of the mission during the past twelve months. It was of a most encouraging character, progress having been made all along the line and £600 wiped off the mission debt account. Mr. Kenyon presented a statement relating to the one-day collection, and this showed the total amount realised was £160, marking a good advance upon last year. In appealing for increased support of the mission, Mr. Kenyon emphasised the fact that the working expenses in connection with this collection did not reach more than 10 per cent.

The Chairman made an earnest appeal for continued assistance, and pointed out how the mission might with advantage extend its sphere of usefulness if the funds available were increased. He urged that it was everyone's duty to give something of his time and talents to those outside his own immediate circle. He asked those who desired to know something of the work to visit the home, and said that personally he always left the place determined to do what he could to help on the work.

The Rev. L. D. W. Spencer, of St. James's, also addressed the gathering, and during the evening the choir rendered a number of selections, and a cinematograph entertainment was given by Mr. Wilding.

#### PRISON PROFITS.

According to the annual report from Chelmsford Gaol the 1,561 prisoners serving "terms" had earned £2,709 during the 12 months. The cost of their maintenance during the same period was £2,405, which shows a profit on the year of £304.

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woman how they lived, and she said on bread and bits. I solemnly believe she was denying herself so that the children might have food.

"What have you in the house?" I asked her.

"What had you for tea?"

"I broke up my last bread among us at dinner-time to-day, and none of us have had a bite since."

The children by her side, with parched-looking lips, were so hungry and restless that they ran for the basins of soup, which was soon steaming in front of each one of them. I could almost see, in the curling steam which wreathed round about them, these words, "As ye did it to the little ones."

In anticipation that this message to send a trifle will reach some hearts, Mr. Williamson, out of his pocket, provided for her needs, and sent her some stock fat to put on the bread. We hurried her off and saw that her two elder children and her husband had a supper that night so that they could sleep without rocking.

#### LUXURY AND POVERTY.

And all this is under the very shadow of the spires, and within a stone's throw of luxury. Methinks the Christmas bells will ring out some melancholy knells in these alleys. But the tongues of the bells shall not tell of a single starving child if we can help it.

Frail, feeble sprites some of these children are. The clogs given last winter are done, and the piercing cold cracks their feet, which have to splash, splash, splash through the sleet, and crunch, crunch, crunch through the snows of winter.

"Please, sir, can I have a pair of clogs?"

I was asked this time after time. These children are like motes dependent on the sunny beam. I do believe they thought Santa Claus had turned up. The clothing sent through the "Lancashire Daily Post" last year, and the money forwarded, saved many a little life. The receipts from the "Post" appeal, and the concert got up by Mr. Makinson and Mr. Jackson last December, realised enough to give suppers all winter to the hungry children, to clothe and to clog or boot them. What a joy to every giver! The supreme delight of the ragged children over the coloured Christmas books given last year was the feature of Christmas morning. They took them to the wretched homes, many of them fireless and cheerless, and put on many an hour with the delights of the fairy tales. In one impoverished home I visited, the one book on the shelf was the well preserved picture illustrated story given last Christmas morning to the little girl. This Shepherd-street supper room is an Alladin's palace for poor hungry children.

We shall open to-day a Fund, to which we shall be glad to receive subscription, and we hope they will flow in a liberality of last year, when they came in freely from men and women of all ranks and conditions.

#### SAD TALES OF POVERTY.

Sad tales I hear. In one house there were seven, and the father was doing odd jobs. In another the mother had been burned to death, and there were three poor children. As one said, with a pitiful look in her face, "Please sir, we've got no mamma." I walked off. They had had nothing since dinner.

"What does your father do?" I said to another.

"I've not got no father, please, sir," she said very sadly. "Have you a mother?" "Yes, sir, and she