

SHEPHERD-STREET MISSION.

A VICAR'S VISIT AS "TRAMP" TO A PRESTON SHELTER.

COMMITTEE'S REPLY TO PAMPHLET CRITICISMS.

The thirty-fourth annual meeting of subscribers and supporters of the Shepherd-street Mission, Preston, was held at the Guild Hall, Preston, on Thursday afternoon, the Mayor (Ald. W. M. Margerison) presiding over a good attendance. Supporting the Mayor were Sir John Kirk (chairman of the Ragged School Union and the National Federation of Christian Workers Among Poor Children), Major Stanley, M.P., Mr. George Toulmin, M.P., Mr. W. Parker, and others.

The Mayor, in the absence of Mr. C. Carter, through illness, submitted the report, and referred to the various operations of the mission.

"The past year," the report opened, "has not been one of the most pleasant for the Shepherd-street Mission, many things having taken place to cause worry and discouragement. With the various branches of the mission, and a family of nearly 50, the work is very difficult within the fold; but when the mission is attacked in a most shameful way from without by such men as the Vicar of Crossens, the Rev. G. Z. Edwards, and the most abominable untruths written and published, it is enough to make anyone hang their heads on the willows, and it is hard work at times to believe that 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'"

"We are able once more to close the year with a balance in hand on each account, but unfortunately we cannot this year, as in years gone by, carry a good balance from the Home and Refuge to the Extension Account. In the year 1902, when we bought the land and property for the labour yard and workshop, we had three cottages and other buildings, the rents of which brought in £50 per year. This old property has now been demolished, and the site used for a new shelter. This loss, together with unavoidable expenses, makes our income over £100 per year less than formerly. Now our family is larger, and provisions dearer, which adds greatly to the cost of living. At our last annual meeting we were practically out of debt, but through the building of the new shelter it has accumulated again to about £1,100."

It was recorded that meetings were held in six lodging-houses every Sunday evening, and that over 20,000 tracts and periodicals had been distributed in these places during the past year. Band of Hope meetings had been continued weekly, and the total abstinence pledge had been signed by 211. Over 650 Gospel, Band of Hope, cottage, and open-air meetings had been held. The Sunday school was small, but the attendance had kept about the average, and what some of them desired and had long hoped for was a large room to hold 500 or 600 children for a real ragged school.

INSTANCES OF POVERTY.

"Local men from the various denominations conduct the services, and preach the Gospel to some of the poorest people that can be found. Not long ago, after the service one Sunday evening, there were about 50 men seeking a night's shelter (more than we had room for). To ascertain the truth of their statements as to their poverty, they were taken one by one to a separate room and cross-examined, and out of the whole lot they could only raise 7d. or 8d. One man had 3d., some of them had a penny, some a halfpenny each; the rest nothing."

It was further stated in the report that 1,300 poor children were entertained to breakfast on Christmas morning; from November to the middle of March 26,678 free dinners were provided for poor children, and 502 pairs of clogs and shoes were supplied, and in many cases stockings and clothes were provided. The town and district collection showed a decrease, the amount collected being £94 15s., against £107 10s. 4d. last year.

"The new shelter, so long talked of and so much needed, is completed and ready for use, but through circumstances over which we have no control we have been compelled to defer its opening till after this meeting. The number of men on the road in search of work seems to be constantly on the increase. At times there are so many that we find it a difficult matter to find them a bit of work to do. The following figures show the number helped during the past year:—For night's shelter and work, 15,677; for supper, breakfast, or dinner, 7,890. The previous year's figures were 15,165 for shelter, 8,254 for meals. Almost nightly some of the voluntary workers visit these men, to speak, read, and pray with them, and in this way to try to lead them to a better life."

"The Children's Home is still doing its good work, taking in the lost and helpless, bringing them up, training them, and sending them out into the world prepared to fight life's battles honourably and successfully. A pleasing feature about the girls who go out to service is that they always make their way back to the old home to spend a holiday or seek advice. During the year ten children have been admitted to the Home, one sent to Canada, three returned to their friends, one sent out to service, four sent to other homes, and two are at trades in the town and living in the Home. As the year closes we have thirty-four children to maintain, those under working age going to Orchard-street and St James's Schools."

"The committee convey their deep gratitude to Messrs George Toulmin and Sons for their efforts in raising such a handsome sum for the poor children's dinners; we also thank Mr Robert Peake and Messrs Merigold Brothers for their kind help in various ways."

MAYOR AND AN "UNCALLED-FOR ATTACK."

The Mayor, in submitting the report, said he had known of the work carried on by the mission intimately since its inception, and it was a mission that had been doing capital work through the whole of its existence. (Hear, hear.) There had been, he thought, an uncalled-for attack upon one branch of the work. The joy of the work had been damped owing to an attack which was made by the Vicar of Crossens, who, as an amateur tramp, went to the shelter. The mission had now nearly 50 children and young people dependent upon it who had been gathered from very difficult conditions, and who were being shepherded into a good life, and nothing but praise ought to be given to those who had undertaken gratuitously this very difficult work. (Applause.) They who had been attending the meetings annually to support the work had heard not only from himself but other speakers of the difficulties in connection with their shelter work. They had had a small shelter in Laurel-street, and the recent hard times had brought along to them quite a large number of men who were without the requisite three-pence that would admit them to the shelter and rough bed of a lodging-house. Many of them were without a penny, but through the means of that mission's work they were given the task of breaking and cutting wood and then a supper and a "lie-down" in a warm shelter. That shelter had sheltered on an average nearly 43 men a night. The conditions were not ideal; they had been complaining of the conditions and begging the people of Preston for years past to give them money to enable them to erect a shelter to carry on the work efficiently. The people of Preston had not

people. The whole country was the better for the work that was being done amongst those who were in need. Men were being "toned up" and helped to become respected members of society. Another consideration was the influence it had in helping to save the rates. They could hardly eliminate the economic aspect, and there was no doubt that good was being done in helping those who would otherwise be a charge on the community to help themselves and become wage-earners. Sir John said he would go further, and say that the work in which such an institution as that was engaged was really an imperial work, for he had seen something of the results of the emigration of young people, and when the dominions across the seas were requiring worthy men and women and boys and girls, he thought they had in this way a more effectual remedy than could be had by staying in the old country. There was also the additional commendation, he concluded, and that was that it was a Christian work. (Applause.)

"NOBLEST WORK OF MANKIND."

Major Stanley, M.P., seconded the resolution. He said he thought any mission that had for its object the raising to a feeling of self-respect of those who were in danger of going under deserved all the good that could be said of it, and all the prosperity it could possibly have, and when, as in this case, it was being done by voluntary effort, he thought they could say that those who were engaged in the work were doing that which was the noblest work of mankind—raising those who had fallen, and helping those who were going down to raise themselves. (Applause.) Referring to the criticism that had been passed on the institution, Major Stanley said few people seemed to escape attacks upon them at one time or another. Though he had had no direct association with the Shepherd-street Mission, from all he had heard of it he thought the words the Mayor had used in refuting the attack that had been made had not been at all too strong. He did not suppose that everything was perfect, but he thought when an attempt was being made, such as was being made in this case, to raise the fallen, it was not necessary to make attacks upon it which could not be absolutely and entirely substantiated. (Applause.)

The report was adopted. Mr. Geo. Toulmin, M.P., moved a resolution:—That this meeting commends the Shepherd-street Mission and Home for Orphan and Destitute Children to the liberal support of the community, believing it is doing a good work among the poor of our town.

Mr. Toulmin said reference had been made to the criticism of this mission, but he, as one who saw something of what was going on, would say that rather than criticise the mission and its helpers he should like to see a little more criticism of those who were not helping. (Applause.) There was a great deal left undone by the community, and a great deal more criticism might be passed because that was left undone, than could be passed on the methods of those who were carrying on this work. (Hear, hear.) They were doing a little, but they were doing it well, and, therefore, if anybody wanted to criticise, let them criticise by coming and helping and improving, because from what he knew of the ladies and gentlemen connected with that mission, they were always willing to better what they had done in the past. (Applause.) He did not know of anything that had progressed in a better way than this mission had, going on from one step to another in improving both its methods and the amount of work it had done. Referring to the report, in which it was stated that two children were working and living in the home, Mr. Toulmin said that from what he knew of Preston the greatest need of the town at present was a working boys' home and a working girls' home, and if anyone wanted to criticise let them start such a home as that. There were working boys' homes which were carried on by charitable persons belonging to one of the great religious communities—and they were doing a good work—but there was room for others, and he called upon critics to start one, and take up work which they could not expect Mr. Williamson with the resources in this case to carry on. (Applause.)

QUESTION OF THE RATES.

Sir John Kirk, continued Mr. Toulmin, had referred to the way in which this kind of work was saving the rates. But that was not the reason he (the speaker) desired the work to be done. If the ratepayers were not doing their duty, and this work was being left undone, he did not wish to subscribe to such efforts in order to save other people's pockets. A good deal of the work in connection with the children of Preston was being left undone. There were something like five hundred children under the control of the Poor-law in the way of out-relief. Some of them were imperfectly looked after, and part of the work Mr. Williamson had to do was because these children were not being properly looked after. They lacked the one thing they got in an institution such as that, and that was personal, individual sympathy. If there was something to be worked upon then it would be found out, whether in the child or the man who was down on his luck, and that was why he commended the work of the institution to the support of the community. (Applause.)

Mr. J. P. Barrow seconded, and the resolution was carried. On the motion of Mr. Parker, seconded by Mr. S. Lee, thanks were passed to the speakers.

At the close of the meeting, those present, at the invitation of the Mayoress, partook of tea.

After tea a meeting was held on behalf of the National Federation of Christian Workers among Poor Children, at which the Mayor presided.

Sir John Kirk, who is chairman of the Federation, said the object of the promoters of the Federation was to link together all the agencies now at work throughout the country on behalf of poor children. No money was required, but simply mutual help and guidance.

Mr. J. P. Barrow, organising secretary of the Federation, explained the constitution, principles, objects, and rules of the Federation, and appealed for the formation of a consultative committee in Preston, and suggested that a local conference of Christian workers amongst poor children might be called. Urging the desirability of co-ordination, he said that he had often been astonished and somewhat amused to find earnest Christian workers almost entirely ignorant of what other workers were doing in their own districts. By the formation of a local council they could co-ordinate the work, avoid duplicating, watch the working of the Children's Charter, influence legislation on behalf of the child through the united voice of the National Federation, and, if necessary, educate and arouse public opinion. The poor children of the country, notwithstanding all the efforts put forward on their behalf, were increasing in numbers, a state of things which boded ill for the future of the country 20 years hence unless a united, coherent, and intelligent effort was made to rescue

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sheltered on an average nearly 40 men a night. The conditions were not ideal; they had been complaining of the conditions and begging the people of Preston for years past to give them money to enable them to erect a shelter to carry on the work efficiently. The people of Preston had not responded up to the present moment, but he thought they would respond.

#### A NEW SHELTER.

Twelve months ago, seeing that they had land which was occupied by houses, they decided to proceed with the work, and £1,100 had been expended in building a very good shelter, giving double the capacity downstairs, and with facilities, when men were making an effort to raise themselves from a life of sin and degradation, to do everything that could be done to forward and assist the effort.

Mr. Edwards, in a pamphlet which he had issued, entitled "A Vicar as Vagrant," had made many mis-statements in connection with this work, and he (the Mayor) was requested by the committee to read the following addition to the report:—

The committee's attention having been drawn to the above, a letter was sent to the vicar asking for an apology and the withdrawal of the chapter relating to the Shepherd-street Mission Shelter, but in his reply the whole thing was shirked, and no apology rendered. The matter was then put into the hands of our solicitor, and he is now dealing with it.

The only fault with the shelter is, it is too small, and those who come to these meetings, and those who read our reports know that for four years we have been struggling to remedy this, and now it is accomplished, as will be seen by this report.

"May I say for myself," added the Mayor, "and without any word from the committee, that if the Vicar of Crossens would only call upon me I shall have very great pleasure in going and showing him the work that was in progress long before he came to visit our old shelter and show him he has made a very great mistake." (Applause.)

The work, concluded the Mayor, was being well and carefully carried on. It was also being carried on on Christian lines, and on lines that if there was a spark of goodness in a man he should be helped to a better life. The workers, of whom Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were at the head, were a grand body of people who were giving their lives in this work. Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were not paid, they were doing the work free, and the town would be a much poorer town without the work that was silently going on in this needy neighbourhood. (Applause.)

Mr. H. Southworth, in the absence of the hon. treasurer, Mr. R. E. Smalley, submitted the treasurer's report.

#### A NATIONAL WORK.

Sir John Kirk moved a resolution including the adoption of the report and financial statement, the appointment of Mr. R. E. Smalley as hon. treasurer, and Mr. J. Williamson hon. superintendent and secretary, and a committee consisting of Messrs. C. E. Grierson, Alex. Foster, J. Williamson, D. Lindsay, A. Spencer, J. Birkbeck, and J. Millington.

Sir John emphasised the importance of the work carried on at the institution, and said he could warmly commend the work to their sympathy and practical support. Mr. and Mrs. Williamson in what they were doing were engaged in what was really a great national work. There was much that needed their help in this work, and he heartily endorsed what the Mayor had said in commending the institution to the sympathy and practical support of the