



The *George Raitton* Collection



II. HEART TO HEART.

Pity, Lord, a wretched creature,
One whose sins for vengeance cry,
Groaning 'neath his heavy burden,
Throbbing heart and heaving sigh.'
O my Saviour, O my Saviour, O my Saviour
Canst Thou let a sinner die?

THAT was the first verse I remember hearing The Christian Mission people sing in the open air, and their words, the looks of pity they cast on the sinners, their prayers, their speeches to the people, the very tones of their voices remain stamped on my heart, one of those impressions that cannot be rubbed out. It was on Monday afternoon, the 28th October, 1872, in the East Indian Road, near the end of Crisp Street, where the little ring of poor men and women were formed, ready soon to march to the site of our present Poplar Barracks, for the laying of the Memorial stones.

As I looked at the pale faces of those East End toilers, and at the threadbare garments of some of them as they stood in the mud, with their poorly-covered feet dangerously near pools of water, what struck me was that they were wretched, as far as outward circumstances could make people so. There could be no question that life to them was a weary, dreary struggle against starvation, and yet they had forgotten themselves, their poverty, and their necessities, and had managed to give up some hours of their bread-earning time, out of pure love and pity for a wretchedness so much deeper and more terrible than their own.

All their speaking and praying was in the tone of the verse I have quoted. They told the crowd around them that they were sinners, wretched, and lost, and going to hell, without mincing language, or using any doubtful expressions; and yet all through it there was not one tone of harshness or severity; it was all of tenderest pity for those who were ready to perish, yearning in terrible anxiety to lead others to that Saviour who had lifted them, in spite of their circumstances, out of wretchedness and sin into the peace and joy which they now possessed.



The *W. & R. Railton* Collection



That little open-air meeting was to me an index to The Christian Mission.

A Christian Mission, indeed! A coming out of the poor to the poor, under the constraint of Christ's own love; a coming out, not with blankets, or loaves, or silver and gold, which these poor creatures had not to offer, but a coming out with the very same overflowing compassion for the wandering sheep which filled the heart of the Nazarene and of His Apostles, and which made to them poverty and toil and shame and suffering, bright with the coming joy of saving the lost.

In that meeting I seemed to read the whole story of the work from the beginning. It was this wide-awakeness to the misery and danger of sinners that had sent out William Booth at the first, and that had sustained him through the seven years in which he had already been struggling to bring light and salvation to the sad, dark, dreary East-End. It was this same love of God that had been shed abroad in the hearts of those whom he had led to the Saviour, and had made them, in their turn, such as the people I saw before me. It didn't matter how many or how few of this description might have been produced up to that time. The same Divine power that had produced this could and would produce any number of the same description; and the process had only to be carried on to spread throughout every dark corner of the world the light and joy of salvation. I saw it all that Monday afternoon. I have seen a deal more of it since. The world will see a deal more of it yet; and oh, that God may reveal to you, dear reader, this great secret of the world's salvation, the contact of one heart; filled with the love of Christ, with another heart groaning in darkness for want of Him.

Twenty-four hours ago, I stood listening in another little ring, and heard two rough navies, one of them converted a few months ago – one of them only a few weeks back – speak to the "dear people," and entreat them to turn from their sins and seek salvation. Said one of them, "I have sat in my own mother's house with these two eyes blacked through fighting in the service of the devil; but now, bless God, I want no more of that; and you needn't have any more of it either." The same old power is doing the same thing still to-day; and now, not only in a few East End alleys, but from New Zealand right round to San Francisco, and from Cape Town to Norkopping.

Once that tender, brotherly feeling exists in the heart, difficulties, and obstacles melt away with wonderful rapidity. What if there was but a poor old tent, standing on a burial-ground, to begin



The *W. Booth* Collection



preaching salvation to the millions of London! What if the old tent was blown down, after a few weeks' use, and absolutely no indoor meeting-place available! What if, after weeks of trying toil altogether in the open air, The General could only find an old wool-shed, and then a room over a stable in which to house his converts! What did the close air of that little loft, with the horses making all manner of disturbance below, and the stifling air of the crowded room, whose ceiling The General's tall hat would almost touch! What matter if on week-nights he often had only one or two to help him in the streets. When there is a heart in it, all these things are nothing.

"Come along, Oram," The General would say, as he saw one of his few helpers in those days approaching in the open air, "you can help me sing;" and then the children would gather round and help, till a crowd of men and women came, and, by-and-by, after a warm invitation given, The General would form his devoted couple of assistants in procession, and march them across one of the biggest thoroughfares in London to the meeting-place.

"It used to be crowded, and many and many a soul got saved there," was the summing-up of my informant, a daughter of the worthy couple, who have both since passed into the skies. The story of that couple, by the way, gives a very fair idea of the conquests of those days. "My mother," says Miss Oram, "had been converted years before, but was a backslider when Mr. Booth came to the East-End, He used to stand near our house. So mother heard him and went out to the meeting, where she sought and found mercy.

"My father, though a quiet sort of man, was all for the world, and used always to be going to theatres and such like. I never saw such a change in anyone as in him when he got saved. It was on the 2nd of December, 1865, and all the way walking home from the chapel The General then used in Holywell Mount, Shoreditch, he kept on shouting, 'I'm a King's son, I'm a King's son!' till I thought he had gone silly. Mother was in bed with rheumatic fever. Ever since she had got converted she used to pray with me and take me to the meetings. On that night she and father prayed together for the first time.

"That Christmas some of father's friends came to see him, and he was so frightened; but he thought he must go out with them, and then he was persuaded to have a little drink, and go with them to the theatre; but when he came back he went straight into the bedroom, fell down on his



The *General Railton* Collection



knees, and cried like a child. He said he had sinned against God, and ' Do you think He would take me back?' 'Oh,' said mother, 'God is always open to take poor prodigals back.' And so he got right, and after that he always went on straight, with a firm faith in God, a quietly happy man. At the time of his conversion he owed three pounds to an uncle. He felt he must pay the money ; and, as soon as he could get it together, tried to do so, but he then found that the uncle was dead, and so he paid the money over to The Army,

"My mother was one of Mrs. Collingridge's Band. She was often at our house, and mother and her were like sisters."

This, by the way, was the first band of female speakers formed in connection with The General's work. These noble mothers, toiling hard all the week in their poor homes, used to spend Sundays and evenings in going from place to place throughout the East End to publish salvation. Most of the glorious group have now passed, like their leader, to their reward in Heaven; but they have left behind them, in the East End, scores of happy homes that were wretched indeed, until, by their self-denying efforts, their occupants were led to Jesus. "I remember," Miss O — went on, "the night Stephen Knott got converted. He was just a rough young man, a journeyman baker, I think; but I remember he was in such agony of distress about his soul that the prayer-meeting was kept on ever so late. I know it was after eleven when I got home. (That young baker, by the way, is now a Wesleyan minister in Canada). It used to take us half an hour to get to Whitechapel, but we went three times every Sunday, and some of us every night, taking it in turns. On the week-nights we used to go round the back streets for our open air meetings, one on one night, and one on another. There used to be lots of rough people hollering at us. But one would speak to them at one corner, and then we would go on, and another would speak at another corner.

"When The General began to have meetings in the Theatres we used to have handbills to announce them with and on the handbill there would generally be his subject. For instance at Epsom Races time he would announce himself to tell about "the man on the white horse," and such like. We used to take the bills and get tracts, and put a bill and a tract in each bundle of clothes that we mangled before we sent them home, and we used to give the handbills away in the streets as well. Some-times, at festivals they would have large bills, that would fill up a whole window.



The *G. Raitton* Collection



"Oh, they did used to struggle to get some of the people saved. I remember one woman that used to come into our house sometimes, and Mrs. Collingridge would get hold of one of her hands, and my mother of the other; but she would say: 'It is no use, mother; you won't get me saved to-night.' Once she came and mother was ill, but she would speak to her, and she said: 'You shall not go out of the house till you hear what I have got to say. If you go to hell it will be your own fault.' That same woman spoke one Tuesday evening, when Mr. Bramwell Booth was at Whitechapel, and said if she died she knew she would go straight home to Heaven. I told her after-wards what good it had done me to hear her give that testimony, remembering how my mother and her comrades had labored for her soul many a time. The next Monday morning she was dead. So you may think how glad I was to be sure it was all right with her!

"We had an old Calvinist living with us, who was, I believe, a good man, but he had got crude notions, you know, about 'all that the Father giveth me shall come to me,' and so on. But we didn't want to have any controversy with him, because we knew it was no good. So when he used to come in we would begin singing a hymn, and then we would continue with another that went to the same tune, and so on, and he used to say: 'I think your hymns are very long.' But we never had any controversy.

"I have seen The General pelted with the rest of us many a time, but he always used to say to the people to take no notice, but go straight on and that was the best.

"'Old Scotty,' the infidel, used to say dreadful things against him. He used to stand close beside our ring in open air with his Bible, pulling it to pieces; and then he used to say the most dreadful things about The General and his family. For instance he used to say that he lived on other people's money, and that by-and-by he would gather it all together and be off."

I must say I felt no small pleasure in tracing this remarkable rumour to its true source. "Old Scotty," whom I remember well myself, was a wretched infidel lecturer of the public-house type, whose headquarters were in a low tavern just opposite one of the mission's principal open-air stands on the Mile End Waste. From this refuge he would come forth fortified by liquor time after time, and pour out upon the Bible, and all who believed in and advocated it, the overflowing vials of his feeble wrath in language too foul to be repeated. More than once the Mission folk



The *General Raiton* Collection



induced him to accept their charity, and after receiving a certain amount of food he would, for a time, make some show of an inclination to turn round; but alas alas! he was soon back again in the old haunts with the old ways.

Upon one occasion a poor woman, who had been lifted from the very gutter by the instrumentality of the Mission, became so indignant at his abuse of the people who had shown such kindness both to him and her, that, seizing large stone, she declared she would hurl it at his head if he said any more. To this wretched old man, of whom I have not been able to hear tidings for some time, belongs the credit of inventing the theory which great newspaper editors, and people of even higher social position, have disgraced themselves by repeating for twenty-one years. The General has not gone yet, with his pile of money; but alas! The blackguards, whether in rags or in sealskin, who repeat "Old Scotty's" suggestion in language more or less like that which he used, can still find listeners, and, I suppose, always will.

That suggestion was born, I suppose, and maintains itself, from the undeniable fact, visible from the first, that The General won the hearts of the people, and through their hearts all the help of body, mind, and means that they were able to give to assist him in his efforts. It has always been so, since the days when the poor Apostles' converts would have willingly plucked out their eye to serve them, and it always will be so where people feel that they are face to face with somebody who really cares for them.

The man who was content to preach the Gospel in the street, where he was hustled, and hooted, and pelted; in the little wool-shed, or the hay-loft, or the skills-alley, soon found his way to the Assembly Room, and then to the Theatre, where huge crowds came every Sunday to listen to him.

"I suppose," I queried to an informant familiar with those days, "there would be well-dressed people in the pit?"

"Oh, dear no; they were all the right sort, you know quite poor, and in the galleries they were a very rough lot; but there used to be perfect order."



The *General Railton* Collection



Oh, that I had seen one of those wonderful gatherings! And yet I don't know that it could matter much, for The Army's crowd in any theatre of the poor to-day must be pretty much the same. And have we not all seen it in the Grecian, and other places, again and again? The rows of men and women who have no Sunday clothes; the faces that tell of no Sunday dinner; the looks that speak as unmistakably of the absence of any regard for Sunday, or God, or Salvation; the crowds that come because somebody has made them come, whether to see a curious sight, or for some other reason; the crowd that has come to pass the time away, to laugh, to enjoy a row, anything rather than to pray. Thank God, we have seen that crowd thousands and thousands of times, and to place ourselves in the presence of the General and his first theatre audiences and victories, we have only to throw our minds back twenty years, and picture in some of the lowest theatres and music-halls of the East End of London what we have seen in later years elsewhere.

Two years ago I saw the General fight just such a crowd at Reading. The Church Congress had been held there, and we needed to use the building put up for them after they were gone. It was a pouring wet night, but that did not prevent the place from being crowded away back to the farthest standing-room by a congregation mainly composed of men, and young men, too. As I passed between these reckless rows, disporting themselves in their fashion during the singing of the opening song, I confess I hadn't much hope for the meeting. They wanted a lark, not a talk about their souls that night, and they showed it very plainly when the General rose to speak. There was a struggle, but he kept on firing till every opposing sound died away, and then all sat silently gazing upon him, till he had done telling what things God had wrought among the unsaved by means of The Salvation Army. To have seen that was enough to understand how thousands of the roughest and vilest of the East End were gathered at the first into a building where they were accustomed to expect an entertainment corresponding with the vile tastes they had formed; and was enough to enable one to feel how the Word of Life went thrilling and cutting its way through those masses, till score after score were ready to get upon the stage before all the rest, heart-broken seekers for mercy.

Oh, those early converts! Those faces in the ring at Poplar! I shall never forget them. Many of them we see no more now, for those first veterans have, in many cases, gone to follow the Lamb in grander scenes. How well I remember climbing, with the General, one morning into the little room, up many stairs, in Shoreditch, where one of that noble little company sat toiling all the day



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long at rough sewing work, by means of which she supported herself and child, and only too often a drunken husband as well! It was on her way to a public-house that poor Carrie Berry had been stopped by one of the open-air meetings, and so led to seek the Saviour in a little back room. Her face during all the years I knew her was never wanting in that expression of peace and joy which it bore in her little room as well as in the meetings, and, preserved faithful and true amidst the worst of East-End surroundings to the last, triumphing with her comrades, and weeping over sinners, she went up from an East-End court to a mansion in the skies.

Modern improvements have swept away many of the spots on which those early victories were won. Broad streets, and piles of fine new buildings cover the sites of not a few of the little meeting-rooms, in which many a "Drunken Bill," and "Swearing Jim, and "Fallen Mary" were led to Jesus; but the life that began in those old places is growing on, and will yet make itself felt, amongst every nation under Heaven.

How do I know that? Because I see that this great work could not have been begun or continued with any less than that love that God alone can give, which fills the whole heart, and which cannot be quenched or turned aside from attaining its object in the deliverance of every slave of the devil from his awful power.

From the beginning, one of the most important features of the work has been the teaching of Holiness, as a pure and heavenly state, which can be attained by a costermonger, or anybody else, and enjoyed in perfect peace amidst all the temptations and harassings of every-day life in the back slums of a great city. No new theory this, of

"A heart in every thought renewed
And full of love Divine,
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine."

Only such hearts can be equal to the Divine toil of raising the most guilty and miserable to a similar life of love and self-sacrifice for the salvation of the rest. What is this but the "everlasting life" promised to all who believe in Jesus. Ah, if people would but believe! That very life pictured



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before us so charmingly in the Gospels, that life of dying to save the lost is within the reach of everyone who will have it.

Have you got that life, or any part of it? I don't ask whether you believe the Bible; whether as a mere matter of creed you recognise the difference between sinners and saints, between those who are going to Heaven and those who are going to hell. What I ask is, do you see those facts as mere shadows made by ink on paper, or do you feel that you, yourself, are certainly going to Heaven, and that you have brothers and sisters all around you as certainly going to Hell? Do you care about them; if not, how can you be saved yourself? If you do, then I defy you to read the story of The Salvation Army and not to care about it also.