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III. SYSTEMATIC SALVATION.

WE have seen how The General almost drifted into this great life-work, and nothing could be more important to those who would rightly understand him or The Army than to bear in mind that nothing was pre-arranged, and that the huge Army of to-day has rather grown than been made.

Commencing with the formation of an East London Christian Revival Society, soon to be developed into an East London Christian Mission, to be called the Christian Mission as soon as it's first narrow boundary had been passed, the General seems only to have become gradually reconciled himself to the idea of any permanent organization or settled plan. He had, and in fact many still be said to have, only one absolutely settled purpose — to save the largest possible number of the souls of the poor.

A tent was good enough to begin with, but it was blown down, and the people must meet somewhere; therefore they were invited to the curious little rooms, of which we have already spoken, until the first real Headquarters was secured in that most suitable of all imaginable localities, an ex-public-house in the Whitechapel Road.

"The Eastern Star!" What a name! What a word of promise for the world written on that old vile public-house sign!

The cholera year, 1866, will never be forgotten by those of us who lived in London at the time. The misery and poverty of East-End life was that year exhibited in colors that ought not to have left an intelligent nation to sleep on for almost another twenty years before the "bitter cry" of millions of its poor, living under the very shadow of its throne, should reach its ears; and the extremity of that East-End misery had a great deal to do with many of the early arrangements in connection with The General's work.

The mind becomes almost bewildered in attempting to realise all that was begun in that one little East-End hall. Amongst the list of the engagements figured not only a long list of open-air and indoor preaching services, but Class Meetings, Mothers' Meetings, Temperance Meeting,



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Band of Hope, Tract Distributors' Meeting, Bible Classes, Exhorter's Meeting, and Children's Salvation Meeting.

Not one of this enormous variety of meetings was merely rushed over. Every department was carefully, laboriously, tearfully cared for by workers, filled with the same spirit and feeling as their leader, who ever incited them all to ever-increased exertion. It is a remarkable fact that after years, in which some of the works of charity especially included in that huge programme have been comparatively unattended to, under the desperate pressure of engagements on the main lines, nearly all the subordi-nate works are being organised all the world over with all The Army's strength, and on a scale that would have staggered the minds of the humble few who climbed the stairs of 188, Whitechapel Road, week after week.

In all, through all, and above all, Salvation was always the ideal kept in view in connection with all these things, and whether a meeting was called a Bible Class, a Mothers' Meeting, a Band of Hope, or a soup distribution, it was pretty much the same; the outer arrangements might differ, but the one thing that anyone who ventured within the lines of the Mission must always expect was to be "tackled" about their souls.

As many as two thousand poor fellows would visit the first soup kitchen in one day, most of them paying pennies of their own for convenient basins of soup, and for substantial food supplied at that price. Free breakfasts were given now and then on Sunday morning to people to whom tickets had been carefully distributed by men, once of their own class, who carefully hunted them out one by one until the tables were crowded with the poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind. But after soup and after breakfast came prayer, the prayer of men who meant to prevail, together with appeal upon appeal, urging to immediate surrender to God as the only remedy for their miseries, temporal and spiritual. Those prayers and appeals did prevail to the salvation of many.

The visitation of sisters, who passed from room to room throughout the crowded tenement houses, quite as eager for the chance to pray with the people and lead them to Christ as for the opportunity to do good to their bodies by the presentation of a soup ticket, told are beyond all that we can calculate upon the souls of the multitude.



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As for the Mothers' Meetings, I should not like to investigate too closely the question as to how many stitches were put into the garments, then in course of completion at those meetings, in any given hour. There is no doubt that many a poor mother was enabled, with the aid of a few pence carefully saved, to procure clothing, which would otherwise have cost them many shillings. But in all the conversations I have had with those who made themselves generally useful in connection with these meetings, I have never once heard anything about sewing. All their memories of the Mothers' Meeting relate to mother this and sister that, who, after a great deal of persuasion, were induced to come to such-and-such a meeting, when they were got upon their knees and transformed into lovers of the Lord before they left the place.

I should like to hear of the establishment of millions of Mothers' Meetings of that sort.

It is rather difficult to trace the extension of the mission, and the completion of its organisation, because of the frequent changes in places of meeting, and though almost equally frequent changes in rules and system which marked the first few years of its history. A number of more or less harmonious but differing elements were at work together, and it would have puzzled anyone to say at any given moment which of these elements would eventually prevail.

First and foremost, of course, came the open-air work. Whatever else was done or undone, the people must be sought after in the streets, and that continually. This idea grew almost into a mania with some. They wanted no indoor meeting-places; they could see no reason why a crowd once gathered should ever be dispersed, or ever be left. As long as the people would listen to them they would gladly stay and talk; or if, by a gradual dispersal the people gently informed them that they had spoken quite too long, no way disconcerted they would go off, like a quack doctor or a street juggler, to another corner and begin again. To these good men the idea of disappointing a congregation which was waiting for them indoors was nothing. Why did not the people come out or stop out, or pray, or otherwise attend to themselves? You might not approve of such ideas, but it was very little use to argue against them. I believe some of those men are to be found to this day at East-End street-corners talking away as earnestly as ever, and who will dare to say that the Lord has not bid them talk, and talk in the open air exclusively? To-day we could find a sphere for such men with the greatest pleasure, and guarantee that they should never be asked to go under a roof as long as they lived.



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But there are others who equally magnified the importance of the indoor meeting. The open-air work was all very well for those who could do it; but they were not called that way, especially on wet nights, and had very little patience with the first-named class. These good folk might have been described as pillars in the house of the Lord, to go out no more for ever. Some of them might he found in the same seat year after year, and, to their honour, never inclined to leave the meeting, no matter how late it might be carried on. As long as a meeting was going on, no matter how, good might be done, probably would be done, of what consequence was it if only four were present, or even a less number than that? They would assure you they had "a glorious time." The Lord drew near to them in very deed, and everything was going to happen that should happen. True, the sinners were not there, and that was much to be regretted, poor things; but that could not he helped. They were there, and meant to be there, and always there, and nowhere else; and any proposed novelty was as gall and wormwood to their poor souls. Yet, who shall dare to say that these, too, had not their place? Dear old souls, some of them, the very sight of their faces was enough to renew your strength. If they did but little else, who can say how much they helped others to do? And again and again such men were the means of keeping halls open – no, rooms, I ought rather to say in little corners, which more active men would have deserted for wider and more stirring scenes.

There was dear father Barber, of Stratford, a miserable old drunkard, sunken to the lowest depths when the Mission folk found him out and led him to the Saviour. How I wish I could present you with a return of the number of meetings the old man held, with the big Bible and nobody, or at most one or two other people in the vestry, "that blessed vestry" as he used to call it. But for that old man's persistence I very much question whether the services at the old Stratford Hall by the Canal Bridge would have been continued long enough for the capture of the woman who, as Mrs. Major Simmonds, was to become the Army's pioneer in South Africa.

There was the teetotal party, to whom the misery of the drunkard's home appeared to be so great as to overshadow almost every other consideration. The message of salvation was certainly conveyed in most of their speeches and songs; for, from the first, the tone of all the meetings had been made so strongly evangelistic that any other element could with difficulty assert itself; and yet there were many among this class who really did value the signing of a pledge, almost if not quite as much as the salvation of a soul.



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And there was the singing party, most of them singers themselves, who considered that nothing could be so powerful, either to attract or lead the people, as good singing, whether outdoors or in. These good folk preferred the sound of their own voices to that of any preacher or speaker. Some of them thought a great deal of practice necessary, whilst others, strong in their own want of knowledge of any music, poured contempt upon anything of the kind. That some of these singers were extremely useful no one would ever question; but no one would have imagined the amount of discord which the lovers of harmony were able to create at any station.

The preaching party, on the other hand, while by no means undervaluing in every case the power of song, were above all impressed with the importance of what they called "giving the people something"; or "feeding the people." To this party it is only fair to say that many quiet hearers, as well as loud speakers, belonged. They would point triumphantly to the congregations gathered and the good done by The General and Mrs. Booth, and would ask where the Mission would have been but for some solid teaching. True they did not exactly profess to be able to do all that The General and Mrs. Booth could do; but, in their estimation, the man who for three-quarters of an hour or more could induce as many as twenty people to sit still and listen to him quietly, towered far above the roughfellow, thundering for ten minutes at a street corner to several hundreds, of people, and then putting up someone else to have a turn. The strength, the spiritual power; and the ability of some of those preachers were beyond all doubt of very great value, and although their influence wherever it prevailed, hindered the activity and improvement of scores of their brethren and sisters, on the one hand, it undoubtedly assisted in the salvation of many souls on the other.

The Sunday-school party scarcely needs description, being represented so widely throughout the world, and having had so many years in which to proclaim its theories. Suffice it to say that, as late as ten years after the foundation of the Mission, there were to be found, at some stations, men and women whose whole interest was concentrated in the Sunday-school, and who would actually prefer to inconvenience, and even shut out the adults, rather than that one of their lessons should be shortened. Yet let it never be forgotten that, in Mission Sunday-schools, there were earnest soul-winners, and that there were children saved who afterwards became gloriously useful in the work.



The *W. Raitton* Collection



One might speak of the party of order who would on no account tolerate, inside a building, anyone who should dare to "laugh in the house of God," and the free-and-easy party, who would almost allow rowdies to take possession of a building rather than risk grieving one of them; of the party of quiet, who could not see the good of noise; and the natural party, who could not help making it; of the conservative party, always talking of the old times, if that only meant three months since, when they sat under the ministrations of the brother who led them to Christ, and upon whose ways they could not imagine any improvement; and the radical party, ever ready to sink into misery, and to declare that there was "nothing doing" if no striking, startling, overwhelming novelty had been introduced at their station within the last week.

And then there were of course the "kind friends" who were always really with help of various sorts, and frequently with suggestions as well. Some of these labored diligently in good works for the poor, and so helped to win many a sad heart for the Saviour. Others, undoubtedly, added to the troubles and perplexities of Mr., and Mrs. Booth to no small degree. Some liked this doctrine, and some that. Most were extremely anxious, that everything should be done decently and in order, that there should be "no excitement" and, in fact, "nothing objectionable" in connection with the services that were to transform the East-End ruffians into nice, quiet men, such as they might with pleasure associate with. Alas! alas! for the man who wishes to please his friends, and to please God into the bargain. God is likely to have a very poor place in the arrangements, and the man a worse still. But amid a variety of plans, each of which seems good, and out of which it seems impossible to choose the best, it is an awkward complication to be troubled with people who will only give help in consideration of the prominence of this or that plan.

And then last, not least, were the organisers. These men were for rule and order. What the rules and orders might be did not so much matter, provided they should have a hand in making them or seeing them carried out. An hour was a small thing to spend in discussing the precise minute at which an open-air or an indoor meeting ought to be commenced or concluded. The great thing in their eyes was the establishment of something that would last "on the best and surest foundations," as the Bible translators put it. They believed in system, and nothing good could be done except on system; but alas! alas! system to most of them meant a great deal more talk than work. Yet, let no man despise all these worthy elders, leaders, exhorters, local preachers,



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treasurers, secretaries, stewards, and what not. They had their place and did their work with a devotion to detail, and an expenditure of time and strength that would do honor to any government or society on earth. They helped, there is no doubt, to continue to multiply and to extend the work that men of another stamp began and carried forward.

The Christian Mission was, above all, an association of remarkable personalities. I do not believe that, at the time when I first made its acquaintance at the end of 1872, there were a score of persons connected with it who had not a thoroughly fixed purpose. Hundreds of different opinions as to the best methods for securing and maintaining the conquest of souls there might be, but each one, with all the strength of his or her individual character, was ready to strive for the one great object. For years past the founder and General Superintendent, actuated by a commendable anxiety to insure a permanent success, whether he lived or died, for this great effort, had been inventing scheme after scheme for the consolidation and perpetuation of the work, and the result was an amount of organisation at which we can afford to laugh now-a-days, but which implied a total of patient toil that it would be impossible now to estimate.

Everything was arranged for, and arrangers above all. In connection with halls that would not hold a hundred people, you might find as many as half-a-dozen different official bodies meeting every week. The poor convert who had been brought to the penitent-form two months since must appear trembling before an elder's meeting, who should ascertain, by examination, whether he were worthy to be enrolled as a member of the Mission. If he ventured to aspire to public speaking he must pass another examination before the exhorters' meeting. Did he wish to distribute tracts, then he must see the tract committee, and satisfy them that he would not only distribute "the silent messenger" with unvarying regularity, but that he would speak to the people in every house about their souls, and pray with them if possible. If, in the course of his work, the tract distributor came across cases of extreme need, then he must apply to another committee for the help to the extent of a shilling or two, which he might be allowed to give. By-and-by would come round the solemn day for the meetings of the local preachers and the quarterly meetings, and woe to the local brother who had dared to appear half-an-hour late at any of his appointments, or to the evangelist or class-leader who had not been known to visit one of his sick members!



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The amount of time spent in official meetings of this description after their day's work was done by these hard tellers in the factory, the street, and the workshop, seems almost incredible, even to those of us who were most familiar with it all, as we look back upon it through the dim distance of the past, only ten years away. Oh, those elders' meetings! Prolonged hundreds of times for hours after the ordinary Salvation meeting was over – prolonged till midnight many a time.

Now, what I am anxious to point out is that all this organisation, however unsuitable it might prove itself to before the work in hand, showed an amount of labor and care to systematise the salvation of the lost such as had never been witnessed in recent history. We shall see later on how much grander were the results produced by the same care and labor otherwise applied. But whilst on the one hand we must never forget that the prodigies achieved by The Army are the direct fruit of the Divine Spirit's work in human hearts, yet the great work begun would never have continued without an infinity of trouble and toil on the part of those who began the fight, which can now be extended with so much greater ease.