

FINDING ONE'S WAY IN CITY MISSION WORK

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A POOR ITALIAN FAMILY—FROM THE TOP FLOOR
TENEMENT TO A HOME OF THEIR OWN



Finding One's Way in City Mission Work



WELVE years ago the writer of this sketch became associated with the work of the City Mission Society of Hartford. The Society was then more than fifty years old, with many interesting chapters in the history of its work. At that time Henry J. Gillette was city missionary, and he had done a remarkable work through his "Yoke Fellows" Club, associated with Fourth Congregational Church. Miss Caroline Bartlett, who had spent several years in the New York City Mission, was superintendent of the Village Street Mission. Under her supervision the work had been transferred from Morgan Street and reorganized along lines substantially the same as those on which it is still conducted.

The experience of a dozen years in social and religious service in the tenement district of Hartford brings to me a distinct feeling of humility, not merely as an individual, but as an American citizen, as a member of the social and religious workers' group, and as a representative of the Evangelical churches. There is something overwhelming in the bigness of the job. It is humiliating to think of the inadequacy of our American Government, municipal, state, national, in dealing with social problems, of the Church's slowness in grasping the

significance of social conditions and religious work among foreign, dependent, and delinquent groups; of the lack of something in our Evangelical churches necessary to meet the needs of these groups.

Most of us enter social and mission work with a fine enthusiasm. It takes courageous faith and persistent resourcefulness to maintain one's enthusiasm. Those who give their gifts and remain aloof from actual service or enter into it only superficially have the easiest tasks. The fairy tales and romantic stories of the work sustain them. There are fairies among the tenements and the lives of the people are full of romance. But the drama of East Side life as a whole is tragedy. The myriad families seem to be under the spell of the Fates. The mission worker is tempted to undertake to rescue a family here and there and let the Fates for the most part have their way. True faith in the Kingdom and in the mission of our American Nation will accept nothing short of the complete redemption of society.

But how can one face the facts and still retain his faith? What can be done to redeem the numberless lives shattered by alcoholism, vice and their attendant diseases? What can be done to overcome the current of degeneracy in so many families, to re-establish true family ideals in homes broken by desertion and cruelty and shiftlessness? What shall be done with the groups of aimless boys and girls, shallow, unresponsive to spiritual and moral appeals, ignorant of the deeper realities of life, immersed in pure sensuousness, engaged for the most part



A LITTLE MOTHER WHO CARES FOR HER
BABY SISTER

in standardized occupations that call for little but unthinking routine, finding their recreation in artificial, colorless or chromo-

colored, sensual, commercialized amusements? What hope can there be for the great mass of poorly fathered and mothered children of the tenements, poorly housed, poorly fed, spending long, unoccupied hours on denatured streets, passing in "goose step" procession through the standardized grades of our public schools, knowing no distinction between moral law and police restraint? How can we instill into our foreign population our modest American virtues and keep them from imitating our vociferous vices? How can we persuade them to conserve their foreign virtues and discard their foreign vices?

It is evident that many of our social tasks are beyond the resources of the social and mission worker. Many of them are national, state, or municipal tasks. It is the duty of every informed citizen, and especially of every social worker and missionary, to promote wholesome social legislation. The adoption of the eighteenth amendment is certainly the greatest piece of social reform since the abolition of slavery. Three other legislative reforms that deal with tasks beyond the resources of the social and mission worker are adequate supervision and regulation of housing conditions, the establishment of a domestic relations court with power to deal effectively with deserting husbands (and wives), and the establishment of a commission on morals with large powers, representing the recognized moral forces of the community.

But the missionary's task still remains. Upon the Church devolves the task of bringing moral and spiritual inspiration

into the congested mass of the tenement districts. Upon the Evangelical missionary devolves the task of bringing the spirit and teachings of the American Evangelical churches into as many lives as possible, with a view to the final leavening of the whole mass with the gospel of the world's Saviour. For surely there is no other life-giving gospel.



VILLAGE STREET MISSION BOYS AT CAMP RUSSELL

During these twelve years I have been searching for some fundamental principle as a basis of mission work. I have been trying to develop a practical technique adapted to the people and the conditions in which they live, and have been endeavoring to approach people in a spirit and with a motive that will call forth a sincere and sympathetic response from their hearts.



FORAGING FOR WOOD

The fundamental principle I believe to be the conservation of home virtues and the development of the home along the lines of the typical American Christian home. It is through the family that the morality of the race has been developed. It is in the home that religion has functioned most effectively in Jewish and Christian history. America has certainly become great through her homes, which have been her finest product, the foundation of her democratic institutions and the source of her continuous democratic spirit.

In making family well-being fundamental in the mission and social program, one enlists the interest and the energy of the

home itself and of all its members; one works in harmony with the best impulses of all the members of the family. The improvement of the home tends directly to the meeting of almost all moral, physical and social needs of all the members of the home.

Several years ago the Mission came in contact with a family which had become a public charge, known to a large group of agencies and people. It was regarded as an almost hopeless family socially, with the strong probability of becoming morally degenerate. The secret of the trouble lay in the partial physical disability of the father. The missionary established a sympathetic relation with the family, somewhat in the nature of a pastor of a church to one of his families. He then arranged with all other agencies and benefactors to withdraw their support or to give it through the Mission. The father was examined by a physician and advised that an operation would likely remove his trouble and enable him to work steadily. The man refused to go to the hospital. The missionary insisted that he go. The man said that he might die under the operation. The missionary replied that if he died in this way it would be in the performance of his duty and that his family would be cared for. Still he refused. The missionary refused to pay the rent. The family had to move. Again the rent became due and the family had to move. No one would assist. The missionary still maintained the relation of a sympathetic pastor, but was firm in his demands. At last the man came and said

that he would go to the hospital for his operation. The family was cared for, the rent was paid, the man was cured and went to work. Soon the oldest boy went to work. The family became economically independent. The home began and continued to improve along all lines. The father and mother became active members of the Village Street Church. Afterwards the children, one after another, united with the church. The family is rapidly developing into a fine American Christian family.

This instance illustrates not only the principle but also the method and spirit of mission work. The method consists in establishing the pastoral relation between the missionary and his families. This does not necessarily mean that the family belong to the mission church. The family may remain Jewish or Roman Catholic and still recognize the missionary as the family pastor who bears on his heart the welfare of every member of the home. The pastoral relation in its deepest sense is not an ecclesiastical relation, but rather one of sympathy, deeply human and spiritual. Just as in many cases ministers of American churches are pastors of whole communities regardless of church affiliations, so the missionary, reaching out from his Community Center, may enter into a sort of pastoral relation with the families in general. There is a peculiar quality about this relation which it is difficult for the social worker along other lines to develop. The missionary's approach is from the religious angle, and yet it is in the spirit of human

sympathy and brotherhood. The spirit of honest fellowship is almost sure to bring a worthy response.

Adopting the conservation and improvement of the home or family as the working principle of the mission affects in a fundamental way the whole conception of the Mission. The Mission building is no more merely a place for the meeting and recreation and instruction of boys and girls, men and women. Keeping boys and girls off the street or giving them a more congenial and beneficial place than their homes, is no longer the aim. The Mission is the place of inspiration where all members of the family are prepared to become more congenial and more efficient members of their homes. It is the home that counts. The success of the Mission is written in the home.

The possibilities of the working program are almost limitless. It involves co-operation with all other agencies; it implies conflict with none. When all religious bodies and institutions and agencies unite in promoting the welfare of the home, social regeneration will be accomplished rapidly.



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