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1896

# SUPPLEMENTARY FORCES.



RESCUE WORK:

ITS NEED—ITS DEVELOPMENT.

READ AT THE ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

**Church Penitentiary Association,**

BY

LADY LAURA RIDDING.

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## SUPPLEMENTARY FORCES.

WHAT the lifeboat is to the shipwrecked mariners' homes of rest or sailors' shelters, such is the relation of rescue work to the penitentiaries. There can be no question of comparative usefulness between these two agencies, which must work in active co-operation. It is absolutely essential that both should exist side by side, assisting, not rivalling, each other's labours. The lifeboat snatches the wretched, exhausted voyagers out of peril and places them within the shelter, whence they go forth again to the world, clothed, healed, comforted. This merciful work done on shore is the necessary supplement to the merciful work done in the storm. It is of the latter, the rescuing efforts of which we are thinking, that I would speak to-day, in the hope that, among some of those present at this meeting, fresh helpers for this special branch of work may be this afternoon enlisted.

Two points I will ask to be allowed to speak about—viz., the pressing need of rescue work, and the urgent necessity of its wider development.

I. *The Pressing Need.*—Those who man the lifeboats are appalled at the awful amount of wreckage. They snatch souls from perishing here and there, but the numbers thus saved are terribly small compared with the wholesale disaster that is going on around them. There is nothing extraordinary in this. As we grow gradually to perceive the evil causes at work, we begin to wonder at the number of vessels which reach port safely, not at the number lost on the voyage.

In past times Cornish people prayed in their churches for a good wreck, and placed false lights among the rocks to mislead strange ships. Now, thank God, such wickedness is undreamt of; and our west coast bristles with lighthouses, buoys, revolving

lights, lightships, foghorns, and danger signals, placed wherever sharp rocks or treacherous shoals threaten. Is it too much to hope that the same Christian change of view is passing over our country with regard to its social wreckage? One is told that not so very long ago respectable people who counted themselves Christians acquiesced in the necessity of some lives being thus sacrificed, as ensuring safety to their pure homes. In Blake's words :—

“ Every night and every morn  
 Some to misery are born ;  
 Every morn and every night  
 Some are born to sweet delight ;  
 Some are born to sweet delight,  
 Some are born to endless night.”

A comfortable doctrine to believers who have contrived to belong to the “ sweet delight ” section ! But I trust that nowadays very few people outside the school of new paganism would dare to plead the pious necessity of this social wreckage ; and deep encouragement lies in the fact that the large majority are waking to see that not only must rescue work be carried on by the lifeboats of society, but that the hidden causes of sin must be investigated, and danger signals and lighthouses must be placed against them to warn off unwary travellers from these perils of life.

Then, and not till that urgently needed work is done, dare we expect to see any marked results of our work ; as then, though the wrecks may still occur, they will be caused by agencies (like the storms and tempests) impossible for us to control, only open to the eye of God to see, and the wisdom of God to deal with. At present we have the double causes dealing out destruction : invisible forces acting on very visible human forces of evil. What then are these shoals, rocks, quicksands, which do this deadly evil in our midst ? I will confine myself to speaking of those which endanger the social life of our poorer women.

The responsibility in the first set rests almost entirely with the Landlord and Employer.

- 1. Perils from the dwelling-houses at home caused by :
  - { High rents, causing overcrowding, absence of sanitary decent arrangements among the poor.
  - { Carelessness of servants' quarters.
  - { Factory girls' } Lodgings.
  - { Shop girls' }
  - { Cramped quarters. Bachelor lodgers.
- In service or employment caused by :
- In cottages caused by :

In the second and third, the responsibility rests upon the landlord, employer, parent, and the general public.

- 2. Perils from economic and social conditions caused by :
  - { Low wages for female labour.
  - { Absence of proper places for amusement and feeding.
  - { Absence of family life and parental control, wandering about the streets at night, dulness, want of ideas and interests.
  - { Absence of proper guardianship by mistress and employer, over-work in drudgery, idleness in empty big homes.
  - { Craving for excitement, drink, dress, amusement, want of early teaching of self-control to rich men's sons and poor men's daughters, lax public opinion and customs, corrupting influences of talk and ideas in place of work, hereditary tendency to vice.
- In towns and In villages } caused by :
- In situations caused by :
- 3. Perils from moral defects caused by :

These are the dangers which send us miserable, disabled lives from the school playgrounds, the crowded cottage or tenement, from the servants' hall, the lodging-house attic, the farmhouse dairy, from the factory loom or the back of the counter, from the unprotected hiring-fairs, the public-house dances, the Sunday evening country town or barracks town promenade. From these various places, where they should be in safe shelter, do our poor girls come, maimed in soul and body on the shoals and rocks of this Christian land.

## II. *The Urgent Need for Wider Development of Rescue Work.*

—Guarding the approaches to shoals and rocks is not the work of the lifeboat crew. Other agencies must safeguard the coast. But those engaged in rescue work must not rest content till they have put forces into action which shall deal untiringly with the preventible causes of evil. We must never forget the great educational work entrusted to us, who know from personal experience the awful *results* of these causes, to try to form public opinion on this matter. Parents, heads of households, employers of labour, landlords, can all help in this holy work by removing dangers, by wise safeguarding, by Christian influences. We need imperatively this great army of helpers. Let us pray God to open their eyes to see the need, and their ears to hear His call to them and help.

Such awakening must take time if it is to be a real rousing of the national conscience. The Bishop of London, in an address in Derby ten years ago, spoke of the awakening thus: "This country lay sluggish and careless of the awful sin of intemperance in its midst. At length by God's mercy she was roused from her deathly sleep, and when she saw the horror of the sin, she rose up to fight it. And now *as a reward* God has opened her eyes to a curse more awful still. The waxed ears and closed eyes have been again opened to see, and again she is called to fight with an enemy."

These brave words should teach us thankfulness, not despair,

when we, and others not yet won to be our allies, gradually behold the tremendous power of the forces which we must fight revealed to us.

How then are we to enlist these helpers? By using all wise opportunities of bringing circumstances over which they have control, considerations which have practical bearing on the question, to their knowledge. It is marvellous how much latent sympathy with good lies in men's and women's hearts waiting to be quickened by the Divine touch. That is the only awakening force. Do not let us ever be beguiled into trying to use any other.

The paternal motive of guarding our own homes from the nemesis of our neglect; the civic dangers resulting from a lax tone of morality; the economic problems forcing themselves on our consideration from starvation wages, a surplus woman population, and growing rates for workhouses, reformatories, asylums, and gaols;—these all furnish urgent motives enough, but they have none of the inspiring life-giving force of Christian brotherhood. We shall win our helpers most surely by our Master's methods: by quiet talks, by visible proofs, by bringing them to Him to convince.

Let us take for granted that when the landlord, the employer, the home mistress, the mother, are awakened to their responsibilities, they will be humane enough to wish to help us; and let us not neglect to provide them with opportunities for doing so, by appealing to them to help us, by not allowing failures to discourage us, but by asking it of them again and again, full of hope and patience and faith in the Holy Spirit's secret pleadings with them. Railway porters, cabmen, policemen, medical men, poor law guardians, magistrates, prison officials, municipal and local authorities—all these should be our allies; and they will be, if we ask help discreetly of them, with private prayer to God to move them to grant it, and if we take it for granted that our prayers will be answered. Nothing is more wonderful than the

way in which God raises up helpers to us in this work ; from the very stones—nay, from the very mud—of our streets. Women long sunk in sin will bring young girls to our rescue homes, will dare the bullies, withstanding them to their faces, and will act with real heroism in helping to save a foolish child's soul.

But the most powerful helpers that we can win to our side are the mothers and elder women. They are the God-given protectors of our girls in their homes, or situations, or places of work. For enlisting their sympathy and help I think quiet talks in their own homes, the formation of mothers' unions or woman's league branches, drawing-room meetings, and talks at mothers' sewing meetings give the best opportunities. In these various ways a lady can speak quietly to her fellow-women, can tell them about the sad necessity for rescue and penitentiary work, and can bring home to her hearers the great call there is to them to help in this matter—not necessarily by outside active rescue work, but by quiet protective educational work and influence in whatever ways their lives touch those of the young creatures committed to their care.

The working-class mother, of course, knows the dangers to which girls are exposed well enough ; but we may be able to help her to form a truer judgment about the sinfulness of sin, and to remind her of her responsibility to God for her children's moral training—a responsibility obscured in many instances by unforeseen workings of the Education Act, a generation of mothers having apparently grown up with the belief that "Government," not they, are responsible for their children's bodies, minds, souls, and spirits from the moment they can toddle off to the infant school!

The leisure-class mother has too often equally crude theories which should be dissipated. We must try to lead her not to think of those we rescue as belonging to a strange, different caste, nor as atoms in a vague unrecognised multitude of "rough girls," "fallen women," "cases," or "penitents," but as

what they really are—viz., poor neglected creatures, grown up under stupid, unkind, perhaps criminal mothers, and then sent out into the world to earn their bread, to shift for themselves as factory or industrial hands, or as drudges of some crowded little house, in a great city where they pick up strange friends, strange ideas, strange morals, keep strange hours, and undergo strange experiences, without a soul to care for them or protect them, or restrain them, at an age when their happier sisters of higher birth go to bed at 8 o'clock, and still wear pinafores! And at 18 years old, when the well-born girls are just coming out, these children are brought to us from the workhouse maternity ward and lockward, from the gaol, from the streets—*ruined*.

We must help our friends to realise what these young ruined lives mean. Many who lead them will die early, but many will go on living them for fifty more years. May I quote a forcible summing up of that meaning which we must make clear to good, older women? “How, deep as hell, is the fact involved in thousands of women living, existing, *only* by what they earn by sin; how that terrible clinging to life must be satisfied at all costs, and how it leads them through their ceaseless material needs into lower and lower phases of misery and vice, in which a bitterness is engendered that makes them revenge their own past wrongs by turning tempters to innocent lads, and at last, by throwing away the last remnants of womanly instincts, by dragging down young girls into their hell of life. How each one of these hundred thousand women, although once an innocent infant, now forms the centre of an everwidening corrupt influence in the varied relations of life.”

If we bring this awful truth home to the hearts of our mothers, rich and poor alike; if we convince them of the glorious truth that in every one snatched from the abyss numbers of others whom they would have tempted are saved too; and if we lead them to realise the solemn truth that their duty is to protect their sons and their daughters from deadly

temptation and sin, by arming them with the armour of purity, then we shall have gained for our work a band of helpers mighty as an army by the power of their influence.

But, to sum up these suggestions for a wider development of rescue work, I will urge again that this educational work is not to be done by writing about the social evil in novels or newspapers. People's hearts will not be turned to a more righteous state by that; but by patient unremitting placing of the subject before their attention in due seasons—not placing it in a picturesque or vague impersonal aspect, but rather forcing them to perceive that a personal service is laid on them, and that everyone who abstains from rendering that service is disloyal to his Saviour and treacherous to his fellow men and women.

This duty of forming public opinion should never be lost sight of by rescue workers. It is involved essentially in the aim of creating a great outer circle of preventive and caretaking agencies round each living centre of rescue and preventive work. And wherever this outer circle is formed, there the centre will never suffer for want of fresh helpers to take the place of the worn-out workers.

Training a new generation of workers is a second very weighty part of our educational responsibility. As with the careless outsider, so with the worker in process of training, the great enlightening forces to be sought are the love of souls and and the love of God. Through them they will learn tenderness, pity, patience in disappointment, courage, faith. Opportunities for training are given us in abounding variety in the different places where our work takes us: in the workhouse, the prison, the hospital, the police court, the foul dens and wicked places and streets of the city, the ruined, neglected homes of the village—our probationers drawn from that outer ring of sympathizers can learn this work in any of these places.

Then, when admitted on to the committee of the rescue and preventive work, it is most important that each member

should have her own definite work to do. If she is on the executive committee, or if she is collector of funds, or organizes working parties, or escorts girls to Homes, or visits in the workhouse or the prison, or works on the streets, or comes on certain days to sit with the inmates of the Home, and so relieve the matron—whatever appointed task hers be, it makes all the difference to the satisfactoriness of the committee's work and to her own proficiency that each committee member should hold a special department of her own, and that no drones be admitted on to it. Those ladies who have least leisure can always undertake to correspond with one or two girls, and that kindly act is one of the most valued.

True rescue workers should know nothing of the attitude of mind which is satisfied with shunting a case into a penitentiary or training home or situation, and then having no more to do with her. For them there should be continued interest and patient prayer, and care for each case till she is called away in death. I believe that our Nottingham system of allotting a "correspondent" to every single case that has passed through our rescue and preventive shelters has been invaluable for this continued mothering. The penny post has woven blessed cords of love between our girls and our associates, and as in 10½ years we have now had 880 cases, I am not speaking from a limited experience! Fresh helpers are always being enlisted for this work. The penitent in the penitentiary, the servant in her situation, the child in the training home, all feel that they are not forgotten, and many a wavering heart and passionate temper have been helped by the timely arrival of a letter from the lady who befriends her.

One other special experience of our Nottingham rescue work I should like to mention—viz., our rule, which we have adhered to from the beginning of the work, that each of our monthly general committee meetings should be preceded by a service of intercession, with an address from the chaplain of the

Rescue Shelter, held in the little prayer room of the Home. I believe that a deep blessing has rested on these services, that this value to our work has been inestimable. It is to them that we owe whatever peaceful wholesome tone has pervaded our discussions ; it is to them that we owe the unflagging devoted zeal of our best workers ; and it is to them that we owe the continuous reminder of the Master who claims from His servants this special service of seeking for His lost and erring children.

It was on a dark, tempestuous night, when the rowers were weary with facing the storm, that our Saviour stepped through the darkness into the boat, and brought to His servants peace and comfort. If we watch for Him as we work away at our oars, we shall see Him enter the lifeboat side by side with every soul whom He gives us the joy of saving.



