

THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

RELICS OF THE PAST

No one dreamed of possible insurrection in the ranks when the decision was announced to move the mission to new quarters.

Some of the converts decided to stay at the Van Buren Street site, which was a sacred Bethel to them. The ringleader of the deserters was a converted drunkard, an old man, who told Crittenton to his face: "Do you see that plank right there on the platform? Twelve years ago my tears fell there when Jesus saved me. As long as I can say a word for my Saviour, you'll find me carrying on by that spot for Jesus' sake. This mission has been a fixture at Van Buren and Federal Streets for forty years!"

That was after the last scheduled meeting had been held on Van Buren Street. For a moment Crittenton was stunned. Then he brightened. "Bully for you!" he answered. "That's the kind of stuff God needs on the firing line for souls. I want you to come out for lunch with me tomorrow."

Over the table the next day the converted drunkard repeated his whole story. "My testimony would never be the same," he said, "if I couldn't tell it down by the platform, right at the spot where Jesus washed my sins away."

Crittenton smiled broadly. "Then you'll have to move with us to 650 South State Street," he said. "The carpenter has been working all morning. I asked him to take out a twelve-foot square of the platform and to move it to the new building."

The ex-drunkard, A. E. Nissen, put his head on the table and wept like a baby. Finally he shook hands with Crittenton and said, "I'm ashamed of myself, Crittenton. I'm just a miserable dog. If you'll forgive me, I'll stand right by the crowd on State Street."

That chunk of platform wasn't the only relic that came from Van Buren Street to the converted White House, nor was the twice-born drunkard the only convert. It was a wholesale moving day and when the mission opened on Wednesday morning, January 31, 1923, for its noon meeting, it seemed just like home.

The previous night the Chicago Evening Post, in a spirited editorial, had wished the mission Godspeed in its new location.

They anticipated the mingled emotions of those attending the last session at the historic Van Buren corner:

THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION MOVES

Tonight there will be a gathering of the old-timers at 67 West Van Buren Street, where for forty years the Pacific Garden Mission has held open the door of hope and reached a hand of help to sin-burdened and broken men.

It will be the last meeting in the old hall. The mission is going to move. It is going to move nearer to those for whom it has prayed and labored. At 650 South State Street a three-story brick building has been secured, where another chapter in the long story of winning men back to self-respect and decency and usefulness will begin tomorrow night.

The Pacific Garden mission is a vital, throbbing part of the history of Chicago. It was founded by Col. and Mrs. George R. Clarke forty-five years ago. It was christened by Dwight L. Moody. For five years its work was carried on at 386 South Clark Street. From there it moved to the Van Buren Street building. The constituency it serves has shifted. South State Street is now the main artery of that lodging-house district which abounds in the flotsam and jetsam of life. Within a few blocks of its new quarters it is estimated 5,000 men sleep every night, men adrift on a stream of swift and precarious currents, homeless and friendless men, derelicts, "without God and without hope in the world." To breast that stream and rescue from it "whosoever will" is the mission's aim.

In tonight's meeting there will be many a human trophy glad to tell the story of how he was won by the word of sympathy, the strong and kindly hand of Christian comradeship, the message that God had a welcome and a place for him. And thoughts will turn to men who have carried the influence of the mission out into a wider field, and with lives redeemed from the waste heap have made an impress for lasting good upon their times.

Old-timers will recall Billy Sunday, whose first impulse to serve his fellows came in the Van Buren Street hall. Harry Monroe will be remembered with gratitude. He was converted in the mission and in 1892 became its superintendent. Then there was Dick Lane, expert in burglary, skilled user of "soup" when a safe stood in his way to "easy" money. Dick abandoned his profession when he heard the call to a better life. In his later years he numbered Melvin E. Stone and H. H. Kohlsaat among his intimate friends. Up in New York City Jack Callahan is devoting himself to the winning of men from its underworld. Jack was a pal of the notorious Butch Lyon, and a redoubtable west side gangster until he "found God" in the mission. Out in Japan, preaching the Gospel, is Bob Atchison. He is known internationally as a missionary today, but back in 1890 he was a Chicago slum derelict.

Scores of business men's organizations throughout the country have heard "Razor" Fenton tell how, after winning notoriety as a pickpocket in Canada and the United States, he wandered into the Pacific Garden Mission and got a new vision and a new motive.

But the night will not be long enough to tell the whole story. Cartwright, oldest of living converts; Briscoe, Bob and Harold Oates, Snow, Mott, McCoy, and scores more will want to be heard. New names are being added to the list each week. Under Louis A. Crittenton, who once sold pianos, the work goes on. Chicago owes much to it. In the great maelstrom of the loop it has been lighthouse and life-saving station. We wish it Godspeed in its new home.

In the new mission room Bill Hadley, Lew Speegle, George Snow, Razor Fenton, Honey Briscoe and other old-timers were as eager as ever to give their testimonies when Dad Taylor called for witnesses. And the crowds thronged to hear them. More than 5,000 men slept within a few blocks of the hall nightly and the unobtrusive salvaging corps, in the new slum district, found a new clientele. If Mel Trotter, after a surprise visit to the mission in its last months on Van Buren Street, could report to the trustees that “great crowds are attending and many are being saved,” so nonetheless Walter Taylor, by the time Crittenton had resigned his general superintendency in July, 1923, after maneuvering the shift to the White House, could report that “a great deal more was being done at the new location than at the old, and everybody was very pleased with the change in location.”

The mission’s lifeboats were moving day and night among the human driftwood on State Street and the record for remaking notorious safe blowers, pickpockets and other underworld characters was admirably sustained. Soon the mission was lodging between 250 and 300 men a night, the drifters finding a hardwood floor or concrete basement welcome change from the out-of-doors. Elderly men were sent to a cot in a nearby flophouse; boys under seventeen were sent to the Y. M. C. A. hotel. In the morning, everyone gathered for hot coffee and rolls. The only prerequisite for lodging and breakfast was attendance at the previous night’s service.

Thus the mission carried on in the spirit of its founders. The wheezy old organ that Bill Trotter once played still bellowed the same hymns; the huge grand piano thundered out its praises to God. The cane-seated chair in which Mother Clarke used to sit, and the ponderous Bible which Walter Taylor once hurled at a dope fiend who pulled a gun on him, were all taken to the new quarters. The pictures of Colonel and Mrs. Clarke and the bronze plaques, the picture and memorial plaque of Monroe, were moved, too, as was the clumsy safe in which the mission funds were kept for years. The walls were decorated with Scripture quotations and pithy sermon thoughts. The painted messages included:

**CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS,
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE YOU WROTE TO MOTHER?
BEHOLD NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME, BEHOLD NOW IS THE DAY OF
SALVATION, CALL YE UPON THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND**

and others.

Behind the old walnut pulpit—a converted cabinetmaker had fashioned it for the Clarkes—Taylor put a small notice visible to the speaker. “Preach the Word 20 Minutes,” it read, “Then People Will Not Sleep or Muse or Go Away.”

On the front, facing the audience, he placed a sign reading, “**Jesus Never Fails.**” On top of the pulpit, peering over the edge of the big Bible was the bronze plate reading, “**Sir, We Would See Jesus!**”

One night when S. D. Gordon was guest speaker he changed his entire address after reading those words.

And from that old pulpit, through the years, great men and small, but Christians everyone, had proclaimed salvation’s tidings. Dwight L. Moody on his infrequent visits was the first in a great succession. Mel Trotter, Billy Sunday, James M. Gray, R. A. Torrey, W. E. Biederwolf, William Evans, Paul, Luke and Lyle Rader, Harry Ironside, Herbert Lockyer, William L. Pettingill, Charles E. Fuller, William R. Newell, Anthony Zeoli, Peter W. Philpott, Paul W. Rood, John R. Rice, George Stevens, Harry Vom Bruch, William L. Ridgeway, Walter MacDonald, Peter Rees Joshua are only a few of the American “Who’s Who in Evangelism” that have spoken from Pacific Garden pulpit in the course of the years.

The fire insurance underwriters had no spiritual sentiment when they valued the old organ at six dollars, the pulpit at one dollar, and the mission chairs at forty cents apiece. The mission converts preached a fire insurance of their own, and placed their own value on the treasures of the past, greatest of which was the good news that Jesus saves.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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