THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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CHAPTER TEN

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MISSION MOTHER

Mother Clarke's tiny chapel in overalls may have been a laughing-stock to the rising tide of modernistic preachers, but it produced candidates for heaven the like of which never came from Bible-forsaking pulpits. Destructive higher criticism was having its hey-day, but at the rescue mission the whole Bible was preached from Genesis through Revelation, and the skeptical divinity school students who came occasionally for observation had much private fault to find with the mission's theology and homiletics. They could have little to say, however, about the twice-born men that only "the old, old story" seemed capable of fashioning.

For thirty-five years after the mission's founding, Mother Clarke was the great heart of love that moved its hands. After the first fifteen years, in 1892, Colonel Clarke died. All the more she felt the challenge to carry on with a double task.

She was a tiny woman, weighing not over eighty-five pounds, and only about four feet ten inches tall. The little pancake hat that looked like a deaconess' bonnet hardly increased her height. In the second-floor mission office where she made toast and tea for lunch in order to save money for the Lord's work, she spent her days praying and dealing with individuals needing spiritual succor.

In one of these interviews she led Mrs. Elizabeth Williamson Bowen to Christ. A Scotch orphan, Mrs. Bowen reached New York and made a living as soloist in a theatrical company until she left them in Indiana "because of things occurring which were not to my ideas of propriety."

One day she stepped curiously into Pacific Garden Mission. From the darkened interior came the voice of Dan Barton, asking if she wanted anything. Dan was in the midst of a prayer, and when the stranger answered, "No," he directed her to Room 12 to see Mother Clarke.

The women lunched together, and Mrs. Bowen gave her heart to the Lord. Through the years she sang in evangelistic work with Harry Monroe, Mel Trotter and other mission workers, and for more than thirty-five years attended the Saturday night mission services where her daughter, Mrs. Betty Shaw, often played the piano.

The year Colonel Clarke died was followed by great opportunity for expanded mission effort. The Chicago World's Fair left thousands stranded. Men and women from everywhere were without jobs and without money.

Many of them for the first time lay down at night on cobblestones with the sky for a canopy. Many slept under the elevated trestles near the mission. Somehow they found money for drink when they had none for food. Each week brought its tragic tales of destitution, despair and suicide. These people, as the mission reached them, were not difficult to touch. Mother Clarke and her helpers worked overtime. She made the mission her very home. For twenty-seven years—almost 10,000 nights—she attended the mission without missing a single meeting and never mentioned it. Then somebody sensed the meaning of it all, and in 1905 the converts gave her a special party of appreciation.

The mission was a neighbor to vice and sin of the worst kind and the toll in broken hearts and ruined lives was enough to bring tears to the coldest eyes. Tears of joy often rolled from the mission mother's cheeks as she praised God for the salvation of human wrecks, but seldom was Mother Clarke so touched as when she heard the story of Jimmy the Rat.

A lad of sixteen on an Indiana farm, he had been introduced to opium by a farm hand, and soon was entranced by the weird phantasies that came with the pipe. Three years later he was a contemptible wretch, hiding in dingy places and nicknamed "the Rat" because he made his bedchamber in a long cupboard shelf. A shaking, shrunken, white-faced phantom of the underworld, he soon wandered into a dope den operated by a Mongolian Chinaman, who sold him cocaine not far from the mission, on south Clark Street. The business was ostensibly a laundry, with a street-front room lined with packaged shelves, a long counter, and a painted Chinese girl. Upstairs were the kitchen and some sleeping rooms for John Lee and his helpers, who had a thriving dope business there before the Chinese exodus to Archer Avenue.

In the basement the dope victims were confined. It was a long, dark room, with only two windows, one at each street entrance, but even these were boarded. The place was dimly lighted by gas jets, revealing the steep, ladder-like stairs to the ground floor. Along one side of the room, in double tiers, were wooden bunks, upon which through the murky darkness a white face would stare from a pillow, then sink back into oblivion.

A Chinaman went noiselessly about, distributing dope. On the floor were mattresses, and upon them, stupefied men and women.

Black hours and agonized nerves were all that remained to Jimmy the Rat. His only heaven was a cessation of torment, and he welcomed heroin, opium, cocaine, morphine—anything that brought forgetfulness.

Then one day in this place of hell, a bulky, red-haired Irishman, evidently a newcomer to the dope world, came gradually out of his dreams. Outside in the street there was singing. "Whist now!" the Irishman exclaimed suddenly. "Listen to the Pacific Garden Mission boys singing in the street."

Jimmy felt something stir in his heart as he heard the words. He had not sung a hymn since he stopped attending a crossroads church in Indiana as an innocent country boy.

The Irishman raved on to himself. “Them’s the mission boys, out in the Gospel wagon this fine Sunday afternoon. And me sittin’ in a dope house like a haythen Chinee; better I’d quit, or it’s too bad fer me,” he added, shaking his head solemnly. Jimmy edged his way to the street entrance to hear the singing more distinctly:

“Though I forget Him and wander away,
Still He doth love me wherever I stray;
Back to His dear loving arms would I flee,
When I remember that Jesus loves me.

I am so glad that Jesus loves me,
Jesus loves me, Jesus loves me;
I am so glad that Jesus loves me,
Jesus loves even me.”

Softly Jimmy unlocked the door, slipped through a small opening, and closed it behind him. Not far away was the Gospel wagon and the crowd that had gathered for the singing. On the car platform was a big husky toughy giving his testimony: “This here Pacific Garden Mission crowd prayed me back to a decent life and—”

A hand stretched through the door and Jimmy was pulled back inside and thrown to the concrete floor. A big Chinaman threatened to kill him. Jimmy was insensible, and was pushed back onto his cupboard shelf. The peddler thought they ought to get rid of Jimmy before he “croaked and the police started investigating the dead lobby gow.”

Not many hours later some Chinamen carried him down a side street, threw him behind a pile of lumber in front of an unfinished building, and disappeared in the rain.

Jimmy never could remember how he got to Pacific Garden Mission. When he entered, the crowd was singing, and the room was filled. The song ended as he closed the door behind him, so he started up the aisle. He held up both hands and called out: “I want somebody to pray for me!”

Mother Clarke quickly stepped from the platform. She put her hand on his arm and led him to a front seat. When she knelt down, he fell to his knees by her side. Mission workers gathered; prayer after prayer was poured out to God.

Back in Indiana Jimmy became a successful, middle-aged farmer with a Christian wife and children. He gave a fervent testimony to God’s saving grace, but stopped using the name “Jimmy the Rat” for the sake of his children.

They grew up to say, rather, in their family prayers, “Thank God for Pacific Garden Mission where daddy learned to know Jesus.”

In 1909, Chicago’s new street numbering system went into effect.

The mission's address was no longer 100 East Van Buren Street, but 67 West Van Buren. The old number had been easy to remember and was therefore well-suited for promotional purposes; but now, thirty years after the mission's founding, almost everybody in the heart of Chicago knew where it was, and had something to say either for or against it. Mother Clarke passed up and down the Loop Streets and gave out thousands of small cards, inviting men and women to the services. The cards read:

HOPE FOR ALL WHO ENTER
PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION
67 WEST VAN BUREN STREET
WONDERFUL TESTIMONIES
Strangers and the Poor Always Welcome
SPECIAL SONG SERVICE 7:30 EVERY NIGHT

Seldom a night passed but that the old mission was not filled. Bad weather kept people away from the church, but it drove the outcasts inside for shelter, and the mission workers were glad to see them.

Chicago soon became the winter metropolis of hoboland. Tramps rode the rods from many parts of the country, and the mission had a tremendous job to do. Converts were being lifted from the depths; God had sent great helpers, especially Harry Monroe; but there was still an emptiness in the heart of the mission mother. She wrote, in 1910, the following tribute to the memory of Colonel Clarke:

A TRIBUTE SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF MY DEAR HUSBAND

This world is very lonely, dear,
Since Paradise has called you there;
No loving touch, no words to cheer,
Nor all my joys and sorrows share.

I list in vain for the tread of feet,
And long for a touch of the "vanished hand";
But no loving form is it mine to greet,
Since called to join the Celestial band.

The journey now I tread alone,
Bereft of all my loved ones here,
Whom the Lord has gathered round His throne,
To be forever with Him there.

Angelic hosts are hovering near,
To guard me safely every hour,
But cannot speak those words so dear,
That human lips, can clothe with power.

No one to greet at “early morn,”
No one to say the fond “good night,”
No one to meet me at the door,
With loving heart and face so bright.

The lonely days, the months, the years,
Are only known to Him on high,
For He who “bottles all our tears,”
Has numbered every secret sigh.

I’m coming soon to meet you, dear,
The journey now is almost o’er,
A few more sheaves to gather here,
We’ll meet up there to part no more.

But she carried on courageously, bent on bringing in the sheaves. She spent Sunday mornings regularly and often weekday mornings, visiting in the jails. From cell to cell she walked, giving messages of hope and cheer. The jailor at Cook County kept a little chair reserved for Mother Clarke’s use when she wanted to visit for any length of time in front of a particular cell.

Her record for perfect mission attendance was broken when she fell down the front steps of her Morgan Park home and suffered a fractured ankle. But the most severe blow came in 1912, when she was hurt in an accident that made it impossible for her to continue mission work. While passing through a revolving door of a State Street department store, she was knocked down and severely injured when a tall, heavy man pushed the door, not noticing the slight woman ahead of him. She suffered broken hips and internal injuries. This accident necessitated her relinquishing attendance at the mission and compelled the use of crutches.

For the last years of her life, 1916-1918, Mother Clarke was a complete invalid and unable to converse with anyone. Her devoted nurse, Anna Andrews, who had left the bedside only one day in six years, dropped dead suddenly, and the shock was believed to have hastened Mother Clarke’s own death, which occurred two weeks later, on January 29, 1918. She was eighty-three years of age. After her private nurse’s death, she was moved to the Hinsdale Sanatorium, the mission trustees having unanimously adopted Mel Trotter’s motion that she be removed there, and that the mission “secure for her the best room and nurse, and every possible care and attention for her wellbeing and comfort.”

Six months before death, Mother Clarke paid her last visit to the mission. She was carried in a chair to the front row, for a Sunday morning Bible class. She was feeble, and had nothing to say publicly. After the meeting old friends filed by and shook hands; few of them could speak a word.

Just as in life the mission mother’s great interest was in supporting the soul-saving station, so in death she made a great provision for it.

Annually she had given as much as $4,000 to erase the debts accruing in the course of an extended ministry. She herself kept all of the books and handled the money transactions, so that mission workers and friends seldom knew the extent of her giving. But in her will she left everything to Pacific Garden Mission, the estate coming to about $100,000.

It was a providential gift, for the list of mission subscribers, most of them making small contributions, numbered only seventy-five. The rent was high, and, in the wake of the World War, prices were up. The mission began to serve meals regularly to the downtrodden after the War, the only payment for a night's lodging and a breakfast of coffee and rolls being previous attendance at the evening service.

The by-laws adopted in 1891 when the mission was incorporated gave as the purpose "*to hold and conduct religious services, to carry on and conduct public Gospel missions, to furnish food, lodging and assistance to the needy and unfortunate, and to do religious and benevolent work of all kinds*." The first group of trustees included J. A. Burhans, S. B. Chapin, Charles E. Coleman, George W. Dixon, George D. Elderkin, A. M. Johnson, John Nuveen, Homer Rodeheaver, Thomas S. Smith, Billy Sunday, Mel Trotter and George D. Webb.

These were years in which the mission could ill afford to lose Mother Clarke. Harry Monroe was taken from service in 1912 also, and the mission was hard pressed for leadership.

Mel Trotter's first duties were to his growing Grand Rapids work, but he was asked to become general superintendent of Pacific Garden Mission, with the understanding that the work be carried on by assistant superintendents. Trotter was overseer from 1912 to 1918, coming to Chicago whenever he could do so, but nobody recognized better than himself that the situation was not ideal.

During the early years of this period a group of "holy rollers" worked their way into the mission, and it was related that Harry Monroe, having made his way to the mission one night despite his illness, was taken aback when he entered and saw the boisterousness and hilarity, so turned around and went home again.

During those years of compromised leadership, the mission's soul-saving work suffered little, however. There was a great group of consecrated helpers. Beaumont, Beveridge, W. D. Bowen, Calverley, Oates and Roberts were just a few of the men ready to step in and handle meetings, and the Moody Bible Institute assigned student workers to help.

There was much musical talent also, including the familiar names of Bert Bowen, Gillion, Hickey, Foster Mansfield, Marx, Mott, Putnam, Shaw, Wood; Miss Burell, Miss Gordon, Mrs. Bowen and Mrs. Fletcher. The converts who came faithfully to tell the story of Jesus' love were beyond number; Briscoe, Ramey, Wendell and the other old-timers were often with the Gospel wagon or in the mission.

One of the converts—August 14, 1915, was his spiritual birth-day—was Bill Hadley, later given charge of the information desk at Moody Bible Institute. Raised in a Christian family, he nevertheless began drinking, and whiskey became his downfall.

He lost his job, and soon was a cocaine as well as alcohol addict. Safe breaking, picking pockets, and hold-ups supplied money for dope, and even a gold crown from a tooth provided the means for several drinks.

Arrested four times in Dayton, Ohio, the police chief gave him one hour to leave the city. Two terms in the Bridewell followed. During the "Pan American" exposition in Buffalo, he held up a postal clerk and was given a long penitentiary term. Then he went to the Chicago underworld, and later to Cook county jail. After leaving confinement there, he staggered back to the old dens, got in trouble in a whiskey shop, and decided to jump into the lake.

On the way, he passed the mission. As he listened to the old Gospel songs, he involuntarily stopped. He was dirty, not having washed for days; he wore an old pair of trousers, a greasy old coat, no shirt and old shoes. Inside, he fell into a back chair by the wall. When the invitation was given, he shuffled front; tears had already cut two paths through the dirt on his face. He took Christ as Saviour. The next day he walked all through the underworld district, stopping before each saloon and den with the prayer that God would give him strength never to go back again. He used to give his testimony night after night, saying: "God has kept me ever since."

The assistant superintendents during these years of transition served only short terms, though some of them did splendid yeoman's work. The longest term was served by Bob Ingersoll, acting superintendent from 1916 to 1918, who then went into wider evangelistic fields. It was during Ingersoll's time that Rob "Razer" Fenton, world-traveled pickpocket, was converted. Since then, Fenton has lectured around the states before service clubs and other groups on "Does Crime Pay?"

Another trophy for Christ was Buford K. Asper. It was on April 4, 1918, at ten minutes to nine, that all things became new for him, as he accepted Christ at the mission. An immediate desire to preach the Gospel moved him from the moment of his conversion. Nor was the Lord long in providing the opportunity. In the Dakota territory he served five small charges, not dismayed at the average of $18.43 for three months' material returns which the Lord provided for food, fuel, clothing and upkeep of the aged car that covered from 75 to 100 miles every Sunday in spreading the unsearchable riches in Christ Jesus.

The post-war civilization was one of moral disintegration and the mission's obligation was more tremendous and difficult than ever. Modernism had flooded the universities and many churches, and had now seeped through to the restless, dissatisfied army of street wanderers. Evangelists of national repute and rescue missions around the country were beginning to complain that it was harder to reach the masses.

Pacific Garden Mission trustees determined more than ever to hold the tiny lighthouse true to the Gospel. Colonel and Mrs. George R. Clarke, the founders, had been put to rest in Mount Greenwood Cemetery. The board was enlarged from twelve to fifteen trustees, and A. M. Johnson, the president, requested that a creed be drawn, based on the Scriptures and similar to that used by Moody church to which board members should subscribe.

It required belief in the inspiration and supreme authority of the Scriptures; the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His incarnation, atoning death, bodily resurrection and personal return; the Holy Spirit and His work essential to the regeneration and the sanctification of believers; the church of Christ on earth composed of the redeemed who are commissioned to make their chief business the evangelization of the world. Positive evidence of the departure from the fundamental doctrines was to be cause for the severance of relations with the mission.

But the mission leaders did not lose themselves in framing creeds, for their main emphasis was to reach the lost.

When the influenza epidemic swept Chicago in post-war days, work continued in the spirit of Mother Clarke's ministry. The mission had never missed a night, but the city authorities insisted that the meetings be cancelled as a health measure. The mission was determined to keep the lighthouse aglow. The workers promised to leave the windows and doors wide open during the meeting, and finally the city consented.

That first night proved one of the coldest of the whole winter; the thermometer hovered near zero, and the mission circle shivered in its overcoats. But there was a good crowd, and the testimonies sounded a bit more glorious than ever.

"If they can keep Hinky Dink's open, and send folks to hell," said one convert, "I guess we can keep the mission open, and help folks get to heaven."

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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