

THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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Introduction by
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CHAPTER NINETEEN

TRIMMING THE LOWER LIGHTS

Unique from his birthday, Harry George Saulnier has held his own place in the world from the day two hospital nurses inadvertently exchanged him with another baby, a mistake his mother immediately rectified. Born in a sector of the Bronx where respectable people with moderate incomes reside, Harry weighed ten pounds at birth. He began preaching the first night, August 19, 1902.

Harry's parents were French born. His father, a linguist and French army officer, came from Calais; his mother, who had realized the dream of every girl's heart, to travel around the world in the employ of a wealthy family, came from Chaumont. New York, rather than native France, was their meeting place, and there they married.

As a lad Saulnier was supershy. Introductions and company frightened him; even calls from family friends sent him scurrying into closets. Nor did Christian and Missionary Alliance boys' camp with other eight-year-olds remedy the situation. There was one Person, however, that he longed to know better, but nobody seemed to help him.

His father quite often knelt beside his bed for prayer, but never spoke to Harry about his soul; his various Sunday school teachers taught the weekly lesson, but when Harry asked who Jesus was, never answered quite satisfactorily; preachers of several denominations never seemed to give a personal invitation while he was present. Night after night he stopped for a street meeting in Fordham Square, where a group gave testimonies and distributed Gospel portions. He carefully gathered the New Testament library of twenty-seven books. But no one ever talked personally with Harry about his soul.

After finishing high school, Harry went to work as a sign company electrician, sending many of Broadway's white lights into their initial flare. Once while connecting a huge sign for the Black Cat Restaurant in Greenwich Village, all the fastenings but one bolt tore loose from the bricks. Dangling in midair with the thousand pound sign, Saulnier knew that if the other fastener gave way, there was no alternative to a crushing death.

The bolt held.

The enthusiasm of his oldest sister who moved to Chicago was so great that another sister and finally the entire family followed suit. That included Harry, who immediately branded Chicago the dirtiest city in the country. Going to work with the Commonwealth Edison Company as electrician, he maintained employment there until 1940 when, after a unique record of Christian service, he felt impelled to accept the superintendency of Pacific Garden Mission. Under his leadership the mission has stilted to its present big-time program and is successfully multiplying the work of its earlier epochs.

Saulnier found salvation on August 21, 1925, having passed as a Christian for several years. Two years before his conversion, he had been elected president of the Christian Endeavor unit at the Edgewater Presbyterian Church, of which he was a member; the following year he headed the entire north shore division of Christian Endeavor. There was no doubt about his popularity, enhanced very likely by his proud possession of a Model T Ford. And he suffered the customary throes of adolescent love, to his educational enrichment, if not, fortunately, to premature entanglements. He never drank, smoked or danced; movies were his only weakness. Then came news that his father, who was visiting a brother in Italy, died there. And his sisters had shortly before moved from Chicago. That incomparably cruel loneliness of a big city was upon him. Quite perplexed, Saulnier turned to his Bible. From its pages gleamed the words of II Timothy 2:4, and he readily confessed that he was **“all entangled in the affairs of this life.”**

That was August 19, his birthday. He came under tremendous conviction and felt he must attend a preaching service somewhere. John Roach Stratton, then pastor of New York’s Calvary Baptist Church, was holding a Chicago campaign. Telling his employer it was his birthday, he asked for the afternoon off. The congregation was mostly women and Stratton gave no invitation. Saulnier returned that night; again no appeal for souls was made. The following afternoon he again missed work, but no invitation was given at that service nor at the one in the evening. He went home in desperation and slipped to his knees in prayer. It was almost dawn when he awakened out of sleep, still kneeling at his bedside. Light was streaming through the window, and in Saulnier’s heart the light of a new-found joy evidenced his salvation of that night, August 21, 1925.

From that moment he mingled with growing Christians. He spoke in missions and churches and attended prayer meeting regularly. Monday nights he met with a north side fisherman’s club, sharing in the testimony meetings and tract distribution. His first street meeting, in Evanston, brought a shower of peas pelted by several young dentists in an overhead office. It was a good corner, however, so the workers continued there undismayed. The following week a well-dressed woman came along, listened to the testimonies, knelt on the street and took Christ as Saviour.

Then she offered a five dollar bill to the group leader. He smilingly refused it.

Saulnier attended Moody Bible Institute night school for two years, 1926-1928, continuing, meanwhile, as re-elected president of the north shore Christian Endeavor. In June, 1928, he married Gene Beryl Tucker, whom he had met several years before in Endeavor circles. She was a splendid Christian, gave musical readings, and was “the prettiest girl in the whole town.”

Furthermore, he liked brown—he often wears a brown shirt, brown suit and brown tie to match his brown eyes—and Gene Beryl Tucker had brown hair and brown eyes.

With Saulnier's widening interests, he sensed a gradual growth away from the Christian Endeavor movement. In June, 1928, however, his north shore leadership graduated him into presidency for the whole Chicago area, and, he seized the opportunity to incorporate an evangelistically-minded regime into strategic offices.

Vic Cory, then with the *Bible Institute Colportage Association*, became prayer meeting chairman. Caspar Henning, a godly civil engineer, became second vice-president. That triumvirate shook the Chicago units with Christian fervor for two years. The conventions were moved back to Moody Institute, where they had once been held in the days of huge crowds. Registrations broke all previous records. In 1930, when Saulnier's term expired, he remained on the Endeavor cabinet, but sought, meanwhile, a more direct outlet for his evangelistic energies.

Saulnier and Henning became interested in a north side mission on Devon avenue. For a while they assisted the pastor in a general way. When he moved to another field, they bought the equipment and paid the rent. They built a good Sunday school but had no outstanding conversions. There were two reasons. A rescue mission program is seldom effective in a so-called respectable area; furthermore, their mission was on the second floor. After a time the mission moved to the basement of Saulnier's home near the Northside Mission Covenant Church. When the main success was in a growing Sunday school, the leaders merged it with the church effort and became church school teachers there.

Then Harry Saulnier got one of those big ideas which, nurtured in prayer and work, constantly gave him a tremendous reputation in evangelistic circles.

In 1932, when still on the Christian Endeavor cabinet, he brought the idea of a city-wide Easter Sunrise service before the annual officers' meeting. He had wrestled with the vision for several years; friends said it was impractical.

The leaders, however, now called together the advisory board of past presidents and representative pastors to consider the proposition. They decided the Endeavor was too small to make the venture a success. Since the Christian Endeavor units were operative in seven denominations only, which did not include Baptists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, or any of the Swedish, Norwegian or German groups, they voted to approach the Century of Progress evangelistic council, representing all denominations.

Two months before Easter, 1933, accordingly, leaders of fifteen big young people's organizations in the city gathered and pledged enthusiastic support. Saulnier was made chairman.

All night long before Easter it rained, and all night long Saulnier prayed.

In the morning the draperies, bunting and flags of all nations were drenched. But soon a speck of blue appeared and sunshine broke the gloom. The turnout of 15,000 exceeded all expectations. Hats, tin cans and paper boxes were pressed into service for the offering.

Since then the service has become an annual event in Soldier Field, donated for the purpose by park board authorities. Twice the attendance has exceeded 55,000. Saulnier declared that “if God hadn’t sent the sunshine, nobody would ever have come back a second time.”

His philosophy—“work like the blazes but give God the glory”—has enabled him to gather a corps of talented lay workers who yearly now prod tens of thousands from their homes long before dawn to attend the resurrection day assembly. His reputation as a slave-driver he justifies by asserting “it’s the Lord’s work.” Forty years young, with a gray spangled head of black hair, he effervesces with enthusiasm. He often has little sense of time and space in his crowded, far-flung ministry, and is in perpetual motion.

First contact with the Pacific Garden Mission on Saulnier’s part came in 1935 when the rescue house needed another trustee. Cap Henning, already a member of the board, made the proposal. Saulnier had visited the mission several years before: the place was crowded, Pop Taylor was at his best, and Harry enjoyed it immensely.

Soon, at Taylor’s request, Harry was speaking thrice a month to the mission crowd on Thursday nights, Dad’s night off. He saw a number of converts under his preaching, although none of them had sensational testimonies. He kept his preaching assignment until Dad Taylor retired in 1936, when T. Donald Gately followed as superintendent.

Gately, himself, was an example of leadership that Pacific Garden produced among its converts. Converted there when Bob Ingersoll was superintendent at the Van Buren Street location, he maintained an active testimony and interest. Miss Moody, who had been mission pianist and secretary, became Mrs. Gately. When Mr. Taylor, because of physical debility, found it advisable to leave the mission superintendency, T. Donald Gately filled the breach before entering specialized work among children. He served as mission leader for four years.

In those years, Saulnier spent increasingly more time in the mission area. In 1934 it was he who revived the Saturday night street meetings on State and Harrison, and brought a fishermen’s group. That corner was the site of his first run-in with the State Street toughs. Bartender “Muzzie” was furious at the idea of a church service in the backyard of his corner saloon. First he parked automobiles along the curb, hoping the street preachers would take another corner, but they shoved the cars out of the way. Then “Muzzie” planted men to threaten the car-budgers.

One night “Muzzie” foamed out of the tavern, shouting, “Leave your hands off those cars or I’ll ;” and fumed back to wait on his patrons. A newly-acquired loud speaker no longer made the corner site a prerequisite, but “Muzzie” tallied by erecting a like instrument over his tavern door to blare jazz interference.

Finally “Muzzie” gave up. When Saulnier said, “Why don’t you take Christ as your Saviour, Muz?” the bartender had a ready answer: “I’d rather take you for a one-way ride!” Harry chuckled and looked him straight in the eye. “Muzzie,” he said, “we’re your best friends. We’ve come right here to your corner, to bring you the Gospel.”

When T. Donald Gately resigned the mission superintendency in January, 1940, the trustees had no successor in view, despite the forty candidates. News of the opening had spread to mission men around the country, but the authorities could not agree on any of the possibilities. Gately promised to continue for two months until a successor was found.

When February came, however, the call was still unmet and the trustees felt that God had a peculiar answer for the mission's pressing problem. Unable to attend the February board meeting, lawyer Paul Fischer sent a short list of suggestions in the order of preference.

At the top of his list stood the name of a fellow board member, Harry Saulnier. It was the first time the possibility had been mentioned, and Saulnier, who was present, was utterly blank-faced.

A unanimous call was extended with a week's time for decision. Saulnier and his wife prayed all week. That Friday night she said, "Harry, I think the Lord wants you to say 'yes.'"

Somewhat quizzically he answered, "Gene, I feel that way, too."

Then he ran to the telephone, called the secretary of the board, and said, "O. K. I'm coming."

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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