

THE MEN'S WORKSHOP

HANBURY STREET, WHITECHAPEL

This Salvation Army carpentering and joinery shop has been in existence for about fifteen years, but it does not even now pay its way. It was started by the Army in order to assist fallen mechanics by giving them temporary work until they could find other situations.

The manager informed me that at the beginning they found work for about thirty men. When I visited the place some fifty hands were employed--bricklayers, painters, joiners, etc., none of whom need stop an hour longer than they choose. From 100 to 150 men pass through this Workshop in a year, but many of them being elderly and therefore unable to obtain work elsewhere, stop for a long while, as the Army cannot well get rid of them. All of these folk arrive in a state of absolute destitution, having even sold their tools, the last possessions with which a competent workman parts.

The Parliamentary Committee of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions have recently stirred up a great agitation, which has been widely reported in the Press, against the Hanbury Street Workshop, because the Army does not pay the Union rate of wages. As a result the Army now declines all outside contracts, and confines its operations to the

work of erecting, repairing, or furnishing its own buildings.

Here it may be stated that these complaints seem to be unreasonable. The men employed have almost without exception been taken off the streets to save them from starvation or the poorhouse. Often enough they are by no means competent at their work, while some of them have for the time being been rendered practically useless through the effects of drink or other debaucheries. Yet it is argued with violence that to such people, whom no business firm would employ upon any terms, the Army ought to pay the full Trade Union rate of wages. When every allowance is made for the great and urgent problems connected with the cruel practice of 'sweating,' surely this attitude throws a strange light upon some of the methods of the Trade Unions?

The inference seems to be that they would prefer that these derelicts should come on the rates or starve rather than that the Army should house and feed them, giving them, in addition, such wage as their labour may be worth. Further comment seems to be needless, especially when I repeat that, as I am assured, this Hanbury Street Institution never has earned, and does not now earn, the cost of its upkeep.

It is situated in the heart of a very poor district, and is rather a ramshackle place to look at, but still quite suitable to its purposes. I have observed that one of the characteristics of the Salvation Army is that it never spends unnecessary money upon buildings. If it can buy a good house or other suitable structure cheap it does so. If it

cannot, it makes use of what it can get at a price within its means, provided that the place will satisfy the requirements of the sanitary and other Authorities.

All the machines at Hanbury Street are driven by electric power that is supplied by the Stepney Council at a cost of 1d. per unit for power and 3d. per unit for lighting.

An elderly man whom I saw there attending to this machinery, was dismissed by one of the great railway companies when they were reducing their hands. He had been in the employ of the Salvation Army for seven years and received the use of a house rent free and a wage of 30s. a week, which probably he would find it quite impossible to earn anywhere else.

The hours of employment are from 6.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. if the man is engaged on outside work, or to 6 p.m. if he labours in the workshop, and the men are paid at various rates according to the value of their work, and whether they are boarded and lodged, or live outside. Thus one to whom I spoke, who was the son of a former mayor of an important town, was allowed 3s. a week plus food and lodging, while another received 9s. a week, 5s. of which was sent to his wife, from whom he was separated. Another man, after living on the Army for about two years, made charges against it to the Carpenters' and Joiners' Union. He returned and apologized, but had practically to be kept under restraint on account of his drinking habits.

Another man spent twenty years in jail and then walked the streets. He is now a very respectable person, earns 27s. 6d. a week, and lives outside with his wife and family. Another was once convicted of cruelty to his children, whom he placed under the boards of the flooring while he went out to drink. These children are now restored to him, and he lives with them. Another among those with whom I happened to speak, was robbed by a relative of £4,000 which his father left to him. He was taken on by the Army in a state of destitution, but I forget what he earned. Another, the youngest man in the Works, came to them without any trade at all and in a destitute condition, but when I saw him was in charge of a morticing machine. He had married, lived out, and had been in the employ of the Army for five years. His wage was 27s. 6d. a week. Two others drew as much as £2 5s. 11d. each, living out; but, on the other hand, some received as little as 3s. a week with board and lodging.

Amongst this latter class was a young Mormon from Salt Lake City, who earned 4s. 6d. a week and his board and lodging. He had been in the Elevator about three months, having got drunk in London and missed his ship. Although he attended the Salvation Army meetings, he remained a Mormon.

In these Works all sorts of articles are manufactured to be used by other branches of the Salvation Army. Thus I saw poultry-houses being made for the Boxted Small Holdings; these cost from £4 5s. to £4

10s. net, and were excellent structures designed to hold about two dozen fowls. Further on large numbers of seats of different patterns were in process of manufacture, some of them for children, and other longer ones, with reversible backs, to be used in the numerous Army halls. Next I visited a room in which mattresses and mattress covers are made for the various Shelters, also the waterproof bunk bedding, which costs 7s. 9d. per cover. Further on, in a separate compartment, was a flock-tearing machine, at which the Mormon I have mentioned was employed. This is a very dusty job whereat a man does not work for more than one day in ten.

Then there were the painting and polishing-room, the joinery room, and the room where doors, window frames, and articles of furniture are constructed; also special garden benches, cleverly planned so that the seat can be protected from rain. These were designed by a young lady whom I chance to know in private life, and who, as I now discovered for the first time, is also a member of the Salvation Army.

Such is the Hanbury Street Workshop, where the Army makes the best use it can of rather indifferent human materials, and, as I have said, loses money at the business.