

WORK IN THE PROVINCES

LIVERPOOL

When planning this little book I had it in my mind to deal at some length with the Provincial Social Work of the Army, Now I find, however, that considerations of space must be taken into account; also that it is not needful to set out all the details of that work, seeing that to do so would involve a great deal of repetition.

The Salvation Army machines for the regeneration of fallen men and women, if I may so describe them, are, after all, of much the same design, and vary for the most part only in the matter of size. The material that goes through those machines is, it is true, different, yet even its infinite variety, if considered in the mass, has a certain similitude. For these reasons, therefore, I will only speak of what is done by the Army in three of the great Midland and Northern cities that I have visited, namely, Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow, and of that but briefly, although my notes concerning it run to over 100 typed pages.

The lady in charge of the Slum Settlement in Liverpool informed me that the poverty in that city is very great, and during the past winter of 1919 was really terrible owing to the scarceness of work in

the docks. The poor, however, are not so overcrowded, and rents are cheaper than in London, the cost of two dwelling-cellars being about 2s. 6d., and of a room about 3s. a week. The sisterhood of fallen women is, she added, very large in Liverpool; but most of these belong to a low class.

In this city the Army has one Institution for women called the 'Ann Fowler' Memorial Home, which differs a good deal from the majority of those that I have seen. It is a Lodging-Home for Women, and is designed for the accommodation of persons of a better class than those who generally frequent such places. This building, which was provided in memory of her mother by Miss Fowler, a local philanthropist, at a cost of about £6,000, was originally a Welsh Congregational chapel, that has been altered to suit the purpose to which it is now put. It is extremely well fitted-up with separate cubicles made of oak panelling, good lavatory accommodation, and kitchens in which is made some of the most excellent soup that I ever tasted.

Yet strange to say this place is not as much appreciated as it might be, as may be judged from the fact that although it is designed to hold 113 lodgers, when I visited it there were not more than between forty and fifty. This is remarkable, as the charge made is only 4d. per night, or 2s. a week, even for a cubicle, and an excellent breakfast of bread and butter, fish, and tea can be had for 2d. Other meals are supplied on a like scale, with the result that a woman employed in outside work can live in considerable comfort in a room or

cubicle of her own for about 8s. a week.

The lady in charge told me, however, that there are reasons for this state of affairs. One is that it provides for people of a rather higher class than usual, who, of course, are not so numerous as those lower in the social scale.

The principal reason, however, is prejudice. It is known that most of the women accommodated in the Army Shelters are what are known as 'fallen' or 'drunks.' Therefore, occupants of a Home devoted to a higher section of society fear lest they should be tarred with the same brush in the eyes of their associates.

Here is a story which illustrates this point which I remember hearing in the United States. A woman, whose inebriety was well known, was picked up absolutely dead drunk in an American city and taken by an Officer of the Army to one of its Homes and put to bed. In the morning she awoke and, guessing where she was lodged from various signs and tokens, such as texts upon the wall, began to scream for her clothes. An attendant, who thought that she had developed delirium tremens, ran up and asked what was the matter.

'Matter?' ejaculated the sot, 'the matter is that if I don't get out of this ---- place in double quick time, I shall lose my character!'

The women who avail themselves of this 'Ann Fowler' Home are of all

ages and in various employments. One, I was told, was a lady separated from her husband, whose father, now dead, had been the mayor of a large city.

A Liverpool Institution of another class, known as 'The Hollies,' is an Industrial Home for fallen women, drunkards, thieves, and incorrigible girls. It holds thirty-eight inmates and is always full, a good many of these being sent to the place from Police-courts whence they are discharged under the First Offenders Acts.

I saw these women at their evening prayers. The singing was hearty and spontaneous, and they all seemed happy enough. Still, the faces of most of them (they varied in age from forty-six to sixteen) showed traces of life's troubles, but one or two were evidently persons of some refinement. Their histories, which would fill volumes, must be omitted. Suffice it to say that this Home, like all the others, is extremely well-arranged and managed, and is doing a most excellent and successful work.

When the women are believed to be cured of their evil habits, whatever they may be, they are for the most part sent out to service. There are two rooms in the place to which they can return during their holidays, or when they are changing situations, at a charge of 5s. a week. This many of them like to do.

Next door to 'The Hollies' is another Home where young girls with

their illegitimate babies, and also a few children, are accommodated. It is arranged to hold twenty-four mothers, and is generally full. A charge of 5s. a week is supposed to be made, but unless the cases are sent from the workhouse, when the Guardians pay, in practice little is recovered from the patients. When they are well again, their babies are put out to nurse, as at the London Maternity Home, and the girls are sent to service, no difficulty being experienced in finding them places. During the two years that this Home had been open eighty-two girls had passed through it, and of these, the Matron informed me, there were but ten who were not doing so well as they might. The rest were in employment of one sort or another, and seemed to be in the way of completely regaining their characters.

I visited this place late at night, and in the room devoted to children, as distinct from infants, saw one girl of nine with a curious history. This child had been twelve times in the hands of the police before her father brought her to the Army on their suggestion. Her mania was to run away from home, where it does not appear that she was ill-treated, and to sleep in the streets, on one occasion for as long as five nights. This child had a very curious face, and even in her sleep, as I saw her, there was about it something wild and defiant. When the Matron turned her over she did not yawn or cry, but uttered a kind of snarl. I suppose that here is an instance of atavism, that the child throw back for thousands or tens of thousands of years, to when her progenitors were savages, and that their primitive instincts have reasserted themselves in her, although she

was born in the twentieth century. She had been ten months in the Home and was doing well. Indeed, the Matron told me that they had taken her out and given her opportunities of running away, but that she had never attempted to avail herself of them.

The Officer in charge informed me that there is much need for a Maternity Hospital in Liverpool.

There are also Institutions for men in Liverpool, but these I must pass over.