

THE MEN'S SOCIAL WORK

MANCHESTER

The Officer in charge of the Men's Social Work in Manchester told me the same story that I had heard in Liverpool as to the prevailing distress. He said, 'It has been terrible the last few winters. I have never seen anything like it. We know because they come to us, and the trouble is more in a fixed point than in London. Numbers and numbers come, destitute of shelter or food or anything. The cause is want of employment. There is no work. Many cases, of course, go down through drink, but the most cannot get work. The fact is that there are more men than there is work for them to do, and this I may say is a regular thing, winter and summer.'

A sad statement surely, and one that excites thought.

I asked what became of this residue who could not find work. His answer was, 'They wander about, die off, and so on.'

A still sadder statement, I think.

The Major in charge is a man of great organising ability, force of character, and abounding human sympathy. Yet he was once one of the

melancholy army of wasters. Some seventeen years ago he came into the Army through one of its Shelters, a drunken, out-of-place cabinet-maker, who had been tramping the streets. They gave him work and he 'got converted.' Now he is the head of the Manchester Social Institutions, engaged in finding work for or converting thousands of others.

At first the Army had only one establishment in Manchester, which used to be a cotton mill. Now it is a Shelter for 200 men. Then it took others, some of which are owned and some hired, among them a great 'Elevator' on the London plan, where waste paper is sorted and sold. The turn-over here was over £8,000 in 1909, and may rise to £12,000. I forget how many men it finds work for, but every week some twenty-five new hands come in, and about the same number pass out.

This is a wonderful place, filled with what appears to be rubbish, but which is really valuable material. Among this rubbish all sorts of strange things are to be found. Thus I picked out of it, and kept as a souvenir, a beautifully-bound copy of Wesley's Hymns, published about a hundred years ago. Lying near it was an early edition of Scott's 'Marmion.' This Elevator more than pays its way; indeed the Army is saving money out of it, which is put by to purchase other buildings.

Then there are houses where the people employed in the paper-works lodge, a recently-acquired home for the better class of men, which was once a mansion of the De Clifford family, and afterwards a hospital,

and a store where every kind of oddment is sold by Dutch auction. These articles are given to the Army, and among the week's collection I saw clocks, furniture, bicycles, a parrot cage, and a crutch. Not long ago the managers of this store had a goat presented to them, which nearly ate them out of house and home, as no one would buy it, and they did not like to send the poor beast to the butcher.

In these various Shelters and Institutions I saw some strange characters. One had been an electrical engineer, educated under Professor Owen, at Cardiff College. He came into money, and gambled away £13,000 on horse-racing, although he told me that he won as much as £8,000 on one Ascot meeting. His subsequent history is a story in itself, one too long to set out; but the end of it, in his own words, was 'Four years ago I came here, and, thank God! I am going on all right.'

Why do not the writers of naturalistic novels study Salvation Army Shelters? In any one of them they would find more material than could be used up in ten lifetimes; though, personally, I confess I am content to read such stories in the secret annals of the various Institutions.

Another man, a very pleasant and humorous person, who was once a Church worker and a singer in the choir, etc., when, in his own words, he used 'to put on religion with his Sunday clothes and take it off again with them,' came to grief through sheer love of amusement, such

as that which is to be found in music-halls and theatres. His habit was to spend the money of an insurance company by which he was employed, in taking out the young lady to whom he was engaged, to such entertainments. Ultimately, of course, he was found out, and, when starving on the road, determined to commit suicide. The Salvationists found him in the nick of time, and now he is foreman of their paper-collecting yard.

Another, at the ripe age of twenty-four, had been twenty-seven times in prison. His father was in prison, his eldest brother committed suicide in prison by throwing himself over the banisters. Also, he had two brothers at present undergoing penal servitude, who, when he was a little fellow, used to pass him through windows to open doors in houses which they were burgling.

I suggested that it was a poor game and that he had better give it up. He answered:--'I shall never do it again, sir, God helping me.'
Really I think he meant what he said.

Another, in the Chepstow Street Shelter, where he acted as night-watchman, was discharged from Portland, after serving a fifteen years' sentence for manslaughter. His trouble was that he killed a man in a fight, and as he had fought him before and had a grudge against him, was very nearly hanged for his pains. This man earned £9 in some way or other during his sentence, which he sent to his wife. Afterwards, he discovered that she had been living with another man,

who died and left her well off. But she has never refunded the £9, nor will she have anything to do with her husband.