In this book Mr. Paul Rowntree Clifford unfolds a tale that has long needed telling. Under his guidance we follow the record of the West Ham Central Mission from its beginnings amid unpromising conditions in 1897, through the remarkable expansions of the present century, to the position as it now is. We are introduced to the two outstanding leaders and the band of loyal colleagues who gathered about them. We find continuous instances, which border on the miraculous, of the guiding hand of God, and we are shown in clear-cut terms the central and dominating purpose of the enterprise—the proclamation of the Gospel of Salvation and the building up of the Church of the Living God amid the masses of East London's population.

VENTURE IN FAITH

THE STORY OF
THE WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

BY

PAUL ROWNTREE CLIFFORD, M.A.

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Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

FRANCIS THOMPSON

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"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."—Genesis 28, 12.

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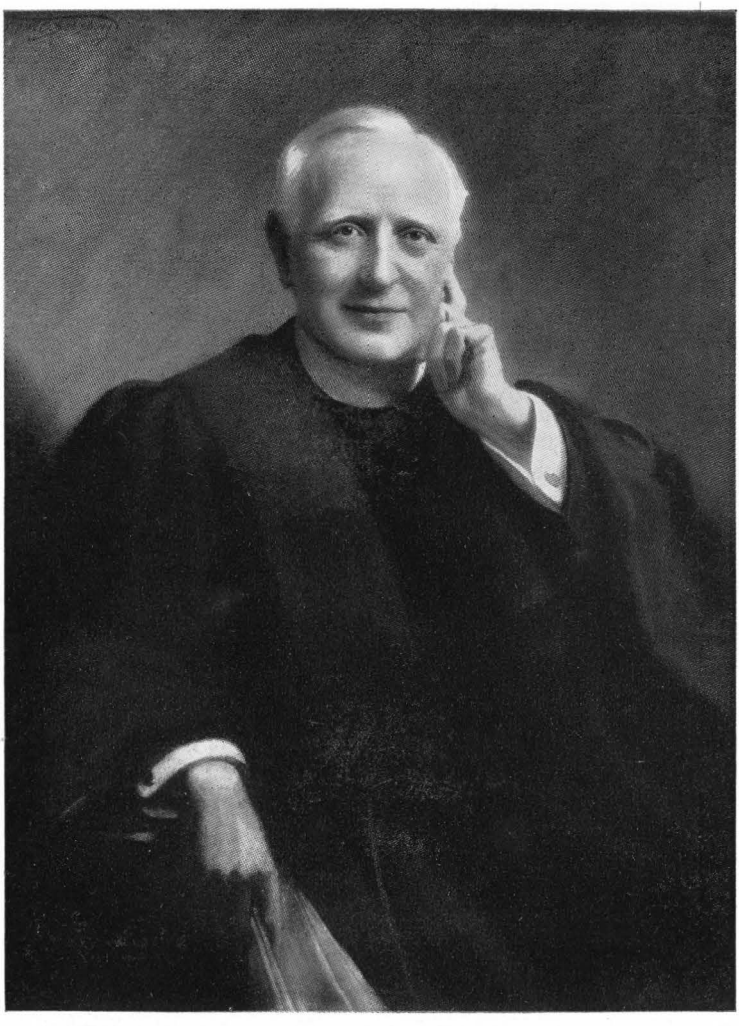


THE REV. R. ROWNTREE CLIFFORD
(From the painting by Frank O. Salisbury)

Born 1st October, 1867
Died 8th November, 1943

PREFACE

THE story of the West Ham Central Mission should really have been written by my mother; for it is her story—the story of dreams realised and visions come true. She longed to build the New Jersualem on the banks of the River Thames and Jacob's ladder was pitched for her betwixt Heaven and Barking Road.

Clearly such inspired vision can only be adequately translated into words by the one who has it. Some years ago the attempt was made and a first manuscript was drafted. Unfortunately it was lost. My mother sent it to a friend to read and a little later received a registered parcel containing a collection of old magazines; she could not understand why such obvious rubbish had been sent to her under registered cover. Enquiries were made and in due course it transpired that the friend had sent the magazines to West Ham in error, thinking she was returning the precious manuscript. The latter had been sent to a girls' home and those who received it had not understood its value and it had been destroyed. There was no copy and so the work of months was wasted.

My mother made no second attempt; time was too precious, and it appeared that the story would never be told. Yet it was vital it should be told while the only person who carried the complete picture in her mind could verify and check the facts. That is how this book came to be written.

The story has necessarily been abbreviated. Much detail has been left out and many honoured names unmentioned. The purpose has been to give a broad picture to as many people as possible and to evaluate the importance of the work of this Mission for the life of the Church at large.

This is more than a record of the past. I am convinced that the story of The West Ham Central Mission has much that is relevant to say about the situation facing the Church of Christ in our land today, and it raises many questions which ought to be in all our minds.

My thanks are due to my mother for many helpful suggestions and the correction of many mistakes I would otherwise have made; to Mr. A. J. Oakeley for reading and checking the proofs; and to Miss G. E. Ladd for typing the manuscript.

As I look back on the pages I have written I cannot but be conscious that an Unseen Hand has been upon the work of the Mission from the very early days. The vision has come from above, and the resources too by which the vision has become a reality. And so, as my father and mother would wish, the story is dedicated "to the greater glory of God," and all the praise ascribed unto Him.

PAUL ROWNTREE CLIFFORD

WEST HAM,
LONDON, E.13.

Chapter One

MY FATHER

THIS is the story of the growth and development of the West Ham Central Mission. It is a romance, a romance of what God has done in His Church in one locality of East London. The significance of the story reaches far beyond the boundaries of London and even these island shores. Today the name of this church is known in many parts of the world and the experiments being made in West Ham have captured the mind and imagination of people in widely separated countries. But the story is not only of the growth of a church; it is the life-story of two people, my father and mother: the one cannot be told without the other. In West Ham they both found their vocation, and in finding that they found each other. For nearly fifty years they strove in wonderful partnership to be obedient to an expanding heavenly vision.

When tracing the course of a river to its source the explorer may find that he has many tributaries to follow before he can discover all that makes the river what it is. The same is true in telling this story. There are the early days of the Barking Road Tabernacle, the lives of many individuals who made special contributions to the work of pioneering, and of course the home backgrounds of my father and mother. The obvious place to begin is in Sunderland, where on October 1st, 1867,

a son was born to Robert Rowntree Clifford, a journeyman shipwright. The child was named after him and to the end of his days he proudly bore the marks of his Northern heritage. My grandfather was a master craftsman endowed with the skill for which the English shipyards are famous. He took a pride in his work and had little interest in anything save this and his home. His wife Anne Sophia was much the stronger personality; by comparison, he was quiet and retiring. She was the master of the house and left the imprint of her strong character on all her children. It was a large family judged by modern standards: five boys and three girls. Four others died in infancy, and so the family had its share of sorrow. My grandmother had an iron will and never acknowledged the existence of an obstacle that could not be overcome. Trials and difficulties were faced with the courage and determination characteristic of a fine Northern home.

In this environment the young Robert spent his formative years. He was a normal, high-spirited boy, often involved in mischief. A passion for playing marbles on his way home from school led him into frequent trouble, and his mother had to wait anxiously for him to return long after the proper meal-time. On several occasions he was involved in a fight, usually with someone bigger than himself in defence of a younger boy. He used to tell of the day when he took on the school bully and gave him a very good innings. In later years he was passionately opposed to all forms of injustice and this had its seeds in these boyhood adventures.

The family had moved to Southampton when Robert was seven years old; but another seven years later they

returned to Sunderland and, with the end of school-days, he was apprenticed in the shipyards. There, the toughening fibre of his character was strengthened as he worked alongside men many years his senior. As he listened to their conversation and saw the standards by which most of them lived he resolved that he would not allow himself to be drawn their way.

So far he had not come under any direct evangelical influence. His father and mother were Anglicans and the children were all christened in infancy, but they seem to have taken little active part in church life. Robert and his brothers and sisters were all sent to Sunday School and the personality of a Sunday School teacher appears to have made more impression upon him than anything he was taught. In the early days of his apprenticeship he met a few so-called Christians and saw how they bore testimony to their faith. He was not greatly impressed. The sanctimonious repelled him; the quality of his own home background had made him quickly sensitive to shams. His was a robust and wholesome attitude to life.

It was about this time that my father began to see a good deal of his relatives the Rowntrees. They were Baptists and members of the Lindsay Road Church. His cousins persuaded him to go there with them and soon he was immersed in all the activities of the place. He joined the Young Men's Bible Class and there met his life-long friend William Speed, the son of the minister. Speed was three years older than my father and, with the background of the manse, somewhat better educated. In those early days he exercised a profound influence on him, constantly challenging his ambition

and spurring him to new efforts. Then, at the age of sixteen, came the decisive moment when the claims of Christ were seen as absolute.

For some time, in the fellowship of the Lindsay Road Church, he had been feeling his way towards an open Christian profession, but his conversion was a clear cut decision on which he could look back all his life. An older man, who became interested in the lad, spoke to him one day about his definite standing with Christ. He pointed him to John 3, 16: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That was for ever after my father's text; for it was suggested to him that when he was willing to substitute "if Robert Rowntree Clifford" for "whosoever" in this verse he could take his stand as a Christian. He made his avowal and right to the end of his days looked back on that decision and the acceptance of the promise in John 3, 16., as the foundation and bedrock of his spiritual life. Throughout his ministry he used to point all who came to see him about Christian discipleship to those same words and he constantly bore testimony to the act of faith he made when he was sixteen.

His younger brothers and sisters were at this time attending St. Barnabas, the near-by parish church. After my father's baptism, he could not rest content until the whole of his family circle had made the same profession. So he began his work of evangelism in his own home. It is a great testimony to his witness that all four brothers and three sisters were subsequently baptized as believers in the Lindsay Road Church and his father, who hitherto

had never attended any church regularly, became a member of the congregation; his brother Ernest was later, like himself, to enter the ministry and became his colleague in the work at West Ham.

A year or two after his conversion, my father's thoughts turned in the direction of the Christian ministry. One of the young men at Lindsay Road had entered Regent's Park College, the Baptist training college in London, and my father made up his mind that he would prepare for admission. But he had received only an ordinary elementary school education and, with younger brothers and sisters, he could not throw up his work as an apprentice and devote himself to study. He talked to his friend Speed about his ideas and received the encouragement which was constantly to stimulate him throughout the years ahead. Speed was attending evening classes and he urged his friend to join him. Matriculation was the objective and it seemed a goal far beyond his reach.

The story of these years of preparation is an epic of determination. He began work in the shipyard at six o'clock in the morning, knocking off at five. He came back home tired and dirty after the day's work, changed his clothes and, after a meal, began the evening's study; he worked until he could keep awake no longer. But the evenings were not enough: out of his meagre earnings, he paid another man to do his job on Saturday mornings and gave the whole of the day to study, closing his books at midnight so that he should not do any work on Sunday. That was the day set aside for the worship and service of his Lord. Opportunities for sport and normal recreation were denied to him by his own choice.

Like St. Paul he said to himself: "This one thing I do."

His tutor at evening classes, supporting his application to Regent's Park College wrote: "Manual labour from six a.m. to five p.m. does not afford much time for mental exercise, and all Mr. Clifford's study was done either before he went to work in the morning, or after he came home at night. No one who had not Mr. Clifford's fine physique and indomitable courage would have undertaken and carried out all that he has done." It was indeed a prodigious effort and in it he laid the foundations of the West Ham Central Mission. Only a rugged determination, a complete singleness of mind and an astonishing capacity for hard work could have enabled him to achieve under God what he did.

In the summer of 1892, at the age of twenty-four he was accepted by the College. In January of that year he had sat for the Matriculation Examination of London University and passed in all subjects except Latin and French. Supported by the ever encouraging Speed and the pride and love of his mother he set out to conquer in a new world. At first college life was strange to him, but he quickly settled down and applied himself with diligence to the stiff curriculum. He was working with men who were, on the whole, far more advanced. He determined not to be behind them in anything and long hours were spent in his study at Hebrew and Greek, while others were taking things much more easily. He sat for the Matriculation examination again and this time, in spite of illness, he passed. From that moment onwards he never looked back. In those days the theological degree for which the men at Regent's Park entered was

the Certificate of the Senatus Academicus of Associated Theological Colleges. He took the examination at the end of his fifth year and was placed in the first division of the Class list: a fine achievement in the light of his early struggles.

There were changes at the College during these five years. My father began under the distinguished principalship of Dr. Joseph Angus, whose scholarship and culture made on him a profound impression. Dr. Angus was succeeded in 1893 by the Rev. R. H. Roberts, who was chosen primarily for his ministerial experience. His short term of office drove my father to the conclusion that only the finest scholarship was adequate for the training of the ministry. For the last year he came under the influence of the Rev. George P. Gould, to whom, like many other Regent's men, he looked for counsel and help at the outset of his work. These three men all left their mark, positive or negative, upon my father and he never ceased to be grateful to his *alma mater*. Throughout his life he was a loyal and devoted son of Regent's Park College.

Towards the end of his theological course my father was appointed to the student pastorate of the village church at Sarratt. It was the custom then, as now, for men in training for the ministry to exercise supervision over small churches which could not afford to have their own full-time minister. My father was fortunate in finding himself sent to this particular village; for the Baptist community there consisted of sturdy country people with strong evangelical convictions and generous in the friendship they offered to the young student. There were two families in particular which opened their

doors to him: "Farmer Simmonds" and Mr. and Mrs. Amos Weeks. The former was a nonconformist of the old school and while my father found many of his ways somewhat crude, he admired the strength of the conviction and loyalty to our Lord which dominated the old farmer's life. At the home of Mrs. Weeks he found a family life which compensated to some degree for his absence from his own home in Sunderland. His reminiscences in later years and the letters he left behind referred to a remarkable comradeship with Mrs. Weeks' little daughter, Dolly. She was an attractive child of thirteen and the student minister soon won his way into her confidence. He treated her as an equal and not just as a child, and in this showed the beginnings of an understanding of human nature which was to develop and mature as the years passed.

At Sarratt he began his life work of church extension. The building they were using was hopelessly inadequate and he set before the people a plan for erecting a new chapel: an ambitious undertaking for a student still at college. The scheme was launched and the local congregation inspired with his own vision and enthusiasm. The chapel was not completed until after the conclusion of his pastorate, but it was largely due to him that the work was begun. To the end of his days he followed the history of the little church with keenest interest: it was his first love and only second to West Ham in his affection. When he died in November, 1943, there was but one advance engagement in his diary: to conduct the Centenary Service of the church at Sarratt in the following August. It was my privilege to go in his place and perform a duty which he would not have wished

left undone. To this day there are people in the village who remember his ministry with gratitude, for they owe to him their first knowledge of Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Soon after the beginning of the first term of his last year at Regent's Park, my father began to face the question of his settlement in the ministry. He was twice invited to preach at Lake Street Church, Leighton Buzzard, and it was clear that the people wanted him to become their minister. During the Christmas vacation of 1896 he was greatly exercised in mind as to the course he should take. Finally he wrote a letter from his home in Sunderland to the Principal of the College, who had strongly advised him to go. It ran as follows: "The past few days have been full of anxiety lest I should mistake the Divine accent. I now have no doubt as to the way I should take. By an irresistible impulse I have concluded Leighton is not my sphere of work. I am troubled, because I fear you will misunderstand my position. I cannot help it. I must so act. In all my deliberations your conversation has lived before me. I clearly see your position in all its forcefulness and truth. I have nervously analysed my decision and feel I am acting in the interests of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." All this was abundantly confirmed in the history of the subsequent years. It is difficult for anyone looking back to doubt the reality of the guidance given to the young student as he prayed to be shown the way of God.

Then came the approach from Barking Road Tabernacle. A small deputation from this little church in Plaistow went to see Principal Gould to enquire

whether there was a man who would be likely to undertake the difficult task facing this struggling congregation. My father's name was suggested and he was asked to preach there on the last Sunday in January, 1897. He made such an impression that he was invited to conduct the Sunday School Anniversary services in March. That clinched matters as far as the people at Barking Road were concerned. They made it quite clear that they wanted him to become their minister and on March 28th, a unanimous invitation was sent to him by the secretary. He replied:

"The invitation of the 28th ultimo to be your minister was duly received by me for which confidence and honour I heartily thank you. Upon receipt of your letter I waited to be led by Him who never errs. It now gives me unqualified pleasure to be able to communicate to you my acceptance. I am glad to say that God has made my way very clear and there is no uncertainty in my mind as to the path I should take. I am confident of the divinity of my calling to minister to you in holy things. The difficulties and great possibilities of your work have a peculiar fascination for me. I feel there is magnificent work to be done for Christ and the world in your midst, and I am prepared by God's grace to give my whole strength of mind and heart to that end.

"My heart's desire and prayer to God is that He will abundantly bless our work together, both in the building up of your church and the extension of God's Kingdom among men."

So began his life's ministry; for he remained in

harness at Barking Road until the day of his death over forty-six years afterwards. The call was abundantly confirmed by all that subsequently took place, but even in the early days the church realised that the seal of God's blessing was upon the way they had taken. The editor of the magazine, writing eighteen months after my father's arrival, said: "The outline of the past year's work demonstrates in a remarkable manner that our pastor did not come here by chance, but that God has sent him; and it is our prayer that he may long continue to work with us." There is no such thing as chance when the leading of God is truly sought.

Chapter Two

EARLY DAYS AT BARKING ROAD

SOME years ago my father was sent a small pocket Bible from Canada. On the fly-leaf there was an inscription recording the death on September 1st, 1867, of "the faithful, devoted, beloved pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Chapel, Barking Road" at the early age of thirty-seven. Apparently he had served as minister for five years. This is the first mention we can find of the church which was ultimately to become the West Ham Central Mission. The building was subsequently known as the Labour Hall and stood as a reminder of the early days, until it was destroyed through bombing in the second world war. Originally it was owned by the young minister and comprised a schoolroom below and a hall above; the minister and his family lived on this lower floor, and so his domestic life and the church he led were both under the same roof: perhaps an unintentional reflection of the way in which the Christian Church began.

On the death of the minister and the passing of the ownership of the building into other hands, the little community removed to premises close by in Anne Street. It is reputed that their headquarters were a barn; S. T. Hayball, an early church secretary, records that they met in a *room* in Anne Street. It is at all events clear that for some years this little fellowship led a precarious

existence. It would seem however that, under the leadership of a Mr. Palmer, they were able to return to Mount Zion Chapel, but upon their leader's death the building was sold and most of the members retired to a small place in Shirley Street. About twenty remained and these decided to form themselves into a Baptist church. They appealed to Charles Haddon Spurgeon for his support, which he readily gave, and on March 23rd, 1871, they met together in Mount Zion Chapel, which they managed to hire, and the church was formed. Spurgeon helped them by sending a man called Henderson from the Pastor's College to act as student pastor.

The story of the next five years was a very chequered one. There were men of distinction among the founders of the church. One of the greatest benefactors of the work right to the day of his death in 1929 was Henry Lester. His brother-in-law, W. W. Howard, the timber merchant, was also a deacon. In 1875 Carey Bonner was baptized at Mount Zion, received into church membership and became secretary of the Sunday School. He was later to become secretary of the Sunday School Union and President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. This influential ministry had its origin in Mount Zion Chapel. But there was another side to the picture: dissension kept splitting the ranks, and while new members joined the fellowship others were leaving. The Sunday School and a Bible Class functioned in almost complete independence of the church and this lack of unity was a source of trouble again and again.

However in 1876 the congregation was too large for

the premises they were occupying and, under the ministry of the Rev. R. H. Gillespie, a plot of land was acquired and work begun on building Barking Road Tabernacle. The proprietor of a sugar factory at Silvertown gave £1,000 towards the cost and, stimulated by this generous aid, a considerable sum was raised; but when the church was opened there was still a debt of £2,000 on the building. Then came a period "full of sadness and sorrow," according to S. T. Hayball. My father, who had to reap the harvest of those years, once said: "Perhaps in the history of Free Church life there is nothing to be compared with the disasters that followed this church up to the year 1896." Continued dissension and a failure of leadership almost brought the work to an end.

For six months one of the deacons, R. Spencer White, preached every Sunday to keep the doors open, and with diminished congregations and an unfortunate history the outlook seemed very black. There was also the debt on the building which, although it had been reduced to just under £1,000, was still a heavy burden to be added to all the other problems.

This was the situation when, in March, 1897, my father was called to the ministry. He could hardly have faced a more difficult, and in some ways depressing, task. When he arrived in Barking Road he found that his lodgings had been changed and, describing how he felt, he says: "I was as miserable as sin." But the welcome given to him by the Sunday School on that first afternoon heartened him as nothing else could have done. The lower hall was gaily decorated and across the platform was a large printed sign bearing the word

"Welcome." All the teachers and children joined in a most enthusiastic greeting, and my father felt the warmth and friendliness of this little community with whom he had thrown in his lot. The text for his morning sermon was Romans 15, 30: "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." In the evening he spoke again on the words of Paul: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." In those texts we see the spirit in which he began his ministry.

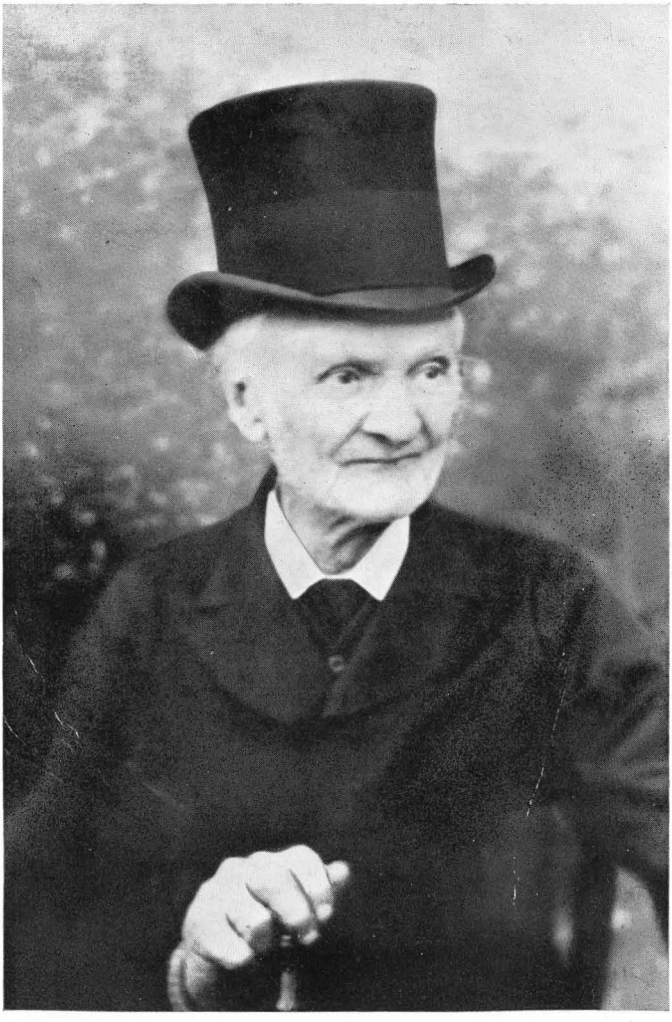
How uphill the struggle was can be gathered from his own words, spoken many years afterwards: "It wasn't so much the £1,000 debt on the building; it wasn't so much that there was no heating apparatus; half the deacons had left and many of the church members. I tried to get many back but it was very difficult work." The first visit that he paid was disheartening. He went to see a family that had been connected with the church, only to have the door shut in his face with the remark: "We're respectable here!" Such was the early reputation of Barking Road Tabernacle.

In 1898 my father was joined by his sister Mary, who came to keep house for him. Not only did she lighten the load of those early days by making a home for him, but with her coming there began a life-time partnership in the service of Christ in Barking Road. Her name is writ large in the annals of this Mission

and in particular she made a lasting impression on the lives of countless girls who came under her influence. Without her confidence and sympathy my father could hardly have borne the anxieties of those early days.

It soon became apparent that something had to be done to establish the reputation of the church in the district and to give fresh confidence to the members. At the beginning of the year the debt stood at £881. Only £21 had been raised by the end of March and on April 10th, my father went into the pulpit for the Sunday morning service to put before the people his challenge. They were to set themselves to raise the whole sum by November 7th; that left them less than six months in which to do it. How could such a small community find £860 in addition to the normal revenue? But the people responded with enthusiasm and set themselves to the task. Two bazaars were held, one in May and the other in October; they gave all that they could and persuaded their friends to help. The effort realised over £600 and the people were overjoyed. The millstone that had hung for so long about their necks was at long last being lifted.

Not so my father: he was bitterly disappointed. He had believed the debt would be wholly removed and he felt that God had not honoured his faith. Did his calling really lie elsewhere? At the beginning of 1899 his friend and adviser, Mr. Henry Lester, had urged him to make another effort to wipe out the remaining debt of £276 and had promised £50 himself if success was achieved. But this little church had already given to the point of extreme self-sacrifice and my father felt that he could not ask his people for another penny. He



Isaac Saunders

came reluctantly to the conclusion that after his second anniversary in July he would have to resign.

Then just before the date fixed for the anniversary meeting he received a letter from a complete stranger, which was to mark the turning point in his life. It was headed "Broomfield," Chelmsford, Essex, and was signed by Isaac Saunders. The writer enquired whether the debt on the chapel had been extinguished. My father replied telling him what had happened and explaining that the church was now exhausted and could not do any more. He received another letter from Isaac Saunders promising £15 if the people would make one more effort. It was just before the anniversary meeting and my father had made up his mind that his resignation would have to go in to the deacons that week; but believing that anyone who could promise £15 might be able to give more he felt that he must go to Chelmsford and explore.

When he arrived at the station he asked for a house called "Broomfield": there was no such house in Chelmsford; but he found there was a village of the same name two miles away. He set out to walk there. On reaching Broomfield he enquired concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Isaac Saunders.

"Oh, you must mean old Isaac Saunders who lives at the cottage down the village street."

"I don't think it can be he, though the man I am looking for is an Isaac Saunders; but I had better enquire."

My father made his way to the cottage and knocked at the door. It was opened by an old man well over eighty years of age, wearing a leathern apron. His hands

were gnarled with manual toil and it was evident that he was at work.

"My name is Clifford. I am looking for a Mr. Isaac Saunders; can you help me?"

"Come in sir," the old man replied. "I wrote to you yesterday, and I am very glad to see you; come in and sit down."

My father entered a small two-roomed cottage, the ground floor room of which was sparsely furnished with a wooden bench and one or two other articles of primitive furniture, on which the old man's tailoring work was spread. There appeared to be only one place to sit down—on the end of a fender which guarded the fireplace and had a seat at either end. As my father looked round the cottage and saw evident signs of poverty he was compelled to ask:

"Excuse me, but did you really promise to send me fifteen pounds; how could you afford it?"

"If you will get up from where you are sitting," the old man replied, "and hand me the little black book under the cushion, I will show you."

My father got up. Underneath the cushion was a little penny black book, which the old man opened and passed across to my father.

"You see, sir, I earn thirty pounds a year. Out of this I set aside six pounds for the Lord's work and in that book I keep a record of the gifts that I have made. The last entry, as you will see, was made three years ago, when I sent six pounds to the British and Foreign Bible Society to provide Bibles for the Chinese. Every night and every morning I kneel by that old fender on which you are sitting, and pray for those who have received

the Bibles, that the Lord will bless and use the gift. But I haven't sent anything for three years and so there is eighteen pounds laid up on the altar. Since writing to you the Lord has told me to give you the other three."

Delving into some recess, the old man produced three golden sovereigns, which he passed across to my father.

"Take these," he said, "and the other fifteen will follow."

My father was quite taken aback with the wonder of the gift.

"I can't accept this. You cannot afford to give so much. You need someone to look after you."

"Ah, sir," said the old man, with a twinkle in his eyes, "females are expensive!"

They laughed together and then my father asked him: "But how did you know about me?"

"I know nothing about you except what I read in a circular that was sent me last year about the effort to clear the debt on your chapel; but I talk a lot to the Lord. Take this and God bless your work."

My father used to tell me that he walked on air from the cottage to the station at Chelmsford; he was so carried away by what had happened. He got into a compartment of the train and found himself sitting opposite a sea captain who had just left his ship at Tilbury. My father had to tell someone about the old man, and he told his travelling companion.

"If you will carry on with the work you have begun I'll give you five pounds after hearing that story."

He boarded the steam tram to take him back home and opposite him was sitting a Mrs. Hammond, one of

the leading members of the church, who had already given generously. Again my father had to tell the story of the old man. When he had finished, she said:

"Mr. Clifford, if you will go foward I will give another ten pounds."

The anniversary meeting on July 13th was presided over by Mr. William Olney of Spurgeon's Tabernacle. My father told the story once more. The chairman turned to him and said:

"We're going to clear the debt tonight."

My father was taken aback. He had already made his final appeal to his people and had promised that he would not ask them for anything more. He knew how much they had sacrificed and so he sought to dissuade Mr. Olney. He was told:

"You're not the chairman of this meeting. I'm making the appeal."

So great was my father's embarrassment that he felt compelled to leave the meeting and in distress of mind he went to his vestry. Mr. Olney offered to give ten per cent of the total promised and the small company present responded with the wonderful gift of sixty-six pounds. This included one gift of ten pounds from a school-teacher who had saved the sum to buy a bicycle. Then Mr. Lester came forward once more with his promise of fifty pounds and they were half-way to clearing the remaining debt. The fifteen sovereigns arrived by post from the old man, each sewn up in a separate piece of silk. My father could not doubt any longer that the hand of God was upon them. A special church meeting was called at which it was unanimously decided to wipe off the debt completely by November

30th. When the day came not only had the target been reached but there was a balance in hand of seventy-six pounds.

My father wrote to Isaac Saunders and told him of what had taken place. The letter he received in reply must be quoted because it reveals the spirit of this saint of God.

"Dear Sir,

I thank you for sending me the account of your gatherings in your December number. I was, and still am, exceedingly thankful that God has thus honoured me as an instrument by which the idea of a starting point was obtained. I do thank God most sincerely for all those whose hearts He did incline to take such an interest in this final movement and I rejoice with them all that God has crowned their efforts with abundant success. In the first letter I received from you, you said, 'The schoolrooms are in a bad condition and we almost feel compelled to do something in the matter' . . . You say now, 'Things must be quiet for some time.' You and your men of business know this is, and will be, an expensive time for renovation when men want 10d. an hour. If God should spare our lives I shall be glad to see you to know about how you are getting on, but not until the Spring gets up when the buttercups and daisies are in bloom; then I can take you into a meadow where I walk, think and pray. At present I cannot promise to assist you in your future movements, as in March last I proposed to adopt a Christian young girl in India and paid ten pounds for her last two years'

maintenance. . . . At present I do not know how much my teacher of truth is to cost me.

I remain,

Yours respectfully,

Isaac Saunders."

The thanksgiving sermon was preached by the Rev. Archibald Brown, and in spite of a typical November fog the chapel was crowded with a grateful congregation.

For a time any thought of improving the material fabric had to be set aside. The necessity of building up the spiritual life of the church was paramount. And so with thanksgiving for the past and a sense of relief that the weight had been lifted from their shoulders, minister and people set out together to face larger tasks and greater opportunities. But without the faith and devotion of Isaac Saunders this would not have happened. My father's resignation would have been sent to the deacons and, from the human point of view, the story of the West Ham Central Mission could never have been written.

Chapter Three

LAYING FOUNDATIONS

"RETROGRESSION is not in our vocabulary. Forward is upon the banner of every organization of the church." So wrote my father in his magazine notes for August, 1900, and these words reflect the spirit in which the next few years were faced. By the time his third anniversary had been reached, 139 new members had been added to the church, eighty-two on profession of faith by baptism. Everywhere there were signs of expansion. The people were infused with their minister's enthusiasm and believed with him that all things were possible. Evangelism was in the forefront of their programme and there are constant references in the records of the period to campaigns for winning the man in the street. Open-air services were held each Saturday night in the summer on the steps of the Tabernacle. On Sundays too, before the evening service, the Gospel was proclaimed in the open-air and passers-by were invited to come into the church. My father wrote to his people: "Love for Him should inspire us to self-sacrificing service; to be ready to do anything and everything to bring some others into the Kingdom."

Many who know something of the story of West Ham imagine that the church in those days consisted mainly of the very poor. That is a mistake and provides

an inadequate background from which to understand the developments of these next few years. It is true that there were few of any substantial means; but the membership largely consisted of some of the leading families in the neighbourhood. Reference has already been made to the business men who were among the founders of Zion Chapel. In the days of which we are speaking it was largely a middle-class congregation: the baker, the printer, the furniture dealer and so on. Further, it was a church where the family pew predominated. Father and mother and children sat side by side. To describe the congregation of those days is to speak of the names of the local tradespeople. One of the leading lights was Mrs. Hammond, who lived in a large house in Barking Road. She was a Victorian of the old school and sailed into a front pew each Sunday morning in her silks and satins: an impressive and somewhat awe-inspiring figure. On more than one occasion she tried to tell the young minister how he was to run the church, only to be received with the firm but courteous reply: "I am the minister of this church." There were of course a good many of the poorer people amongst the members, but the leadership was in the hands of these independent and, in many cases, well-educated families.

The urge to evangelism, however, constantly brought the church face to face with the needs of the surrounding district. West Ham was entering into that phase of extreme poverty which was to shock the conscience of the country before long. Among the first to see the challenge was the minister himself, and as early as 1900 we find him writing: "Our church stands as a protest

against all the organised evil and sin in the immediate neighbourhood." One of the deacons was elected to the Town Council that autumn and signs of the coming battle against squalor and want had already appeared.

In the summer of 1901 the strain of the work began to tell, and my father was compelled to take a protracted rest. By then the Sunday School had grown to 500 children and a Boys' Life Brigade, afterwards united with the Boys' Brigade, was beginning to meet the needs of many of the boys in the surrounding district who were running wild. The church was buzzing with life and was being prepared to meet the great opportunity to come.

Then at the beginning of the next year seven thousand men in the docks were out of work and starvation faced many homes. A relief fund was started and my father was in the thick of the battle. In his January notes for the magazine he wrote: "I am in the very heart of this relief work, and the sights seen and the tales heard are enough to break the heart of any man. . . . The sweetest music that Canning Town has heard for a long while is that Thames Ltd., have got a ship to build for the Government." He himself was appointed secretary for relief in his own ward district and worked unceasingly at all hours of the day and night to do whatever he could to alleviate the distress. His was a gentle nature. He often said he could not kill anything, not even a fly. The sight of human suffering moved him to the depth of his being, and he never spared himself. Allied with this compassion for his brother man was a burning hatred of injustice; it was the only hatred in his life.

This distress in the district was not the only social

challenge. The new Education Act was a matter of bitter controversy throughout the country and the battle was waged in West Ham as well. Free Churchmen were strongly opposed to subscribing through the rates towards education in schools under the sole jurisdiction of the Church of England. Many joined in the passive resistance movement and refused to pay their rates. My father, with many other Free Churchmen in the neighbourhood, was summoned to court and had to suffer the distraint of some of his household goods. They were bought back through the good offices of David Reed, one of the church members. Here again, what he felt to be injustice drew forth resolute and outspoken opposition.

The fight against social injustice did not deflect my father or his people from their main task. The winning of men for Christ was the central objective all the time. It is striking to observe how the social gospel was interwoven with an evangelical ministry. Christ had come to save the whole man, body, mind and spirit. To neglect one side of man's need was to be untrue to the Lord and His commission. And so in the midst of the relief work the spiritual life and witness of the church grew in strength. In April, 1903, a Forward Movement was launched to win the man in the street and a People's Service was started on Sunday evenings. At the Harvest Thanksgiving later in the year many were turned away because there was no further room in the church and attention had to be given to the enlargement of the building. An ambitious scheme was adopted, including the provision of galleries, the installation of adequate lighting and heating, the acquiring of an organ, and the

Mrs. Rowntree Clifford, O.B.E.

incorporation of the manse for increased Sunday School accommodation and an Institute for young people.

But the spectre of poverty still stalked the streets of Dockland. The winter of 1904-5 was a terrible one and starvation was a reality in many homes. No longer could my father and his people battle alone without extra help from outside, and so two deaconesses were invited to come for the emergency. Sister Kathleen arrived just after Christmas Day and Sister Hettie on a bleak New Year's Sunday. How momentous their advent was! My father wrote in the magazine: "I am delighted to state that they will remain for three months, and it is probable that Sister Hettie will remain for at least eighteen months as a permanent worker. I shall always remember with gratitude the splendid service they have already rendered. They faced arduous duties and lifted a burden from my mind and heart at once." They came to face an emergency: they stayed for a life-time. Sister Hettie was to become my father's partner in life and the inspiration of all the developments that lay ahead; Sister Kathleen was to give all she had in love and loyalty as my mother's devoted lieutenant.

To digress in a narrative of this kind may be bewildering, but sometimes we have to turn aside and go back if we are to have an adequate picture of the whole development of the story. My mother's coming to West Ham is the occasion for such a digression; for the background of her early years paved the way for the unique contribution she was to make. Her birthplace was on the outskirts of Coventry in a country hamlet. She was carried as a small child into the village chapel of Salem, Longford and in the context of the best and most sturdy

Nonconformity she had her introduction to Christ and His Church. Longford is now an industrial suburb of the city of Coventry but Salem is still the village chapel in appearance and in a strange way has preserved the character of its early history. In those days it was surrounded by fields and, as a child, my mother walked through the countryside every Sunday to her beloved chapel. Though an unprepossessing factory-like building, she loved every brick of it and when within its walls, felt she was at home. In fact, Salem was her home, dearer to her heart even than the old house in which she lived; and she was always conscious of belonging to the Christian family as much as to her own intimate circle. Her father was a man with considerable business interests and her mother a gracious, devout Christian. It was a home where the things of the world and the things of the Spirit were daily topics of conversation and in this wide background, with its constant tensions, she grew up. Her father was a sound, upright business man with extensive knowledge of men and affairs. To the house came many friends and acquaintances and she listened to their conversation. But all the time it was the chapel at Longford which in the main moulded and shaped her life. There she was challenged and there she made her friends. Amongst the earliest was Florie Parker, the minister's daughter, and through her my mother acquired that love of the manse which was to remain with her all her days.

No one can read the history of the West Ham Central Mission without being struck by the unusual imagination that lies behind its development. It is a place where dreams have come true: my mother's dreams. Those

dreams began in childhood. She would steal away from her family and friends and play all day by herself in the hedgerows, building houses. Hour after hour would pass as the bank of earth with its twigs and foliage would become now a city filled with people and now a mansion beautifully appointed. "Your old men shall dream dreams," said the prophet Joel. Yes, but children dream as well and sometimes their dreams come true. My mother dreamt as she played of building the city beautiful where "naught that defileth can ever enter in."

When she was nineteen years of age she persuaded her parents to allow her to go to Birmingham to join the teaching staff at the Cottage Homes experimental colony at Northfield run by the municipal authority. She worked there for six years, with remarkable success, proving herself to be not only a born teacher but one with a natural aptitude for getting the best out of boys and girls whose circumstances were near to defeating them. She saw how bad social conditions could affect the life of a child, but at the same time the belief was confirmed that all were made in the image of God. Given patience and understanding, none was beyond the power of the Gospel; and the love of God, mediated through the love of a woman, could win anyone into the ways of righteousness. These six years established my mother in the conviction that every child was meant for the fulness of life and could enjoy it if only he or she were brought into touch with the Friend Unseen.

Not only was belief in the power of the Gospel strengthened in those six years; my mother learned to love people, particularly the underprivileged, with that abandonment which was to be the secret of her life's

work. Northfield was a stage on the way, a preparation for the next step. The call was irresistible to offer for training as a Baptist deaconess to work in the areas from which the boys and girls came. She felt she must tackle the problem at its roots, in the homes where the children were born. The Gospel must be carried to the mothers and fathers, especially the mothers; for they were the key to the family as a whole.

William Booth had begun his work in the Salvation Army and the challenge of the pagan slums was beginning to awaken the conscience of the Christian Church. At one time my mother dreamed of going to China as a missionary, but here was a mission field at home and a clamant need which she had already come to grips with at Northfield. And so she applied for training at the Baptist Deaconess' Home in Guilford Street, London.

How fortunate that a woman like Sister Constance was in charge! My mother loved and admired her from the outset. She had the best qualities of the Victorians: a warm evangelical piety, a wide culture and a deep sense of refinement. She was a strict but gracious disciplinarian; not a cuff out of place, not a speck of dust anywhere. In her frilled cap and white cuffs she presided over the table with a watchful eye. All the same the sisters in training were living in no monastic order cut off from the world of reality. They were given the widest and most varied experience. My mother worked under Dr. Percy F. Lush in the Baptist Medical Mission Dispensary in Holborn; she visited in the Italian quarter around Eyre Street Hill, learning much of the grim conditions of tenement life and speak-

ing often in the open air at factory gates and at street corners. It was soon apparent that she had a remarkable gift for public speaking. Possessed of a rare voice, both rich in quality and remarkable in power, she could hold an audience spellbound, and men as much as women stopped to join the crowd which assembled when the young sister in the grey veil got up to speak. So God prepares His servants for the day of opportunity. It was while she was at Guilford Street that the call came from West Ham, and she went out, not knowing whither she went.

Some measure of the gigantic task which faced the church in Barking Road can be assessed from the fact that no pastoral notes appeared in the January issue of the magazine. My father was so deeply involved in meeting the crisis that there was no time to write even a few lines. A milk depot was opened in the Christian Endeavour room and relief on a large scale was administered to hundreds of families, each of which was personally visited by one of the band of forty workers. The national press, in particular *The Daily Telegraph,* had brought home to the general public the terrible conditions which prevailed in West Ham and considerable sums were made available to finance the work. In February my father wrote:

> " The hungry, suffering mothers with their brood of starving little ones, and the men, gaunt and strong, willing to work, but unable to get it, have made life altogether different to me.. . . Our schoolroom was packed with men, and two hundred could not gain entrance on Thursday morning. These men heard

that we wanted a hundred to chop wood for six hours and at the end they would receive three shillings. The men do not want charity, but work. They hate charity as we do who administer it. But if there is no work, there must be relief to starving families."

My mother was in the forefront of the fight; but for her it meant agony of mind and spirit. One of the first homes she visited was that of a proud and respectable family. The man's job was in the docks, but for weeks there had been no work. A child had just been born, and when my mother went into the house she heard the baby crying for food and there was nothing at all to give him. That day my mother knew something of what it was " to enter into the sufferings of Christ." She came home brokenhearted. Help was forthcoming, but for years afterwards on the anniversary of that day an equivalent gift for others was sent by the father and mother. The money was repaid a hundredfold. Such were some of the people whom the church sought to serve—the salt of the earth. Another family was in dire distress and my mother set out to take them some money to buy food. She tucked into her glove a golden sovereign and made her way to the street. By a devious route she at last found herself at the door. To be anywhere else than there! The humiliation of having to give to someone else burdened her soul and made her cheeks aflame with shame. God never meant anyone to stand beholden to others in this way. It was an affront to the divine dignity of human personality. When the door opened she hardly knew how the gift was passed from one hand to the other. The greed of man and the

resulting unjust social order had caused this situation. With the sense of the guilt of the community weighing upon her she went back to break her heart over what she had seen and what she had been constrained to do.

This was no work of charity. Those who were tackling the situation at first hand in the name of Christ had to look at human need through His eyes and that meant standing beneath His Cross. For another to describe the the reaction to the sufferings of Dockland is to miss the agony of mind that was felt by those who had to tackle the problem at the time. A letter from my mother, written a few weeks after her arrival, gives the picture as she saw it.

> "It is an ill wind that blows no good, and, truly, coming to help the friends at Barking Road Tabernacle has been a privilege and joy to be remembered throughout the rest of one's life. And yet the need for this help presses heavily on heart and mind. Brought face to face with starvation, witnessing death by inches, one listens to the cry of children asking for bread, while shivering in the bitter cold; their mothers in scanty clothing waiting in a great crowd for a little milk, to say nothing of the host of men craving work, drive one to prayer. Ignorance tells us that these scenes are exaggerated, but the minister and friends at the Tabernacle know that it is impossible to do this. If in unity and faith we lengthen our cords and strengthen our stakes, very soon shall these men and women be cared for, not only at special times, as now, but from year's end to year's end."

Such were the conditions prevailing in West Ham,

and the gigantic task of feeding the hungry and combating the spectre of poverty was bravely tackled by the church and its leaders. But it was impossible to face the material needs of men and women without seeing the much bigger spiritual problem: the district was pagan and was facing hardship and tragedy without spiritual resources. So the missionary call of the Church became paramount and the way was open for the advances of the next few years.

Chapter Four

ESTABLISHING THE MISSION

THE word "mission" has been seriously misunderstood. It has conjured up in many people's minds the picture of a large set of buildings, rather like a factory in appearance, erected in a dirty side-street in the slum quarter of one of our large cities. The main work of such a centre has been conceived as the doling out of charity, old clothing, buns and cups of tea, provided by those better endowed with this world's goods. There would, of course, be services, vaguely described as "of a mission type," at which the Gospel would be preached to those with whom contact had been made through material help.

This is a somewhat crude description of the picture which many still have in their minds; a picture, I would hasten to add, for which those working in down-town missions have been largely responsible. The exaggeration, if exaggeration it be, helps us to bring into relief the real nature of home mission work. If we are to get our thinking right, we have to divest our minds of the idea that charity and social service are the key words, and remember that Christians are always and everywhere called to establish the Church. The Christian message is not just addressed to individuals: it is addressed to them as they are in society; the message

itself is not simply one of personal salvation, but of salvation into a new society—the fellowship of the redeemed, the Church. That is fully recognised in the work of missions overseas. We do not misunderstand the nature of the foreign missionary enterprise. It is the establishment of the Christian fellowship in a non-Christian or pagan country so that it may be fully indigenous to that country. Such too is the task of missions at home: the establishment of an indigenous Church in a pagan neighbourhood; the creation of the new society in the midst of a disintegrating community. Social service and works of charity can only be an expression of the life of the Church, if they are to be truly Christian. To expect that they can stand on their own, divorced from the Gospel in the Church, is to be untrue to the Christian message. So far from the preaching of the Gospel and the establishment of the Church following on the social service of Home Missions, the precise opposite is the truth. A doctrine of the Church is anterior to successful evangelism and the *raison d'être* of all practical service.

This point is of vital importance as we come to consider the developments in West Ham; for it was with the Church as the centre and inspiration of everything that the work grew in scope and effectiveness. In the early part of the century much thought was being given to the problems of East London and some of the big settlements were founded, usually by Christian men, who felt that the Church had failed and that this was the way in which it would revive. While paying tribute to the courage and devotion of those who gave their lives as well as their money to experiments of this kind, we are

compelled to admit that such schemes had an inherent weakness. The motive power for Christian settlements and clubs was the sense of social responsibility which imbued many individual Christians. But these men and women were largely foreigners to the district they sought to serve, and though some of them tried to identify themselves with the neighbourhood in which they were working by living in it, most of their helpers were imported from outside. The result was that these institutions were kept going not only by outside subscriptions, but by outside leadership. They came to depend on a few individuals. The Church itself as a fellowship was never in these institutions and therefore they never really became indigenous to the neighbourhood. Furthermore, their appeal was mainly to the young, who after passing through adolescence, found no permanent society in which to take root.

I do not wish to underrate the outstanding service rendered by such settlements and clubs, nor would I detract for one moment from the contribution made by many gifted individuals through their agency. But it is necessary to set this conception of Christian work, so often confused in people's minds with Home Missions, over against the idea of the Church as an indigenous fellowship; a society of those who have been redeemed by Christ, finding their relationship to one another in Him and seeking to evangelize the neighbourhood around and so strengthen the Body of Christ.

It was this pattern of what a Home Mission should be that dominated the minds of the leaders at West Ham and it was followed with varying success from the very early years. The work of relieving distress had opened

many doors. Not only were the physical needs of the people plain for all to see; they were spiritually starved too. The Church could not hold back and give the bread that perishes without the bread of life. None the less the opportunities were far greater than the resources of the local fellowship were adequate to meet. Help had come from outside to meet bodily hunger: surely Baptists all over the country would support the first Baptist Home Mission. The Barking Road Tabernacle would become the West Ham Central Mission.

The vision and enthusiasm of the minister and his colleagues commended itself to an ever increasing and influential body of people. In the spring of 1905 an article appeared in *The Baptist Times* on the idea of an Institutional Church, and from many quarters practical support was forthcoming; but at this stage the Denomination as a whole was too heavily committed in many other directions to sponsor the scheme directly. Encouragement was given, but it was left to those on the spot to take the initiative and shoulder the burden.

My father faced another difficulty with his own people. They had loyally supported him and followed his leadership, but the establishment of a central mission with financial commitments beyond their own resources was a responsibility they felt they could not shoulder themselves. If he was prepared to go forward they would support him as far as they could, but the final responsibility must be his.

So began an adventure of an unusual character. Committed to the ministry of an independent, self-governing church, my father launched out as a pioneer in the field of institutional work organically related to the

life of the local church. He, and later my mother with him, was the connecting link between the two. It was not until just before his death in 1943 that the two sides of the work were in sight of being completely integrated. However, that is to anticipate. In 1905 the immediate task was to gather around him a group of workers who would pioneer in the home mission field while he maintained the ministry of the church.

At the same time men and women of Christian charity had to be found who would provide the financial resources. Henry Lester and other old friends stood by him and new supporters were forthcoming too. Among the first was Mrs. L. G. Angas, an Australian by birth and a lady of wealth and wide Christian sympathy, whose name is writ large in the annals of West Ham. Not only did she give with unstinted liberality, but she came herself to render practical service in response to the call of human need. However, the Church remained the very essence of the whole enterprise. My father wrote: "Our institutional work is not an accretion to church life, but an organic development. At the heart of everything there stands the Church, self-supporting, unifying, controlling and directing all."

In the autumn of 1905 the first Report of the West Ham Baptist Central Mission was published and sent to a wide circle of interested friends; in particular to those who had helped to bring relief during the preceding winter. After describing the enlargements and renovations just completed, my father wrote:

"The cost of this scheme amounts to £4,498 1s. 6½d. Of this amount £2,777 16s. 1½d., has been

subscribed. It will be readily seen that a work of such magnitude cannot be maintained by this wage-earning congregation. It is only fair to say that, until this year, the Church has maintained all its obligations without any help from outside. The Church, believing this step to be in obedience to the irresistible call of God, has given to the point of high sacrifice, and now appeals to the Brotherhood of the Churches, and to all who have come to the succour of West Ham's immediate relief in these dark days. It is our imperative duty, 'for the sake of the Name,' to bring into these dull and squalid homes the permanent ministries of sweetness and light which radiate from those who have fellowship with Him Who went about doing good. 'How long, O Lord,' we cry, 'will the Church of Jesus Christ allow these vast areas of mean streets with their poverty, suffering, squalor and heart-breaking problems, to give the lie to the glorious Gospel it proclaims?' The multitudes are crying, 'No man cares for my soul,' as they hunger for the Bread of Life."

This was the ground of appeal to the wider constituency—the Brotherhood of Churches meeting the need together at the point where that need was most urgent. This must always be the strategy of evangelism. We are members of the Body of Christ and in every local situation the whole Body is involved. Just as in the physical organism, the whole is involved in the pain or stimulation of a part, so the Church Universal should be sensitive and responsive to the claim made on every local fellowship. Karl Barth writes: "Wherever a

church considers herself as a part of the Church alongside other parts and is not conscious in all seriousness of being in her individuality the whole Church, she has not yet understood herself or taken herself seriously as the Church, that is, as an assembly of people under one Head, Jesus Christ."[1] The independent Free Churches need to take such a profound insight to heart as they face their task in the world today. From the early days this understanding of the local church has been vital to the work at West Ham.

Soon after my mother's arrival in Barking Road the Women's Meeting was formed. One Monday afternoon in late February, after an extensive campaign of visitation, this remarkable gathering began its existence. It was a dismal afternoon, with rain falling and an atmosphere of gloom hanging over the streets. In spite of this the building was crowded and the phenomenal attendance has continued, unbroken except for Bank Holidays, and even through two world wars. They were women who knew the privation of physical hunger. But it was not for this bread that they came: it was for the Bread of Life. Five hundred assembled on that first day and met for an hour's service. Within a few months the membership increased to one thousand four hundred and fifty.

Scarcely any of these women enjoyed a day out of their grim surroundings; and so one of the first things my mother set out to do was to organise a day's excursion to the country. In her own words she described what happened: "The great day dawned gloriously fair, and throughout its sunny hours all went well. At eight

[1] *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, page 163.

o'clock in the morning we assembled in the Tabernacle for a hymn and prayer, and what an excited, happy crowd we made! With a child's abandonment to pleasure we, with one accord, gave ourselves up to innocent fun, and many a too-often tear-stained, care-lined face was wreathed in smiles. Altogether there were over eight hundred of us, and the way in which it had been made possible for many of these women to join in this one day's holiday in their sad and often sordid lives, is a story so beautiful and pathetic, that perhaps only the Recording Angel could make it known.

"There was first the money—just over £50—subscribed by friends far and near, and then the women's savings, about £60. The excursion cost about 2s. 7d. a head, which included the brake ride, lunch and tea. Two days were set aside for women to come for their tickets, and the Savings Bank books were opened. Here was a revelation! Women, who from January to June had not been able to save more than a few coppers, were so disappointed, and yet how bravely they tried to hide it and to rejoice with those who had managed to save enough for us to consider their application.

"'Have you come for your ticket?' asked a worker of a very pleasant-faced woman. 'No! I've only got threepence in.' 'Very well, I will refund your threepence.' 'Oh no! that's not what I've come for. There may be some poor soul who has got it all but threepence, so please put mine to hers, and then it won't be two of us done out of going.'

"Turning round, sounds of sobbing greeted our ears, and there was a woman, over seventy, being led by a niece who had managed to get her ticket. 'It's my aunt,'

she said, 'and she's never had a day's holiday for years. She only gets parish pay, four shillings a week, and she's saved fourpence; but if you'll let her have her ticket, she'll pay when she gets her money from the Relieving Officer, even if she has to go short for a bit. She's got nobody to help her, and we're all poor.' A ticket was given to the poor old starved woman, who was quite unable to speak, for first she cried for sorrow and disappointment, and then for joy.

"Another customer was a very respectable-looking woman, who shyly took her ticket and then hesitated. 'I'm glad you have managed to save your 1s. 6d.,' (the sum asked), said the friend who gave her the ticket. 'Oh, I haven't done it! It's the children! My husband's in the National Hospital at Ventnor, and the children did want me to get this day's holiday, and so they've earned the coppers by running errands and doing odd jobs. It takes me all my time to keep the home together, and I daren't spend a penny on this sort of thing.' 'I am sorry your husband is ill.' 'Yes, but they think he'll get better; he's improving.' And then, summoning up all her courage, she put six hot pennies into the worker's hand, saying: 'My husband sent me up this towards my ticket, but as the children had got mine, I want you to let it help someone else to go.'

"One other outstanding deed was that of about five women who had reached the summit of success and secured their tickets, but in their little street lived a member, the only one quite unable to save a penny, who had no hope of getting a holiday. A little committee meeting was held, and these women, out of their deep poverty, put a few things together and pawned them,

raising 1s. 6d., and then triumphantly got a ticket for the poor woman and carried her off for the day in high glee."

Such was the need and such were the women to whom this Meeting ministered.

During the years many distinguished speakers and soloists have given their services on Monday afternoons. Among them have been ministers and clergy of all denominations, including several Bishops of the Church of England. Chief among the soloists was the incomparable Dame Clara Butt, whose wonderful voice and warm heart brought many a tired and weary mother to the feet of God. One old soul, dying in a back room in Bethnal Green, asked a district visitor to get her a gramophone record of Clara Butt singing "God shall wipe away all tears." She had heard it sung at the Women's Meeting in Barking Road years before, and with the strains of the music in her ears she passed into the Heavenly Kingdom. The visitor wrote to my mother, who sent the letter on to Dame Clara now very near the end of her own journey.

Carrie Tubb, Ben Davies, Elsie Suddaby, Stiles Allen, Gladys Ripley and Muriel Brunskill, are a few among the great artistes who have sung on Monday afternoons. In that meeting thousands have heard the Gospel and many have come to know Him who is the Lord and Saviour of us all. Heaven alone will record all that is owed to this service for women. As a visitor once said: "This is the Mothers' Sunday." And so it has been; for with household duties and a family to look after, many women have found Sunday a day of work in which there was no time for rest or worship. Monday became

their Sabbath, and washing-day was postponed till Tuesday. The time was soon to come when not a street in West Ham was to remain uninfluenced. Over this service my mother has presided for more than forty years and has won the love and loyalty of countless women. But she would be the first to say that while personal magnetism played its part, in the end it has been the magnetism of Jesus which has brought forth the lasting fruit.

The men were not to be outdone. A few weeks after the Women's Meeting began, a meeting on similar lines was formed and held on Sunday afternoons. This owed much, in its inception, to Arthur Boore, who was for many years the secretary and, later, honorary manager of the Angas Institute. At the outset the students of Regent's Park College undertook responsibility for the meeting. The first chairman was Vaughan King, later the distinguished minister of Coats Memorial Church, Paisley. He was partnered by Bevan Jones, who subsequently became one of the best known missionaries to India and Principal of the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies at Lahore. The following year Murray Page, one day to be elected chairman of the Baptist Missionary Society, joined in the work. The Men's Meeting was indeed fortunate to receive the help of these pioneers, who entered with enthusiasm into the venture and responded to the daring leadership of Sister Hettie no less than to the more restrained direction of the minister. My mother tells the story of Vaughan King, going, at her behest, to the House of Commons, to interview John Burns and get him to speak at one of the early Men's Meetings. He came. Everything had to

be attempted in those days that men might be won for Christ.

The Men's Meeting was helped forward at every stage by the women. Monday after Monday they were urged to make it easy for their men folk to go on a Sunday afternoon. "Clean and polish their boots for them and bring them to the door of the Tabernacle yourselves," my mother told them. The great day was the Anniversary, and one member of the Women's Meeting wrote an account of what she did to make sure her husband was there. It shows better than anything else the enthusiasm of those early days.

"Come in, Mrs. Barton; that's right, sit down. Oh, yes, my dear, I'll tell yer, as I said I would. I can spare a few minutes while the copper boils, but I must hurry up becos it looks like raining again, don't it? I am glad to know your Annie is better, she'll soon pull round now, I hope. Yer could hardly believe it that Bill Smith went to the Tabernacle, could yer? Well, he did! But my Jack and his boy Fred, they *did* have a job to get him to go. My Jack went into Smith's with that foot-iron he had borrowed of Bill to mend May's boots on. I put him up to it, 'cos *he* didn't know what excuse to make to go into their place. So instead of sending young May with it, he takes it in hisself. They'd just done their tea, and Bill was having a smoke. Jack says: 'Going out anywhere, Bill?' Bill looks at him rather straight, and says: 'Why, what's on? 'ere's this young 'un of mine crazing me to go over to the Anniversary, and I s'pose you're on the same lay—but I ain't a-going.

I'll stop at home and look after the fire. The old woman is going, and Fred—him and his tart are going, and *somebody* must stop at home with the kids.' Nellie came in from work while he was talking, and she up and says: 'You go, dad. I'll mind the house and the children, and I feel sure you'll enjoy yourself if you'd go.' He says: 'I ain't a-going amongst a lot of collars and cuffs. I likes my old wropper round my neck. I should feel like a fish out of water amongst a lot of them toffs over there.' 'They ain't no toffs, Bill,' said my Jack; 'I only puts on my collar and tie on a Sunday. I've got my wropper on, and I've got the same clothes as I wear on Sundays, for Uncle is minding my best suit while I ain't working, and if yer comes over you'll find that they don't judge a man by the coat he's got on.' Young Fred he offered his dad one of his collars if he'd wear it, but Bill says: 'If I fell down with one of them bloomin' things on, I should cut my throat, besides having all the kids running after me thinking I was Guy Fawkes out-of-date.'

"Jack was surprised as Mrs. Smith hadn't said anything all this time, and he was quite took back when she said to Nellie as she had better come with her, and Bill would look after the children; but she said to me afterwards: 'My old man is just like an old mule, if you want him to go straight on you've got to pull him backwards.' However that may be, when he thought as she didn't particular want him to go, blessed if he didn't put on his cap and go over along with Jack. Me and Mrs. Smith follows on behind, and we gets up on the gallery agin, but Jack and Bill

was in the front row and we set just behind 'em. Bill Smith was took up with the music. (Did you ever hear the Men's Meeting band, Mrs. Barton? It's all right, I tell yer!) You know when old Bill was a soldier, he was in the band—played a cornet, so she says, and when they started playing I could see him keeping time with his hand on his knee, and I could see he enjoyed it. But you should see how he looked when the Countess sang, and he listened with both ears to what the gentlemen had to say on the platform; and I must say they had some good speakers; though one young man told a tale which wasn't very complimentary to the women. He said as how two men were in a carriage with two women, and one of them men tried to please these 'ere women; but he couldn't, for one wanted the window open or she'd die, and the other wanted it shut, or *she'd* expire, and so the pore man didn't know what to do. So he asked the other old chap his advice, and this is what he said: 'Open the window till the one is dead, and then shut it up again till the other pegs out.' I don't believe Sister Hettie would have allowed him to have come to our Women's Meeting after that, if he had wanted to, do you?

"Annie Swan talked to the men, and, my word, she did rub it into them. I think it hit old Bill Smith, he took in every word she said She was splendid. I wished I could talk like her, but we can't all be bright lights like her, but we can all of us do our best to let our small lights shine out before men and glorify our Father who is in heaven, can't we?

"My opinion of the Men's Meeting is this, Mrs.

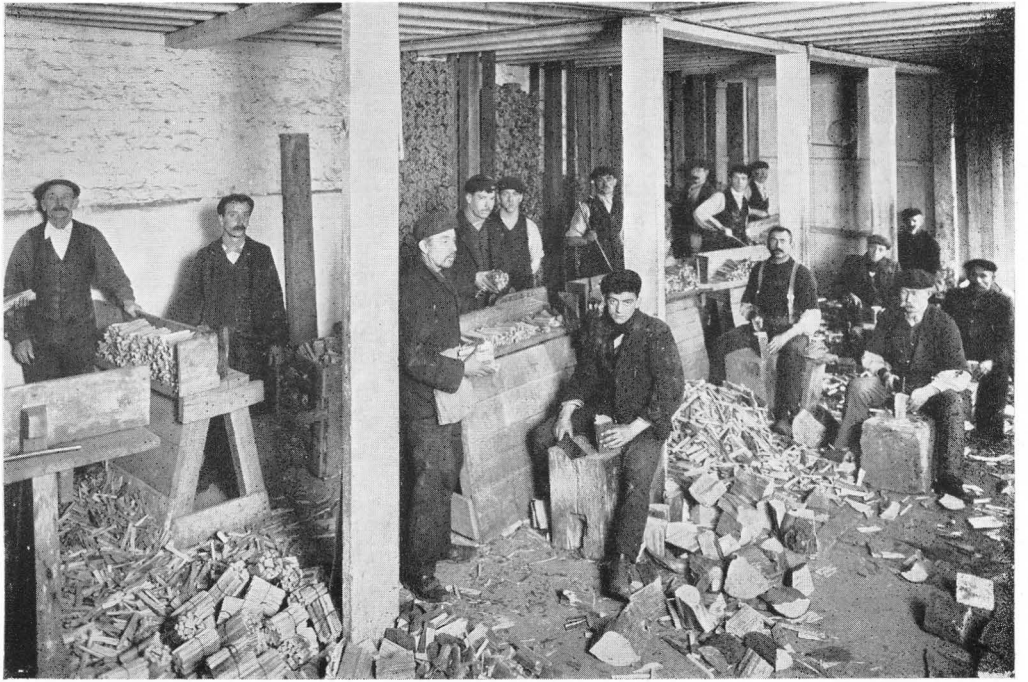
Barton! It isn't a patch on ours, of course, but they are doing a lot of good work. (We ain't got a band, but we've got a choir *and* we've got Sister Hettie, and she is better than any band, ain't she?) I felt quite proud of our Anniversaries, both the Men's and the Women's—and what do you think? Bill Smith went last Sunday, all on his own, *and* he'd *got a collar on*!"

In the meanwhile the renovation plans for the Old Tabernacle were put into effect. For five months new quarters had to be found. The Public Hall at Canning Town was rented for the Sunday Services and the Men's and Women's Meetings, while a block of elementary schools in Denmark Street housed the Sunday School. By September the adaptation was completed. With galleries to accommodate more people and the adjoining manse turned into Institute premises, opportunity for expansion was afforded. Now there was space for evening classes of all kinds and the beginning of a succession of gifted women offered their services to teach in the Institute and visit for the growing Women's Meeting. A Band of Hope for children was started and a Lads' Rally to attract off the streets the boys who were running wild. In the hall below the Old Tabernacle, a physical training class was organised for them, and other activities were designed to bring them under discipline and so to that service which is perfect freedom.

As the manse had been given up, and in view of the need for providing a headquarters for the voluntary workers, my father and his sister moved to Holly House,

where a hostel was established. This hostel differed from the independent settlements, in that it was linked so closely with the local church, without which it would not have continued. In my father's office the two were held together, and, as the years passed, the settlement became the nerve centre of the church life as well as the headquarters of the constantly changing activities of the larger mission work, as it was called. While for convenience we shall be compelled to speak of the Church and the Mission as though they were two separate entities, it must never be forgotten that this distinction is a misleading one: the story of West Ham is the story of the elimination of this distinction. Here lies its peculiar interest for those who are seeking to discover and unfold the function of the Church today in its approach to the people. If this point appears laboured, the excuse for that is its importance.

The story of the next few years is one of rapid growth in response to the ever-increasing challenge. The grim battle against poverty, starvation and unemployment had constantly to be waged. Out of a population of a hundred and forty thousand in South-West Ham, seventy-two thousand had insufficient food and thirty-six thousand were in a state of incipient starvation. Someone asked my father: "Is the distress still so very great?" "Great?—if England knew, if it could only realise what the true condition of this area of poverty is, there would be such a thrill of horror from end to end as has not shaken it hitherto." An invalid kitchen was established to serve food to those in the direst distress. Through the generosity of Mrs. Angas a Labour Yard and Shelter were opened in Butchers Road. Here



THE LABOUR YARD

unemployed men were given a day's work chopping and binding fire wood. A well-equipped kitchen served them with hot meals and a dormitory provided beds for the homeless. Numbers of men were saved from despair by finding a job to do, while at the shelter services they heard the good news of the Kingdom. The first full-time manager was Arnold Yates, later to enter the Baptist ministry, and he was succeeded by J. J. Harding who carried on the work until the outbreak of the first world war. One answer to the unemployment problem was emigration, and steps were taken to get hundreds of men and their families to the Dominions where they could make a new start. When I was visiting Canada in 1947 I met many people who had lived in West Ham and had emigrated during the early years of the century.

There was also the problem of sweated labour. Women were making shirts at sevenpence-halfpenny a dozen:

> "Sewing at once, with a double thread
> A shroud as well as a shirt."

This was the literal truth. George Hawker, who wrote an account of the Mission's work in 1910, tells the story of one home which he visited. He saw a "frail girl at the machine, whose thin delicate hands were keeping the home together. Her breast, which ought to have been rounded, was flat, but her back which ought to have been flat, was finely rounded, and there was not a trace of colour in her cheeks. I called her mother's attention to the poor obtrusive shoulders and she said: 'Yes, that is the machine.' By working fourteen hours

a day this little heroine is keeping the wolf at bay upon the threshold."

More often it was the mother who was the victim of this sweated labour. Life had become a hell in truth for very many and here was a social problem which cried out for redress. My mother wrote and spoke everywhere about this iniquitous exploitation of human life; others too joined in the crusade until those responsible became increasingly fearful of the exposure. It was said: "Don't let that woman at the Tab. know what's happening or you'll get into trouble." By 1914 public opinion had been so roused that sweated labour in its worst forms had been abolished.

To sweated labour were added the problems of drink and gambling. The only escape for many was the public house, where sorrows could be drowned in liquor and a brief respite be gained from the awfulness of the surroundings. Gambling offered a slender chance of passing the bare subsistence level and so many found themselves even worse off than before and perpetually in debt. My mother led the campaign against these twin evils and numbers of homes, wrecked by drink and gambling, were redeemed.

The pressure of slumdom weighed heavily on those who were growing up. The child who came to the Band of Hope without having had any dinner or tea presented a heart-rending challenge. "Ello! I ain't 'ad no tea," said a dirty, ragged little fellow to a member of the staff one night. It turned out that he and his brothers and sisters had only had a slice of dry bread for dinner and a slice of bread and butter for breakfast. His name was Ralph Theodore and his brothers and sisters had equally

imposing names. The explanation was given by his mother: "I had nothing else fine to give them, so I resolved they should have fine names." Humour and pathos enough to touch a heart made of stone! Yes, and enough to stir to wrath those who were working in Christ's name, at the conditions under which these little ones were living. The wealthiest city in the world allowed children to live like this on its own outskirts.

It is difficult to assess in the midst of so much suffering upon whom the burden fell most heavily. Perhaps girls growing up into womanhood were the most pitiable victims of the conditions. Forced to share a tiny room, and sometimes a bed, with young brothers and sisters, denied any of the refinements of life, and condemned to ragged clothing, many were driven to walk the streets. The wreckage of the future was being piled up in young womanhood going to waste. The Institute buildings were used to meet this need and the score of voluntary women workers taught classes of all kinds: needlework, cooking, dressmaking, hat-trimming and physical culture were among the subjects tackled. The rooms available were crowded to capacity and the church became the only real home some of these girls ever had. Many of them were trained for domestic service and, fitted out with uniform and completely re-equipped, they were placed in Christian homes where a new start was possible. Above all they came to learn of Him who brought beauty for ashes and colour and joy into life as He came to reign within the heart.

So in many ways the onslaught upon misery and poverty went on. But in all things the spiritual continued to predominate and the story of these years

of social enterprise is also the story of lives redeemed by Christ and homes transformed by His grace. The Women's Meeting had reached a membership of eighteen hundred and fifty and there were eight hundred names on the Men's roll. In one year over a hundred and twenty people were baptized and received into church membership. But numbers are not always the best guide. In Old Testament days, to number the people was forbidden and we should look to the dangers of counting heads. The Good Shepherd left the ninety and nine to search for the ONE that was lost. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." The one lost sheep was often to be found in the Women's Meeting.

One Monday afternoon my mother was telling a story which she had heard about a Scotch shepherd and a black sheep. Soon after she had returned to the hostel there was a sharp rat-tat on the door, but when she went to answer the knock she found no one there. A letter had been pushed through the postbox; it had been written hastily: "I always trusted you and believed in you, but I trust you no longer; you told the story of my life to all those women this afternoon and as I left the Tab. the women drew their skirts away from me; I shall never come again." It was signed "The black sheep," and obviously was meant to be anonymous, but in her haste the woman had put her address at the top of the paper. My mother straight away tied on her bonnet and went to find the house. As she turned the corner of the street she saw a woman sitting on a window sill some few doors away sewing a piece of pink flannelette. The woman looked up, and when she saw

my mother immediately looked down and went on furiously with her work.

"That's my woman," thought my mother, and went up to her:

"Have you just written me a letter?"

"Yes, I have, but how did you know?"

"You put your address on the top of the paper; you didn't mean to do that, did you?"

"No, I didn't."

"May I talk to you?"

"I suppose you can, if you've got anything to say."

"Well, may I come inside and sit down with you?"

"I suppose you can."

They went inside and sat down.

"Now," said my mother, "suppose you tell me the whole story."

"Well, everything you said this afternoon fitted me exactly; you must have known; you couldn't have told that story without knowing all about my life and I was ashamed that anyone should know."

"But I didn't; at least I didn't know anything about you. You must forgive me, there are so many strange faces in our meeting and you are a stranger to me. The story I told was one I heard in my own home town a week ago, and if it fits you that is without my knowledge; it is the leading of the Spirit of God. What lies behind all this?"

The woman lifted up a cushion and produced a copy of an illustrated periodical which featured society events. She opened the paper at a picture of

one of the most notable weddings. "That's my cousin," she said. "She and I rolled on the same hearthrug as babies in the same drawing-room."

"What!" said my mother. "You belong to that family?"

"I do; and I'm the black sheep. It's no use talking to me any more now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I will come to the Meeting next Monday afternoon and it will be the last time I shall ever be there. No matter who comes to speak you'll pray; and you'll pray this prayer: 'God have mercy on the black sheep.' You'll never see me again; I shall leave the district and no one will be able to trace me."

My mother never saw her again. The prayer next Monday afternoon cost her more than can be put into words; it was not the only prayer offered for that woman, for I veritably believe she has been prayed for ever since. Was she really lost? God in His mercy surely answered that prayer. It was not given to my mother to know the end of this story, though she joined in the rejoicing over many another.

Chapter Five

HOPE FRUSTRATED

THE rapidly expanding activities of the Mission placed an increasing burden on the buildings. They had been renovated in 1905 and extra rooms secured, but within a few months these proved altogether inadequate. The only thing to do was to launch an ambitious building programme which would provide a church large enough to accommodate the growing congregations, and institute premises in which the many activities could be housed. Many people saw the need. In 1907 Mr. A. W. Shakespeare of *The Baptist Times* wrote:

> "The time has come, I venture to think, when as a Denomination we should take up this duty, not in any haphazard or niggardly fashion, but in the light of the experience gained during past years in our own and other churches, and on a scale that will fire the imagination and enlist the sympathy of Baptists everywhere. If the East End of London and the slums of our great cities are to be purified, uplifted, evangelized, it cannot be by nondescript mission halls, mean chapels, stinted resources. The Church must give of its best, in workers and in material things. Our Central Missions in such districts must be, as Mr. Jowett said, beautiful enough to take the people's

breath away. Why should the gin palace be the most comfortable and the finest building in the street? Barking Road Tabernacle is not mean in appearance. It is not comfortless in its arrangements. But it is wholly and absurdly inadequate for the work. Something has to be done, and done quickly. The work cannot stand still. What ought to be done is to convert the present chapel into schools, and to erect a settlement near by, with an auditorium to hold at least 1,500 people, and with ample accommodation for all the institutional work in which the church is engaged.

"I said above that the Church, if it is to attack successfully the problems of poverty, must give of its best in workers and in means. We have given of our best in consecrated men and women in this work at West Ham. When we compare their work with that of most of us in comfortable and respectable suburban churches, while it is something of which as Baptists we may be justly proud, it is also something of which we ought to thank God with great humility and self-abasement. But we have only given half of what we owe, and that vicariously. We ought to show ourselves worthy of such men and women by supporting them properly. They are our representatives, doing the work to which we are called as well as they. Let us support them by our means, as well as by our sympathy and prayers. And our immediate duty is to see to it that their expert knowledge, their proved capacity, their splendid courage and their Christ-like consecration are provided with all the resources necessary to make them most effective for the glory of God and in the service of man."

And so the decision to build was taken. The site chosen was where Holly House stood—the home of my father and his colleagues. There was enough ground to allow for the erection of a large church. Later on it became evident that the position was more strategic than many had imagined; for the grounds of Holly House were in the midst of a much larger area of land forming a triangle bounded by three roads. As adjoining property fell vacant, so it was acquired, and today the buildings cover nearly three acres. But that is to anticipate. At this early stage my father showed a real flair for spotting the right land and obtaining it. What a success he would have been as an estate agent!

It was one thing to get a site and raise the necessary money for new buildings: it was another to make sure that those buildings would be the best from the point of view of use in the future. Not only had an immediate and pressing need to be met, but a pioneering venture was being undertaken with incalculable consequences. The churches in Britain had little experience to offer and the work of the Social Settlements was only in its infancy. From where could new ideas be got?

My father's thoughts turned to the United States, that land of enterprise and fertile invention. In May 1909, he set sail in the *Lusitania*. He called it a three months' holiday. Actually he travelled from the Atlantic to the Pacific and visited as many cities as he could in America and Canada, staying in Settlements and investigating the Christian approach to the social problem. Some idea of what he managed to compress into those few weeks can be gleaned from his itinerary: New York, Philadelphia,

Chicago, Denver, Colorado Springs, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Minneapolis, Toronto, Montreal, Boston, and back to New York. Greatly as my father enjoyed the much needed change and the new experiences, he found very little of what he was hoping to discover. Social work there was in abundance; but, though in many instances it was undertaken by Christians, the distinctive Christian emphasis was lacking and the evangelistic note almost non-existent. He wrote home from New York: "I have been working day and night in getting to understand the problems of this city, and to see how they are grappled by the churches and the settlements. I have visited all kinds of work. My present conclusion is that New York can teach us very little in the way of church work or settlement work." He missed that integration of institutional activity with the worship and evangelism of the Church which he had always set as an ideal before him. The problem is still largely unsolved in the United States. When I was there in 1947 I was told on all hands that the very comprehensive activities sponsored by the churches were but rarely organic to the life of the Church. My father was, however, more deeply convinced than ever that this was the only fruitful line of development. The Church must not only be at the heart of every enterprise to which it sets its hands, but also those enterprises themselves must be agencies for evangelism and exhibit the fellowship of the Church itself.

My father received a tremendous welcome on his return and found that, in his absence, steady progress had been maintained. For some time he had enjoyed the help of a ministeral colleague in Ronald Williams,

the first in a numerous succession. His sister was, as ever, a tower of strength to him, and the large band of workers at Holly House provided the leadership which at that time was lacking in the local church. But above everyone else Sister Hettie had become his closest colleague and the inspiring genius of most of the Mission's enterprises. His letters home from America show how much he had come to depend upon her. It was therefore not surprising that everyone greeted with joy the announcement of their engagement in the summer of 1910. They were married by Dr. John Clifford—no relative, but a friend to the end of his life—in the little village chapel of Stoke Golding close to my mother's home. So the partnership in service for Christ developed into a life partnership of love and marriage, the happiness of which the writer has most grateful cause to acknowledge. No man could have deeper reason to thank God for his father and mother.

Marriage, and later, family responsibilities, meant no lessening of the place of the work at Barking Road in both their lives. On the contrary they felt that together they had more to give. Always the complement, almost the ideal complement of each other, my mother supplied the vision and drive, while my father, with his cautious mind and sound judgment, steered the course.

Advance however did not wait on new buildings. In 1912 a Mission with far-reaching results was conducted by Dr. Harry Grattan Guinness. Over five hundred and fifty conversions were recorded and the signs of God's blessing were abundant. Poverty was still the great enemy, but more help towards relief was now forthcoming. The need had been made articulate even

overseas, and consignments of meat for distribution arrived from Australia and New Zealand, the first evidence of much greater help in subsequent years. About the same time my mother started a nursery school in the garden of Holly House where children under school-age could be cared for and taught while their mothers earned the necessary money to make ends meet. This was pioneering indeed; for the Nursery School Movement is still in its infancy. What a far-sighted idea to conceive its location in a garden! How little beauty surrounded the lives of these children!

Two houses were acquired to provide rooms for old people. The plight of many of them was pitiable indeed; they had no old age pension, and were often unwanted by their overburdened families. These houses only provided rent-free rooms, but the visitors from Holly House were able to succour many an aged pilgrim in the hour of need and make the last days of the journey here brighter and more comfortable.

All the while the problem of poverty continued to weigh heavily on the hearts and minds of my parents. They well knew that this problem had to be tackled at the roots. Relief was only a palliative, however necessary. In season and out of season they sought to stir the conscience of the country. And how passionately they felt and spoke. In the foreword to one of the Reports on the year's activity my father wrote of the leaders of the drink traffic: "I impeach them as running sores in civilization and murderers of little children." Or take the words of my mother, written out of a burning heart in the early days of the first world war:

"Our allies down east—the poor, the oppressed, the down-trodden, the neglected, the victims of the enemy's treachery, how they suffer! Their land has been swept by the enemy, and they have been driven into a few miles of mean and horribly over-crowded streets. Swiftly, silently and subtly has the enemy done this so that the exterior still deceives. 'It does not LOOK so bad,' said a distinguished university visitor after one brief morning's survey. 'Where would you like your mother and sisters to live?' asked his guide. 'Ah, that is a different matter,' was the reply. (THEY must live in a mansion surrounded by beautiful grounds, while they draw the money to pay for it from the occupants of stifling streets.) Having driven Our Allies Down East into a corner where decent living is a miracle, the enemy continues his torture of body, soul and spirit. With gloating satisfaction he compels them to load and unload much of the world's commerce. Hungry themselves, they have supplied others with abundance of food. There have been times when even the crumbs from the rich man's table have been denied them. Footsore and weary, they have supplied others with carriages and motor cars. Dwellers in mean and stuffy rooms, they have built large and airy houses for others. Ill clad and uncomfortable, they have made for others beautiful garments. Tired in mind and body, they have provided recreation for others. Out of their pitiable earnings others have amassed fortunes. And then the exploiters have ridden swiftly away that they may devour the spoil in their own fair land. But they have not left us free. They have left their

representatives to continue the oppression in their absence. They have fortified the land they have taken: gin palaces are everywhere, in likely and unlikely places."

Did not the Old Testament prophets speak in similar terms of the injustice in their own day? "What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts."[1]

The support of many influential people was forthcoming. Among them was the writer, Annie S. Swan, who lent her name and pen to the cause. She wrote the report and appeal in 1912. Here was the need as she saw it:

"When one is forced to consideration of a problem so vast and far-reaching as that involved in the conditions of life in West Ham and district, the natural question arising from the heart to the lips, is: 'Why should such things be?' A Mission, however noble and efficient, is obviously only a palliative. Can no permanent remedy be found to heal this open sore? All these questions pass in sad review in front of me as I sit at my desk. I am not sufficiently versed in political economy to be able to offer any solution. To my ordinary and practical mind it seems an appalling thing that any government or state, knowing these things, can delay the day of legislation."

Who can tell what far-reaching effect this outspoken campaign against poverty and its causes had upon public opinion and the Statute Book? It is strange to hear

[1] Isaiah iii. 15.

that the Christian Church has always gone hand in hand with privilege and has not let its voice be heard against social injustice!

By the year 1914 the money necessary for the new building had nearly been raised. The site had cost £4,500, and it was estimated that £16,000 would be needed for the church. Seventeen thousand pounds had already been subscribed, and after long years of hard work and patient waiting the time had come to begin. Just as the goal seemed to be in sight, there was a building lock-out and work had to be postponed. Imagine the disappointment! But this was surely only a temporary set-back. Then came the immeasurable disaster of the war. Of course the scheme had to wait. When, in 1922, the new church was opened, the cost had risen to £68,000. It was well that so formidable a task —the task of raising such a sum—was hidden from those who were bearing the burden. The pressure of events was already well-nigh beyond human endurance; but God is always sufficient and even if the future could have been foreseen, nothing would have impeded the fulfilment of His purpose.

At the same time there was much cause for encouragement. The building scheme had captured the enthusiasm of the local people as well as the sympathy of friends in many parts. Both interests were brought together on Golden Monday. One beautiful June afternoon in 1914 the "Old Tabernacle" was crowded as usual with women; but there was unusual excitement in the air. Across the front of the church was a screen bearing in gold the word "Inasmuch." Every woman was decorated with a golden buttonhole and golden flowers

bedecked the building. Four generous friends were presented with a cloth of gold and, holding it at each of the four corners, received a shower of golden half-sovereigns from their concealment in the dark-beamed roof. The cord which released them was pulled by the Dowager Duchess of Carnarvon and this wonderful gift of eight hundred pounds was thereupon presented to Mr. Herbert Marnham, the Treasurer of the Building Fund. It marked the second instalment of the sum of £1,000 which the women of the meeting had promised to raise towards the cost of the new House of Prayer. And out of what poverty it was raised! What sacrifice it involved! Who could help being moved by the story of Golden Monday!

In spite of disappointed hopes and with wholly inadequate premises the work went forward throughout the years of war. As the casualty lists mounted, the homes of the people were stricken with a new kind of suffering. The breadwinner of the future was being taken, killed or maimed; but that is the least important thing that can be said when wife or mother is bereaved. "The Old Tabernacle" was a spiritual fortress. Comfort and strength were brought into the lives of countless people and contact was kept with many of the boys in France and Belgium by letter and parcel.

In 1917 came the disaster of the Silvertown explosion. A factory in the docks, producing munitions of war, blew up, destroying many streets and devastating hundreds of houses. The plight of the homeless was pitiable and the doors of the Tabernacle were thrown open to them. Whole families were given shelter and fed. Frightened women and children were made

welcome in the strong citadel of the Christian fellowship. It was a day and night job until new homes could be found and life could begin again for the bereaved and destitute.

The first air-raids had started just about twelve months before. The damage to property was negligible in those days, but the terror was new. The war had struck at the homes of Dockland. This was but a foretaste of the perils of the blitz many years later, but the effect on the people was the same. As the church marshalled its resources and came to the rescue many were able to prove the truth of the Psalmist's words: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Evangelism and the call to build up the life of the church were held steadily in the foreground. There was, by God's providence, no lack of friends to see the importance of what was being done and to lend encouragement and help. In 1915 the anniversary was celebrated at a remarkable gathering in the Public Hall, Canning Town. Mr. Herbert Marnham presided; Dr. Campbell Morgan gave the address; Madame Clara Butt and her husband Mr. Kennerly Rumford presented the prizes and sang. There was evidence of great enthusiasm and illustrations of the many varied activities of the Mission were on view at an exhibition in the adjoining hall.

The maintenance of such a work demanded an ever-increasing band of helpers. For ten years there had been a residence for the staff of deaconesses and visitors, but Holly House was inadequate. Moreover when the new church was at last built, Holly House would have to be demolished to clear the site. A row of shops and

cottages on the main road had been acquired and with the help of an architect, who was also an artist, it was decided that a transformation could take place even under the difficult conditions then prevailing. Materials were in short supply, but Holly House was carefully dismantled and everything that could be salvaged was pressed into use. Bricks, doors, windows, woodwork, all went into the patchwork, and by 1916 Marnham House Settlement was completed and ready for occupation. With its latticed windows and stucco front, it provided a sharp contrast to the unimaginative buildings on the main road. As the visitor entered through the wide arched doorway, the hall, from which opened a spacious dining-room, gave the impression of a Tudor residence. Slats of wood across the ceilings produced the illusion of an oak-beamed roof and the warmth and colour of the home was felt at once.

My father and mother occupied one wing. My aunt presided over the rest of the establishment in which there was a separate bed-sitting room for each worker and spare rooms for those who gave certain nights a week to visiting and classes. To make a home in the midst of the Mission had always been the ideal. Here in Marnham House Settlement the ugliness of two disused shops and two broken down cottages had become the beauty of a country house. It was a parable in bricks and mortar.

The personnel at the Hostel, as it was called, was a varied one and frequently changing. A large number of gifted women served with great devotion, sparing no effort to meet the many demands made upon them. In those days a girl did not as a rule take up a business or professional career. She stayed at home and busied

Miss M. E. Clifford

herself with household duties and shared the social life of her neighbourhood. In many well-to-do homes there were consequently those who felt some frustration. A life of comparative leisure was irksome and they longed for something purposeful to do. The needs of a district like West Ham with its challenging poverty made an immediate appeal and they were glad to help. Consequently, from fine Christian home backgrounds, they brought a cultivated mind and a large sympathy to this and other Settlements.

Then there were the deaconesses. There were eight of them at Marnham House in 1916; women who had consecrated their lives to Christian service; women who, like the part-time helpers, brought mental and spiritual gifts of the highest order to the task. Some, like Sister Clara and later Sister Vera and Sister Hilda, gave many of the best years of their ministry to West Ham. But it was Sister Kathleen, my mother's colleague in 1905, who gave her life to the work. No one will ever be able to express all that West Ham owes to her. After the emergency of the Dock Strike she left Barking Road for a few years, only to return for good in 1914. From then onwards in the Sunday School, the Women's Meeting and the Church she gave the gracious beauty of a consecrated life to the people with whom she threw in her lot. Her smile was one of her greatest assets; how many were made to feel at home on the first occasion they entered their Father's House! The same welcome in His name was always theirs whenever they set foot inside the doors.

It is never easy to live together in community. Christian Settlements have their own peculiar problems;

for they are not balanced homes. Furthermore, to live and work in the same house can so easily mean that a leisured mind becomes well-nigh impossible and horizons of interest quickly narrow. To keep fresh is the constant problem. Much, if not everything, depends on the head of the house. My aunt grew into this responsibility and perhaps it was the only way in which it could be exercised. Coming from the closest knit of Northern families, with a tradition of good housekeeping, the life of the hostel matured under her hand. She had a great love for girls, and with remarkable success led this side of the work. A host of women owe their introduction to Christ to her and rise up to call her blessed. But although the obvious fruit of her life-work lies there, the incomparably harder task was to preside over such a household. It was only possible because of the close ties of affection which bound her to my father and mother and the singlemindedness of her devotion to the cause of Christ in Barking Road. With my father and mother she was the pivot on which the Mission turned.

Since the early days it had been clearly apparent that the ministry of the church could not be exercised by my father alone. A colleague was absolutely necessary. R. R. Williams, of whom mention has already been made, was succeeded in 1910 by A. J. Billings, who was responsible for the Men's Meeting and generally assisted in the ministry. When he went to Oxford in 1913 his place was taken by Walter S. Lord. He was a rare character. My father had few friends and was intimately drawn to very few people. But Walter Lord had a place in his mind and heart which no one else ever quite occupied. He was a quiet, gracious personality, shy and

modest to a degree. Although tall and strong in physique, he was gentle as a child. In the pulpit he was sound and scholarly. In his personal relationships he was the wisest of counsellors and the firmest of friends. He loved beauty; and flowers, particularly roses, were his passion. Such a Jonathan was just the man my father needed for the arduous years ahead. A text often quoted and much loved was Isaiah 32, 2.

> "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

So my father thought of his friend and colleague.

These were some of those who shared the burden of the war years with their tragedies and deferred hopes. Varied in gifts and temperaments, they were one in the unity of the Spirit.

Chapter Six

HOPE FULFILLED

THE end of the 1914-18 war was marked by great rejoicings throughout Dockland. The carnage was over and the boys were coming home; at least some were coming home. The houses were bedecked with flags. Doors were taken down to make improvised tables and each street vied with the next in giving the children a "Peace Tea" they would never forget.

There was a sombre note in all the celebrations. For many, the gaiety was forced and the heart wounds were sore. Nowhere was this felt more than in the Women's Meeting. All the same it was announced that there would be a "Peace Tea" in the Tabernacle on Monday afternoon December 9th, and Lady Lawley had promised to be present as guest of honour. A few days beforehand she telephoned to my mother to say that she could not be there as she had to go to France. Could anyone take her place? Jokingly my mother replied that only The Queen herself could mitigate the disappointment. "I am going to the Palace this afternoon. I'll ask her." My mother did not take this suggestion seriously. It never occurred to her that Queen Mary would come to a Women's Meeting in the East End of London.

On Monday morning, about 12 o'clock, there was a telephone call from Buckingham Palace. The Queen was coming. No one was to know before the meeting started. Imagine the consternation! No time to make any special arrangements and no experience in what was expected of those who received Royalty! The prayer was offered that God would undertake and overrule.

It was a dreary winter's afternoon. The streets were wet and the air damp and cold. But the crowd poured into the building and the women were squeezed into every available space. My mother made her announcement. The effect on the meeting was electric. It took a moment or two for the fact to sink in and then the applause was long and loud.

At 4.30 the signal was given that the car was approaching. The great concourse stood and welcomed their Royal Visitor with the singing of the National Anthem, followed by the waving of more than a thousand handkerchiefs and a storm of clapping. After my mother had voiced the welcome of the women and Madame Jessie Strathearn had sung, the announcement was made: "Now, my friends, lay your tables for tea." Queen Mary joined in the general laughter as handkerchiefs were spread and cups produced. A host of workers carried round the tea. The Queen drank a cup herself and looked at the array of lined and careworn faces. "What a lot of black!" she remarked. "How they must have suffered!" There was a deep bond of sympathy between the First Mother in the land and this great company who had passed with her through the crucible of war.

What deep chords were touched that afternoon cannot be known. The visit, however, marked the beginning of a gracious, sympathetic interest which has remained unaltered by the passing years. Queen Mary was to pay two subsequent visits to the Mission and the present Queen was to open Child Haven and visit Greenwoods; there were indeed to be many marks of royal patronage; but on that bleak December day, under the tragic shadow

of war, Queen Mary brought comfort and sympathy to many in their hour of sorrow and grief. Only in the impenetrable secrets of the heart is the effect to be measured. And God alone knows that.

The end of hostilities brought the renewal of the call to go forward, and plans long deferred were now within sight of realisation. Tenders were put out for the erection of the new church and, amid much rejoicing, the first sod was cut in March, 1921. The writer was only eight years of age at the time, but he was given a small spade and stood by his father's side on this memorable afternoon.

The advancing work however, could not wait on the new buildings. An army hut was erected on the adjoining ground to provide temporary facilities for youth, and my uncle E. O. Clifford, was invited to join the ministerial staff to develop the work amongst men and boys. He had served as an Army Chaplain in France and Russia and he was no mean athlete. Ideally fitted for this hour of opportunity, he stayed for nine years until the call came in 1929 to tackle the uphill task at Shoreditch Tabernacle. During these nine years he saw the steady advancement of this side of the Mission's enterprise.

The Women's Meeting continued on its triumphant way; but the girls were not to be outdone. As soon as the war ended a Girls' Meeting was started on Tuesday nights under the leadership of Miss Clifford. Over eight hundred joined and to this simple service they came week after week. The singing was led by a robed choir under the leadership of Madame Lawrence, who had taken over the music of the Mission during the war.

This choir, and the singing class which preceded it, carried off many prizes and established a very considerable reputation. But the spiritual note predominated in all these activities. On one Tuesday evening alone over seventy girls registered their decision to follow Christ.

Another new venture was undertaken at about the same time. One day a visitor called at the Hostel and asked to see my mother. He was a stranger and his story was a remarkable one. Hearing of the Mission, he had come to see for himself and had attended a service at the Tabernacle. Deeply impressed, he had wandered through the district to get some idea of the conditions in which the people were living. The sight of the children, without boots and stockings and badly undernourished, moved him profoundly. The street was their playground and they were surrounded with sights and sounds which were in grim contrast to the conditions under which boys and girls were meant to live. What an untold blessing it would be if some of them could go away to a home in the country where there would be healing of mind and spirit as well as of body! Surely it was possible to introduce some of them at least to a child's true heritage? These and other thoughts were in his mind when he came to Marnham House.

For many years the need of the children had been upon my mother's heart and she had longed to do something for them. But there was so much else to be done and the new building scheme was an enormous financial undertaking. There was no money to spare to bring this other dream to fruition. As the unknown visitor spoke of what he had seen, the light began to dawn.

"I will give you £4,500 to buy a Children's Home and to provide part of the running costs for the first five years. I make only one condition. My name must not be mentioned."

This was the gift and call of God. A Home at Tiptree in Essex was found with eight acres of ground—enough to provide camping sites for the growing youth organisations as well. Moreover, one of the deaconesses was a trained nurse, ready to take charge of the new venture. In the autumn of 1920 Sister Janet went to Child Haven and the first party of boys and girls arrived in November. Since then thousands of children have found healing at Tiptree and later at the larger homes in Hutton and Stock. Though many have gone down in ambulances, despaired of by medical science, not one child has died at Child Haven: surely a unique record. What is the explanation? The answer is provided in the words of a distinguished doctor.

> "Mrs. Clifford, I have a little girl of ten. Do you know what I would do if anything happened to her and our medical knowledge failed? I would send her to you. You have the one thing more."
>
> "Do you mean that we pray?"
>
> Very quietly came the answer, "Yes, I do."

Meanwhile work on the new church was going forward. The foundations were laid and the building was beginning to rise. By the summer of 1921 sufficient progress had been made for the stone-laying ceremony to take place. It was a broiling hot day. The scaffolding was decked with flags and bunting. Crowds assembled from far and near: through guards of honour of Scouts,

Boys' Brigade and Guides the visitors arrived. Mr. J. H. Silley, an old Plaistow resident and well-known business man, was in the Chair: Dr. J. C. Carlile, President of the Baptist Union, gave the address and Lady Lawley received the delegates of churches from all over the country who came to present gifts. A circle of stones round the building commemorated churches, individuals and organisations who contributed fifty pounds or more. The main stones were laid by my father and mother, Dame Clara Butt, Mrs. L. G. Angas, Mr. Herbert Marnham, Mr. Arthur Newton, Dr. J. H. Shakespeare, Mr. G. H. Leavey and the Rev. W. S. Lord.

It was estimated that £30,000 was still required. Imagine the enthusiasm when a cable arrived from Australasia telling of £6,000 on the way! Behind this wonderful gift lies the story of an adventure of two daring women—so they were described by a New Zealand newspaper.

Realising that the large sum needed was not going to be forthcoming by ordinary appeals, Sister Kathleen and Madame Jessie Strathearn offered to go to Australia and New Zealand to plead the cause. They knew no one there. The way was not prepared. But they went forth into the unknown. Madame Strathearn had sung to thousands of boys in France behind the lines, among them many from the Commonwealth. She now sang her way into the hearts of their fathers and mothers, their families and friends on the other side of the world. She sang and Sister Kathleen told the story. People responded, and Australia and New Zealand put the roof on the Memorial Church—a memorial to those of many lands who had laid down their lives in the war. The

stone commemorating this generous help was cemented into its place by Walter Lord.

Another £20,000 was still required. The crowds departed with the challenge ringing in their ears. As the scaffolding went up, money from all over the country continued to arrive, keeping pace with the work.

Even those who were familiar with the plans scarcely visualised the gigantic structure that was beginning to tower over the small houses of West Ham. Nothing like it had been erected before in that part of London. Every morning Walter Lord went on to the scaffolding and offered prayer for the men at work; and no accident marred the progress of the building.

A year later the church was near completion. The architect, Mr. Hayne, had designed a fine Byzantine structure with two towers, surmounted by white domes. Within, he relied on simplicity of form and line; only the Byzantine design of circle and cross relieved the austere beauty of the conception. It was to be a Free Church Cathedral for East London.

September 21st, 1922, was the day fixed for the Opening Ceremony. It was to be performed by Mrs. James Edmondson, whose friendship and magnificent help had supported my father and mother through many dark days. On this memorable occasion she presented a cheque for £5,000 in memory of her own two boys killed in the war. With other gifts the amount required by the end of the day was only £3,500. Imagine the rejoicing.

Tremendous crowds assembled, far more than could be accommodated inside the church. They had come from all corners of the British Isles. The veteran Baptist

leader, John Clifford, had promised to preach the sermon, but a few days beforehand his frail health failed him and Dr. Charles Brown took his place, preaching from the text he had chosen: "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Although he was not well enough to preach, Dr. Clifford was able to be present and offered the Dedicatory Prayer.

The church was packed again for the evening meeting, presided over by Mr. Herbert Marnham, and Dr. F. W. Norwood of the City Temple gave the address. Writing of the events of the day Nicholas Notewell reported in *The Baptist Times*: "I went away rejoicing that the dream, put into words in the Town Hall years ago by Sister Hettie, had been realised—the dream of a great cathedral church towering above the mean streets of West Ham, witnessing to the love of God, and welcoming, as to a house of beauty and peace, burdened and weary hearts."

Not only was the new church opened that day. Earlier in the afternoon Mrs. L. G. Angas had declared open the institute for men which bears her name. From the early days of my father's and mother's ministry she had stood beside them and given not only of her wealth, but of her service out of a loving and generous heart. What she gave in money alone could never be computed, and the Angas Institute was by no means the first or the last of her munificent gifts.

Every need in West Ham made a claim upon her, but from the days of the Dock Strike in 1905, the men had the first place in her concern. A club had been started at "The Old Tabernacle" in the early days, which had later been moved to two disused shops

adjoining the settlement. Its purpose was not just to provide recreation. Billiards and draughts are not of themselves the business of the Christian Church. It was designed, as a contrast to the public house, to express the Christian fellowship. There, around the billiard tables, men might discover what the Body of Christ really is, and find their way to Him. But the accommodation in the two shops was wholly inadequate.

Near to the site of the new Church was a spacious building used by the Society of the Divine Compassion as a printing-press. This was one of the several trades in which the devoted brotherhood of Anglo-Catholics expressed their life. The time came when this aspect of their activity had to be curtailed and the building was for sale. With its two large halls and smaller rooms it was ideal for a men's centre. Mrs. Angas purchased it, and Mr. Leavey, a local Christian business man and generous friend, helped with the equipment. There it was, ready for opening on the same day as the church. So the two aspects of the Christian community—worship and fellowship—stood expressed side by side.

To return to the church itself. The opening ceremonies were not over. After the first Sunday, on which Dr. W. E. Blomfield, Principal of Rawdon College, preached to crowded congregations, the women had their own opening day. The whole district was stirred by the events of that Monday afternoon, and it provided a fitting climax to a great week.

The members of the Women's Meeting assembled in the streets adjoining "The Old Tabernacle," while many friends from afar were welcomed into the building itself. When all was ready the band of the Poplar and

Bromley Tabernacle, with the autumn sunshine glancing on their brass instruments, led the huge procession of 2,000 women, with flags and banners waving, up the Barking Road. Crowds lined the route. Mother was moving house. Never had West Ham seen anything like it. At the doors of the new church stood Dame Clara Butt, Annie S. Swan, Mrs. Herbert Marnham and Mrs. Leete to bid them welcome. The crowd packed the building and many were forced to stand. Clara Butt sang and Annie Swan spoke. But the greatest moments of the afternoon were reserved for my mother.

After welcoming the women to their new home, she told them she had an announcement to make which they must stand to hear. There was a message from the Queen.

> "The Queen congratulates Mr. and Mrs. Rowntree Clifford, and all their fellow-workers, on the wonderful success that has attended their building enterprise; Her Majesty thinks this great effort has already been rewarded by the practical freedom from debt, and hopes the Memorial Church will prove a comfort and a blessing."

But that was not all. Dame Clara Butt had promised to give the organ!

What grateful hearts there were that night! Many could say from their hearts: "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad." My father and mother joined in the general rejoicing. The fulfilment of dreams and hopes long deferred had been realised. But the great task still lay ahead. There was a district to be won for Christ.

Chapter Seven

EXPANSION

THE new buildings provided the means whereby the ministry of the Mission could be rapidly expanded. Great crowds thronged the church on Sundays, and on Monday afternoons the capacity of the new home was taxed to the utmost. Extra chairs had to be used, and on many occasions camp stools covered every spare foot of floor space.

Walter Lord had promised my father and mother that he would stay until the building scheme was complete and then he planned to retire to the country. His retirement, however, meant no lessening of his interest, nor indeed of the contribution he made. He agreed to serve as Honorary Financial Secretary, and in that capacity he remained as a trusted counsellor and friend until the day of his death, twelve years later. He travelled up to Barking Road from his home in the country several days a week and gave the most careful and wise supervision to the finances. My father and mother could always rely upon him as upon a great rock. After all there is no retirement in the service of Christ.

He was succeeded by Grenville Hutchison, an old Regent's Park College man, and friend of the years. His father was the founder and first editor of the *Boys' Own Paper* and, from his earliest days, he had grown up amongst lovers of children. Hutchison and his wife

came to take charge of the work amongst boys and girls. The idea was to turn "The Old Tabernacle" into a Children's Church, and they were the ideal couple to embark on such an experiment. A church for "under-fifteens," all to themselves: this was a new approach in days when the Sunday School Movement was beginning to lose ground. So, with new helpers and high hopes a period of remarkable expansion began.

At first the services in the Memorial Church were led to the accompaniment of a grand piano, but, as has been stated already, an organ had been promised by Dame Clara Butt. A series of concerts and recitals were given in London to which many notable artistes made a generous contribution. Dame Clara could, of course, command the support of the whole musical world, and she was at the height of her own personal popularity. The amount was soon subscribed and by the summer of 1924 the organ had been built and installed. On July 16th this wonderful and generous friend declared the new instrument open "to lead the prayers and praises of God's people in this holy place." She sang to its accompaniment Handel's *Largo*, and the great crowd listened enthralled. Then W. H. Squire set all hearts to music as he played his 'cello.

That was not all. Dame Clara Butt and Kennerly Rumford stood side by side and sang *The Keys of Heaven*, in which they expressed the most intimate of ties that bound them to each other. No one could help feeling that the love they bore each other was grounded in the love of heaven. How else could it have been delivered from selfishness and have overflowed into the lives of such multitudes of people? But somehow this

great-hearted pair were moved and stirred by the people in West Ham as nowhere else. "My thoughts often go out to you all," wrote Dame Clara to my mother, "and I shall be happy when I can come and sing to those upturned faces again."

When Dame Clara died and the musical world thronged All Souls, Langham Place, to mourn her loss, it was my father who was asked to deliver the Memorial Address and a contingent of our Scouts, to whom she gave her name, formed the guard of honour. She and her husband will ever remain enshrined in the hearts of countless people, but in Barking Road they came to be loved and honoured as nowhere else.

On the day the organ was opened the church was declared free of debt. What an achievement! A beautiful sanctuary and an organ built for the greatest singer in the land—the gift of an unnumbered company, rich and poor, known and unknown; and through them the gift of God.

One thing was left to be done. The two towers were empty. If only there could be a peal of chiming bells, to play the old hymn tunes and tell out the Gospel to the whole neighbourhood! Surely this would be the most fitting memorial of all to the men who had fallen in the war. There was an immediate response to the idea. Cards were issued with detachable coupons on which the picture of a bell was reproduced. Like the paper bricks which were sold when the church was being built, the "bells" represented 1d., 3d., 6d., and 1s. In addition to this West Ham effort, friends of the Mission in many quarters subscribed, and by March, 1925 a peal of ten bells had been cast and hung.

Each bell was inscribed with the names of the men from the Church and Congregation who had fallen in the war. One bore the name of Prince Maurice, the only member of the Royal House killed in action; another the name of Hugh Marnham, son of the Chairman of the Building Fund, and Cyril and Percy Edmondson, the two sons of the opener of the church. It was Mrs. Edmondson who unveiled the tablet, declaring in her own inimitable way:

> "At the going down of the sun and in the morning
> We will remember them."

The bells answered by ringing out the hymn:

> "For ever with the Lord.
> Amen. So let it be."

In the days to come they were to summon many to the House of Prayer at the hour of worship and wing a message of comfort and hope to troubled souls in dark and difficult times.

As the reader carries his mind back over the story as it has so far unfolded, he will realise that the church in Barking Road had become for many people "home" from the cradle to the grave. This was true if it was only possible for them to get there for a service once a week: it was no less "home" for those who, confined to tiny rooms, heard the sound of the bells and looked forward to the next visitor from "The Tab." However, the failure of the dwellings, in which large numbers had to live, to be homes in any true sense, weighed heavily on the hearts of my father and mother and their colleagues. Child Haven, full to overflowing, was not big enough. Again and again "No room" was the

answer. Then, too, the plight of lonely old people, unwanted and uncared for, was a perpetual challenge.

One day my mother received a letter. The writer was a complete stranger, but she said that she had read in a leading religious journal something my mother had written about the need of old people; she wanted to help. The unknown lady was invited to come and see for herself. When she arrived, my mother was somewhat taken aback. Instead of a woman in late or middle life, someone who looked little more than a girl introduced herself. Dressed with extreme simplicity, she was slender in build and shy to a degree. Her face was a sad one, though the eyes quickly lit up in response to a kindly word, and a happy smile seemed just hidden out of sight. She looked rather like a frightened child. Speaking with the greatest diffidence and reserve she told her story. Her mother had died when she was very young and she had been brought up strictly by two elderly aunts, often living with them in residential hotels. It had been difficult to make any friends, and now that she was living by herself in Kensington she was very lonely and life held little joy for her. Her aunts were Congregationalists and she knew scarcely anything of Baptist life and nothing at all of West Ham. Having read my mother's article, she had resolved to do something for the lonely and the aged in memory of her own mother. How much would it cost to make a home for old ladies?

"Oh, that would cost nearly £3,000," was the reply.

"I should like to give it."

That was how Hilda Swift was introduced to the work at Barking Road. For more than fifteen years,

until her death at the early age of fifty, she gave unstintingly, not only of her wealth but of her personal service too. In fact she found all her interest centring in West Ham. It became her life. Ultimately she was baptized and received into church membership by my father. And so the narrow horizons of her earlier years were enlarged, and in the Christian community at West Ham she found her joy and peace.

Soon after that first meeting Miss Swift moved to a house near-by and became my mother's devoted companion and friend. Unfitted by temperament for public life, she was able to make bearable the ever-growing burden of responsibility my mother had to carry. Her car was available at any hour, for any distance. If there was clerical work to be done, she was ready to do it. How meticulously the attendance registers of the Women's Meeting were kept and how many tired and care-worn mothers found her ready to welcome them when they came to her room at the back of the church!

To return to the home for old people: my mother had a site and a plan. Adjoining Marnham House Settlement were two disused shops in which the men had carried on their club until the Angas Institute became available. These could surely be adapted in the same way as the other shops and cottages when they had been transformed into a home for the Mission staff. The earlier experiment of housing old people in rent-free rooms has already been mentioned. Valuable as this was, it had suffered from a serious defect. There was no resident matron, no home life, no real shouldering of responsibility when "granny" became too frail to fend for herself. In the new home there was to be a

communal dining-room, a lounge with easy chairs and large open fireplace and a separate bedroom for each resident. Everyone was to have a private locker and facilities for doing their washing, and to create a family atmosphere was to be the aim.

What was the house to be called? After discarding many names, "Rest-a-While" was chosen; for here, aged pilgrims were to rest a brief period after a hard piece of the road before taking their journey into the land beyond. And so earth became heaven's ante-room and Rest-a-While the introduction to those things which the heart of man cannot conceive.

The alterations were completed by June 1925 and on a lovely summer's afternoon Miss Swift opened the house. A bouquet of flowers was presented by the oldest inhabitant of the homes further along the road, who was to become the granny of the new family. She often spoke of the day when "me and Miss Swift opened Rest-a-While." A helper of earlier days returned to mother the household. Miss Duncan had a double training, as a nurse and as a Baptist deaconess. A Scot, with a large heart and a deep love for her Lord, she ministered with tenderness for many years to "her old dears," as she called them and, with the help and advice of Dr. Margaret Thomson, a deacon of the church and honorary medical officer, she succoured many an aged servant of God in her hour of weakness. As grey heads bowed for family prayers around the dying embers, the words "Our Father which art in Heaven . . . " were repeated with the intimacy of perfect trust. "At eventide there shall be light."

From old age to childhood. The coming of Grenville

The Children's Church

Hutchison and his wife had brought within sight the goal of a Children's Church. The beloved Tabernacle was no longer needed for Sunday services, but it was too sacred a building to be discarded, and the needs of boys and girls were an ever-recurring challenge. To adapt the old place for new purposes would require time and a large expenditure of money. In the meanwhile there was no reason why the venture should not begin.

And so a Sunday morning service was started for those under fifteen years of age. It was designed for them and they were to take a full share in it. The first " deacons " were appointed. Stewards were given charge of rows of children and a choir was formed. While their seniors worshipped in the new temple higher up the road, the old Tabernacle renewed its youth.

Nevertheless, it was a clumsy tool. Radical alterations would make it much more serviceable. The underground schoolroom was the starting-point. Pillars were removed to give open floor space and large iron girders took their place, bearing the weight of the structure above. (What a boon this was to prove during the dark days of the ' Blitzkrieg " when this hall became an underground refuge for hundreds of people in their hour of peril!) This was the Hall of Play.

The pews were removed from the area of the chapel; a floor spanned the circle of the gallery, with the pews remaining to form a kind of Quaker Meeting House; the organ stayed where it was and a platform at the same level provided a place for the pulpit, communion table and chairs. In this way two more halls were added, one for work and the other for worship. The rooms behind offered facilities for kitchen, library, nursery, classrooms

and so on. As boys or girls climbed the stairs, they climbed higher in aspiration: play, work and worship.

Today the Children's Church has its own minister. A board of deacons, six boys and six girls, are elected by everyone over eleven at the beginning of the year. Twenty servers, girls and boys, give up their Saturday mornings to clean part of "their church." A blue-robed choir of forty voices leads the singing. A girl presides at the organ. The link with the parent church is maintained by a youth service on the first Sunday morning of the month when everyone over eleven joins in the service at the main church, and the Primary, who have their own service in the Hall of Work on other Sundays, join their bigger brothers and sisters in the chapel above.

The building is open throughout the week. A library with over one thousand children's books provides a quiet room; there is a room where games can be played under the eye of a kindly mother or older sister; lemonade and buns may be bought at the canteen and the lower halls echo with hammer and chisel as work goes on to make toys to help children overseas, or resound with singing voices or marching feet.

The Children's Church was opened by Mrs. Angas in June, 1926. As the crowd stood on the steps outside waiting to enter, the sign, painted by the famous artist Harold Copping, was unveiled by Mrs. John Smith, another old and generous friend of the Mission. Two pictures placed back to back, set forth in the most graphic way the message of Christ to the boys and girls of the district. One of them depicts Jesus surrounded by a group of West Ham children: the newspaper boy,

the girl with her shopping bag, and the orphan boy, while the little lost child nestles in the arms of the Saviour who will carry her safe home; for "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." The other picture faces the Docks, portraying Jesus with His arms outstretched in welcome and the masts of ships and factory chimneys in the background. "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not." This, then, is the Children's Church, the spiritual home of those who are beginning to awaken to the claims of Jesus in the days of their youth.

One new venture led to another. The expansion of the children's work at West Ham made clearer than ever the fact that the home at Tiptree was inadequate to the need. It was too small and too isolated. In the winter, lighting by oil-lamps was difficult and dangerous, while the water supply left everything to be desired. The strain imposed on a small staff was far too great. Miss Swift drove my father and mother to see one house after another. The search seemed endless, until one day they discovered "The Burses" at Hutton.

It was a lovely old place standing in eight acres of ground, with well-planned gardens. My mother soon saw how it could be adapted for the purpose in view. The main hall would become the chapel, with tiny chairs, a small pipe organ and blue carpets and curtains. Worship must be at the centre of the new home. The billiard-room with its large windows overlooking the main lawn would make a lovely nursery. A dining-room, kitchen and staff-rooms completed the downstairs appointments. Upstairs there were three wings; one should be the flower wing, each room decorated with the

same flower pattern on friezes and furniture; another should be the bird wing; the third should depict well-known nursery-rhymes. What was to be done with the large stable-block? The horse boxes were removed and a wooden floor took the place of the stone paving. Here was an ideal open air play-room with brightly coloured walls and paintings of ships and animals to delight the eyes of a child. At one end was the gardener's cottage and at the other a well-equipped laundry, so necessary to such a large household. The courtyard in front was covered in by a vita glass roof, so that the children could have the maximum sunshine and light when they had to be under cover. In hot weather the little stretcher beds were laid out side by side and it was possible for everyone to sleep in the open air. Opposite the stables a sand pit and playground were constructed. Here was a child's paradise, and fittingly, the bluebird of happiness became the Child Haven symbol.

After builders, plumbers and decorators had finished their work and numerous shopping expeditions had been made, the home was ready for occupation. Who was to open it? There was one young mother who had won her way into the hearts of the whole nation. Would Her Royal Highness The Duchess of York perform the ceremony? Graciously she consented to do so and on May 10th, 1928, the eagerly awaited day arrived.

The Royal Family always goes the extra mile. It would not have been possible to find room for many of the Mission's large family in the marquee at Child Haven and there would have been much disappointment in West Ham among those who were unable to see the Duchess of York. Generously Her Royal Highness

promised to visit the Mission premises on the way. Great crowds greeted her arrival at the Children's Church and the Memorial Church was thronged with the members of the Women's Meeting. After inspecting the Angas Institute and Marnham House Settlement, The Duchess of York left for Hutton.

Arriving through a guard of honour, Her Royal Highness was welcomed by the Lord Lieutenant of Essex and many distinguished visitors. Then came the moving moment when Bertie Window, supported on crutches, presented the gold key. Bertie had gone to Tiptree with a diseased hip. All his brothers and sisters had died, and the doctors said that this little lad would never walk again. But no child was given up as hopeless by those who served in the name and by the power of the Physician of Galilee. Nor was any limit placed upon the stay of a boy or a girl other than their need. Bertie had been at the old Child Haven for over two years and a miracle had taken place. He had learned to ride a bicycle and now, on his own feet, he walked towards the Duchess of York and presented the key which was to open the new and larger home of healing, a home for saving child life. After this visit Her Royal Highness promised her patronage to Child Haven and the work continued to flourish under this gracious aegis.

We return at the end of this chapter to the mothers. "Win the mother for Christ and you have captured the citadel of the home. She brings her man and the children." How often have I heard these words repeated in our family circle! In very truth the Women's Meeting had become the centre of the Mission's life. After the anniversary on the last Monday in February, the books

were closed and everyone had to rejoin for another year. In this way the membership was always a live one. Monday after Monday the church was crowded with a vast concourse of women who came to lay their burdens at the feet of the Saviour and find forgiveness and peace.

" What do you get out of that meeting? " one woman was asked.

" What I come to find," was the reply.

And what had she found? Complete deliverance from a life of degradation in sin. She, who had described herself on one occasion as the worst woman in West Ham, had become beautiful with the beauty that is only to be found in Christ.

In 1927 the meeting had reached a new peak in membership. That year 2,485 had joined. Almost every street in West Ham was represented, and what was said on Monday afternoons influenced the thought and life of the whole neighbourhood. The women always looked forward to the notices and announcements, so frequently a dreary interlude in church services. My mother always delivered these herself and spent anything up to twenty-five minutes on them. They were not just ordinary announcements. A running commentary was given on all that was happening in the church and the district, and with pungent force the Gospel was related to the topics of the hour. It was always impromptu, but the touch was so very sure. One moment the crowd was roaring with laughter at some homely allusion to " the old man "; the next, the laughter would turn to tears, as a wave of sympathy went through the church when mention was made of some tragedy or misfortune that had befallen one of the members. The murmurs of

THE VISIT OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN MARY IN 1930

agreement and the eagerly expectant faces showed not only the deep understanding of the leader, but the wonderful love she has always had for "her women."

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Meeting—the silver wedding—was approaching. How could it best be celebrated? The thought crossed my mother's mind that Her Majesty Queen Mary might be willing to come and crown the birthday rejoicings with her presence. The Queen readily consented to do so.

Over eleven years had passed since that wet December afternoon when the Royal visitor had joined in "The Peace Tea" at "The Old Tabernacle." The visit then had been unexpected and there had been no time to make any preparations. This was to be an official occasion and anticipation lent colour to the event. A programme, printed in silver on pink cards and embossed with wedding bells, was given to every guest. As the writer scans it again it brings back vividly the scenes of that memorable day in the Mission's history.

When the car drew up at the gates of the Children's Church, Her Majesty was received by the superintendents of the Mission and members of the staff. After passing through a children's guard of honour, The Queen visited the three halls representing worship, work and play. The first was crowded with boys and girls who sang as Her Majesty walked through their midst. In the middle hall the nursery school was assembled, with their percussion band, and a baby pupil presented a nosegay of flowers. Below, one of five birthday teas given by Mr. and Mrs. James Edmondson, was in progress. From Monday to Friday in groups of several hundred at a time the members of the meeting were fêted. It was

a great thrill to have The Queen of England as principal guest on the day of the Anniversary itself.

The Memorial Church was crowded to the very doors. Gipsy Smith was the speaker, and Ben Davies the soloist on this day of days. The Queen entered down the middle aisle through a guard of honour of crèche workers, seat stewards and registrars. Each held a silver rod decorated with pink flowers, with which they formed an archway. Her Majesty was deeply touched by the wealth of affection shown to her that afternoon, not least by the spontaneous words of one mother who exclaimed as she passed, " God bless you, Queen."

The Girls' Club, the Angas Institute and Rest-a-While were all inspected, and then tea was served in Marnham House Settlement. To the pealing of the bells and the cheers of the crowds The Queen drove away. It had been a great and colourful occasion. To many whose lives were set in drab surroundings it was a thrilling experience. New doors were opened to the mind and heart. God did not mean life to be joyless and dreary. This day was a parable in pageantry and ceremonial.

Chapter Eight

NEW ACHIEVEMENTS

A DETERMINING principle, always in the minds of my father and mother, was that the Gospel must be presented in terms of beauty. West Ham was an ugly place. Some of that ugliness was inevitable, given an industrial district in the heart of Dockland: some of it was avoidable; and it hid the glory of God from the eyes of men. The parody on the words of the eighth Psalm is called to mind: "When I consider thy slums, the works of thy fingers, the filth and the dirt which thou hast ordained, what is God that thou shouldst be mindful of Him?"

Christians have not always been alive to the significance of the beautiful. This has been particularly true of the Free Churches in down-town industrial districts. Many Nonconformist chapels erected in the last century were uninspired in their architecture; and the conception of a Mission is still to a large extent dominated by the idea of a hall with a corrugated iron roof. Utility has too often been the ruling principle: what a building looks like does not matter so long as it is serviceable. This was the kind of outlook against which my mother and father resolutely set themselves. In a neighbourhood where ugliness and uniformity prevailed, men and women must be allowed to glimpse the glory of God. Those who sought to preach Christ must point to a beauty that is a reflection, or rather an earnest (to use the New Testament word), of the unsurpassed wonders of heaven.

One day my mother was travelling by bus along the main road from the city. She was tired and somewhat despondent. The ugliness and dirt of the neighbourhood she loved weighed heavily upon her. What a contrast to the green fields and fresh countryside of her childhood's home. There were so few open spaces and the street was such a dangerous playground. As the bus rattled on its way she closed her eyes. Then a voice said: "Make a garden." A garden: an oasis of flowers and trees in the heart of the Mission. "The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." Yes, surely there was new significance in the familiar words. "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Had not it been said?

> "You are nearer God's heart in a garden
> Than anywhere else on earth."

These and other thoughts were running through my mother's mind as the bus drew near to Barking Road.

The idea was not altogether a new one. From the early days of Holly House there had been a garden surrounding the Settlement. After the end of the first world war a gifted doctor from Scotland had stayed at Marnham House and experimented with soils and plants, testing what would grow and the way in which the earth could be protected and purified from the chemicals in the air. It was a difficult thing to make a garden in such a neighbourhood. Patient research had its reward and a small piece of barren land had been made to blossom.

My mother had a plan. Adjoining the Angas Institute was a metal yard, stacked with old iron and junk of all kinds. You could find almost any part of a broken-up

car somewhere in the yard. The lease of the property had expired and the yard was ours. If only it could be turned into a garden what an oasis of beauty there might be. Scripture would be fulfilled! The desert would "rejoice and blossom as the rose." My mother had many gardening friends, among them Dr. and Mrs. Inglis Clark of Edinburgh, who possessed one of the famed gardens of Scotland at Rosslyn Castle. My parents had met the doctor and his wife in Egypt some eight years before. They were distinguished travellers who had journeyed all over the world and collected many valuable plants from the places they had visited. Their country house was on the brink of a deep ravine. This offered rare facilities for garden lovers to exercise skill and give rein to their passionate love of beauty. Four and a half miles of crazy paths, all named after loved ones and friends, with seats and shelters to catch the best views, produced a garden which must have been almost unique. How my mother dreamed of something of this beauty and sanctified imagination transferred to the drab surroundings of West Ham. She talked with her friends and the dream took shape.

However, money was the problem. One day my mother read in the newspaper that a Cabinet Minister had asserted that there was money enough in the country to provide recreational facilities for people in industrial districts, if only ideas and open spaces were forthcoming. She promptly wrote to him, saying she had an idea and an open space but no money! Could he grant her an interview? The Cabinet Minister was George Lansbury. A letter came inviting her to see him.

When my mother called at his house in Bow, this

grand old man of the East End received her with sympathy and obvious interest.

"I should like to help you, but I have no money. Mine was a general remark which the press reported. But I have a friend who might be interested and I'll mention your scheme to him. Perhaps I could bring him down one day. I don't promise anything, but I'll see."

My mother left the house confident she would not be disappointed; yet there was no fund available and she had been given little hope. Amid George Lansbury's many public duties would the interview be shelved and then forgotten? Would the dream remain a dream?

A few weeks later a message came that two gentlemen were at the door of the Settlement. There was George Lansbury with a complete stranger. His dress and general appearance revealed nothing. When the garden was mentioned, the thought flashed across my mother's mind that perhaps he was to have the job of making it!

George Lansbury asked that the scheme should be explained. Plans were produced and then they went out to look at the metal yard.

"Do you really mean to say that you could make a garden out of this?" asked the stranger.

"I do. I'm sure it can be done."

"How much would it cost?"

"At least £1,500," my mother replied.

"You won't do it for that. Two thousand pounds will be placed to your credit at the bank within the next day or two, and I will give you the services of a landscape gardener as well. I make only one condition. My name must never be mentioned. I am of another

faith than yours. I'm a Jew. But what you are doing appeals to me and I should like to help."

A second wonderful gift by a man whose name was not to be mentioned: first Child Haven; and then the garden!

The work was put in hand at once but the difficulties were tremendous. The contractor dug down three feet without coming to anything but rubbish, and finally every spadeful of soil had to be carted to the site. Tons of fresh earth covered the waste ground; paths were made; beds were cut; lawns were laid and shelters erected. Dr. Inglis Clark sent priceless shrubs from his garden in Scotland and many friends contributed flowers and bulbs.

My mother wrote to Queen Mary and asked whether the garden might be named after Her. Her Majesty graciously consented and gave a seat for one of the shelters. So The Queen's Garden came into being. Wrought iron gates, surmounted by a crown and bearing the emblem of a boy and girl at play guarded the main entrance. Would The Queen open this new sanctuary herself? Unfortunately she was unable to do so, but Princess Mary graciously promised to come. By May, 1931, all was ready and amid great rejoicing the Princess arived. "Mother has told me so much about this place," she said. "I'm so glad to be here."

Although Queen Mary herself could not be present at the opening, much evidence of her interest was to follow. For some years a consignment of plants came from Sandringham and, on one occasion, deck chairs for the old people to use. Such sustained and understanding interest confirmed my mother and father in the way

they were taking, as well as giving confidence to many would-be helpers.

The Queen's Garden provided an ideal open-air setting for the Nursery School. Retaining its old headquarters at the Children's Church during the winter, as soon as the warmer weather came the school moved up to the new playground. At one end a kitchen had been constructed which allowed meals to be served outdoors in the middle of the day, while large sun blinds provided shade for the little stretcher beds on which the children rested in the afternoon. The wide paths were ideal for pushing carts and all kinds of toys on wheels, and they were named for the benefit of the little ones, Daddy's Way, Mummy's Way, and so on. Thus the experiment begun in the grounds of Holly House was continued in a larger and more beautiful setting. Here was a modern nursery school, staffed by trained teachers, pioneering under ideal conditions in the name of the Christian Church.

Further possibilities were suggested by the new garden. The trees shed their leaves in the autumn and the flowers wither and die. Must the garden remain bleak, even when hearts are glad at Christmas time?

Each year the members of the Women's Meeting received a small Christmas present to help them supplement what would otherwise have been their meagre fare. The children too had their party with toys supplied by generous friends from many parts. Why not turn The Queen's Garden into Fairyland and bring home the message of goodwill in a setting which would never be forgotten?

The idea was received with enthusiasm and a host

of ready helpers set to work. Fairy lights were slung from the flagmast over the centre shelter to each corner of the garden. A chimney was built on the flat roof of the same shelter and an effigy of Father Christmas was seen climbing out of it, his sack laden and balloons flying in the wind. The shelters became treasure-caves, gaily decorated with red and green, cotton wool and tinsel. How the women loved it as they came throughout the day for their presents! In the evening, under a full moon and twinkling fairy lights, the children crowded the pathways singing Christmas carols. "And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." So spoke the prophet.

Meanwhile the second Child Haven was proving an untold blessing, no less than its smaller predecessor. The need was greater than ever, but funds were the problem: they were not sufficient to meet increasing expenditure despite a Wireless Appeal which secured the interest of many new friends. To establish the cause amongst existing subscribers and to widen the appeal it was decided to hold a Foundation Day each summer.

The guests of honour at the first in 1930 were Dame Clara Butt and her husband. It was their wedding anniversary and they celebrated it amongst the children. A small boy in a sailor suit, with round cheeky face and deep husky voice presented a button hole to Kennerly Rumford and bowed solemnly from the waist. Dame Clara turned to her husband: "My dear, you have never before had a rival, but you have one now, and there he is!" What a miracle Norman was! Legs straightened, chest healed, his tonsils and adenoids gone, and his little body, with which everything seemed to be

wrong, made as perfect as possible. Such was the ministry of Child Haven evidenced that day.

Still more help was needed. How could people be made to see and how could sympathetic hearts be touched to respond? Perhaps the Royal Patron would lend her support and revisit the house she had opened. And so on June 2nd, 1932, The Duchess of York came to receive purses on Foundation Day. The response was immediate and generous. Two thousand pounds was specially subscribed and on the lawn a procession of children and grown-up people filed before Her Royal Highness and placed their gifts in a tiny cot. The maintenance of the work was assured.

Nevertheless nothing stands still; certainly not in the kind of venture we are describing. Fresh needs were ever pressing on my mother and father. For a long time the plight of motherhood in West Ham had been a burden on the heart. Maternity services were not very far advanced, and in spite of increasing facilities for pre-natal care, post-natal work largely had to go by default. If only there was a place where mothers could take their babies as soon as they were out of hospital! It would make such a difference if they were able to rest in quiet and peaceful surroundings instead of being plunged into the uphill work of running a home and looking after the new baby before they were well enough to undertake domestic duties. Moreover, most of them needed help and advice.

My mother spoke of the need to two child lovers. Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Clegg of Leeds had given the nursery at Child Haven and were among the most generous supporters of the Home. The building of a wing for

mothers and babies captured their imagination and they promised to provide all that was required. The greenhouses were removed and the new wing erected at right angles to the house. A spacious nursery at one end, with windows on three sides and a covered verandah for prams, opened on to a passage leading to attractive rooms for the mothers. The nursery was fitted with the latest cots and appliances, while the bedrooms and sitting-room were decorated in pretty pastel shades with windows overlooking the lawns and flower beds. Upstairs was accommodation for a day and night nurse, and a tiny chapel. At either end a flat roof offered a quiet spot where mothers could lie in a hammock or sit on deck chairs and look over the whole garden. In all there was room for six mothers and babies at a time.

The work was completed by the early summer of 1935. Greatly to the delight of everyone, The Duchess of York consented to pay another visit to inspect the Home and open the new wing. A key was designed of exquisite craftsmanship in chased gold with an enamelled Madonna and Child. Over the mantelpiece in the nursery was a specially carved plaque on the same theme with the words "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," which The Duchess of York unveiled. No one could mistake the inspiration of this extension to Child Haven. The Lord of heaven and earth had been cradled in a mother's arms and welcomed with love and tenderness. Such was the high calling of motherhood. "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me."

These fresh achievements meant that an ever-

increasing number of people had become interested in the Mission and realized the value and significance of what had been achieved. This was recognised within Baptist circles by the nomination of my father for the Vice-Presidency of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1932. He was not easily persuaded that his name should be allowed to go forward; for although he was a staunch Baptist and had always taken a full part in denominational life he felt the heavy pressure of his responsibilities at West Ham. Only by intense concentration had he been able to lead his people forward, and a roving commission was not really compatible with his own deepest inclinations. However, the call was an insistent one and he accepted. To the great delight of his friends, on this first and only occasion on which he stood for this office, he was elected. I was standing by the door in the gallery of the City Temple when the result of the ballot was made known and I vividly remember the acclamation with which the announcement was received. Running out to a telephone box, I sent the news back to West Ham. Many joined in the congratulations of that day, which marked the tribute of the whole Denomination; and none were more thrilled than the people at Barking Road, who shared the honour with him and on whose love and loyalty he had so constantly depended.

He was installed as President the following year in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow and the address he gave on that occasion was typical of his thought and life. The title was *Christ's Challenge to His Church*: an impassioned plea for a larger conception of the function of the Church. Only through an evangelizing fellow-

ship, he said, could the needs of men be met and social evils tackled at the root. He laid special emphasis on the ministry of women; a balanced partnership alone could present the Gospel in such a way as to meet the many-sided problems which men and women had to face together.

These profound convictions on which he had based his whole ministry were the ever recurring theme of his addresses to churches and associations throughout his presidential year.

During the decade which preceded the second world war many helpers came and went. In 1929 a young student from Regent's Park College joined the staff for work amongst boys. W. F. Bodey had no conventional ideas about a minister's life and the freshness of his approach made an immediate appeal to my father and mother. With a wide experience of scouting he had a natural understanding of the average boy's sense of the artificiality of much church life. Christians were often so pious: they talked the wrong language. These were the boys that Bodey set out to win, and he had a special place for the odd man out—the misfit in society.

His car was a joke. *The Rocket* covered the ground but you always had the feeling it might collapse in pieces at any moment. This impression was confirmed when you saw a struggling pile of young humanity hanging on to every part of this baby Austin on their way to camp. How could a car hope to stand up to such heavy usage!

The mid-week service was closing one evening when a woman dressed in black with a shawl over her head asked to see my father.

"I'm a deputation from our street. I've come to thank you for what the young minister did this afternoon."

My father asked her what had happened.

"Well, sir, your young minister came to bury a lad who'd been killed in an accident in the docks. When he found there was not enough room in the carriages for all of us who wanted to go to the cemetery, he filled his car and took us there. That's a bit of real Christianity, sir."

Three years after Bodey came, he married Gladys Wilson, the headmistress of the Nursery School, much to the disappointment of many of the scouts, who looked upon him as the ideal bachelor! But the partnership was to open new doors of service, and who can tell what was accomplished in the lives of hundreds of children and mothers during the grim war years when the Bodeys took over together the superintendency of Child Haven!

During these years there was loss as well as gain. In the summer of 1934 Walter Lord had a stroke and died within a few days. This was possibly the deepest personal sorrow that ever came into my father's life. The preceding pages have shown how he loved Lord, and how he had come to depend upon him. It was as if a foundation stone of the Mission had suddenly been removed. My father wrote of him: "He was a rare soul, greatly endowed in mind and heart, sound in judgment, sagacious in insight, gracious in spirit, catholic in sympathies, always moving in a large place."

The gap in the ranks was a serious one. But just before Walter Lord's death the promise of new help from

an unexpected quarter was forthcoming. One Sunday evening, when my father was feeling particularly weary, a minister from the North of England arrived and suggested conducting the service for him. At supper afterwards, David Tait Patterson offered to leave his church at Dewsbury and come and share the burden. My father and mother were delighted. The associations with the Dewsbury Church were strong; for many of the most generous supporters of the Mission were to be found amongst its members and my mother had known Tait Patterson and his wife and sister for some years. Thus at a time of need, just when the burden seemed too heavy, the Patterson family, with their wide experience, lent their hands and hearts to the task.

All the time the horizons were widening. During this decade two further ventures were to be undertaken: a home for old men and a building for youth.

The value of Rest-a-While was now well established. Many an aged servant of Christ had found it heaven's ante-room and there, in this Christian family, old age had become a beautiful thing. But women, even when they are old and frail, can fend for themselves to some extent. Men are so helpless. If Joan had provision within the Mission's precincts what about Darby?

Mrs. Angas had for long realised this need. The men had always been her first concern, right from the Labour Yard and Dock Strike in 1905. Now she offered to provide a home for them when they were too old to look after themselves. A plot of land was acquired adjoining The Queen's Garden and work was begun on a spacious building in Tudor style with gabled roof and latticed windows. There was room for fifteen

residents, some in single rooms, some in rooms with two beds. A dining-room with a bay window overlooking the garden was at one end of the house; at the other end was the common-room, the most prominent feature of which was a large open fireplace. In the evening the armchairs were drawn up in a semi-circle, pipes lit, and the affairs of the world settled! Over the entrance a beam was fixed inscribed with the words: "Enter dear Lord, mine house with me, until I enter thine with Thee." In the five years up to the time when all the old people had to be evacuated, many a "grandad" found in "Eventide" the dawning of a new day.

From age to youth; and from one generous friend to another. Hilda Swift was watching a physical training display given by the boys in the basement hall of the Children's Church. Many of the young ones had thin, under-developed bodies, in most cases the result of lack of nourishment and bad living conditions. Suddenly a boy fainted and had to be carried out. Miss Swift resolved that she must do something.

An aunt had bequeathed to her a legacy of £10,000. She offered the whole of this sum for the erection of a Hall of Youth with gymnasium, shower baths and facilities for the proper physical development of young people within the sphere of the Mission. A site next to the church, on which stood two houses, proved to be just large enough for such a hall. The idea was explained to an enthusiastic church meeting. One young man, who, under conditions of considerable difficulty had taken a university degree, asked that there might be a place where others like himself could have quiet for study. Miss Swift readily responded, and to the original

scheme was added another floor containing a library and facilities for various youth activities.

The library was to be no ordinary room. It was to be unlike anything else the young people of the Mission would use. It was panelled in oak; a stained glass window, depicting scenes from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, occupied most of one side; a polished refectory table ran the length of the room as far as the alcoves, on the shelves of which were the books of Walter Lord; a heavy pile carpet covered the floor, and there were easy chairs in which to sit. Miss Swift's most valued possession, a beautiful Bechstein grand piano, was loaned for the opening; and there it remains today for the use of the music society and the choir which meet in this lovely room.

There was, however, a cloud overhanging all the plans. Miss Swift was suffering from cancer and the doctor did not believe she would live to see her Hall open. The story of this wonderful gift was told to the famous artist, Mr. Frank O. Salisbury. When he heard of it he offered to paint Miss Swift's portrait to hang beside the Bunyan window in the Library. This generous understanding and appreciation was later to be repeated when the same distinguished artist painted my father's portrait.

And so two rare art treasures have been added to the Mission's wealth of imperishable gifts, each portrait proclaiming: "There is no death."

To my mother's great joy Miss Swift was able to open the Hall herself in the year of King George V's Jubilee. The doctor had proved to be mistaken and the dire disease was checked for a time. Dr. Hutton, the Editor of *The British Weekly*, offered the prayer of dedication

and Lord Kinnaird presided over the ceremony. In the library Lady Kinnaird unveiled the portrait in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Salisbury and a company of distinguished friends. So another dream came true.

But these were anxious days. The Nazis were on the march and war clouds were hanging over Europe. The fury had already burst upon China. When there was time to pause and think, we could not help wondering what would happen to these miles of Dockland streets, if ever the bombers were to come. We tried to put these forebodings out of our minds. Thank God we could not foresee the future. And yet they were to be great days: days of destruction, yes; but, by God's grace, days of triumph too.

Chapter Nine

THE CLOUDS OF WAR

THE sirens first sounded as the congregation was joining in worship on Sunday morning September 3rd, 1939. The service was immediately suspended to allow people to take shelter in the passages and underneath the galleries. The scoutmaster was sitting in the midst of a group of his boys and at once gave the order that they were to be the last to move: a command typical of him and of the leadership he was to display in the grim months ahead. A woman passing by in the street was helped into the church in a state of collapse and the first shock was alleviated by giving her assistance and by shepherding the congregation to places of safety. That morning everyone visualised a mass raid on London and the holocaust of war bursting all at once upon our beloved capital. There was also the sense of impending tragedies in many homes and the realisation that the country had suddenly entered another phase of history.

The threat of immediate devastation, of course, did not materialise; but as the people made their way home the sense of shock remained and the realisation that, within the past few hours, life had radically changed. A smaller company than usual assembled for the evening service. There was a quiet seriousness about them all and in the hush of the sanctuary the Presence of God was very real. In Him alone was our hope. That night the sirens wailed again, sending the people for the first time from their beds hurrying towards the shelters. Again

it was a false alarm, but this first twenty-four hours was a realistic prelude to many days and nights to come.

The first weeks of " the twilight war " as it was called did not seriously affect the people of West Ham apart from this one Sunday. The children were evacuated, but except for some of the more carefully organised parties, like our own Nursery School which went to Stowmarket, most drifted back when the threat of air-raids did not materialise. The " call-up " affected comparatively few and life went on much as usual. In a dock district, of course, there were many families who had men at sea, and as ships began to be sunk there were casualties; but only a home here and there was affected. Then on November 23rd came the news of the sinking of the armed merchant cruiser *Rawalpindi*. She encountered the German pocket battleship *Deutschland* between Iceland and the Faroes and was sunk with the loss of her captain and two hundred and seventy of the crew. Only thirty-eight survived, of whom twenty-seven were made prisoners. This was a terrible blow to the district, for the ship was largely manned by men from the neighbourhood and many families connected with us were bereaved. On the following Monday afternoon a Remembrance Service was held at the Women's Meeting. Looking at the large congregation and seeing how many came into the church that day dressed in black, one realised how stricken the district had been. As so often in the next few years, words of comfort and hope were spoken to many a bruised heart.

The disaster in Norway and the fall of Mr. Chamberlain's government brought the first realisation that, so far, we hardly knew what war was. The invasion

of the Low Countries, the evacuation from Dunkirk, and the fall of France followed in quick and bewildering succession. The beginning of serious hostilities produced a second evacuation of children from the district and the schools were closed. Many parents, however, would not allow their children to go, preferring to take the risk of keeping them at home. The result was that numbers of boys and girls were roaming the streets with nothing to do except to get into mischief. We decided to open our own school at the Children's Church. The university summer vacation had just begun and so we invited a group of students from Oxford to come and conduct the classes. Our impromptu school was great fun while it lasted, but within a week the authorities had decided to bow to the inevitable and the ordinary schools were re-opened. But the effort was not wasted. We had learned to improvise in meeting an unexpected emergency and we had made contact with undergraduates at Oxford who, with many of their friends, were to render invaluable service when the blitz burst upon us in all its fury.

Towards the end of August it was clear that the long expected air-raids were at last imminent. The Battle of Britain had begun. The problem of providing shelters for the crowded population of West Ham was a formidable one. Many of the houses had been built on marsh land, and this meant that any structure underground was liable to be flooded. Consequently there were scarcely any basements available and trenches and Anderson Shelters in the southern part of the borough were difficult to keep dry and usable. The bottom floor of the Children's Church was a rare exception. It was partly

underground, and when the building was altered, the weight of the roof and floors had been lifted by huge steel stanchions. The Local Authority had earlier earmarked this floor as a Public Air Raid Shelter, which we offered to man with our own personnel.

As the reconnaissance planes came over and the first occasional bombs fell, people from the near-by houses took refuge in the Children's Church and it became plain that this beloved "Old Tabernacle" was going to be a centre of comfort and relief as it had been in other grim days gone by. Then on Saturday afternoon September 8th, the attack began.

There have been many descriptions of the Battle of Britain and the air-raids on London, but this story would not be complete without an account of the stern challenge that came to the church in Barking Road and how that challenge was met. Almost overnight the clock was put back more than thirty years. The emergency of 1905 was repeated, but on a much larger and more terrible scale. The terror by day and night was added to the sufferings of the people.

The sun shone that afternoon in a cloudless sky. At the Children's Church a party was being held for nearly two hundred boys and girls with the help of a group of students from Oxford. When the sirens sounded the youngsters were shepherded down to the basement in an orderly procession and passers-by were admitted; but no one had anticipated the fury of the onslaught. Over five hundred bombers launched a mass attack on the docks and the little houses in the crowded streets suffered fearful damage. As we emerged from the shelters after the "all-clear" the sky was blotted out by a pall of smoke;

the air reeked with the fumes of gelignite; the whole district was ringed with a circle of flame. It seemed that we were in the midst of hell's inferno.

That night the bombers returned to stoke the fires and they came back again and again, night after night. The shelter at the Children's Church was packed almost to suffocation. The scoutmaster, Fred Beagles, was in charge, and it needed his tremendous physique and powerful voice to hold the crowd through that first night of terror. His outstanding service was recognised with the award of the Bronze Cross, the highest distinction for gallantry in the Scout Movement.

For the first twenty-four hours the church buildings escaped damage, but in the early hours of Monday morning a heavy bomb exploded at the end of The Queen's Garden. My father and mother, with the members of the staff who were not on duty at the Children's Church, spent the night in the tiny boiler-room of the church, lying on mattresses covering the surface of the floor, while the old caretaker occupied the corner by the entrance. As they emerged into the early morning light a scene of destruction and devastation greeted them. Most of the windows in the Settlement and the Hall of Youth were broken; the roof had been blown off the Angas Institute and Eventide looked a shambles; The Queen's Garden was strewn with rubble; the houses at the end were wrecked and the Nursery School kitchen damaged beyond repair. As my mother surveyed the scene in the half-light of dawn she turned to me and said, "All our life's work gone." So it seemed on that bleak September morning.

But man's extremity is ever God's opportunity. As we

were to prove, the damage to buildings could always be repaired. More important by far was the emergence of a new church life from the ruins of the old. Many of our people were scattered; the children were evacuated; normal Mission activities had to be suspended; and even church services had to be curtailed since it was impossible to hold any meeting after dusk. None the less a faithful remnant was left, including many of our best leaders and we had a grand staff, supplemented by university students. The need of the district was clamant and in facing that need the life of the church had a new beginning.

When air-raids were first envisaged, the authorities thought in terms of short, sharp attacks with heavy casualties. Preparations were made accordingly and there was ample provision (too ample as it turned out) to deal with the dead and the injured. Happily, in spite of the widespread nature of the attacks, the casualties were comparatively few. No one, however, had foreseen the problem of the homeless and the unnerved. For every single person killed or injured, there were fifty or even a hundred in desperate need of assistance. In the face of this huge problem the administrative arrangements broke down. This was the fault of nobody. The scale and nature of the problem could hardly have been visualised in advance. It was a case for improvisation and emergency measures.

We had an experienced staff, equipment and resources which could be devoted at once to meeting the needs as they arose. Moreover, " The Tab." was known and loved and it quickly became a centre to which people looked for help. The first thing to be tackled was the shelter

problem. Queues lined up in the late afternoon to secure admission for the night; mothers carried bundles in their arms, blankets for the night and their precious possessions; children and old people waited hopefully for a chance to get inside. Officially we were supposed to provide space for two hundred people only and that assessment had been made on the assumption that air-raids would last only for twenty minutes or half an hour. We were faced with the difficulty of accommodating as many as we could for twelve, thirteen, and fourteen hours at a stretch. In those early days we could not restrict our numbers to two hundred: we had to crowd in as many as we could.

A few evenings after the blitz had started, the shelter was crowded to capacity with people lying head-to-toe like sardines in a tin; there was only a narrow gangway down the middle. The sirens had sounded and the guns had started firing. The message came that there was still a queue, mainly of women and children, clamouring for admission. There was only one thing to be done: the position was explained and an appeal made to those whose need was not as great to leave the building. Without a word, nearly all the men, from the young to the grey-heads, filed silently out into the night. Such was the sense of comradeship. Those of us who were privileged to lead these people felt we would do anything for them.

Gradually order emerged out of the chaos. A children's corner was set aside and furnished for the young ones and volunteers acted as nurses each night. It became quite an attractive nursery with its Moses baskets and cots. Bunks were installed and blankets

provided for every shelterer. The men formed themselves into a fire guard for the building and kept watch in shifts throughout the night. Canteen facilities were made available for those who had to come straight from work, and morning and evening prayers were led by the member of the staff on duty. Old prayers and hymns took on a new meaning. "Lighten our darkness we beseech Thee, O Lord, and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night for the love of Thy only Son our Saviour Jesus Christ." With reverence and simple trust this mixed family entered into the act of worship; for a family it soon became, as close knit a community as many had ever experienced.

As the weeks went by, life became centred around the activities of this underground community. Concerts and singsongs passed many an anxious hour, and the cockney cheerfulness and humour soon came to the surface. An old character known as Bill, was a familiar and beloved figure. He must have weighed nearly eighteen stone and his face always seemed wreathed in smiles. When a particularly heavy bomb crashed down near-by, someone was sure to call out: "It's all right; Uncle Bill's fallen out of his bunk!" A burst of laughter quieted unsteady nerves.

Every Sunday night a service was held in the shelter. Among the vivid memories is the evening when this service was broadcast with a mobile gun blazing away in the street outside. The B.B.C. commentator described the scene: the nurses in their uniform, the children in their corner, and the members of this strange community perched on the top of their bunks. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

The shelter at the Children's Church soon became a centre for service to the neighbourhood. Each night, after the sirens had sounded and the bombs had begun to fall, parties set out by car and van to the arches under the Silvertown Way, to trench and surface shelters, and to as many places as possible where people were taking refuge. Two huge coppers in the kitchen, installed at the time of the great explosion in the first world war, provided hot soup and cocoa which was conveyed in thermostat urns. In this way about one thousand hot drinks were served every night to many shelterers all over the district. The squads, in their tin helmets, carried the urns with trays of buns to the people who had to spend all these hours under protective covering and the arrival of the party with the mobile canteen was always eagerly welcomed. Different groups of young church members and students formed the personnel each night.

In the early days of the blitz sanitary conditions in the shelters left everything to be desired, and those who spent twelve, thirteen, and fourteen hours crowded together, often in damp quarters and breathing an atmosphere that could be cut with a knife, were open to the ravages of infectious disease and all kinds of ailments. It was a miracle that there was no epidemic. After the first two or three weeks a mobile medical squad was formed, led by two Red Cross nurses, one of them only nineteen years of age. There was no properly equipped vehicle for the purpose and a borrowed car had to serve. Night after night these girls went out with their first-aid box, giving what help they could and, by their cheerful efficiency, carrying with them a spirit of confidence to all with whom they came in contact. Later the American

Committee for Air Raid Relief generously gave a van which was euphemistically called an ambulance and nicknamed "Blanche." The larger space enabled others to accompany the nurses, prepared, wherever possible, to hold a concert or a sing-song. As the van left the cul-de-sac at the side of the Children's Church, it was not unusual to see the organist with a portable gramophone and a pile of records, squatting in the corner, prepared to conduct a musical appreciation group in one of the shelters.

There were many opportunities to lead spontaneous prayers and conduct impromptu services, especially on Sunday nights. Sometimes on their own, sometimes with members of other churches, our people were able to lead many a strange company in the singing of well-known hymns and bring to them the Word of God.

While the needs of the shelterers made a special claim upon the personnel and resources at our disposal there were many other urgent problems to be faced. Every morning as dawn broke a carload of members of the staff set out for the streets where there had been incidents. This was known as "doing damage"; a somewhat strange expression to describe what was actually accomplished! First of all, the homes of adherents of the Mission had to be visited and comfort and advice given to those who looked to us for help. Then there were the many others who faced the loss of their possessions and the breaking-up of their accustomed life. Before many months had passed there were few who had not experienced what it meant to be "bombed out," and for an ever increasing number this had happened two, three, and four times.

At first no official provision was made for evacuating any others than children of school age, those with children under five, and expectant mothers. The plight of the aged, the invalids and the unnerved was pitiable in the extreme. During the first weeks of serious bombing an appeal was made to churches in safe areas to receive parties of those who could not leave London under one of the officially sponsored schemes. It was a tremendously difficult undertaking; for the country's resources were being taxed to the uttermost to cope with those for whom plans had been made. Nevertheless there was a wonderfully generous response and, within a very short time, well over a thousand had been found new homes through the office set up at the Children's Church.

Many more wanted advice on all kinds of questions: how to make claims for war damage; where to get clothes to replace those they had lost; how to find money for their fare to a friend's home or to a billet that had been offered to them. In the eight months from September, 1940 to May, 1941, over six thousand people passed through the middle floor of the Children's Church to be interviewed by members of the staff and other volunteers.

Between three and four thousand were completely reclothed in the same period. Imagine what that involved! Men, women and children of all shapes and sizes requiring new outfits and changes of garments! The clothing store became a fitting-room and the Hall of Youth was turned into a great depot with tons of dresses, suits, coats, undergarments and shoes. An army of volunteers undertook sorting and stacking, as the bales

from America, Canada, South Africa and all over the British Isles were delivered and unpacked. The capacity of the gymnasium was taxed to the uttermost, and the piles of clothing almost reached the height of the gallery.

A kitchen was established on the middle floor of the Children's Church and many who had lost their homes and could not leave the district came to live there until new accommodation could be found. They had all their meals on the premises and slept in the shelter at night.

To carry through such a programme of relief, with its constant improvisation as fresh needs arose, required a considerable staff. My father and mother gave up their home in Wanstead and returned to the Mission compound to share the perils and trials of their people. It was unthinkable to them that they should be out of it, and although my father was now seventy-three and my mother only six years younger, they, with Miss Clifford and other older workers, faced the ordeal of these months with resolution and a triumphant faith. Sleeping night after night in a makeshift dormitory, they never thought of themselves. Their concern was for the people of the district they loved.

There was a large gap in age between those of my father's and mother's generation and the rest of the staff, all of whom were in their twenties or early thirties. On the latter fell the responsibility for most of the work. Apart from an occasional night's rest in the country, they worked in two groups: one on duty at the Children's Church throughout the night; the other sleeping in the dormitories at the back of the church and ready to go out at dawn to the streets that had suffered damage.

The Mission staff was not adequate to meet the challenge unaided. Deacons, organist, and a large number of church members readily came forward to take their share of responsibility, as members of the mobile squads, in the shelter, in the canteen, in the clothing store and wherever else they were required. Their number was supplemented during the Christmas Vacation of 1940 by nearly forty dons and students from Oxford University, including Dr. W. G. Moore, the Dean of St. John's College and Miss Margery Perham, Reader in Colonial Administration. Many of the students found the reality of the Christian fellowship for the first time in their lives as they saw the Church in action, and several became convinced Christians and ultimately developed into real spiritual leaders. Arising from this Christmas visit, a group was formed in Oxford representative of every denominational tradition, and consisting of students from India as well as this country, to study the nature and function of the Church and to pray for West Ham. The question was inevitably asked: "If a miscellaneous collection of undergraduates, of every Christian tradition and none, find themselves at home in the fellowship at West Ham and are discovered by Christ through this corporate life in Him, must not the Mission become a training ground for Christian leadership?" To this question we shall have to return in the last chapter.

Meanwhile the Rev. and Mrs. W. F. Bodey were maintaining Child Haven and the Amy Clegg Wing. What a wonderful thing it was to have this centre in the country to which mothers and children could be sent away from the scenes of destruction! The Bodeys were

an ideal pair to meet the demands of the situation. Their baby girl, Margaret, had contracted a sudden illness from which she died. This bitter blow was faced in the real spirit of the Cross:

> "And from the ground there blossoms red
> Life that shall endless be."

The loss of their own child was a call to save the children of others. As father and mother of the Child Haven family they surrounded the boys and girls who came to them with a love that is born only out of personal sorrow. There was the little fellow who had been dug out of the ruin of his home; the little girl who had seen her friends killed before her eyes while playing on a bombed site; the child whose nerves had been so shattered in the raids that she screamed when anyone came near her. During the five years of war in which Mr. and Mrs. Bodey were in charge of Child Haven eleven hundred children, over four hundred mothers and approximately the same number of babies were welcomed, cared for and restored to physical, mental, and spiritual health. The full story can only be known in heaven.

During the early months of 1941 there was comparative relief from heavy raiding. The crowds continued to come to the shelters and the problems of the homeless remained. Then on two successive nights, May 10th and 11th, the full fury of the attacks was launched on London once more. They were the worst raids the district had so far experienced, for the Germans used heavy land mines which did extensive damage. Fires blazed and street after street was shattered. If

this were to continue we wondered whether anything would be left of West Ham. But the *Luftwaffe* had struck its last blow for the time being. The capital stood unconquered and the spirit of its citizens unbroken. The Battle for London had been won.

As far as the life of the church was concerned recovery began almost at once. Normal services and activities had been severely restricted throughout the winter of the blitz and at first it appeared that the church itself would necessarily disintegrate. Yet the nucleus remained and it was a sound one; one that had proved itself to be the witnessing and serving fellowship of Christ during these dark days. There was much leeway to be made up. The youth organisations, such as scouts, guides and brigades, had preserved their identity by the service they had rendered throughout the winter, but their numbers were greatly reduced, and with the quieter days and nights, they were able to plan their programmes once more and recruit new members.

The Women's Meeting, like the Sunday morning service, had never stopped. On the first Monday afternoon of the blitz, a small group of not more than twenty women met in the great church and joined my mother in prayer for the stricken homes and the great family of mothers they represented. As they prayed, the sirens sounded and the bombers came over again: so the service was continued in the passages where there was better protection from blast. Monday after Monday they met, a few more joining them each week until the one hundred and then the two hundred marks were passed. By the spring of 1941 the attendance was still very small in comparison with what it had been, but

between three and four hundred women were gathering for that remarkable meeting. All through the war the numbers steadily increased until at the end of hostilities the church was within sight of being crowded again on Monday afternoons.

The Angas Institute had been badly damaged by blast. The roof was off, the windows were out and the floor had been forced up in many places through the damp. It was over eighteen months before the building could be put into a temporary state of repair. By the summer of 1942 it was ready for limited use.

At first it was open only on Saturdays, but then the evenings were increased until by the autumn it was in full operation every night in the week. How grateful we were for this building when the troops began to pour into emergency camps in the docks prior to the invasion of Normandy!

A young minister, straight from college was invited to come and take charge of this new men's work. He was succeeded in 1944 by the Rev. A. E. Oakeley, under whose leadership it continues to develop and flourish.

By this time many of the children had drifted back to the district. It was impossible to keep them away, now that the *Luftwaffe* no longer appeared interested in London and was heavily engaged elsewhere. From the Children's Corner in the shelter the beginnings of a new work amongst boys and girls had emerged. In the initial stages the leadership was undertaken by Mr. Clifford Bodey the brother of the Superintendent of Child Haven. Under the very difficult conditions he made an excellent start, but he was in business in another part of London and it soon became apparent that full-time help would be

required. My brother, Hugh, was just completing his course at Oxford. His own mind was not turned in the direction of West Ham, but the deacons, knowing that he had special gifts for this type of work, sent him a unanimous invitation. He had already accepted another appointment which would have taken him to the Far East and into a very different kind of life. But here was the call of God, and so it happened that the two brothers were to serve side by side under their father for the last year of his ministry.

The end, when it came, was totally unexpected. My father had been feeling the strain of the war years and had occasionally complained of slight pain across his chest. This had always been attributed to indigestion and no one had any idea that anything was seriously the matter. The first week in November, 1943, was the last in his life; and it was a very full one. He attended to all his correspondence, gave many interviews, and was present at the Finance Committee of the Baptist Union in the Church House on the Thursday afternoon.

The most important thing he did that week was to give final approval to the draft of a scheme for a Trust Deed. This was designed to safeguard the future of the Mission and put the work on a sure and permanent foundation. For some years he and my mother had been exercised in their minds as to the continuance of the organization they had initiated. Everything had been done by them in their own names, and although they had consulted the deacons of the church at every stage, the initiative and the responsibility had been theirs. After much careful thought and exploration, my father had invited Mr. Kenneth Smith of Bromley to be the first treasurer

of the Mission a few months earlier. Kenneth Smith had been a friend of mine at Oxford. Now he was a director of a large business and a young Baptist layman of marked gifts and a deep interest in the Mission. This was the first step. But the vesting of the properties in a Trust Deed and the establishment of a governing council were to my father urgent necessities. He entrusted the drafting to his junior colleague, Denis Lant, who had been a qualified solicitor before entering the ministry. There was still very much more to be done on the scheme before it could be put into final shape, but in that last week of his life my father gave his approval to the broad principles on which we could proceed. This made the task a much easier one when we had to complete the work without him, for we knew that the lines we were following had commended themselves to him.

Overshadowing these days at the beginning of November was the serious illness of the church secretary, Robert Raffan. Between him and my father an extraordinary bond existed. They were never on terms of easy familiarity, but they trusted each other as deeply as two men have ever done. Raffan was an Irishman with a strong evangelical background. Brought up amongst the Plymouth Brethren, he retained the firm and definite beliefs of his early days. At the same time he was widely read, had travelled extensively and was director of an important manufacturing concern. He was blessed with an extraordinary sense of humour and as he let fall some sharp witticism, the solemn expression on his face never changed. Only the mischievous twinkle in his eyes revealed something of what was really in his mind.

Many ministers would have found such a cryptic and unfathomable church secretary hard to work with. Not so my father. He admired Raffan and trusted him unquestioningly. He was rewarded with a devotion that amounted almost to idolisation; but, let it be added, this devotion was never assumed or abused. When Robert Raffan was taken ill with a sudden stroke my father felt it deeply. He knew that his friend and colleague would not recover and what would the church be like without him?

Sunday, November 7th was Remembrance Day. My father was present at the morning service, though he left the conduct of it to me. As usual he went to the vestibule and talked with the people as they left, challenging two of his congregation with the claims of church membership. He presided over the lunch-table in the Settlement, leaving it in the middle to listen to the news on the wireless. After a short rest he set out on his last visit by car to Ilford. It was to the home of Robert Raffan, and he took with him an air mattress. His secretary lay there, unconscious that his minister was standing beside him and offering prayer. Who could have guessed that the man so ill in bed was to survive the other who appeared so well? After talking with the family, my father returned just in time for evening worship.

It was Communion that night. My father always presided, assisted by two of his junior colleagues, one on either side. It so happened that my brother and I were to have the privilege at that service, the last he ever took. With his deacons ranged behind him, he broke the Bread of Life to his people and shared with

them the Cup of the Saviour's blessing. The closing verse of the hymn exactly expressed the faith by which he lived:

"Vine of heaven! Thy blood supplies
This blest cup of sacrifice;
'Tis Thy wounds my healing give;
To Thy Cross I look, and live:
Thou, my life! Oh let me be
Rooted, grafted, built in Thee."

The congregation left the church and soon after the air-raid sirens sounded. My father and mother hurried back from the church and he complained of feeling a little out of breath. But he seemed quickly to recover and retired to Eventide, the house in The Queen's Garden, now converted into the manse. At that time my rooms were in the Settlement, but I usually went across the garden to say goodnight and talk over the doings of the day. I went to see them just as usual. There they were, sitting on either side of the fire, weary with the cares and anxieties they had been shouldering for others, and yet tranquil with the peace that passes all understanding. We talked of the services and of all that had been happening during the last few hours. Then I left them. As I walked across the garden, I thought to myself: "If their life were to finish tonight what a perfect ending it would be." I suppose the constant threat of air-raids was at the back of my mind. Certainly I had no direct premonition of what the next day was to bring.

After I had left them my father and mother knelt side by side in prayer, commending themselves, their family and their people to God.

They slept in adjoining rooms. In the early hours of Monday morning my father knocked on the wall. He had woken finding it difficult to breathe. Dr. Margaret Thomson, one of his deacons, was quickly summoned. As soon as she arrived she found his pulse very weak and gave him an injection. It appeared to be only a passing attack and with rest all would be well. My brother and I who had been called went back to bed. Not an hour passed before my mother was aware that he was suddenly worse and in a few minutes he had gone.

His people could hardly believe it. Only a few hours before, he had ministered Communion to them. A wave of sympathy and sorrow swept over the Women's Meeting when the announcement was made. As for his deacons and the intimate circle who knew him best, the blow was as severe as it was sudden. But he had died in harness, as he would have desired. For him there was no retirement in the service of the Lord.

The funeral took place in the church on the following Thursday. The coffin, amidst a bower of flowers, had been placed in the chancel and the young members of the staff had kept vigil all through the previous night. The service was conducted by the Rev. M. E. Aubrey, General Secretary of the Baptist Union, and the Bishop of Barking. Among the great congregation that thronged the church were representatives of the civic authorities as well as all the local churches. Father Andrew and colleagues from the Society of the Divine Compassion, the Anglo-Catholic community across the wall, ranged alongside members of the Free Churches, typified the catholicity of my father's life and work. But his own people were the chief mourners. Colleagues past and

present, deacons, seat stewards, organist, choir, church members, those whom he had led to Christ and baptized —they missed him most. Many an eye was blinded with tears. How they loved him!

Earlier that morning Robert Raffan had entered into the presence of His Lord. He and his minister would have desired to go together. Beside the wreath we placed upon the coffin, was a bunch of flowers bearing the words " From Robert Raffan to his dearest friend."

" . . . and in death they were not divided."

So ended a chapter in the life of the Mission: no, more than a chapter, a volume. The mantle had passed from father to son. It was a great challenge; a challenge to take up the task where he had laid it down. But for him surely, as for Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, " all the trumpets sounded on the other side."

Chapter Ten

WIDENING HORIZONS

THE death of my father made the provision of an adequate scheme for safeguarding the future all the more urgent. It was a simple enough matter to devise a Trust Deed covering all the property, but the problem lay in deciding who was to be the controlling authority. Hitherto my father and mother had acted jointly in this capacity. Who was to take their place?

This was a particularly difficult question in that the West Ham Central Mission was a Baptist church. This meant that there was no central agency which could assume the oversight; for, under Baptist polity, each local congregation is a self-governing, independent body responsible directly to Christ, the Head of the Church. Strictly speaking, therefore, the local church, acting through its elected deacons, should have been the executive authority. But the Mission was clearly more than a local church. It belonged to the whole Denomination and even to the Christian fellowship at large. Of course this really holds good of every local church, though the true position is often obscured. In this case, however, the issue was plain. The work at West Ham depended to a considerable extent on the voluntary contributions of large numbers of people all over the world. The buildings had been erected through the generosity of many friends, whose gifts were commemorated by the stones around the Memorial Church. Surely

it would not be right for the local people to have the sole voice in the conduct of affairs. Moreover an enterprise on so large a scale demanded the best advice and experience that could be brought to its service.

For these reasons my father and mother were quite convinced that it would be both wrong and impracticable for the control to be vested in the local community. On the other hand they were not at all convinced about the advisability of setting up an independent council composed of men and women who had no direct connection with West Ham. This was not a charitable institution: it was a church; and the principle that in all its activities the Mission was the Church could not be disregarded or even overshadowed.

The solution was the result of much prayerful thought and discussion. It was decided to establish a Church Council which would be responsible for all matters of major policy. This Council was to consist of the elected deacons of the church, the superintendent, and such members of the staff as he or she should advise, and certain others representative of the Baptist Denomination and the Christian Church as a whole. The effect of this arrangement was that the diaconate was enlarged and strengthened for certain purposes by the inclusion of those who represented the wider interests. They were, in fact, co-opted as deacons for these purposes. It was possible, for example, for an Anglican or a Methodist within the terms of the Trust Deed to become members of the Council and thus virtually to serve as deacons of a Baptist church: a novel experiment in œcumenical co-operation! The elected deacons continued to exercise the same function as before, meeting together once a

month. The enlarged diaconate or Church Council was to be convened at least twice a year and an executive committee was appointed to act in the interim. In this way the form of government for the local church was preserved and the wider interests safeguarded. It would be interesting to enquire what this special arrangement, made to meet special demands, has to contribute to the complex question of Baptist polity in the years to come.

It was certainly a unique experiment in Church government.

The Council met for the first time on November 2nd, 1944, a year after my father's death. The Secretary of the Baptist Union and the Secretary of the London Baptist Association were among those present as statutory members of the new body. Later on other places were filled, Mrs. Howard Hooker, the Principal of Ridgelands Bible College, being the first Anglican to be appointed.

The establishment of the Church Council gave visible expression to the expanding ministry of the Mission. The influence of this ministry was felt far beyond the bounds of West Ham. One medium through which that influence spread was broadcasting. Reference has already been made to the service relayed from the shelter during the blitz. This was to be the first of many. During the early months of 1944 the B.B.C. asked a group of clergy and ministers to collaborate in a series of broadcasts setting forth the Christian Message in its total impact on the needs of man. This series of broadcasts was publicised under the general title: *Man's Dilemma and God's Answer.* Three of the concluding Sunday evening services were relayed from the Memorial Church on Passion Sunday, Palm Sunday and Easter

Day. The whole congregation realised that this was a great opportunity for corporate Christian witness. How far the seed of the Word of God was sown cannot be known, nor can the results ever be assessed, but one story, told me some years afterwards, is indicative.

A young married couple asked to see me one night when I was visiting a church in an East Coast town. As we sat talking in the vestry, this was what they said:

> "One Easter Sunday evening a few years ago when you were broadcasting from the Mission, we had just come indoors. We were both feeling very 'fed up' with life and were thinking of going out to the pictures just for something to do. Turning by chance the switch of the wireless, we heard a service in progress and began to listen. Gradually we were gripped and we listened to every word. We didn't go out that night. We sat and talked together into the early hours of the morning of all we had missed. That was the first step in our conversion, for within a few weeks we had both become definite Christians and now we are joining this church."

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." So wrote the Hebrew of old. His words have increasingly come true in the expanding influence of the Mission.

The summer of 1944 saw the retirement of Miss Clifford from the active superintendency of Marnham House Settlement. Coming to Barking Road with my father at the outset of his ministry, she had given the whole of her life to West Ham. Now the strain of the years was beginning to tell and she needed a less arduous

and exacting life. Her links with the Mission could never be broken. The church made her a life deacon, and her help and advice were always to be at the disposal of those who carried on in her stead. She retired to her old home in the North of England, but she has always been ready ever since to return and lend a hand in any emergency. Barking Road is her real home and ever will be as long as she lives. Above all she is enshrined in the hearts of the people who love her and honour her for all that she has done.

In these last few pages the war has receded into the background of our story, but its trials and tragedies were always with us. News came of homes bereaved, and anxious mothers and wives waited to hear of loved ones in the battle areas. There were over a thousand men and women on our active service roll with whom we corresponded and to whom a parcel was sent at Christmas.

Fortunately the German bombers had neglected the district since the two dreadful nights of May, 1941. There had been warnings and air-raids, but they were of a spasmodic character and little damage was done. At last the long awaited "D-day" arrived and, with the landings in Normandy, the end of the war seemed to be in sight. But there were testing and perilous days still ahead for the people of London and of the East End in particular. In many ways the experiences of the last year of the war were worse than those of the grim winter of 1940-41. The British Intelligence Service had been aware for some time that the Germans were preparing new weapons for an attack on the home base, but the people were unprepared for the savagery of the

onslaught. West Ham was within the range of both V.1. and V.2. missiles. Day and night from June, 1944, to the very end of hostilities our people never knew where the next flying-bomb or rocket would fall. The destruction was widespread and the loss of life considerable.

The emergency measures which had been taken during the earlier raids had to be adapted to the new situation. During the blitz it had been possible to some extent to plan the day's work. Most people took shelter at night and then the day was given to repairing the ravages of the attack. It was now no longer possible to plan even an hour, much less a day, with any certainty. The Mission staff was on call the whole time, ready to go at a moment's notice to the street where the last bombs had fallen. During the summer months, when the flying-bombs alone were used, it was possible to get some warning, for one could hear them coming. But when the rockets began to fall, there was no means of knowing who would be the next victim. Superficially, people carried on much as usual. There was nothing else to do. Services were held as the bombs soared overhead and the weeknight activities continued uninterrupted. Nevertheless, the constant uncertainty and the frequent tragedies were a protracted strain on the nerves.

One typical incident comes vividly to mind. The morning service had just ended. It was the first Sunday of the month and the uniformed organizations were on parade. As the congregation left the church there was a tremendous crash and the doors and windows shook with the blast. A column of smoke was rising above the houses nearby.

Never shall I forget the sight. Boarding a car I hurried to the scene of the disaster. The church was on the job. Scouts and guides in their uniforms were moving rubble and lifting people from beneath the debris. Our doctor had rushed from her place in church collecting on her way a small party of first-aiders to assist her with the injured. A girl in her late teens, a young church member, accompanied the first ambulance that had been summoned to hospital. On one side was someone she knew to be dead, covered with blankets. On the opposite stretcher were two or three people badly injured. She kept her head, comforting those who were suffering from injuries and shock, and hiding from them the fact that there was a dead body on the stretcher at the end of which she was sitting. As I saw this fine body of young people in action, many of them just boys and girls, I felt proud to be their minister.

The attacks continued to within a few days of the end of the war; for the V.2. sites in Holland were not overrun by the invading armies and were among the few remaining strongpoints left to surrender. One of the last rockets to fall in West Ham scored a direct hit on the home of two of our members, killing them instantly. It was, therefore, with great thanksgiving and relief that the whole neighbourhood heard that the final shot in the West had been fired and the Nazi tyranny destroyed.

The scenes were reminiscent of those at the end of the first world war. Streets were gaily decorated and every flag and piece of bunting that could be found were pressed into use. Tables were laid in the middle of the roads and mothers baked hundreds of cakes and buns to give the children a "Peace Tea." On the afternoon of

VE day I visited street after street, saying grace before tea, watching the children's races and admiring the bonfires that had been prepared for the occasion. Wood had been collected from every bombed site, and there were effigies of Hitler ready to be burned; and each street vied with the next in the splendour of its celebrations. That evening our people gathered for thanksgiving in the Memorial Church, and there the heartfelt gratitude of those who had endured the fiery trial and had proved the overarching mercy of God, was given free and glad expression.

As soon as the war in Europe was over, the task of reconstruction began. And what a task it was! The district was devastated. Over fourteen thousand houses had been totally or partially destroyed, and practically every other house and public building had been damaged, many severely. Overcrowding was worse than it had ever been and the men were soon to return from the forces. Where were they to live? In spite of tremendous efforts to repair damaged dwellings and to provide hundreds of prefabricated huts and bungalows, the situation was but very little improved. At best the housing problem could be prevented from becoming worse. Those who do not know the neighbourhood intimately could not possibly conceive the extent of the destruction and the hardships which a suffering people still had to endure.

Material reconstruction was an urgent matter; but spiritual reconstruction was even more important. The aftermath of war always brings its spate of moral problems, broken homes and disintegration of community life. Here was a new challenge for the Mission to face;

new in its form, old in its nature: for the heart of man has ever been the same.

The story of the war years has revealed the fellowship of the church emerging, tested and tried in the crucible of carnage and destruction. Outwardly it had been shaken and disrupted; many of its old forms of expression had gone. But the Church of Christ is, in the last resort, inviolate. After the first shock of the blitz and the underground winter, the Christian fellowship emerged and sought to express its faith in new ways to meet the ever-changing situation.

It must not be inferred from this that the life and work of the Mission was in all respects radically changed. The services on Sundays and during the week continued much as before. The Men's Club, the Children's Church, the Hall of Youth housed many of the same activities. None the less we were conscious, as never before, that our calling was not only to evangelize and build up the Christian fellowship in West Ham, but also to see that the West Ham Central Mission was an experimental centre and a training ground for Christian leadership. This gave rise to three special ventures, all of which are as yet in their infancy.

The first, and so far the least developed, was a training scheme for students. The visit of Oxford undergraduates during the heavy air-raids of 1940-41 had challenged us and made us realise that the Mission had something to give to a far wider circle than its own immediate neighbourhood. At the outbreak of the war the old people's homes had necessarily been evacuated and "the families" dispersed to safer areas. At the express wish of Mrs. Angas, Eventide had become the Manse and

Rest-a-While was now available for new uses. The latter building adjoined the Hostel and provided extra rooms which could be put at the disposal of students.

My mother had longed for many years to undertake a training scheme for women who were intending full-time service in the Church at home. Most college courses, valuable as they were, seemed to her too remote and too divorced from the practical problems girls would have to face in Christian work. Moreover the conception of a woman's place in the ministry had struck her as being far too circumscribed. Surely many more girls with gifts of mind and heart, could be drawn into full-time Christian service if they were given a real vision of this high calling and an adequate practical training.

In the autumn of 1945, Mary Abel joined the staff as right hand to my mother and leader of the Women's side of the work. For ten years she had been a missionary in New Guinea and, with the experience of the foreign field behind her, she felt the need for practical training of girls whose vocation was overseas.

These two strands of thought and experience naturally came together and the first steps were taken in the initiation of such a programme. Girls from several different colleges, Anglican as well as Free Church, came to spend some weeks at a time, sharing the life of the Settlement, working alongside the staff, and learning at first hand how to tackle the problems of a pagan district in the name of Christ. Many of them are now in full-time service in many parts of the world.

This training scheme is mentioned not because much has yet been achieved: as far as men are concerned it has not even been started. It does indicate, however, the

direction in which the Mission is moving and the kind of challenge that has to be faced in the years to come.

The second venture was the International Clubs. When my brother first came to West Ham he found that there were many boys and girls who could not be incorporated in one of the uniformed youth organisations, partly because there was not room for them all and partly because many had no inclination in this direction. On the other hand the ordinary type of club was an unsatisfactory way of meeting their needs. What was its purpose? What answer could be given to the questions: "Why do you engage in table-tennis and billiards?" This is the problem that all club leaders have to face. The programme is the constant headache. My brother's own interest lay in international affairs. Was it possible to bring this interest to bear on club work and devise a programme which in itself would challenge young people with the claims of Christ and express the life of the Christian fellowship?

Through the goodwill and co-operation of members of the Norwegian Government, then in London, the first International Service Club was formed, the purpose of which was to serve the boys and girls of Norway in the name of Christ. The Club motto was "Christus Victor"; the text on which it was based was from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, "He hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us"; each meeting ended with the members forming a letter V for the closing prayer, the apex being left empty, signifying that the victorious and risen Christ was there and at the head of every V.

The activities of the Club were divided into two main

parts—handicrafts and badge work. At the carpentry benches all kinds of articles from toys to household goods were made; while at other tables needlework, leatherwork and soft toys occupied many busy hands. The members made nothing for themselves and never even asked to take anything back home for their own use. It was all for Norway. Everything was to be sold in aid of some project for the boys and girls of that country. Meanwhile there were badges to be won. To serve others meant that something had to be known about them. In this way the members of the Club set to work to learn the language, understand the customs and conditions and begin to appreciate the culture of the land of their adoption.

When a boy or a girl had qualified for the initial badge an investiture service was held. The first of these services took place in the Norwegian Seamen's Church at Rotherhithe, conducted by my brother and Pastor Ursin, the Lutheran Chaplain. Taking their stand in the formation of the letter V the members of the Club pledged themselves to serve the boys and girls of Norway, with their hands crossed, symbolising hands across the seas in the name of the Cross of Christ. A Norwegian standard was then presented by Dr. Devik of the Ministry of Church and Education, and he gave to each of those who had passed the necessary tests an enamelled badge bearing the flags of the two countries. And so the service ended with the singing of the hymn " Jesus shall reign."

The Norwegian Club was soon followed by others linked with the Netherlands and Greece, and the whole conception gradually matured. Before long, group

leaders were being trained to take responsibility for sections of their own, instructing the boys and girls under them in craft and badge work. In this way these young Christian internationalists began to educate one another.

When the clubs were well established the first visits overseas were planned. In the summer of 1946 a party left for Norway, the first organised group of English youth to visit that country since its liberation. They received a tremendous welcome in Stavanger, Odda, Bergen and the other towns where they stayed. Two years later another group went to Norway and a party from the Dutch Club spent a memorable fortnight in camp on the island of Walcheren with members of the Free Youth Church of Rotterdam, a remarkable organisation for young people drawn from all over the Netherlands.

The crown of these achievements was the International Camp in the summer of 1949 at Greenwoods, the new country centre of the Mission. Boys and girls from Norway, Greece and Holland were the guests of the club members who had raised the full cost of their entertainment through work done over the previous years. The ten Greeks were the first young people from that suffering country to visit England since the outbreak of war and they were the successful candidates out of twelve hundred applicants. Each tent had its flag with the sign of the Cross upon it, boys or girls of each nation sleeping under the same canvas roof.

How could the significance of such a venture be missed? Hands had been stretched across the seas; the minds of many young people had been opened to a world of which they knew practically nothing; they had

been taught what real Christian service meant; and they had discovered a fellowship in Jesus Christ, which transcends all national barriers and makes men one.

The story of Greenwoods has been left to the last. "The leading of God" is a phrase which is often used all too lightly. But it would be impossible to describe how this new branch of the Mission's activity came into being without using it, for God has indeed led us into paths of service we had never really envisaged.

The story begins with a scoutmaster's inspired idea. The Boy Scout Movement has made remarkable strides in this country and throughout the world since Baden Powell wrote his famous book, *Scouting for Boys*. As a youth organisation within the Christian Church it has met with varying success, depending entirely upon the depth of the conviction of the leaders concerned. Unlike the Boys' Brigade, it is not necessarily rooted in the life of the Church. But where the leader is a convinced Christian it can be an instrument second to none in the hand of God.

Both Boys' Brigade and Scouts have flourished side by side in the Mission for a very long time. They have each been blessed for many years in the leadership of two fine Christian men; in fact, Percy Arnold has just completed his thirtieth year as Captain of the Boys' Brigade. Fred Beagles became Scoutmaster some twenty years ago and his obvious understanding of boys clearly marked him out as a leader of great promise. The influence of both these men has been instrumental in winning a constant succession of boys to Christ and the Mission today owes much to their sustained Christian witness.

From the first days of scouting, Beagles had developed

GREENWOODS

a deep concern for the boy who got into trouble—the lad given up by his parents and despaired of by the authorities. There was no such thing as a really bad boy: that had always been his fundamental belief and it was confirmed by a wide and long experience. So many of them never had a real chance, the chance he longed to give them. Beagles, therefore, urged upon his colleagues the claim of a Boys' Home and offered to give up his job in the city to come and run it.

The response was immediate and the Church Council set itself to find a farmhouse or suitable building in Essex where such work could be undertaken. There was one further requisite. There must be enough land to provide camping facilities for the youth organisations; for an essential part of Beagles' idea was to give the problem lad an opportunity of mixing with normal boys of his own age and discovering that a Christian could be even tougher than he was! Camping grounds around the Home would offer a natural means of achieving this end and it might be possible to purchase a van which would run between the Home and the Mission centre, bringing the boys up from the country to join in the gymnasium and other activities. In this way they would be introduced to the life of the Church from the outset, and the ground would thus be prepared for following up their period of training.

My colleague, Bodey, was commissioned to find the new centre. One day I received a telephone call: "I've seen a wonderful place today. It's not what we are looking for, but I think you ought to go and inspect it." And so I saw Greenwoods for the first time.

As soon as I drove through the main gates I realised

that this was no ordinary house. It was a lovely Essex mansion, the old wing in Georgian style, a new wing added by the previous owner at the dawn of the century. Passing through the imposing entrance I found myself in a courtyard, bounded on the road side by a red brick wall, on the left by another wall with a wrought iron gate leading into the garden, and on the other two sides by the house itself, which was built in the form of a rectangle.

The door was opened by a maid who was obviously an old and trusted servant and I was ushered into a large oak-panelled hall, beautifully furnished and with a wide staircase at one end. Only a few months before, the owner had died and the home was kept exactly as he had left it, even to the provision of matches on the table by his chair.

I was led through one room after another; billiard-room, library, study, drawing-room, dining-room, kitchen, servants' hall, sixteen bedrooms and an attic running the whole length of the house. Everything was in perfect condition, ready for occupation at a moment's notice.

Then I saw the gardens and my breath was taken away. The lawns and flowerbeds, the carefully trimmed hedges, the ornamental lily pond, the walled kitchen-garden, the greenhouses—all were beyond my dreams. They evidenced careful planning, skilled attention and the mind of an artist. Beyond was rolling parkland bordered by woods. From the bedroom windows not a building was to be seen and in the midst of the distant trees was a grove of rhododendrons and azaleas, planted to give the effect of a splash of vivid colour amid the

green foliage. A home farm, stabling, outbuildings and seven cottages completed the picture. In all there were over a hundred and sixteen acres of land.

Certainly we were not looking for such a place. We were trying to find a Boys' Home, a simple house with a few acres of ground surrounding it. Sadly I turned away to drive back to West Ham.

And yet what could not be done with such an estate if there was vision to develop it as a centre of Christian community? It would be a tragedy to let it go. Gradually the conviction deepened that God was asking us to enlarge our vision to fit the place he would give us, rather than find a place to fit our own small and unpretentious scheme.

Plans were discussed and soon the picture began to take shape. The house and gardens would be kept as nearly as possible in their present character. What a wonderful thing it would be to introduce young and old, the frail and the sick, the downhearted and defeated to the beauty of a new home life. Here in the Church's home, in a Christian family atmosphere, many would be able to find their way to Christ and draw from this new environment, inspiration and strength. What a contrast it would be to the life of a busy, dirty, noisy street in West Ham! At certain times in the year it would be possible to hold conferences or training courses for young people. Again, groups of church members could spend some days together learning to share a common life.

The Boys' Home might be started in one of the cottages. It would not be big enough to meet the demand, but it might be an advantage to start with a

small number and expand the work later. At any rate there was plenty of ground on which a proper Home could be built. As for the camping facilities, they were beyond our wildest dreams: nearly one hundred and twenty acres of park and woodland, with the barn and outbuildings lending themselves to headquarters under cover in bad weather.

This was the scheme in broad outline. But "there's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip." Others had their eyes on Greenwoods and were determined to secure it. More than once we were sure that we had lost it and yet we could not believe that God had given such a vision without allowing it to come to fruition. At last, after many anxious months, all the difficulties were removed and the whole estate with its freehold was purchased. The money was found through the sale of the old Child Haven and from legacies left to the Mission by generous friends.

The decision to relinquish Child Haven was a difficult one to make. For nearly twenty years it had been the means of saving the lives of hundreds of children and the house and grounds had become dear to many of us. But it had been so well used that to make it serviceable for the future a great deal of money would have had to be spent on it.

And so Greenwoods became the property of the Mission. My mother set to work to furnish the house. This was something after her own heart, and for which she had a real genius. The furniture from Child Haven was renovated; many friends gave or loaned valuable pieces which were too large for their own homes and which they preferred should be used rather than put in

Her Majesty The Queen at Greenwoods

store; and my mother's own furniture completed the appointments. When the work was done no one would have guessed that it was all patchwork. The billiard-room became a nursery for the children and the panelled room adjoining, a little chapel. Upstairs, bedrooms were fitted for old people, mothers and babies, married couples and children. The attic was turned into a games room and, through the gift of another friend, a model electric railway was installed. In all this my mother was assisted by Miss Clifford, who came back from her retirement in Sunderland and threw herself into the new venture with the enthusiasm of youth.

Another dream had been realised. Here within the precincts of Greenwoods was a Paradise for all ages; a fairyland for the children, green pastures and still waters for the weary and heavy laden, and the gateway of heaven for the aged. "In my Father's house are many mansions," said Jesus. Surely this was a foretaste of the eternal home.

On August 5th, 1948, Her Majesty The Queen set the seal on this new enterprise by paying an official visit to Greenwoods. My mother received her and conducted her round this new country centre of the Mission. Hundreds of friends and supporters, old and new, gathered to welcome the Royal Patron. But perhaps The Queen was moved most of all by the cheering crowd of youngsters in camp, who from their place of concealment beyond the rising land of the park, rushed to greet her as she stood at the gate leading from the garden.

It was a triumphant occasion for my mother. In the early days of the war she had received the award of the

O.B.E. from The King for her services to the women and children of West Ham. Now, on this memorable summer's afternoon, her life's work was crowned by the visit of The Queen to Greenwoods.

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The story is told. And yet it ends in midstream, for the future lies before us and there is much of the land still to be possessed. When one realises that the neighbourhood is today largely pagan and the number of professed Christians relatively so small, the question inevitably arises in the mind: "Has all this labour and sacrifice achieved so little? O Lord, how long?"

But on that note we cannot, we dare not end. All over the world are men and women who look to The West Ham Central Mission as their spiritual home. In the ministry, on the mission field, in churches throughout the British Isles and in the countries of the British Commonwealth as well, are those who owe their conversion and their first training in Christian leadership and service to this one church. Then there is the witnessing, adventuring, Christian fellowship of today, facing the challenge of our lost society with the message of eternal hope and everlasting life. Finally there is the great company in heaven. Looking back over the years we must needs remember all those men and women, many whose names have not even been mentioned, who have given their money, their time, their thought, their prayers and their service that Christ might be uplifted in West Ham. "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."