

NOT THE RIGHTEOUS!

ADAPTED FROM PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION'S RADIO SERIES, "UNSHACKLED!"

by Jack Odell

"For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" Matthew 9:13

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Chapter 8

E. E. Standish . . . who found peace

"Calm Soul of all things! Make it mine
To feel, amid the city's jar,
That there abides a peace of thine,
Man did not make, and can not mar."

Matthew Arnold

STANDISH WAS A SUCCESS BY ANY POSSIBLE WORLDLY MEASURE. Not a sensation, but a solid, respectable, dependable man of business. Socially, he was more than acceptable. Suave and polished, he read enough to be a good conversationalist and was the sort of eligible bachelor people need to make their dinner parties successful. Business associates usually addressed him by his initials, "E. E." Friends called him "Stan."

Yet, when E. E. Standish, clean shaven, neatly dressed and prosperous, came picking his way among the derelicts on a Skid Row street he was neither sight-seeing nor slumming. He passed up the saloons, the peep-shows, the burlesque houses and the pawnshops. For him all these things offered neither an attraction nor a problem. He was looking for the Pacific Garden Mission.

The need he took with him was as great in its own way as the needs of any of the shabby men on that miserable street.

Standish needed peace of mind. That's one way of saying he was a typical product of our civilization. As his need for peace became more apparent, he had tried most of the world's ways for seeking it. One by one they had failed him. Now quietly desperate, he was looking for peace of mind in the last place you'd expect to find E. E. Standish on any errand - in a Skid Row rescue mission.

The symptoms had been a long time showing up in Stan.

For a number of years, he was too busy winning promotion even to think of peace of mind. He saw life as a sort of scramble for prizes, with never enough of them to go around. This forced him to hustle to get his. There was the right fraternity in college, the right apartment at the right

address, the window seat on the suburban train, the right promotion in the company, the right office with the sunniest view, and the right secretary with the proper regard for her employer's delicately balanced peace of mind.

That secretary business may have been one of the first warnings that Standish's peace of mind was a little too delicately balanced. Lately, he'd been wondering. He could remember the day he fired that girl who . . . what was her name? That's right, it was Miss Meadows. He recalled every detail of the way he'd handled the matter. She had been closing her book when he spoke.

"Miss Meadows, harmony is of the utmost importance to me."

"Yes, Mr. Standish."

She stood up and a faint wave of cologne drifted across the desk. He didn't care for sweet cologne.

"I'm a little afraid you and I are - not going to make it."

She was surprised and showed it. Standish wished people would learn to govern their reactions.

"Aren't you satisfied with my work, Mr. Standish?"

"Completely." He leaned back in the swivel chair and noted with satisfaction that there was no squeak from the well-oiled springs. "You're an excellent secretary, Miss Meadows."

"Well - then I don't know why you say we can't make it, Mr. Standish. I've never left the office while there was any work left to do, even when it meant staying overtime. Lots of days I've stayed overtime and haven't even told you about it!"

"I know, Miss Meadows. You're telling me things I already know, but . . ."

She broke in. He always disliked being interrupted. "I've even done some of your boss's work so you'd always have things ready for action the next day!"

"I'm perfectly aware of that, Miss Meadows. Self-defense is not at all necessary."

"But, why don't you . . ."

He was quite willing to interrupt a painful scene. "You must understand that harmony in my working conditions is of the utmost importance to me. Harmony, Miss Meadows - complete harmony! I happen to be a man who can't stand confusion. My work requires concentration, and I enjoy working hard. I'm sorry we haven't made the grade" and I'll see that you get six weeks' severance pay and an excellent recommendation. But I'll have to ask you to resign as of today."

"How can you give me an excellent recommendation when you're firing me?"

"I'm not an unkind person, Miss Meadows. I want you to find another position - one where things will be harmonious. This isn't selfishness on my part at all. I'm simply concerned about

the company's best interests. They'll best be served when I have peace of mind. And I know, Miss Meadows, what my environment must be."

The girl was about to cry. Standish noted the signs of tears with deep distaste.

She said, "But what do I do wrong? I think I have a right to know why I'm being fired! What have I done?"

He sighed at the need to perform an unpleasant duty. "Just what you're doing at this moment, Miss Meadows."

"What?"

"Chewing your fingernails like a schoolgirl!"

He'd been right about the tears. Miss Meadows wailed and ran to the ladies' room. Later, when she had gotten hold of herself, he dictated the letter of recommendation. It was really rather glowing, he thought, though she sniffed a time or two. She asked no further questions and he was relieved. It saved him having to tell her about the cologne (much too sweet), and her annoying trick of clearing her throat gently each time she picked up the phone.

Miss Meadows asked to leave early. It was a relief to Standish to see her go. The day had been most unharmonious. When he cleared his desk that evening, he noticed more than the usual number of cigarette ends in the ashtray. There were several over his usual careful quota.

"Bad sign," he thought. "No harmony - no peace of mind."

He sat with an acquaintance on the suburban train. Still troubled, he told of the day's annoyances. The acquaintance was sympathetic.

"You're right, Stan. Those little things can jangle a guy's nerves."

"They certainly can. Play hob with a man's peace of mind."

Now, that's true, of course. If a man's peace can be wrecked, little things can surely do it. And once that man starts fighting to hold his peace of mind he's well on the way to never having any.

Later on there was another thing that might have been a symptom. Standish recalled that it stemmed from his annoyance over the tiresome train ride to and from the suburbs. He began looking for an apartment in town. One building seemed ideal. It was ten minutes from his office and the address had solid prestige. He studied it carefully from across the street, taking satisfied note of the neat little lawn (curb your dog), the glass-canopied entrance, and the quietly uniformed doorman.

Stan decided he might as well see the apartment and pay a deposit at once. He went briskly to the intersection and crossed over.

A newsboy stood on the corner near the building entrance.

"Getcher eevnin' papeyeer! Read all abaat it! Getcher payper-er! "

If lung power sold papers, the boy was tomorrow's tycoon. Standish had passed him and almost reached the entrance - canopy when a sudden thought struck him. He stopped, reflected, and went back to the paper boy.

"Paper, mister?"

"Why - yes." Standish fished for a coin and the boy slammed a folded paper securely under his arm. "Keep the change."

The newsie was impressed.

"Tanks, mister! You live in here?" He flipped a thumb over his shoulder at the apartment house.

"Well - not yet. But I'm thinking about it."

"Swell joint. Takes a lotta dough. I guess you ain't worried none about money, though."

Standish ignored that and got to the point.

"Tell me, son - do you sell papers here every evening?"

"Yep. Mornin's too, before school!"

"Hmm - well, good luck."

"Sure!" The boy turned away. "Paaayperl Getcher evenin' paper!!"

Stan went in and looked at the vacant apartment. As he'd feared, the windows were close to the newsboy's corner. The view was lovely, but the hawking was audible even eight stories up. Standish sighed. Money was no assurance of peace of mind. Harmony was hard to come by. He thanked the manager and left. The newsboy was still yelling when he reached the street. In time, a satisfactory apartment turned up. There were no newsboys within two blocks.

Soon, however, Stan discovered that the location of his new quarters was entirely too convenient. Customers, out on the town for an evening of carousing, often thought of their old pal, "E. E."

The house phone frequently rang at odd hours of the night and well-brandied voices greeted him from the lobby. This always upset Standish, but customers must be catered to. He forced himself to say, "Why don't you come up for a drink?" The invitation was never refused.

"A drink" usually turned out to be half a dozen, and Stan was no drinker. To him, the noisy parties that stumbled into his apartment were most inharmonious. Still, business was business. He told himself this was the cross he had to bear.

But when one of his own nephews showed up after midnight and demanded not only a drink, but twenty dollars as well, Stan was furious. The intoxicated boy found this very amusing.

"Stan, old uncle - I can tell by the look in your left eyebrow that you would like to murder me - in warm blood! Very warm, my good kinsman, because it's forti- fah - forti-fried - fortifried with anti-freeze. Tha's very funny, isn't it?"

"No," Standish said. "I don't find you amusing. In fact, you're disgusting!"

"Tha's exshellent! Then perhaps you'll loan me twenty dollars so I can be on my way?"

"No!"

"No? I'm dishappointed! In fact - I'm so dishappointed I think I'll jus' lie down on your couch for a while - and brood about it."

"No!"

The nephew ignored him grandly and stretched out full length. Standish prodded him.

"Get up, you worthless drunken bum!" More prodding, without result. "What do you want with the twenty?"

"If you musht know - I intend to purchase whishkey."

"That's the last thing you need in your condition . . . Wait! Don't go to sleep! I'll never get you out of here if you do!"

"Preshishely!"

Standish was desperate.

"All right, then. Take the twenty dollars and get out of here. I'll pay blackmail before I put up with you!"

That happened five times. It was hard enough to have peace of mind at the office. Now the apartment, his only real refuge, was being invaded. He was losing precious sleep. Standish lay awake all one night waiting for the house phone to ring. It didn't, but by morning he was exhausted. There was only one thing left to do. He packed a few clothes and went to a hotel.

The first couple of nights he just slept. But once he'd caught up on his rest the room seemed too small for his peace of mind. Standish worked hard all day, kept his new address a secret, and spent the evenings pacing up and down between the dresser and the bed. Before the end of the week, his restlessness drove him to the lobby to find companionship.

He struck up a conversation with a man named Simmons. Simmons was a good listener. Within ten minutes Stan was telling his troubles in a most uncharacteristic way.

Simmons said, "Too bad. It's a shame you had to leave your home and move into a hotel."

"A shame? It's terrible. I don't know what's happened to me lately. Sometimes, when I hit the bed at night, I wish I'd just sleep away."

"That bad, eh?"

"And the strange thing is that I've always lived a decent, law-abiding, respectable life. I've got all I need for security. I don't gamble. I don't drink. I watch my cigarettes - even coffee! But people won't let me have any peace!"

"That's the great problem of the age we live in." Standish nodded. "You're right. There just doesn't seem to be peace anywhere. I've traveled to all the so-called peaceful places. I've read books. I've tried to hold right thoughts - but peace is always out of reach. No harmony!"

"Maybe we're all expecting a miracle of some kind." Standish laughed. "Well, the age of miracles is past."

Simmons was silent. Then he said, "I wonder if it is?" "What do you mean? Miracles?"

"A kind of miracle," Simmons said. "Some friends have been telling me about a place here in town where miracles - of a sort - happen every day."

"If you're talking about peace - it must be the morgue." "No. I laughed when they told me. It's a Mission."

"A Mission?" Standish was confused. "You mean converting the heathen savage?"

"Uh - not exactly. We seem to have heathens quite close to home. This place is on South State Street, down in Skid Row."

"Oh, one of those!" Stan was relieved. "You mean - soup and salvation. Bible-thumping and hymn-singing."

"Something like that. But these friends of mine claim they heard ex-drunkards and ex-gamblers - even a murderer - stand up and vow they'd found what you're looking for."

"Peace of mind?"

"That's right. Sounds fantastic, doesn't it?"

It certainly did. But it stuck in Standish's mind and he couldn't shake it loose. Later on, when he'd paced his room for a couple of hours and felt more un-harmonious than he ever had in his life, he decided to find out. Stan told himself it was just curiosity - and besides, he had time to kill. He had long ago marked religion off his list of ways to find peace.

That's how E. E. Standish came to Pacific Garden Mission.

During the service, he tried to hang on to his aloof, skeptical attitude. But this wasn't preaching. It was testimony, from men and women whose faces vouched for the truth of what they said.

Over and over again they spoke of having - joy! Almost everyone mentioned having peace of mind. They usually described it as, "**the peace that passeth all understanding.**" But in spite of the unfamiliar words, Standish could see they were talking about the thing he lacked. He began feeling uncomfortable and tried to resist the growing weight of testimony.

"This is ridiculous," he thought. "These people are boasting! This is rank, ignorant egotism dressed up to look like religious experience. It's utter pomposity!"

Still, he knew that if these people were crazy, it would be a relief to have their kind of insanity. The peace they had was worth anything. But he couldn't stay in a place like that!

Standish hurried outside and hailed a cab. He had to be alone, to think and recover his conventional perspective.

The hotel room was just as he'd left it, but now he was uncomfortably conscious of the Gideon Bible on the dresser. He'd seen hundreds of them, of course, but this one refused to be ignored. He knew there was nothing in it for him. He was an upright, respectable man. He had no sins to confess!

When he picked up the Bible, it fell open to the Book of Romans. Standish began to read, and as he read he sank to his knees by the bed.

"There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God . . . Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips . . . Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known." - The way of peace they have not known!

There on his knees, he began to pray.

"GOD! In the name of JESUS CHRIST, forgive me for my selfish life and give me peace . . . give me peace!"

It was daybreak when Standish rose from his knees.

During the long hours of prayer, he had seen himself for the first time, not through his own eyes, but through the eyes of JESUS CHRIST. He saw that E. E. Standish had been playing GOD. And he knew at last that without CHRIST the ingredients of peace simply weren't in him. He knew, too, that at last he had been given peace, because in him now lived the Person of GOD Himself.

That day showed him the reality of his transformation.

Though he'd had no sleep, his day's work was, of all things, harmonious. He didn't have to protect his precious self.

That night, still without sleep, he was back at Pacific Garden Mission. E. E. Standish, dignified business man, had his own story to tell there of, "**the peace that passeth all understanding.**"

That was only a beginning. Night after night, for the remainder of his life on earth, Stan joined his ex-derelict friends with the scarred faces, telling the true story of how he found peace - when he permitted JESUS CHRIST, the Son of GOD, to find him. He always remained suave and respectable, socially acceptable. But more than that - he was poised and peaceful.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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