

# THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### FROM COUNTERFEITING TO REALITY

When a Detroit federal judge singled out and freed an Irish lad from a gang of counterfeiters on trial in federal court, he gave Harry Monroe a first shove toward heaven.

“You don’t belong with that crowd,” said the judge.

Harry never felt less like belonging with them than at that moment. Bad from head to foot and hard-boiled to the core, he nevertheless couldn’t keep back the tears. Those were the first really kind words he had heard since leaving home.

“Your honor, I believe if I had half a chance I would go straight, I’m so tired of it all.” The judge stood up and put his hand on Harry’s shoulder. The lad wasn’t charged with making counterfeit money; some of the others did that. He merely “shoved the queer,” as they called passing the fake bills along to innocent victims.

Harry wept and waited for the judge to speak. “I trust God and I trust you,” said the man, “to carry on.”

Harry bounded for the first train to Chicago. He had little money, but from the Windy City depot he went that night to the first big saloon within sight and ordered a schooner of beer. The saloon clock showed 7:30 when he lifted the glass to his lips. Suddenly he stopped.

“If I drink that,” he thought, “I’m right back where I was.”

An electric tingle surged through him. Replacing the glass on the bar, Harry Monroe walked out.

As he turned the corner, a door opened on Van Buren Street, pushing music and singing in its sweep. Monroe stopped, then walked inside.

It was a Saturday night in February, 1880, in Pacific Garden Mission. When Colonel Clarke came down at the close of the meeting and asked Monroe to give his heart to Jesus, the lad answered: “You stick to your business and I’ll stick to mine.” It was a queer response from one destined for 35 years after that to be a close friend of the rescue mission, for 20 years its superintendent.

Harry Monroe came from Exeter, New Hampshire, where he was born January 17, 1853.

His fondness for drink soon introduced him to the wrong crowd. In Chicago he was no stranger to Whiskey Row, where he lost what money he had in the gambling dens, and where he saw many of his friends go to drunkards' graves. Before long he was associated with an outfit that made and passed counterfeit money. Caught in a police net, he was only 27 when he appeared for a hearing in Detroit before the federal judge who told him to go straight.

The night Monroe surprised himself by wandering into Pacific Garden Mission, after an aimless shambling along the street, he heard some of the very men who had formerly quaffed the cup on Whiskey Row. They told of Christ's power to change lives and their words rang true. Speaker of that particular evening was D. W. Potter, prominent Chicago banker, who took charge of the meetings one night a week.

Monroe shook from top to bottom, but concealed his reaction effectively and sufficiently to rebuff Colonel Clarke's invitation to become a Christian.

The big-hearted colonel understood. Smothering Monroe's trembling hand in his own, he said: "Young man, do you know that Jesus loves you and so do I?" Then the colonel told of his wonderful Saviour, of Christ's power to save others, and of His promise to cover all the past with His shed blood, and to give men a new start.

"A new start?" questioned Monroe. "How?"

Colonel Clarke told him and Monroe was converted that very night. "I quit booze from this minute on," he said, and then bowed his head for prayer. "God be merciful to me, a sinner," he blurted, as the colonel led him along toward the front of the mission, "and save me for Jesus' sake."

Harry Monroe told that story over and over. "I've never regretted that prayer for a moment," he'd say, outlining the life from which Jesus saved him.

As he told of his past life of gambling and drink to the listening derelicts gathered in the mission, he had a habit of closing his eyes, as though the experiences of the days and nights he was recounting were too painfully vivid.

The night Harry was converted he was lodged by the colonel in a cheap room. Before retiring he wrote his Massachusetts mother for the first time in twelve years. She thought he was dead. Harry didn't sleep a wink all night. The hours were too filled with praise to God for the new chance to make good in life. Looking back over the years he saw nothing but dismal failure; looking into the future, he saw only glory.

The next day was Sunday. At the mission Harry Monroe gave his first testimony, sending a thrill of joy through the crowd. It was only a few weeks until Colonel and Mrs. Clarke had him helping in the meetings. Learning of his ability to sing, they gave him charge of the song service.

Hymns and Gospel songs throbbed with new life as Harry pulled more singing out of that nondescript bunch of tramps in the old mission refuge than many a preacher ever evinced from the best robed choir. He was determined to pour the Gospel music all the way down Whiskey Row, where he himself had lost a small fortune, buying tickets to hell.

Harry was a barber shop tenor. Night after night he would sing, "Tell Mother I'll Be There," and then relate how he found Christ in the mission and wrote the same night to the mother who thought him dead. "Steady, now," he would say; "let's bow our heads while I sing the chorus once again." Then his voice would fill the hall:

"Tell mother I'll be there  
In answer to her prayer;  
This message, blessed Saviour, to her bear!  
Tell mother I'll be there,  
Heav'n's joys with her to share;  
Yes, tell my darling mother I'll be there!"

Then he would pray and give the invitation. Hands would go up for prayer before the message of the evening had been given.

Perhaps as he turned in reflection upon his own redeemed life, Harry Monroe's vision of the fields white unto harvest grew into an unending horizon upon which he looked with penetrating compassion. Porky and of medium height rather than pudgy, he had a fondness for blue serge suits. Kindliness glowed from his face, so frank and unadorned in its general squareness, yet so adamant in its structural strength. He had a ready wit which flowed from his lips. The grimness of those lips, once the mouthpiece for the issues of everlasting death, now heralded the glad tidings of eternal life. The bushy eyebrows once knit in a formidable plotting of crime now cupped the gleam of unraveling twisted lives. The hair on his head was vanishing and there were furrows on his face. What must once have been the marks of sin, God's grace had softened into lines of sympathy and understanding. This Harry Monroe, heavy and squared in general impress with modifying strokes of graduated boldness throughout his face, could unashamedly raise his high voice in testimony to Him who maketh all things new.

From the very start he was a soul-winner. His passion to win the lost kept him pleading and praying until victory and newness of life came to seeking hearts. Nor would Harry Monroe stop there. He shepherded his spiritual children as his very own, seeking out respectable jobs and helpful environments and feeding them more and more with the Bread of Life.

It was not unusual then, that when Colonel Clarke died in 1892, Harry Monroe should succeed his spiritual father as superintendent of Pacific Garden Mission. Together with Mrs. Clarke he held high the Saviour of men to mission crowds until 1912, when he answered briefly the call to nation-wide evangelistic service.

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