

THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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CHAPTER TWENTY

FOLD OF THE LOST SHEEP

April 1, 1940, was Harry Saulnier's first official day as superintendent. He appeared for work the previous night, pleading with sinners to come to Jesus. That was the night Charlie Mason handed him a loaded thirty-eight caliber pistol which he had stolen from his brother, an Ohio deputy sheriff, to make some holdups.

"Take this gun, before I kill myself and somebody else," said Mason.

The meeting had just ended when Mason entered. All night long he had walked up and down the street in front of the mission, hearing the amplified service. The men had gone to their beds and Saulnier, about to lock up, waved Mason inside. They sat down, alone, in the mission hall. Mason was still carrying his gun in his pocket when Saulnier pulled out a New Testament and began reading from Romans 6.

"I'm saved, but I'm a backslider," said the gunman.

"Then let's pray," said Saulnier. Then, as he slid to his knees alongside the old Billy Sunday piano, he added, "First give me that gun." Mason handed it over and they poured out their hearts to God. Six months later the news reached the sheriff's office in Ohio and Mason's brother scribbled a note to Saulnier, begging him to send the pistol. It was a pleasure, wrote Saulnier. During these few years of Saulnier's superintendency, the converts have come from every walk of life. The primary emphasis, however, is still to salvage the outcast. The presentation of the invitation to Jesus has changed somewhat, for Saulnier knows that "mother's prayers seldom follow wayward sons in this generation; in fact, many mothers are worse than their children." So it is a direct appeal to come to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, that Saulnier gives. The crowd is asked to bow in prayer; then the superintendent usually repeats that great invitation, "**Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,**" spoken by Jesus. Then,

"Ah, soul, are you here
Without comfort of rest,
Marching down the rough pathway of time?
Make Jesus your friend
Ere the shadows grow dark
Oh, accept this sweet peace so sublime."

“How many here tonight would like to take Christ as their Saviour? Would like to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Raise your hand and give us the blessed privilege of remembering you in prayer.”

What hands have been raised in response! Hands of murderers, drunkards, prostitutes, gamblers, adulterers, gigolos, revelers. But other hands, too: hands of musicians, college students, soldiers, sailors and white-collar workers.

“Now that you’ve given us the privilege of praying for you,” adds Saulnier, ever pouring out his heart in intercession, “give us the privilege of praying with you. Come to the prayer room behind the platform, while we sing this old hymn, ‘Just as I am . . . Jesus, I Come.’”

The bulky grand piano resounds and the crowd takes up the words. A spiritual electricity charges the air, and the penitents start forward to the words,

“Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!”

Personal workers are going through the audience, to see if any are on the verge of decision and need just a word of encouragement. They accompany such to the prayer room, rather than to the front of the main auditorium, for it is quieter and more private.

It is a great heart that beats beneath the vest of the one hundred ninety pound, six-foot three-inch mission overseer. Secret of his success is his deep personal interest in other people. He numbers among his personal friends such workers as William R. Newell, Walter L. Wilson, William L. Pettingill, William McCarrell, J. I. Overholtzer, and “Ma” Sunday. He never met Billy personally, although he heard him a number of times, but “Ma” Sunday has said many times that Billy would be delighted in Harry’s conduct of the mission.

“Dad would be one-hundred percent for a man who loves souls like that,” she volunteered.

Right there she placed her finger on the bright spot of Saulnier’s superintendency. More than one hundred converts a month, on an average, are being made at the State Street lighthouse. Many a church would delight in a record of a hundred converts a year, but in 1941 Saulnier’s records showed 1302 persons, from every state in the union, won to Christ. During the first six months of 1942, there were almost seven hundred converts. Those in January alone came from twenty-four states and two foreign countries.

An efficient staff of workers gets much credit from Saulnier, especially Ole Neswold, who took the meetings for the month before Saulnier could leave the Commonwealth Edison Company, which, incidentally, volunteered to give him the only furlough in its records for religious activity. Another spirited worker is Howard Potter, a West coast college professor who felt a call to mission work, and who serves as mission secretary.

Mission converts are interviewed and an employment record is made, to ascertain where they will fit into the business and manufacturing firms co-operating with the soul-saving station. Workers, with qualifications ranging from a year's grammar school to graduation from Harvard, have been placed in hotels, restaurants, mail order concerns, railroads, machine shops, garages and factories.

Prerequisite to an increase in conversions was a stepup in the attendance of down-and-outers, which Saulnier encouraged from the very start. For various reasons the attendance had decreased, and Saulnier sent word into the hovels and dens that he had a great message for men with empty hearts.

One of the problems had been the tremendous turnover because of transients, which means that more than ever the mission must drive for decisions among men attending for the first time. During 1941, the total attendance at Gospel meetings was 82,479. Meals were served to 36,362 persons and dormitory lodging was given 19,275. What is important, there is an efficient follow-up campaign; the converts are put to work, asked to come to prayer meetings, to give their testimonies, and to help with tract distribution.

Saulnier inaugurated noon street meetings five days and nightly meetings three times a week at the northwest corner of State and Harrison. Usually he is in charge of the noon meetings and Howard Potter takes the night sessions.

Both old timers and young converts come to tell their stories. George Snow tells how he used to cheat the suckers in the gambling dens, and how Christ saved him. Successful loop merchants and professional men, Christian business men, add their word of testimony to Christ's redemptive power.

Tract work has more than doubled under Saulnier's leadership. Between 200,000 and 250,000 leaflets are distributed annually. Saulnier is a great believer in religious journalism. Wherever he goes—whether by foot, automobile, train or airplane—he distributes a tract or “one of these lovely road maps to heaven”: The Gospel of John.

Recently a conductor on the Sante Fe, alert for enemy propagandists, became suspicious of Saulnier's tract work. At the next station a plain clothes detective boarded the train, and, taking a seat next to Saulnier, struck up a conversation. Soon Saulnier gave him a printed folder and told him about the Lord.

“I'm a good Methodist,” blurted the detective. “That's all right,” answered Saulnier; “you've got to be born again, too.”

In February, 1941, a women's work was inaugurated, supervised by Mrs. Susan Wymer, jail and mission worker, who for years has been active at Pacific Garden Mission. Though the men's work has held the prominent place for years, this new department is beginning to make converts and has become an integral part of the mission, taking over its jail visitation. A women's worker, Miss Grace Vander Ploeg, is also on the job daily.

Taking to the air at the invitation of Station WMBI, the mission has broadcast its Saturday night service every other week from May to August.

One of Saulnier's objectives is a regular mission broadcast which lacks but two essentials: a radio station that will donate the time on the air, and a sponsor to pay the thirteen-dollar monthly rental for a wire to the mission.

So vigorously has the mission grown that present facilities have become overtaxed and inadequate. The present auditorium seats but two hundred, and were it not for the decrease of vagrants due to war demands, many more would be turned away than at present from outstanding meetings. The present dormitory, accommodating seventy-five, is overcrowded and men have often been turned out into a winter night to tramp the snow without lodging.

God brought Harry Saulnier to the mission for such an hour as this. At his urging, the trustees in July, 1941, made first payment on the two buildings just north of the mission, the purchase price being \$30,000, although redecorating will raise the figure half again as much. Saulnier has prayed many nights that some Christian benefactor will write a check for \$20,000 to forward the work of salvaging prospective Monroes, Trotters, Sundays, MacDonalds and others.

Plans for rehabilitation are not elaborate, but provide a larger chapel with a seating capacity of four to five hundred persons, a larger prayer room, greatly increased dormitory and dining room space, showers and fumigators, Sunday school rooms and an adequate office. A Christian servicemen's center, for the duration of the war, is also planned. Another feature, when funds permit the provision, will be arrangement for a boys' and girls' work with special emphasis on child evangelism, in which field Mrs. Saulnier is a leader.

Still located in the suburbs of hell is this historic mission.

It is a half block from Chicago's slums of sex, on the southern fringe of the loop. On all sides are doors where men and women check their consciences as they enter.

Cheap hotels are headquarters for prostitutes; procurers lounge in drinking dives to enlist customers. Just the other day, Chicago police clamped a quarantine on one nearby hotel, following a complaint that servicemen had contracted venereal diseases there.

Burlesque houses continue to display gaudy signs of women in the nude, at which passersby halt to avidly anticipate the pleasures of the stage unfrocking inside. The sex centers were given a setback a few years ago when the Chicago Daily Times ridiculed Mayor Kelly's closing the Selwyn Theater where "Tobacco Road" was playing, because it was "a mass of obscenity."

The Times quoted a police corporal as stating that while "Tobacco Road" broke seven of the Ten Commandments, stripteasers in the burlesque houses outdid that. Before police compelled the paunchy blondes with dyed, frizzy hair to wear more than a light pair of trunks as a concession to decency and law, they uncovered some interesting facts that patrons of State Street knew had been uncovered for a long time.

The once beautiful but now weather-beaten chorines pour into skintight gowns, only to shed them again with gestures, wriggles, wobbles, twists and squirms, to the catcalls and whistles of delighted moronic sex-perverts who infest the audience. Nervously shifting in their seats, and watching with glassy eyes, is a good sprinkling of youngsters who hardly know the full significance of it all, but who are getting a post-graduate sex education overnight. There are plenty of old men, too aged for thrills from anything but lewd jokes and suggestive dances. Then there are ladies, if one may be that charitable, who loudly laugh, cackle and bray as hammy comedians waste time between the performers' scanty change of scenery.

It is a fifty minute show, during which debased beauty makes sex a target of vile slurs and obscenity. The "girl choruses" feature painted has-beens who double at shedding gauze garments. Their lurid dances, their routine of sexy filth, stimulate the emotions of patrons and make them enthusiastic visitors at the nearby taverns, dance halls, recreation parlors and other dens.

During the burlesque intermission, a hawker sells the sex-starved clientele French postcards at a nickel each. The flabby-muscled women in tights are a temporary letdown, however; the customers laugh, knowing they can do better not too far from where they sit.

Outside the stench of perspiring hot dogs, the swing music of cabaret bands, the parade of unmasked hell itself merge into a caterwaul of depraved humanity. Here is where the mission has deliberately chosen to prove its mettle. There is no running away from sin. Rather, sheathed in the full armor of God, its testimony plucks the fiery darts of the Wicked One from many a pierced target. It is a struggle against mighty forces, as David Anderson, in the November 17, 1940, edition of the Chicago Tribune, writes:

"Competition is tough on South State Street, but the old Pacific Garden mission still does a thriving business in men's souls.

"Night and day thousands of homeless men—bums, hoboes in from the wheat fields, ragged pan-handlers, crippled up, mumbling, shuffling men—limp down South State Street from Van Buren to 11th street and then plod back again. It's a parade of perpetual motion second only to West Madison Street. Where they go, whence they come, is nobody's business and nobody cares much.

"Under the gaudy marquees of the burlesque shows they stop to look at the posters of hefty blondes. Or, they gather at the open doors of the tattoo parlors and watch the artist tattoo a spread eagle on the chest of a sailor. Sometimes as they move past the barber shops they wink at the lady barbers.

"Here, in this jumble and welter of pawnshops, poolrooms, honky-tonks and cage hotels where a night's lodging is a dime or 15 cents—40 cents for a private room, including breakfast— the Pacific Garden mission holds its own.

"Each night the mission houses 73 men on iron cots upstairs after the services on the main

floor are over. The men bring bundles of newspapers for bedding. Some evenings as many as 400 persons crowd into the hall to hear the singing and preaching. Harry G. Saulnier, superintendent, estimates that in a single month the mission has managed to find jobs for 20 to 30 men. ‘But we don’t keep records of such things,’ he adds.

“Our first work,’ he says, ‘is the saving of souls. Giving men a place to sleep and finding jobs is incidental. Bringing men to God is our primary business. All else is secondary.”

With a record of some 30,000 converts in its 65-year history, Pacific Garden Mission in enlarging and tending its flock continues to hold an unusual place of service in God’s kingdom. It is one of the four hundred fifty missions dotting the United States and Canada.

Usually these centers are classed into four types:

- (1) the pure gospel, which accepts as motivating basis that the gospel alone will do the work; if a man be changed spiritually, all other factors and relationships will be changed;
- (2) the community mission, usually established in poorer districts, which incorporates and promotes all the various activities of the average church;
- (3) the welfare mission, stressing social service as well as spiritual preaching;
- (4) the industrial mission which seeks to reach men spiritually by working with them in manual activities.

It is interesting to note that all these classes of missions also maintain a program of jail work, realizing the need of help to the outcast as well as to the downcast.

“House of miracles” is no misnomer for these help-stations. Each year thousands of men, women, and children representing as many thousands of backgrounds, problems, and needs, have been reclaimed and reclassified.

These missions have varied histories. Some have no specific denominational affiliation or support, whereas others do; some are municipally governed, others bear the names of founding individuals or families; others, again, indicate specialized work among certain races or creeds. With the advance in responsibilities and complications of modern living, methods and means of service are constantly enlarging. Where once a well-shod worker ministered to a particular area, the horse-drawn vehicle, then the automobile, and now involved amplification and sound systems bear the same news of salvation.

The driving principle seems to be to send the Good News in the quickest way to the most people in the widest area.

Statistics never tell a complete story. They nevertheless, like an arrow, point to a more vital source of illumination.

It may be of interest, then, to study the following figures, which represent the partial work of the past six months at Pacific Garden Mission, only one of these four hundred fifty “churches in overalls”:

CONVERSIONS: January, 1942, 151; February, 131; March, 133; April, 90; May, 87; June, 100.

ATTENDANCES About 40,000;

MEALS: 20,000;

SLEEPERS: About 1700 per month, making a total of almost 10,000 for six months.

Yet, basically, these items are but echoes of the greater call to sound the invitation of Him who said:

“I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine.

“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

~ end of book ~

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