

# THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE APOSTLE OF STATE STREET

The unabated influx of converts that marked the life-long history of Pacific Garden Mission was highlighted by colorful individuals all along the way. Dad and Ma Taylor's last thirteen years of service at 650 South State Street, from 1923-1936, had their representative number, too.

It was a regular feature that Dumbbell Tilly and her group of girls, all of them in the early twenties, attended the mission once a week, no more, no less. They were a peculiar crowd, evidently given to the lures of drink and night life; nevertheless it would have been definite cause for alarm if Tilly, the apparent ring-leader, would not have made her weekly appearance with the group.

Yet when Pa Taylor went to speak with her, the only response to his inquiry was a well-aimed punch in the stomach. For Miss Rice, the personal worker, there was not such violent reaction; quite on the contrary, absolute silence for over a month was the only answer she received. Then came the night of decision, when Flora Rice led Tilly to the Lord. And a leader of quite different caliber she proved to be. The mysterious Dumbbell Tilly, it was discovered, was a cook on a large Evanston estate. Her pals were the other servants. Twelve friends, including the silver and kitchen girl, other cooks, and a sister, soon found the Lord through her new witness. She was strengthening her spiritual muscles, hence the nickname which she still uses in correspondence with the Taylors. Tilly later married a Christian man and named one of the children Flora, in honor of Miss Rice.

"They're all doin' it," was the excuse under which an Esthonian sailor justified his sin of drink and licentiousness. But when such a one leaves the sea to get rid of evil companions, it either indicates a weariness of life, or points to something better. For Otto Kiel it was both. He left the docks in New York in 1921 and came to Chicago, for many years not having written his Christian mother who since Kiel was three until the time he ran away surrounded him with Bible teaching and a godly life. Out of sheer curiosity he entered Pacific Garden Mission on May 14, 1923. The testimonies unearthed the long-dormant seed that his mother had planted in faith many years ago. At the invitation Kiel surrendered to Jesus, finding an immediate peace and joy that had never been his lot. It was a memorable letter of good news that reached a still-praying mother when Otto Kiel sent his testimony home.

Harry Venema, the native Dutchman, had a reputation, too— for profanity.

This acquisition of questionable worth perhaps had an innocent beginning. Not knowing any English when he reached America's shores, he thought the language of his newly-found boisterous companions was of the best. Before long, Venema's vocabulary was his outstanding mark of identification. It was miraculous how God cleansed him of this sin after September 7, 1924, the night Venema came to the Pacific Garden Mission and found Christ. All things, vocabulary included, truly became new. His vocation is that of a truck driver, an occupation he has used to spread his testimony throughout the miles of his business.

Royal L. Leeson thought sleeping in jails a real privilege. For a youngster exposed to his father's pool room lessons in smoking, gambling and swearing, and branded with expulsion from school at the age of sixteen, the road offered many possibilities. There was a variety of short jobs from New York to Wyoming, from the Dakotas to Illinois, with the added fillip of a year in the army.

A gambling house in Peoria, Illinois, took whatever cash he had, but an army officer of that town provided the necessary dollar for the stretch to Chicago. Working in a West Madison Street restaurant two days produced four dollars, a state of unconscious drunkenness, and a rest at the Des Plaines Street Police Station. The meal ticket which the Salvation Army Headquarters gave him to a Chinese shop on South State Street brought him into Pacific Garden Mission territory. It was a rainy day, and he accepted the doorkeeper's invitation to the service. At least it meant getting out of the storm. Listening to the testimonies that rang out, Leeson was strangely affected. That day's plans, to obtain money by either robbery or holdup when night came, somehow lost their edge.

He determined to get work and quit the old life. Unable to find work the next day, Leeson returned to the mission, stating his plight to the superintendent. Pa Taylor found work for him with a plumber, a Christian who gave him the money for the first meal in four days. That night, December 20, 1924, was the first time he ever knelt in prayer. Wanting to respond to the invitation at the mission, Leeson nevertheless hesitated doing so because of his ragged coat. Pa Taylor supplied his own, and in it Leeson fell to his knees and acknowledged his need of Christ and salvation. His testimony strengthened not only the witness of Pacific Garden Mission, but went with his missionary services into Central and South America.

Whiskey had such a hold on George Wells that he couldn't even attend to his unlawful business of bootlegging. And at home his two baby daughters were innocent victims of his vice, too. One Sunday morning, the memory of which now brings a shudder, found a doctor in the home. In a drunken stupor, Wells was just conscious enough to learn that he had poisoned the girls by giving them ginger-ale from the same glass he used for whiskey. God spared their lives for the later joy that came into a new Christian home when George Wells found Christ at Pacific Garden Mission.

On January 25, 1925, while standing on State Street waiting to pass some "stuff," Wells heard the singing from the mission. Walking into the hall, he heard the story of God's love for the first time in his life. He wept in repentance, and found freedom from sin in Christ Jesus. Immediately he secured new work, a position with the Volunteers of America which he holds to this day.

Louis Houge had been a backslider for many years.

His two-thousand dollar pool-hall brought neither him nor the many patrons closer to God. Yet, night after night he visited Pacific Garden Mission. As he said in a testimony, "I kept coming to the Mission for many meetings. Mr. Taylor put his hand on my head one night as he urged me to let Jesus save me and said as I refused to go forward, 'My man, those gray hairs are not a good sign for your putting off the decision for eternity. You are too near the edge.' I didn't forget that."

On September 2, 1926, he knelt at the mission in confession of sin, and arose to turn the key in his pool-hall for the last time. His work among railroaders is an excellent place for testimony, and he is active in jail visitation and in the work of the Christian Business Men's meetings.

In the summer of 1929, a college fellow with an automatic pistol in his pocket drifted into Chicago. Walking along on south State Street, LaVerne Poole was attracted by the singing of a strangely familiar hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." He slipped out of Pacific Garden Mission as unobtrusively as he had slipped in. The next night, however, he was back again.

This time when the invitation to come to Jesus was given a personal worker spoke to Poole about his relationship to Christ. He said he'd take a chance. Going to the altar, God's love so completely lifted him out of sin that LaVerne Poole's surrender was full and unreserved. Since that night, September 15, 1929, God's blessings have flowed in full measure. With a Christian wife, and strengthened for Christian service by seminary training, Poole is now working faithfully as a successful pastor.

Born in a parsonage, the son, grandson, and great-grandson of God-fearing clergymen, and himself preparing for the ministry, Otto P. Woysch nevertheless spent half a century in rank atheism. He has the best education obtainable. Leaving native Germany for Canada, he saw in the Northwest Provinces the opportunity for easy self-advancement. That was the reason for accepting a pastorate; he did not even believe in God, let alone believe in such a thing as God's call to His service. After a number of years of such hypocrisy, Woysch became an outstanding foreign language editor of several publications, all the while defying God, His church and work, in the most blatant manner. There came a day, however, when self-sufficiency vanished.

Walking disconsolately into Pacific Garden Mission on October 17, 1930, he heard the Gospel preached in its beauty and power for the first time in many years. A sudden realization of sin overcame Woysch. All night long he wrestled in turmoil of soul. That next night, October 18, found him in the mission a second time, now in full contrition, accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour. His preaching now is not a mockery; it is a heartfelt experience.

The present pastor of Glenwood, Illinois, United Church was reborn in Pacific Garden Mission hardly ten years ago. Arthur E. Petznick had run away from home at the age of twenty, finally securing employment in Detroit until the depression. Loss of work, gambling, life in the Chicago slums followed in quick turn. Grant Park benches were his bed many times. On October 9, 1931, as the police entered the front door of a pool-room at State and Harrison, the quickest exit for Petznick was a side door. Walking down State Street on this cold, rainy day he welcomed the invitation of a worker at the mission door.

The first thing that attracted him inside the hall was the sign, HOW LONG SINCE YOU WROTE TO MOTHER?

Suddenly he realized what a disgrace he was to his home; when Dad Taylor preached, he realized what a disgrace he was in the sight of God. In the prayer room that night he made place in his heart for Christ. A course at the Moody Bible Institute followed. Now, with his wife, Arthur E. Petznick is testifying to the saving power of God in full-time Christian service.

L. C. "Casey" Jones ran away from home to see the world, but the world saw him coming, and the snares were ready. While serving his country in Cuba in 1898, he took his first drink of whiskey, the one which made him a drunkard. In railroad work he found opportunities for promotion, but liquor was ever his obstacle to progress.

On October 26, 1919, he attended the Pacific Garden Mission. "Mel" Trotter who brought the message closed with "If there is a man here who has tried to handle his own life and defeat is staring him in the face, but really wants to be a man, will he raise his hand for prayer?"

"Casey" put up his hand, and went forward for prayer. When Jones surrendered, peace came into his heart. Forth he went to tell the story to the "gang." He was promoted to conductor, and soon gained the respect of the officials of the company. Still with the railroad, "Casey" Jones has a happy family and maintains that the Pacific Garden Mission is "the dearest place on earth."

William James Taylor, alias Bill Hennessy, alias Ed Lynch, alias Tom O'Brien and whatever other appellation was expedient and helpful, learned that he couldn't hide from God.

At the age of three, behind his father's San Francisco saloon he grew into a taste for liquor by dipping his baby fingers into the dregs of glasses and bottles. Small wonder that by twelve he was a drunken street urchin. After two years in a reform school he lived aimlessly until a second arrest placed him in an industrial institution. Gambling, drugs and drink both provided a livelihood and made him a constant fugitive from the law that kept him constantly on the move, whenever he wasn't serving sentence.

The night he arrived in Chicago, he hurried into Pacific Garden Mission to avoid what he thought were suspicious glances of a policeman. He returned a second night. Again he heard the testimonies of what God had done for such as he. Walking to the front, he knelt at the altar and repeated after the personal worker, "God be merciful to me, a sinner, and save me now for Jesus' sake."

"That night," Taylor said, "I slept in a bed and took my shoes off my feet, which had not been done for some time. And since then I haven't used any drugs, nor I haven't wanted any. I cannot tell all Jesus Christ has done for me. But one thing I can do, and that is tell others about Him.

"And there's a lot of things I don't know. But there's one thing I do know. And that is God ain't any picker of persons."

Of such was the Kingdom built as Ma and Dad Taylor worked loyally under divine empowerment. Although his own testimony was not spectacular in the sense of what many others at the mission could give, nevertheless Taylor's ministry was powerful. He was a full-fledged preacher; the seven or eight heavily marked Bibles in his use attested the fact of his feeding on the Word.

In addition to what the mission could do in the way of providing physical nourishment, secondary, of course, to the evangelistic basis of the work, the mission had its annual Christmas dinner, inaugurated by Dad Taylor. There was even plum pudding. The tense moment of excitement came when the first of the many unsuspecting guests jumped to his feet with the shout. "Hey, Mr. Taylor, I got a quarter!"

It was the cue for each one to hunt the nickels, dimes, and quarters that Pa had buried in the dessert. One year, however, the basement, in need of repairs, could not be utilized for the holiday treat. Dad Taylor found a solution. Facing the men that Saturday night before Christmas he said, "Gentlemen, it's near Christmas dinner. We have \$100 in the safe over there. The money was given by Jesus. We trust you, and Jesus doesn't want you to use it for sniffers. Each of you will receive fifty cents to buy your Christmas dinner."

The following Sunday morning revealed what an unregenerate heart and a crowbar can do. The safe was empty. Friends made up the necessary amount, however, and the men had their Christmas dinner.

And he loved these men, ragged in soul. As they found Christ and gave testimony to His grace, Dad Taylor already anticipated eagerly the first spiritual birthday of each one. It was something of a principle and tradition with him that no convert speak from the platform until he was a year old. And there were many birthday candles that shone with increasing light as the years cast lengthened beams into this world's night.

Twenty-seven was the largest ingathering of a single night on the State Street location during those years. And in the year of 1933 a total of 775 had knelt in prayer at the mission altar. Each one had been dealt with personally, each one had been given a portion of Scripture, and each one had professed Christ. That was but one year out of many. Such harvest was both provocative and indicative of Dad Taylor's prayer, "To be a piece of machinery at the Holy Spirit's beck and call."

**~ end of chapter 17 ~**

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