

THE PACIFIC GARDEN MISSION

A Doorway to Heaven

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE SHIFT TO PACIFIC BEER GARDEN

“Colonel Clarke’s Mission,” as it was called, continued on the south Clark Street levee only for three or four years, for a golden opportunity came as if overnight.

The lease of the Pacific Beer Garden, regarded as the most notorious, murderous joint west of New York City, was for sale. Located on Van Buren Street, between Clark and Dearborn, the site was better than the Clark Street location in many respects. Here where the vilest and toughest groups gathered for cheap beer, just around the corner from dens of ribald and licentious women, was the very district in which to plant the growing mission. Recalling a few real estate principles, the Colonel interviewed the owners and struck a deal.

Shortly thereafter, during one of Dwight L. Moody’s visits to Chicago, Colonel Clarke mentioned the transfer to the Pacific Beer Garden and asked the great evangelist to suggest an opportune name for the refuge. Moody, then on an evangelistic circuit of American cities after having stirred England as only Wesley and Whitefield had done previously, replied at once: “Name it the ‘Pacific Garden Mission.’” And so it became. No stranger to the work of the Clarkes, Moody called the mission “the greatest on earth,” and not infrequently fished there for men himself.

Down-and-outers struck a new trail to 100 East Van Buren Street, where, from 1880 onward, the Pacific Garden Mission occupied a good-sized room on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Van Buren Street. In 1909 Chicago changed its street numbering system, and the address became 67 West Van Buren Street. Fourth Avenue became Custom House Place, and still later, Federal Street. But the rescue house through the years maintained a ring-side seat on sinners’ lane, and used the larger quarters to good advantage. Needy men found their way into the gloomy interior, dimly lighted by kerosene lamps, heated by barrel stoves. There was always a heartfelt welcome by “Mother” Clarke who showed them a seat on the hard wooden benches, and who turned their tossed spirits to the sure Word of God.

Nobody, however rowdy, was ever turned away from the meetings until “Mother” Clarke gave the word. When the service began, order was imperative. If a man became noisy, an usher would politely ask him to become quiet for the sake of the others who wanted to hear the singing and speaking. If the request was not heeded, “Mother” Clarke herself would walk back, place her arm tenderly around the drunkard and whisper, “You must be still now, for we want to tell you about Jesus, your Saviour.”

Then she returned to the platform. If the noise persisted, a slight signal from “Mother” Clarke which the ushers recognized, authorized some of the half-dozen saintly “bouncers” to lift the offender bodily into the air, out the door, and to stand him firmly on his feet again. From the beginning it was a rule of the mission that no drunkard should ever be permitted to disturb a meeting.

One night, accordingly, a drunkard too delirious for reasoning was ushered from the room. Unknown to him a New Testament had been slipped inside his coat pocket alongside the troublesome whiskey flask. When the next morning he found the flask broken, he nevertheless realized his pocket was not empty. With amazement he opened the New Testament. On the fly-leaf was written, “From one who is praying for you.” Thus reminded of his saintly mother who for years had placed him first on her prayer list, the drunkard battled conviction for some days and then returned to the mission to acknowledge Christ as Saviour.

On another night a curious drunk, not daring to venture inside, yet wanting to know what took place, climbed up the gas pole in front of the mission and looked through the open transom. On the front wall his eyes met the words which were not visible through the frost-covered windows: **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save them that are lost.”** It was the beginning of a heart restlessness that was not stilled until, at a return visit to the mission, this time inside, Christ became his Saviour.

Men and women of all ages, levels and color sat in that dingy room and forgot the darkness as Colonel Clarke preached the light of Jesus as the Saviour of the world. They came from barrel-houses, as the low drinking places were then called, from far and near.

Under the mission itself was what appeared to be a basement laundry, but which was actually an opium dive. The adjacent shoe shop was a blind for a gambling house. Stretching south from Van Buren was the red light district, and in every direction were cheap saloons. The tinny banjos and other instruments wailing from bar-rooms were heard on every street, but soon the old mission organ sent its triumphant melody to the heart of this vicious district of defeated mankind.

“Hope For All Who Enter” read the sign over the mission doorway, and it was true. Derelicts, women of the streets, the flotsam and jetsam of a great city, came nightly to hear Colonel and Mrs. Clarke tell the story of Jesus and His power to save. One by one, brands were snatched from the burning, and they went out to win others for Christ. Accordingly the mission was becoming more loved and more hated. In addition to its regular ministry, prison and hospital visitation was fostered, and in that mission Chicago’s first free kindergarten was begun.

Twice a week Mrs. Clarke spent afternoons visiting from cell to cell in the county jail. Among the many jail converts was a John Callahan. Arrested in New York and sent to a reformatory, Callahan had made his escape, and drifted to Chicago where he joined a notorious west side gang. The law finally captured him, and now, awaiting trial, he was visited in his cell by Mrs. Clarke. Butch Lyon, Callahan’s cell-mate, jumped on the top bunk with derisive laughter, not wanting the “angel of mercy” to deal with him. Callahan, on the other hand, fell to the floor and prayed for mercy.

After serving a term in Joliet, Callahan went to Minneapolis, where, instead of tending bar as he had once done, he walked into a mission and into newness of life in Christ Jesus. Butch Lyon met death on the gallows. John Callahan was born again and became superintendent of the Hadley Rescue Hall on New York City's Bowery.

On another afternoon, so hot and sultry that workers were tempted to omit the jail visitation, but finally decided that human need rather than the weather should dictate to their spirits, a forlorn, broken-hearted man in desperate need of God sat in cell 79. He fell to his knees, pleaded for forgiveness and then arose, a new creature. Turning for his tobacco, he suddenly shrank from it, declaring: "No! I must never touch that weed again." For twenty-four years he proclaimed the grace of God in Christian service as a faithful mission worker,

During those years the cost of the mission was borne by the personal income of the Clarkes. With the shift to Van Buren Street, expenses for rent and general maintenance were quite heavy, especially since the Colonel's income had been somewhat limited now with his full-time application to mission effort.

The day came when there was not enough money in view to pay the rent. It was necessary to meet the obligation promptly. Colonel and Mrs. Clarke prayed all night long for the Lord to send them rent money, so the bill could be met on time the following night. Demands for mission lodgings had increased, and the reclamation of sinners showed constant advance. They could not tolerate the idea of shutting the mission for a single night. Though never discouraged, the question why God should permit them to come to such financial stringency when the work was being carried forward so faithfully crept into their hearts. Finally they determined not to question divine wisdom, but merely to pray and trust.

The next morning God sent manna from heaven in nineteenth century terms. The entire front yard of the Clarkes' Morgan Park home was covered with mushrooms of the best quality. The event was the more mysterious because the plants appeared in advance of the regular season. With thanksgiving the mushrooms were gathered and sold to the then already famous Palmer House. There was enough and to spare. The rent was paid and also other mission expenses met.

In her booklet, "*God Is Love*," written thirty-five years later by "Mother" Clarke, she commented: "No mushrooms were ever seen there before—nor any since."

Though the Clarkes' private income previously had not been meager, the thought impressed them both that valuable indulgences of their early society years might well be disposed of to carry on the Lord's work.

Diamonds and jewelry of every description, valued presents, and other items were converted into cash for the conversion of sinners.

It was a tremendous step of faith, but God blessed it, for in its wake came an opportunity for Clarke to invest in a mining operation by which he realized sufficient income to adjust his business matters and to run the mission for ten years.

“Mother” Clarke herself sometimes became almost niggardly as to her own comfort, in order to save money for the mission. At mission board meetings, whenever the treasurer found a deficit he merely handed the statement to “Mother” Clarke, who immediately wrote a personal check for the shortage. She ate the most common lunches and walked unbelievable distances to save small change. Nor would she be shaken from the habit.

During the mission’s early days, railroad accommodations were poor. Only a dummy train, morning and evening, with a midnight train on the same line, ran anywhere near the Clarke home. A considerable walk always remained at that.

One night, when the Clarkes took the midnight train as usual after a strenuous day, they were obliged to make the two-mile walk from the station to their residence through a terrific storm, facing heavy rain and sleet all the way. When entering the house, Mrs. Clarke later related, she “found his satanic majesty on hand, and with a modest voice he inquired, ‘Does it pay?’ I emphatically replied, ‘Yes. I’d walk ten miles— or all night—if I could be the means of winning a soul.’”

After that, she said, the devil never accosted her again along those lines.

Day after day the Clarkes continued. With methodical precision, “Mother” Clarke entered the mission door, went to Room Twelve for prayer, proceeded to the mission workers’ prayer meeting, and then took her place on the platform. Colonel Clarke would turn the pages of his Bible, join the personal workers for prayer, and then start the meeting. Together they worked in the joy of bringing many souls to Christ. They were an incomparable team of consecrated workers for God. It was a great task for Christ and His kingdom, and as the Clarkes carried it forward, they fell more and more deeply in love.

On his sixty-third birthday, in 1890, Colonel Clarke wrote:

ODE TO MY BELOVED WIFE ON MY SIXTY-THIRD BIRTHDAY

I’m sixty-three today, dear wife,
How quickly time has sped,
The larger part of childhood’s friends,
Lie mouldering with the dead;
But since our paths of life were joined,
A happy life I’ve led.

I’ve marched along with you, dear wife,
Our steps with knee to knee,
My heart enraptured with you, my dear,
And your warm heart with me;
For thus, dear wife, it ever should,
With married people be.

A truer wife than you have been,
Since we were joined IN ONE,
Ne'er sat beneath the moon's pale light,
Or walked beneath the sun;
I well might say till then, dear wife,
My life had not begun.

'Tis true it has not been, dear wife,
All "rose without a thorn,"
How could it be, since we were wed,
On such a stormy morn;
And yet the many cares of life,
Have all been sweetly borne.

No child has graced our wedded life,
In all these passing years,
Nor have we nights of vigil kept,
O'er such with anxious fears;
Nor death has filled for us a cup,
With sorrow and with tears.

Not oft we've sat around our hearth,
On winter's stormy night,
To look upon the glowing coals,
Of fires burning bright,
But trust we've brought to darken'd hearts,
A little more of light.

The pleasure-seeking world, my dear,
To us has been unknown,
As year by year away from it,
We steadily have grown;
And yet, dear wife, apart from it,
We ne'er have lived alone.

In living thus for others, dear,
We've found a solace sweet,
As we have tried to lessen some
The tramp of weary feet;
And caused some aching hearts, I trust,
More cheerfully to beat.

We have not traveled far from home,
While traveling every day,
Nor have we seen the wondrous sights,

Of countries far away;
But we have homeward led again
Some feet which went astray.

We've worshiped not in churches grand,
Or sat in cushioned pews,
But we have told to sinful men,
The Gospel! Blessed news;
And filled with holy oil I trust,
Some widow's empty cruse.

Not much have we to leave the world,
Of silver and of gold,
Nor large estate, nor titled names,
Of lineage grand and old;
Nor have we lived a selfish life,
With hardened hearts and cold.

But then, dear wife, I trust we leave,
A little brighter place,
In some once darkened hearts on earth,
(Before they saw our face),
Which more than wealth or fame, my dear,
May benefit our race.

The blessed Lord who loves us, dear,
Has very faithful been,
To knit our hearts together, love,
And keep our pathway green;
And all along His guiding hand,
In everything is seen.

There's no such thing as growing old,
To loving hearts and true,
Each year has brought a sweeter joy,
To me, my dear, and you;
To us the oft recurring years,
Bring always something new.

We've climbed the hill together, dear,
And passed the summit o'er,
Not far ahead we see the light,
Of Beulah's happy shore;
Soon we shall see the face of Him,
Our hearts so much adore.

And when the night of death comes on,
Perhaps “the white winged dove,”
May bear our souls together, dear,
To live with Christ above;
And share together with His saints,
The treasures of His love.
And He may grant us then to see,

The good that we have done,
The many happy souls that we,
To Him perhaps have won,
As at his pierced feet we lay
The golden sheaves all down.

Two and one-half years later, on June 22, 1892, the Colonel was dead. During the fifteen years they had worked side by side, the mission had never closed its doors a night. Nor would God be afar off now: His man for the gap was already chosen.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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