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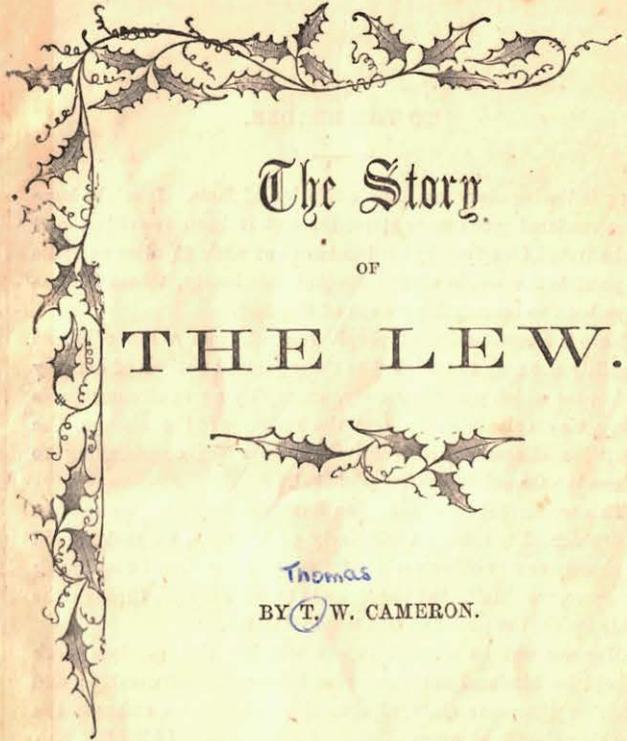
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The Story of The Rev.

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The Story
OF
THE LEW.



Thomas
BY T. W. CAMERON.

LONDON:
MORGAN AND SCOTT, 12, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS, E.C.
WILLIAM BOOTH, 3, GORE ROAD, VICTORIA PARK ROAD.
PRICE ONE PENNY.

TO THE READER.

THE following story is a simple relation of facts. It might have been rendered much more attractive had it been rewritten and embellished for effect, but it has been our wish to alter as little as possible the words of the devoted missionary, whose labours have been so remarkably owned of God.

Here is a community of people rescued from a life of direct hostility not only to God, but to those general notions of decency and order which pervade society, exemplifying in circumstances every way calculated to test the reality of the change, the Christian character, and actively engaged in commending to others the Gospel of the grace of God.

This wonderful transformation has been wrought through the instrumentality almost exclusively of one man, without the aid of charity or any other earthly influence, giving most convincing evidence, we think, that the Gospel of Christ is still, through the Holy Spirit, the power of God unto salvation.

May we not be allowed to ask whether this glorious work should be hindered for want of a larger place of worship; and whether the same class of operations carried on amongst the working classes at every Station of the CHRISTIAN MISSION should not be amply sustained?

WILLIAM BOOTH.

3, Gore Road, Victoria Park Road,
London.

Autumn? 1873

THE STORY OF THE LEW.

As I entered Tunbridge Wells for the first time, and looked at its lovely scenery and the mansions of its wealthy inhabitants, I thought, "Surely this is not the place for an unlettered preacher of the Gospel! Everything about it seems to call for the graceful and polished eloquence of a man whose soul is full of poetry, and whose brain is full of thought."

But, upon further inquiry, I found that amidst the lovely scenes of nature there were to be found the dark and direful fruits of vice; that in addition to the lordly villas there were to be seen the dirtiest hovels, and that we had only to go to the portion of the place inhabited by the poorer classes of the people to exchange the sweet scent of flowers and the charming songs of birds for the reeking exhalations of filth and the loudest shouts of ribald blasphemy.

I was told that in a part of the town called "The Lew"

I might see human nature in its *worst* forms, and I found this only too true.

“The Lew” is a crowded suburb, consisting for the most part of cottages, many of them more like huts or navvies’ cabins than dwelling-houses, and inhabited chiefly by petty hawkers, rag and bone gatherers, sellers of violets, clothes-peg makers at tenpence per gross, fern-collectors for the London market, beggars, tramps, and others engaged in like occupations.

The poverty of these people was not more conspicuous than their vice and brutality. Upon inquiring whether the scenes of violence I at first witnessed were exceptional, a woman said, “Why, sir, the whole Sunday afternoon is spent in drinking, fighting, and all kinds of wickedness, until the opening-time of the public-houses in the evening. Then at night the men come rolling home drunk, bawling and quarrelling till past midnight; and scarcely a night passes without three or four hours’ fighting and rioting, people running out of the place screaming, and the neighbours alarmed by cries of murder and police. The heavy blows have been heard at the opposite side of the yard, while pots, pans, and pokers would be thrown all over the place.”

In the middle of the place is a large square, which was by many called “The Little Hell,” and which I at once selected as the chief sphere of my operations. Here I took

my stand *alone*, and preached the glad tidings of salvation night after night and every Sunday afternoon, while I visited the people in their homes during the day.

At first all my efforts appeared utterly in vain, but, after a few weeks’ perseverance and much earnest prayer, little congregations of ones and twos began to gather in the open square, who would stand and listen to my message, and at the close gratefully receive the tracts I distributed.

One evening it rained, but I held a short service notwithstanding for twenty minutes, and the people came out to listen, the women putting their aprons over their heads and remaining till I concluded. This manifested interest encouraged me, and made me anxious to secure a room where we could hold services without such interruptions and discomforts as are always more or less attendant on open-air preaching. Accordingly, I announced that if any one would lend me a room I would come and hold a meeting in it. At the next service a woman said she should be very glad for us to hold a meeting in her house, and on Thursday, November the 14th, we held our first indoor service in the Lew, which was attended by ten adults and several children. All listened most attentively, some wept, and we thanked God that we had reason to conclude that His Spirit was at work upon their hearts.

The people now ceased to look upon me so shyly as I

went from house to house. But this visitation revealed an amount of wretchedness which was appalling.

In one house I found a group of six, gathered round a plate in the centre of the room, and all, with or without knives, were going into a quantity of parsnips and pudding. No chair, no table to be seen; only an old box or two at the side of the room. They received me kindly, and allowed me to pray with them before leaving.

Another day, when I went into a poor woman's house, I saw on the table no bread for the five little hungry ones, who fixed their eyes on me eagerly while I spoke to them. A boy sat beside the fire in his shirt while his mother mended his trowsers; a little bright-eyed girl of three or four sat close to the fire, which was almost giving up life, for there were ashes above and below. The children's hands were quite cold. The poor woman told me she had nothing for them to eat, and while I stood speaking a neighbour brought in the leavings of some soup for their dinner. On leaving, I commended them to Him who is the Friend of the poor and the needy.

I specially remember one Sabbath afternoon service, held about this time, which also cheered me. As I entered the square, I could easily have imagined myself in some heathen country. It had evidently been washing day, as the clothes were hanging out to dry in all directions. Here a group of

boys were playing marbles, and there a batch of men, with oaths and curses, were engaged at pitch and toss; while others were standing at the doors, leaning out of the windows or over the railings.

Could it be possible that this was the Sabbath in a Christian land, and that I was within five minutes' walk of the quiet homes and churches where respectable people were enjoying the rest and worship of the Lord's Day? And yet this was the usual method of spending it here. I at once went to work. Obtaining the loan of a fish kit, which served me for a pulpit, I preached to these people, for upwards of an hour the Gospel of the Son of God. The games were soon given up, the people gathered round from the doors and the railings, and all listened very respectfully during the service.

The next week the cottage was filled to its utmost capacity, and it was at once evident that God had begun to work, and that we must obtain a larger room. In the midst of the place was a wooden shed, put up for a carpenter's shop, but which had never been occupied. It looked a very rough and comfortless affair, but as it was the only place to be had, there was no alternative, and we at once decided on an effort to secure it. After ascertaining who was the owner, and waiting for an answer from the deputy about the rent, I found to my great disappointment a builder putting a lock upon it, having taken it only two hours before.

I did not give up, but, entering into conversation with the man, ascertained that there was another shed which, though totally unsuited for our purpose, would do for him. I at once proposed that he should make the exchange, to which he assented, and sent us the key the following Tuesday.

Now I had got the place, but neither men nor money to fit it up, and there was nothing for it, but to roll up my sleeves and do it myself. Accordingly, I set to work. First I borrowed some brushes and pails, and getting two young lads to help me, we whitewashed and coloured it in one day. This left us aching arms, seeing it was the first time that it had ever been done.

Then we wanted light, and for eighteen pence we got nine squares of glass put in.

I then purchased some wood at the saw-mills, and planed it for a platform, which was put together for love by a dear brother in the Lord.

I then bought half a hundred bricks from the brickyard, and made a path through the mud to the door. Joshua Wilson, Esq., kindly lent us a few forms, with permission to cut them to suit the room. Mr. Toulson gave us an old stove to warm it, and, after purchasing some piping and removing a few of the tiles, I fitted in our warming apparatus.

We then got a few rough boards to serve as footstools, and made a carpet for the remainder of the floor with saw-

dust; and, although very cold and draughty, we had a very good congregation and a blessed service in it for the first time on Sunday, the 8th of December.

Since then over one hundred and twenty preaching services have been held, besides private meetings for the new converts, and many open-air meetings.

Nearly every house in the immediate neighbourhood has been visited once, and some twice, every week. There have been about seventy professed converts, of whom fifty-six meet regularly under our oversight, while others have removed to a distance, or attend churches in the vicinity.

We hold three services in the hall on the Sabbath—two in the open air,—and five on week nights. On Sabbaths the place is crowded; in fact, we could fill it if it were four times the size, and often it is full on the week night.

We have often wished we could have some means of contrasting the past and present condition of these poor people. There is, perhaps, but little or no difference in their temporal circumstances, for they are still very, very poor; but the marvellous change in their hearts, homes, appearance, and conduct is only known to those who have been eye-witnesses of their past life.

With grateful hearts they often acknowledge this mighty change, and again and again ask what should they have done had not a loving God directed our steps to the place.

I went, one day, into a room where the people had received the Gospel, and found three persons and a child round a handful of fire. It was after twelve o'clock, but there was no appearance of dinner. I asked them where the pot for dinner was. They said there was no dinner, but it was all right: the love of Jesus was a good dinner. They showed me a few tea-leaves, but admitted that they had no sugar. I asked if they thought the Lord would provide, and, with a radiant face, the oldest said, "I am sure He will."

A dear wife said, the other day, "I thank God that my home, which was one of misery, is now a home of pleasure. God has made my husband's footsteps a welcome sound, which were once a cause of terror."

Another woman said to me, the other day, she had sat with her husband, when on the tramp in his wicked, wandering life, by the road-side, many a time without food, and with two children under her clothes and two in her arms, to keep them warm; and she wished his praying mother could come and see the blessed change God had wrought in her husband.

More particularly to set forth the change that has taken place, we will give an outline of the previous history of a few who have been benefited. They may be regarded as a fair specimen of all.

A. was the son of pious parents. At work one evening, when about twenty years old, on a haystack, hearing the sounds of drunken revelry issuing from a tavern close by, he hurried through his work, and, with a sovereign in his pocket, made off to the alehouse. Upon entering, he ordered a gallon of ale, to be drunk all round; and, as fast as one pot was emptied, ordered another. He was at once hailed as a good fellow, became a ringleader amongst the drinking crew, and, from that hour and circumstance, he dates a life of drunkenness, suffering, and poverty, such as no pen can describe.

Years rolled on; he married; but there came no change: poverty of the severest kind was his lot. Several times he has had to sit, with his wife and family, by the road-side, without shelter, food, or funds. Attempts at reformation were made, but only to fail, until, in December, 1872, he was drawn by curiosity to attend the Hall, where he decided for Christ, and found mercy. His wife and several other members of his family soon joined him in the way to heaven. Now the ale-bench and his old companions are deserted, and, by his conversation and Christian deportment, he gives ungain-sayable evidence that he has passed from death unto life.

B. left home when fifteen years of age, wandering from place to place, wasting his youthful days in drunkenness and vice. Before he was eighteen, he had been in prison twice for being found drunk and incapable in a shed; for, though poor, he was too proud and independent to avail himself of shelter in the casual ward; and yet he was afterwards often obliged to "face the rappers," and beg from door to door.

He was afterwards convicted of a more serious offence, and sen-

tenced to two years' hard labour. When they got him into the prison, he refused to work the treadmill. To compel him to do so, they lashed him to it, and set the wheel in motion; but were obliged to stop, for fear of breaking his legs. They then ordered him into a dark cell for three days, for insubordination. Here he got up such a dreadful noise, making what he called "Beelzebub's music," by hammering with one of the few articles of furniture allowed him, and running round his cell with the most hideous yells, that they removed him to a dark cell beneath the hospital. Here he so annoyed the poor patients, that he was again removed. Now he managed to break up his iron bedstead, and, with one of the posts, smashed the windows, ripped up the pillow and mattress, and conducted himself in such a violent manner, refusing his food, as at length to bring himself to the gates of death.

After his release, he was again convicted and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment, when he manifested the same ungovernable temper, threatening to knock the governor's eye out, and again going the same round of punishment for insubordination.

On the expiration of this term of imprisonment, he got married, and seems to have behaved better upon the whole; but again and again the fearful appetite for drink revived in full force, and brought him down again in the lowest degradation, going about in rags, and with old shoes tied on his feet with a piece of wire.

At the onset, he was bitterly opposed to his wife's attending the meetings at our Hall, and looked upon us as a great nuisance in the neighbourhood; but at length, drawn by a curiosity he could not resist, he would creep to the window, to hear what went on inside, then to the door, and at last he entered the place, was convinced of sin, and sought and found the Saviour. Soon afterwards, his wife was converted, and with him rejoiced in pardoning mercy. He now

says all his desire is to warn others to shun the broad and miserable road in which he walked so long, and which leads to destruction.

C. declares he has been the chief of sinners. From his youth he has delighted in mischief and wickedness. He married at twenty-two, and led a drunkard's life until December, 1872, when he gave his heart to the Lord. His wife also is rejoicing with him on the way to heaven.

D. went among the navvies at fifteen, and then took up with the broom making. Sunday and week-day alike, his money was squandered in drunkenness, pitch and toss, and all kinds of gambling. After this, he left home again for brick-making, when he attended club processions, boxing booths, racing, and very frequently the brutal practice of fighting. After a while, he returned home, and took to collecting ferns. His Sabbaths were spent in shooting, catching hedgehogs, and the like. Then he married, but this brought no change for the better. His leisure hours were spent in the public house; and so he went on, until in mercy God met him, in December, 1872, and, at the little Hall, he found Jesus; and

"Now new songs his lips employ,
And dances his glad heart for joy."

E. was a chimney-sweep in the early part of his life, and afterwards a mat maker. With a company of ungodly companions, he led a life of idleness and sin. The Lord met him also in our little Hall, and since then he has known the peace that passeth understanding, although enjoying but a small share of the comforts of life. His wife and friends are also converted. Oh, how delightful it is to see whole families serving God!

F. was deserted by his mother, and left by the highway side, when only three months old. He was picked up by a minister, and put in the union, where he remained until his parents claimed him. At thirteen he ran away, took up with bad companions, and begged his bread from door to door. Ashamed to return home in this destitute condition, he went to sea, and, when sixteen, was caught in a squall near the spot where the "Northfleet" went down. He now praises that God who delivered him from a watery grave and the dreadful punishment he deserved. He afterwards deserted the ship, and spent his hard-earned money in drunkenness, and, disregarding the mercy so remarkably manifested towards him, continued to live in idleness and sin.

While skating upon a pond in the neighbourhood of Hastings, the ice broke, and he went under twice, and was saved by some one who caught him by the hair.

Afterwards he was thrown from a scaffold, falling more than twenty feet, and breaking his shoulder bone. Upon another occasion he had a narrow escape from being transported with several companions.

After this he married, but neither himself nor wife cared for their precious souls. They had children, but, alas! they trained them up in the same "broad way." He abused his wife when she tried to persuade him to give up the drink; and, while his children have cried for bread, he has taken the last shilling to the tavern. This continued until he heard us preaching in the square one Sabbath evening. His heart was smitten, he came to the Hall several times, and, on December 26th, 1872, found a full and free salvation. Soon afterwards his wife was converted, and they are now serving God and walking in the pleasant ways of religion. You have only

to see the man's countenance to know that, though very poor, he enjoys the peace which passeth understanding.

G. had a praying mother. At nineteen he took to rambling through the country, much to her grief. This wandering life he continued after he had got married until twelve months ago, when he came to the Lew, with the intention of staying there; but very soon he started again with a wife and four children, and arrived in London without a penny in his pocket or a place to lay their heads. For five weeks they wandered on, walking eight and ten miles in a day, often passing the night by the road-side, huddled together, to keep each other warm. At last they came again to Tunbridge Wells, got employment, and succeeded in making a humble home.

All this time he was a vile sinner in the sight of God, and his hardships were but the consequences of his transgressions. He never thought about his precious soul, and scorned the people of God, until he heard us preaching opposite his door; and the Lord sent the word home to his heart, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He came to the Hall, and cried for mercy. God answered in love, assuring him of the forgiveness of sins. His wife and children are also on their journey to Mount Zion.

It only remains for me to say a little with reference to the meetings held in the Hall. The delight of these newborn souls in a pardoning God finds abundant expression in their joyous songs and thanksgivings, and time after time

their zeal for God is increased as one and another is brought from darkness to light, and joined to their happy number.

A gentleman living in the neighbourhood, who takes pleasure in this good work, wrote respecting it to the Editor of the CHRISTIAN MISSION MAGAZINE:—

“ I am full of joy at what we are seeing at the Lew. The class to which these people belong is a far lower one than has yet been reached in any numbers by any previous or existing work. I don't wonder that they linger at the meetings. I happened to say, the other night, ‘ Can't we get a big house, and all live together ?’ and you should have heard the response. They sit and sing and forget their poor homes and to-morrow's fight for bread, and would, I verily believe, sing all night, if we would let them.”

The work still goes forward. At almost every service there are some anxiously inquiring after God. We must have a better Hall for next winter. Surely the Lord's people who have the ability will gladly sustain a work on which God has so evidently set the seal of His approbation. We commend it to them, and beg to be remembered with practical sympathy and earnest prayer.

THE CHRISTIAN MISSION.

Similar operations to those described in the preceding story, are carried on at the following Stations and numerous places connected with them:—

LONDON.

People's Mission Hall, 272, Whitechapel Road.
Ebenezer Hall, Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel.
New Hall, Kirby Street, Poplar.
Mission Hall, Cheval Street, Milwall.
Mission Hall, Canning Town.
People's Hall, near Bow Bridge, Stratford.
Eastern Alhambra, St. Anne's Place, Limehouse.
The Apollo Hall, Hare Street, Shoreditch.
Mission Hall, Hart's Lane, Bethnal Green Road.
Mission Hall, Loddiges Road, Hackney.
Assembly Rooms, Stoke Newington.
Lecture Hall, High Street, Tottenham.
Mission Hall, North Woolwich.
The Luxembourg Hall, Dalston Station.

CROYDON.

New Hall, Tunworth Road, Croydon.
Preaching Room, Bromley, Kent.

HASTINGS.

Market Hall, High Street, Hastings.
Boy's British School Room, Hastings.
Mission Hall, Ninfield, Sussex.
Mission Hall, Battle.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

Mission Hall, The Lew, Tunbridge Wells.

WELLINGBORO'.

Corn Exchange, Wellingboro'.

PORTSMOUTH.

South of England Music Hall, Portsmouth.

Contributions will be thankfully received by Mr. BOOTH, 3, Gore Road, Victoria Park Road, London, E., or by N. J. POWELL, Esq., Treasurer to the Mission, Shortlands, Bromley, Kent; or they may be paid in to the account of the CHRISTIAN MISSION, at Messrs. Dimsdale, Fowler, and Co.'s, Bankers, Cornhill.