

FIRST DIFFICULTIES AND HOW THEY WERE OVERCOME.

"I wonder how many will turn up." "I don't suppose they all will, perhaps 150." "Well, I'll be pessimistic and say a 100." This is part of a conversation which took place on the first Sunday evening after we had established ourselves in 19 Bootle Street. We were on our way down to the school-house for our first Sunday Evening Mission Service. A small service run by a layman, had been in existence there for some time previous, and had consisted of a congregation of about 30, chiefly teachers and scholars of an afternoon Sunday School. But during the previous week we had given our district such an overhauling as, we verily believed, had stirred it into a condition of at least spiritual expectancy. Eight of us, *i.e.*, the Head, the "initial staff," as the Church Times has described us, Mr. H. G. Studdert Kennedy, a couple of students from T.C.D., and four other local T.C.D. men, who gave their services during the Easter vacation, had visited the district house by house, and street by street, discovering and tabulating the various forms of religion which were professed by the inhabitants, advertising the service on the coming Sunday evening, and exacting promises of attendance. The latter were readily given, to the number of 200 certainties, according to our carefully tabulated books. As the reader will see by the portion of conversation recorded above, we began the work with a laudable, if somewhat unexperienced, faith in the truthfulness of mankind coupled with a due allowance for circumstance; unexpectedly interfering with the literal and corporeal fulfilment of all the promises so gladly made. There seemed a strange quietude about the hall-floor, but then we were early. When at last, the Head and the "initial staff" fully robed, left the vestibule and entered the Hall, they found a large empty space in front of them, while down one long seat against the wall at right angles to the "East End" sat the teachers and scholars who had constituted the service for some months previously. And that was all! Not one of those 200 promises had been kept! Six months later we would not have either felt or shown surprise and even disappointment would have failed to stir us deeply. That experience was a healthy initiation into the difficulties which lay before us. A time came when we had to find protection in the form of a stalwart policeman from excessive and "unfitable" members. Indeed, there were nights when he failed to protect even himself, complaining to us afterwards that he had received a brickbat between the shoulders from an indignant would-be-attendant at a week-night service, for whom no room could be found, or had he been forcibly ejected? We forget which. But that was in the days when we had inaugurated "Lantern Services," which the children of the district found a pleasing variety to their usual pastimes of swinging on lamp posts, or playing peggy, or whatever the game of

the season might be. The real difficulty about the Sunday Service was discovered to lie in a feminine dislike of appearing outside one's house in a shawl on the Sabbath Day. For a time it was partly overcome by twelve women in one street, each promising to come if eleven others made the same promise, and they kept their promises this time, but somehow other streets would not follow suit. However, the solution seemed to lie in a Thursday night service, the Lantern and its attendant satellites were relegated to 7 p.m. and in time a very well-attended service at 8 p.m. became one of the encouraging features of the work.

The starting of work among the boys of the district was similar in many respects, but decidedly more exciting. It started one cold and rainy night. The discomfort of the group huddled dripping on the least exposed wall of a corner gave plausibility to the suggestion that indoor games might be more enjoyable on such a night. The following Wednesday was arranged. A convenient back door was left open and we waited. Nothing happened. We strolled out into the school-yard and were aware of uncat-like sounds proceeding from the school roof. There, silhouetted against the sky was a row of urchins, who in the course of the next half-hour became the original members of our first boys' club. O, ye heavens, those Wednesday nights! If only they would have continued playing any one game for 5 consecutive minutes, we would not have minded what noise they made over it. Forcible ejection, even as a last resort, only brought about a continuous fusilade of pebbles against the window panes for the rest of the evening. There was one visitor who had intended staying with us for many weeks and who received an urgent call home (it didn't come by post!) on the morning after he had been left in charge of the club. Things became more manageable when a helper arrived who knew the rudiments of drill. He, the late Rev. T. V. Wallace, did wonders with the boys in an incredibly short time. From the 90 odd lads of the club, he selected a small group of the most regular and reliable, and formed these into a Scout Troop. The Rev. G. S. Kennedy formed another out of more raw material still in Beresford Street, and these troops formed the beginning of the splendid troop at present in existence. But one wonders at times if the work with all its encouragements to-day can prove quite as interesting as the exciting experiences of those early days. Little has been said of the house in Beresford Street where some of the most exciting scenes occurred both on Sundays and week days. The modern upholders of up-to-date Sunday School methods would have quailed before the problem presented by that packed kitchen. But the house had its advantages in the separate rooms and modern principles vigorously and perhaps unrecognisably adapted to circumstances (such circumstances!) brought a wonderful semblance of order in the course of time.

The problem of the men was exceedingly difficult. Attempts at Sunday Bible Classes proved utter failures, and they came very sparsely to the services. "Tuppence worth of putty," led the way to the beginnings of hope, or at least the bearer of it did so. He was a member of the boys' club sent on a message by a party of men engaged in making an arch for the Twelfth. There was also a picture of King William being painted on a gable, and afterwards unveiled in great state by the Mission Staff. But that is another story, the "putty" led to a small loft where a body of men were busily preparing the arch. How were they going to amuse themselves when the Twelfth was over? The question led on, finally, to the formation of a Band (subsequently dis-banded) a very successful Dart Club, and a Bible Class.

An old letter written about this time has come to hand and a quotation therefrom may give a glimpse of evening activity in 19 Bootle Street. "Had you paid us a visit about 8 p.m. last night you would have found plenty of life about our Hall door. Into one room a number of men were gathering; into another as gay a troop of bare-footed young ruffians as you would care to meet. To the right of the Hall door we have turned a room into a free and easy men's club. Its furniture consists of a few forms and a small billiard table. Last night the men were gathering to one of a series of lectures on the 'theory of music,' these being held in preparation for the more serious work of a Drum and Flute Band. The Band has been formed and the instruments bought, and all is in working order, but as yet "not a drum has been heard, not a funeral note." Next week, however, the silence of the night is to be broken! The boys who were gathering into our Common Room were coming to discuss the formation of a Boy Scout Troop. One unusual difficulty is the lack of boots. The uniform would hardly look 'au fait' with a ground work of bare feet. Also we have to try to foster a sense of self-respect. We intend making them pay for whatever uniform they get; but their incomes are not large, pennies being scarce, and the Picture Houses attractive. There follows in the same letter a passage which is specially interesting with regard to the object of this Bazaar. "Our work will always be cramped until we have a large Hall in the centre of the district. I have made enquiries about an old store which would do splendidly; but, alas! it will take from £600 to £700 to acquire it and make the necessary alterations."

This description of the first year's work gives but a glimpse of the character of the work, omitting many interesting and exciting adventures. There was, for instance, the discovery of 19 Bootle Street, with the consequent eviction of its owner and occupant! There were adventures with hordes of small boys with drums practising for the "Twelfth" on our windowsills, followed in time by

interviews with irate parents on the doorstep! There was the excavation of the front garden, the work of a whole winter. There was our first visitors' day when motors departed to the cheers of a dense mass of children assembled from every street within a wide area. There was the coming of the Bishop to live with us—a real live Bishop sleeping in Bootle Street! There were the ever-recurring and fiercely contested theological arguments at meal-time, especially after we were joined by the clergy of St. Luke's parish! There are many other memories which we would fain elaborate, but space does not permit. To us who made such beginnings as we could it is a constant joy to know how well the work has prospered and how ably it is being conducted at present. God grant that it may continue to grow, and prove a blessing to many lives.

A. W. BARTON.



SUNDAY SCHOOL PIC-NIC.