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THE OLD BREWERY,

AND THE

NEW MISSION HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

NOW AND THEN.

BEFORE presenting a picture of the Five Points in the days of its "bad pre-eminence," it may not be uninteresting to look at it ninety years since, as we find it in an old map* of the city of New York, as surveyed in 1766, and 1767. On this map, dedicated to "Sir Henry Moore, Captain General and Governor in and over his Majesty's Province of New York," we see Fresh Water Pond on this spot. Broadway then terminated at Duane street, and the Hospital was in the country. Orange street ran on the margin of the pond which prevented Queen, now Pearl street, from pursuing its present course. From this pond which extended towards Cana-

* Now in the possession of The New York Society Library.

street, flowed a creek which ran through Lispenard's meadows. Most suggestive of the repose that reigned here is the law passed in 1733, to preserve the fish in Fresh Water Pond. The first records of human history in this place are stained with blood, and the successive scenes of life here, have not been out of keeping with the opening tragedy. In 1741, when there were in New York but twelve thousand inhabitants, of whom one sixth were slaves, the celebrated "negro plot" occurred, and a great panic was created by frequent fires and robberies. Of the 174 persons who were committed to prison, thirteen negroes were burned at the stake, at the intersection of Pearl and Chatham streets, and twenty were hung (one in chains) on an island in Fresh Water Pond. Only the poorest class of houses were built on the low, marshy grounds in this vicinity, already claimed by poverty and crime.

When Broadway was continued and opened through Thomas Randall's property, (called the Sailors Snug Harbor,) to meet the Bowery, the hills were levelled and carted into Fresh Pond till it became dry land. But as again in 1842, we see this place through the eyes of an observant foreigner, it would seem to cry aloud for its ancient waters to cleanse it from the pollution and degradation of man's presence.

"Let us go on again," says Mr. Dickens, in his walks about New York,* "and plunge into the Five Points. But it is needful first, that we take as our escort these two heads of the police, whom you would know for sharp and well-trained officers, if you met them in the Great Desert. So true it is that certain pursuits, wherever carried on, will stamp men with the same character. These two might have been born and bred in Bow street.

"This is the place: these narrow ways diverging to the right and left, and reeking every where with dirt and filth. Such lives as are led here, bear the same fruit here as elsewhere. The coarse and bloated faces at the doors have counterparts at home and all the wide world over. Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken frays. Many of these pigs live here. Do they ever wonder why their masters walk upright in lieu of going on all-fours? and why they talk instead of grunting?

"So far, nearly every house is a low tavern, and on the bar-room walls are colored prints of Washington and Queen Victoria, and the American Eagle. Among the

* "American Notes."

pigeon holes that hold the bottles, are pieces of plate glass and colored paper, for there is in some sort a taste for decoration even here. And as seamen frequent these haunts, there are maritime pictures by the dozen: of partings between sailors and their lady-loves; portraits of William of the ballad and his black eyed Susan; of Will Watch, the bold smuggler; of Paul Jones the pirate, and the like: on which the painted eyes of Queen Victoria, and of Washington to boot, rest in as strange companionship as on most of the scenes that are enacted in their wondering presence.

“What place is this, to which the squalid square conducts us? A kind of square of leprous houses, some of which are attainable only by crazy wooden stairs without. What lies beyond this tottering flight of steps that creak beneath our tread? A miserable room lighted by one dim candle, and destitute of all comfort, save that which may be hidden in a wretched bed. Beside it sits a man; his elbows on his knees: his forehead hidden in his hands. “What ails that man?” asks the foremost officer; ‘Fever,’ he sullenly replies, without looking up. Conceive the fancies of a fevered brain in such a place as this!

“Ascend these pitch-dark stairs, heedful of a false

footing on the trembling boards, and grope your way with me into this wolfish den, where neither ray of light, nor breath of air, appears to come. A negro lad, startled from his sleep by the officer's voice—he knows it well—but comforted by his assurance that he has not come on business, officiously bestirs himself to light a candle. The match flickers for a moment, and shows great mounds of dusky rags upon the ground, then dies away and leaves a denser darkness than before, if there can be degrees in such extremes. He stumbles down the stairs, and presently comes back shading a flaring taper with his hand. Then the mounds of rags are seen to be astir, and rise slowly up, and the floor is covered with heaps of negro women, waking from their sleep: their white teeth chattering, and their bright eyes glistening and winking on all sides with surprise and fear, like the countless repetition of one astonished African face in some strange mirror.

“Mount up these other stairs, with no less caution (there are traps and pitfalls here for those who are not so well escorted as ourselves,) into the housetop; where the bare beams and rafters meet overhead, and calm night looks down through the crevices in the roof. Open the door of one of these cramped hatches full of sleeping negroes. Bah! They have a charcoal fire

within, there is a smell of singeing clothes or flesh, so close they gather round the brazier; and vapors issue forth that blind and suffocate. From every corner, as you glance about you in these dark streets, some figure crawls half-awakened, as if the judgment hour were near at hand, and every obscure grave were giving up its dead. Where dogs would howl to lie, women, men and boys slink off to sleep, forcing the dislodged rats to move away in quest of better lodgings.

"Here too are lanes and alleys paved with mud knee-deep; under-ground chambers where they dance and game; the walls bedecked with rough designs, of ships, and forts, and flags, and American Eagles out of number; ruined houses, open to the street, whence through wide gaps in the walls, other ruins loom upon the eye, as though the world of vice and misery had nothing else to show; hideous tenements which take their name from robbery and murder: all that is loathsome, drooping and decayed is here!"

Thus as delineated by a careful observer whose quick eye noted the details that make the *tout ensemble* of horrors, is this spot brought before us. Was there no remedy for all this sin and wo? No "lever" to "stay the growing avalanche of sin?" Apparently there was none. Six years from the time of Dickens' visit pass-

ed in the old miserable way, without the putting forth of Christian effort. No sanitary influences reached this spot steeped in vice and wretchedness. The graphic picture of Dickens was still true to the life. We would faithfully chronicle however one improvement, and the only one as far as we know to which those years will testify,—those dark years of crime, whose secret history will only be known in that day when the hidden things of darkness shall be revealed. The improvement was an outward one. It was the purchase by the Corporation, (the property holders being taxed for half the amount) of a small triangular space intended for a park, which is now literally a green spot in this "wilderness of brick and mortar." An opening was thus made for more light and air, a movement heralding the light of truth that was soon to penetrate the darkness. In 1848, the regards of some Christian women were attracted to this place accompanied with an earnest desire to test the power of Christianity to give life even here. They were told by gentlemen whom they requested to survey the ground, that no suitable room could be procured, but they expressed their determination to send a missionary there, which they did in 1850.

Their modes of working and some of the results of their efforts are detailed in the following pages, and we

may be permitted to express our gratification at finding that they had unwittingly followed "the model or normal specimen of the process," by which West Port—the Five Points of Edinburgh, was redeemed. As Dr. Chalmers may be considered the highest authority on a subject to which he devoted his best thoughts and energies we may be pardoned for quoting from his life, by Dr. Hanna, a history so similar to that of our own mission that we may appeal to the issues of his great experiment with confidence and hope, and feel ourselves justified in our plans by the example of a great and good man who looked upon the completion of this experiment as the most joyful event of his life.

"It was true that in each locality he desired to see a church erected, which must be connected with some Christian communion. It was equally true, that in that particular locality which he might himself select, the church so raised would come naturally to be connected with the Free Church; but with some hope of his motives being understood and appreciated among his former opponents—the Voluntaries—he could indignantly repudiate all sectarian aims and in the fervor of intense excitement could exclaim—"Who cares about the Free Church, compared with the Christian good of the people of Scotland?" *Who cares about any church,*

but as an instrument of Christian good? for be assured that the moral and religious well-being of the population is of infinitely higher importance than the advancement of any sect!"

The locality selected by Dr. Chalmers as the scene of his projected enterprise was the West Port; a part of Edinburgh, to which a few years previously an infamous notoriety had been attached by those secret murders, the discovery of which sent a thrill of horror through the land. . . . Out of a population of 2000 three-fourths were lost to all the habits and all the deficiencies of Christian life. In these families the number of children capable of attending school was only 411, and of these 290 were growing up altogether untaught. The physical and moral condition of this community was deplorable; one-fourth were paupers on the poor roll, and one-fourth were street beggars, thieves, &c. . . . It was a somewhat formidable enterprise—to many it would have seemed altogether hopeless—to come into close quarters with such a population. Aided, however, by a band of zealous associates, Dr. Chalmers went hopefully forward. The West Port was divided into twenty districts, containing each about twenty families. Over each of these districts a visitor was appointed, whose duty it was to visit once each week all the

families committed to his care; by all such attentions and services as he could offer to win their good will—by reading the Scriptures, by distributing tracts, by entering into conversation and by engaging in prayer—to promote, as fit openings were given him, their spiritual welfare. A printed slip drawn up by Dr. Chalmers was to be left in every house by each visitor explaining the object of his present and future calls.

A school-room was at last obtained. It lay at the end of the very close down which Burke and his associates decoyed their unconscions victims. Fronting the den in which those horrid murders were committed, stood an old deserted tannery, whose upper store-loft, approached from without by a flight of projecting wooden stairs, was selected as affording the best accommodation which the neighborhood could supply. Low-roofed and roughly floored, its raw, unplastered walls pierced at irregular intervals with windows of unshapely form, it had little of the scholastic or the ecclesiastical in its aspect; but never was the true work of school and church done better than in that old tannery loft of the West Port. Dr. Chalmers invited all the inhabitants of the neighborhood to meet him there on Wednesday, the 6th of November. By this time the frequent calls of the visitors had awakened a

general curiosity, and the invitation was accepted, the loft presenting a larger assembly of what he called "genuine West Porters" than had met together for many years. Acting upon the saying of Talleyrand, which he so often quoted, "That there is nothing formidable in meeting with the very lowest of the people if you only treat them frankly," Dr. Chalmers told them all that he and his friends meant to do for them, and all that he expected that they would do for themselves.

The school was opened with sixty-four day scholars and fifty-seven evening scholars, on the 11th November, 1844; and in the course of a single year, no fewer than 250 were in attendance, and those chiefly from the West Port. The educational part of the process having been fairly set a-going, the higher and more difficult operation was commenced, of bringing the adult population under regular spiritual instruction. On the forenoon of Sabbath the 22d December, Dr. Chalmers opened the tan-loft for public worship. We were present on the evening of that day, when the city missionary officiated, and when we looked round and saw that the whole fruit of the advices, and requests, and entreaties which for many previous weeks had been brought to bear upon all the families by the visitors,

was the presence of about a dozen adults, and those mostly old women, we confess to strong misgivings as to the result. But the services were regularly continued thrice each Sabbath, and the private agencies were renewed. In April, 1845, Dr. Chalmers was so peculiarly fortunate as to secure the services of the Rev. Mr. Tasker—the attendance grew under his ministry, and at the close of the year the nucleus of a good congregation began already to appear. The scheme, however, was obviously working at disadvantage so long as an apartment so difficult of access, and so rudely fitted up, formed at once the school-room and the church. Ground, therefore, was purchased, and all other needful steps were taken for the erection within the West Port of a church and a school-room.

The liberality of many Christian friends supplied Dr. Chalmers with funds sufficient not only to build a church and school-room, but to purchase and fit up a tenement of houses for working-men, in which, at a low rent, additional means of cleanliness and comfort were enjoyed.—On Friday, the 19th February, 1847, the West Port church was opened for public worship, by Dr. Chalmers, and on the 25th of April, he presided at the first sacrament administered within its walls. On the following Monday, he said to Mr. Tas-

ker—"I have got now the desire of my heart. The church is finished, the schools are flourishing; our ecclesiastical machinery is about complete, and all in good working order. God has indeed heard my prayer, and I could now lay down my head in peace and die."

"Scarcely more than two years had elapsed, yet how great was the transformation! When the work began, the number attending all places of worship did not exceed one-eighth of the whole population of the West Port. In the new church 300 sittings were taken as soon as it was opened; and of the 132 communicants, 100 were from the West Port. When the work began, of those capable of education, three-fourths were not at school: already the ratio had been reversed, and three fourths were in regular attendance. The change was beginning to show itself even in the outward appearance of the district—in the increased cleanliness and tidiness of the children, in quieter Saturday nights, and more orderly Sabbaths.

"It was but the dawning which he (Dr. Chalmers) was permitted to behold. A few weeks after that first communion in the West Port, he was removed to the communion of the heavens, and the work was left in other hands. There were some who thought that his removal would be fatal to its success; and that it was

only by such impulse as he could give, that such an enterprise could be sustained. But five years have passed since he was at its head; and, under the admirable management of Mr. Tasker, each year has witnessed an advancing progress. In its educational department, the work is complete. In the different schools, male and female, day and evening, between 400 and 500 children are in attendance; *nor is it known that there is a single child of a family resident within the West Port who is not at school.* The ecclesiastical department presents us with a no less gratifying result. The habit of church attendance has become as general and regular within the West Port as it is in the best conditioned districts of Edinburgh. The church is filled to overflowing, and, while these pages are passing through the press, the people of the West Port, who among themselves, contributed no less than £100 to the building of their church at first, are contributing, at an equal rate of liberality, for the erection of a gallery. It (the West Port enterprise) stands the only instance, in which the depths of city ignorance have been sounded to the very bottom, nor can the possibility of cleansing the foul basement story of our social edifice be doubted any longer."

We will close this interesting account so applicable

to our own work, by an extract from Dr. Chalmers' sermon, on the opening of the West Port Chapel—as confirmatory of our own views, the wisdom and expediency of which have been questioned. After dwelling upon the advantages of local conveniency to attract to the house of God, Dr. Chalmers says, "But local conveniency will not detain the attendance of multitudes, unless there be a worth and a power in the services which are rendered there. To fill the church well, we must fill the pulpit well, and see that the articles of the peace-speaking blood, and the sanctifying Spirit are the topics that be dearest to the audience, and on which the Christian orator who addresses them, most loves to expatiate. These form the only enduring staple of good vigorous preaching." After speaking of the moral ascendancy given by the pastoral relationship he says, "It is utterly a wrong imagination and in the face both of experience and prophecy, that in towns, there is an impracticable barrier against the capability and triumphs of the gospel—that in towns, the cause of human amelioration must be abandoned in despair—that in towns, it is not by the architecture of chapels, but of prisons, and of barracks, and of bridewells, we are alone to seek for the protection of society—that elsewhere a moralizing charm may go forth among the

people from village schools and sabbath services, but that there is a hardihood and ferocity in towns, which must be dealt with in another way, and against which all the artillery of the pulpit is feeble as infancy."

And may we not in the use of the same means look for the same blessed results that cheered the laborers at West Port? Yea, have not our eyes seen "*genuine*" *Five Pointers* "walking erect in newness of life?" Are there not a number even now striving to lead sober, righteous, godly lives? Can we not visit them in their cheerful, pleasant rooms in the Mission house, and find them with busy hands "plying their daily task," while their children are attending the Mission school? Do we not see a gradual improvement in the appearance and behavior of the children of the school, and whenever we enter the infant class-room with its sixty children, are they not uniformly quiet, cheerful and obedient?—the dull, heavy look of neglected childhood fading away before the coming ray of intelligence in their young faces. Our well attended evening meetings, drawing out many who blush in their deep poverty to meet the light of day—and the large and attentive congregations assembled in the chapel for the Sabbath services—the quietness and order reigning in the formerly tumultuous streets—all these are not

merely omens of good, but they are indications that God's blessing has already accompanied this truth. For we would express our firm conviction that while other instrumentalities may be good in their place, the religious element must be our main dependence in any comprehensive plans for the reformation of the degraded poor. Without this, relief may be afforded for a day, but the seat of all the evil remains untouched. "It is not always the dark place that hinders, but sometimes the dim eye"—and any efforts unaccompanied with the inspiring motives of Christianity must fail in accomplishing permanent results.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIVE POINTS.

"Life hath its contrasts, its realities,
Which make humanity itself aghast!"

A STRANGER, taking his position in Broadway, near the City Hospital, would find himself at one of the central points of the wealth, the fashion, and the commerce of the largest and most influential city of the