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THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY  
56 Paternoster Row  
LONDON. E. C.



Let us now turn to another and very different type of Sunday life in this strangely-mixed quarter of our world metropolis, in which men and institutions of divers races and religions are living together and working out their several ideals side by side. We are now to make acquaintance with the Quakers of Spitalfields, the Society of Friends who, on ground of their own choice, and with methods peculiarly their own, are doing excellent work in this part of London.

The Bedford Institute, a very attractive-looking building, is the headquarters of the Society of Friends' Home Mission to East London. Established some thirty years since, and just rebuilt on a larger scale, "The Bedford," as it is familiarly called, embodies the beneficent ideals of its founder, the late Peter Bedford, silk merchant of Spitalfields. It also marks an eventful departure in the spiritual polity of the Society of Friends. The idea of mission work, which it so conspicuously realises, was by no means a received and orthodox tenet of the society when the Bedford Institute was founded. Nevertheless, in a very short time the enterprise rallied round it many sympathetic and influential colleagues. To-day not only is the Bedford Institute one of the most valuable centres of Christian work in Spitalfields but it has sent out vigorous ramifications into nearly all quarters of East London.

The visitor will find the Bedford Institute situate near the Shoreditch end of Commercial Street, Spitalfields. It is flanked by Quaker Street and Wheler Street. In Wheler Street was the historic meeting-house where George Fox, William Penn, George Whitehead, and other leaders of early Quakerism were wont to assemble, during the years from 1656 to 1700. In 1755, the site passed into other hands. But the Bedford Institute, built as near as possible to the spot, worthily sustains the cherished traditions of its seventeenth-century predecessor. The lofty, picturesque, red-brick building, with its gables and tall roof, is constructed and equipped with the solidity and liberality and far-sightedness which distinguish all the admirable buildings erected by the trustees.

The Sunday begins with a well-planned hospitality to the destitute of the district—a free and substantial breakfast to the poor whose poverty is nowhere seen in a more aggravated form than in Spitalfields.

Provision is made for two hundred, who are supplied with tickets of admission by those who well know the district, and the poorest of its lodging-houses, and the hiding-places of those who are ready to perish. The large lower room in which they are received and comfortably seated is built for the purpose, and is itself a lesson in cleanly living as well as of hospitality. The needful ventilation of a room crowded by two hundred guests, entirely devoid of any resources for personal cleanliness, is supplied by rapidly revolving

steam fans placed over the doorways, the exhausted air being withdrawn at one end whilst fresh air is drawn in at the other. The kitchen arrangements, too, are admirable examples of forethought and efficiency. After grace is sung, the hungry ones are amply fed, and the bearing away of a portion to the breakfastless ones at home is acquiesced in by the kindly givers of the feast, but not before a prayer is offered, a hymn sung, and a few short and brotherly addresses delivered for the guidance, cheer, and help of the departing guests. A temperance society, a labour agency, and rescue homes are all in requisition at these useful gatherings, and the testimonies of their value week by week are more than enough to encourage those who conduct them.



BEDFORD INSTITUTE.

**Free Breakfasts**

With regard to the general question of free breakfasts, especially in London districts abounding in confirmed mendicants, the trustees of the Bedford Institute are alive to all that can be said upon the subject. As a matter of fact, it was found impossible to restrict the mission to the ordinary evangelical and educational work of the Institute without some visible and tangible evidence of Christ-like sympathy with the hungry and starving who abound in the vicinity. Further, the redeeming agencies for which the gathering affords opportunities not otherwise obtainable are such as to make the occasion a means as well as an end, owned and used by Christ Himself in the spiritual transformation of the outcast and the abandoned.

Previous to the erection of the present building the early breakfast meetings were held in the spacious but unsuitable Huguenot Chapel in Church Street.

The Sunday-schools follow the breakfast. These are for boys, girls, and infants. A characteristic feature of the teaching of the elder scholars is the use of copybooks, so that the Scripture lesson is at the same time a writing lesson.<sup>1</sup> The copies chosen are Scripture mottoes or texts bearing upon personal religion and conduct. The classes meet again in the afternoon. In all the schools connected with the Institute more than two thousand children attend. In the evening the children are gathered to listen to short addresses and to join in worship, the service being made as simple and engaging as is possible.

**Mission Work  
among  
the Friends.**

By far the most important outgrowth of the Bedford Institute is to be found in Hart's Lane, Bethnal Green, a little distance from headquarters. Here there are no less than seven hundred children in attendance at the beautiful and admirably equipped building known as the Friends' Hall. This large number of little ones is superintended by no less than one hundred and twenty teachers. There is also an adult school after the Birmingham model, meeting at eight A.M. Evangelistic meetings are held morning and evening, and there is an outdoor meeting at the end of the evening service.

Those who are unaccustomed to associate Evangelic fervour and missionary zeal with the Quaker temperament and with their meeting for worship and Sunday-school work would be agreeably surprised if present at one of these gatherings. The following is from the report of the First Day School at Hart's Lane. The speaker is one of the young women who shares in the teaching of the seven hundred children:—

"It is very touching in our senior classes to see the young people there on prayer meeting Sundays, and hear them pleading earnestly in their own simple way that the Lord would help them to live holy lives in their homes, to stop the angry word, and to curb the hasty temper. Some of us know what it is to be the only one in the family who is trying to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We know how difficult it is and feel our need then of living very near to Him. We do desire that our hearts may be filled to overflowing with His love that it may flow out to the dear ones whom we try to get on the Lord's side. Sometimes we see, in our classes, the tear quietly fall while lessons are going on. We enquire the cause. Sometimes we are taken into full confidence and find it is a little trouble at home. You see how we feel the need of living near to the Lord ourselves, and our earnest desire is to be able to point these dear ones to Him who said, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.'"

**Adults  
Schools.**

The adult Sunday-school for men, meeting as early as eight o'clock, has already been mentioned. Its importance in the eyes of the Bedford trustees, who are anxious that it should be as great a success in London as it is in the Midlands and the north, is considerable. In London, the late hours of the Saturday night tend utterly to destroy

the value of the Sunday morning for any religious or serious purpose, and are among the greatest evils which the clergy and church workers generally have to complain of. The uses of the Sunday morning early adult-school in this respect are obvious. Accordingly, the Bedford Institute trustees have shown their appreciation of the case by providing a large and handsome range of buildings specially for these 8 A.M. Sunday gatherings. The handsome and costly structures assigned and indeed built for the purpose are situate in Bunhill Row, and are known as the Bedford Memorial Buildings. There is an average weekly attendance on Sunday mornings of some three hundred men, out of a membership of four hundred on the books. The movement is regarded by the promoters as being almost in its infancy in London, but it has been so seriously taken in hand as to win the congratulations of those who, not knowing the stock from which it sprang, at first regarded it either as an interesting innovation or at best a doubtful experiment. It is now viewed by other religious workers in the locality with a watchful sympathy which will not improbably be a prelude to imitation, to the further advantage of Sunday morning observance in Spitalfields.

Such are some of the aspects of the Quaker mission in Spitalfields. The memories and traditions of the Huguenot weavers and their ancestors could scarcely find a worthier embodiment than the Bedford Institute. But the Bedford Institute is more than a memorial; it is a Christian mission, and, in the frequent words of one of its leaders, "mission work has now become an essential part of vital Quakerism."

NOTE.—By an unlucky slip, the figures as to the Sunday attendances at places of worship in East London were given at the low average of 5 per cent. This figure would undoubtedly be the highest that could be assigned to the larger and more congested districts, such as Spitalfields, western Bethnal Green, St. George's, and Whitechapel; but as applied to the whole of East London with its very diversified social conditions, and its pleasanter, well-to-do suburban areas, it might be seriously misleading. Unfortunately the only census available for an estimate is now nearly ten years old, and, moreover, admits of widely differing conclusions. In 1887, the estimated population of East London and Hackney, excluding Stoke Newington, was 909,000. At a census of the attendance at the churches, chapels, and mission-halls of this district, taken in October and November, 1886, and published in the *British Weekly*, it was shown that the attendance at *all* the services—morning, afternoon, and evening—was 202,600, or 23.6 per cent., as against 29 per cent. for the whole of London, calculated on the same method. But it may be assumed that a large number of these would be present at more than one service, and would thus be counted twice over. As a set-off against this, there would be an indefinite number of persons attending an early morning or extra service. Allowing for this reduction, it would appear that the number attending public worship in East London (including Hackney with its North London middle-class population) on the Sunday, may be roughly estimated at from 5 to 20 per cent.

<sup>1</sup> See "Sunday in Birmingham," SUNDAY AT HOME for March, 1894, pp. 293-346.