

Lantern
Missions
in
Ireland

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(including the Scripture Readers' and Irish Society)

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Gospel Lantern Missions in Ireland

SOME people wonder at the name of the Irish Church Missions, and seem to have the idea that our activities are confined to the work carried on in the Mission Church at Townsend Street and in the city of Dublin, and that such is as much of Ireland as we are able to reach. But that is far from the truth. While admitting that, through lack of financial support, the work has been curtailed of late years, we are still able to conduct mission work in almost every corner of our land.

For many years I have been holding evangelistic mission services in North, South, East and West, through the kind co-operation of the clergy of the Church of Ireland who lend their parochial halls and school houses for say three or five nights in the week. With the aid of a good lantern, I have given addresses all over the country on Gospel and Temperance subjects to large and appreciative audiences.

It is true to a large extent that since the advent of the cinema the lantern may have lost much of its attraction as a means of entertainment, but it is still powerful in Gospel mission work, especially in the

country districts where people walk for miles to be present at our meetings, many of whom have not seen a lantern before. This may seem almost incredible in this twentieth century.

I call to mind one place in the West where we were holding our mission services in a boat house, and that too on bitterly cold nights. Before the lecture we were showing a few local pictures. Among others we threw on the screen an Irish jaunting car with the driver standing at the horse's head. Well, you should have seen the scared look of some in the audience who thought the picture was dropped from the roof, and when the lecturer said "There is no need to tell you what this is," one of them exclaimed, "Did you hear the man on the picture speaking?"

But even in the cities the lantern is still a draw, especially to the young people. I remember in Belfast when we applied to a Rector for the use of his school-house, he said, "You may have it, but you would only be losing your time; there is a cinema only next door." "True," I said, "we'll try, and if it is a failure the fault shall not be ours." There is still a charm in "admission free," even in Belfast. What was the result? The first night was fairly well attended, and after that the place was not big enough to hold the people, and the rector and his curate had their work cut out in getting them all seated. We had a month in a large Belfast parish in four different halls, and had nearly a thousand people each night. For a children's service at 6.30 there were about six

hundred, and from three to four hundred adults at 8 o'clock.

"What is the secret?" My answer is undoubtedly a good lantern, and that properly worked, but of course above all the glorious Gospel message of "Jesus and His love." The people love it and they need it. It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. As a man said to me just recently after a mission in Co. Wicklow, "There is one thing I admire about you men; you speak with assurance, and seem to know what you are talking about." To get the sinner into personal touch with a living Saviour is our constant aim.

What subjects do we take? Here is one week's programme. Monday, "The Roll Call," a story of the American Civil War in 1860, in which we stress the importance of Bible reading for the home and the individual. Tuesday, "The Little Captain," a Temperance story showing how drink and gambling ruined a certain home, and many another since. Wednesday, "The Pilgrim's Progress," here we show sixty beautiful slides illustrating this wonderful dream story of John Bunyan, telling how he got rid of his burden at the cross, and finally reached the Celestial City. Thursday, "Probable Sons," a telling story of a little girl who loved the story in Luke xv. and was the means of bringing back to his Heavenly Father her bachelor uncle with whom she went to live, who was a real live Probable Son. It is the message that counts, not the messenger. Then, on Friday we

finish up with the grand subject of "The Conquered General," which is really Naaman the Syrian, to illustrate the gospel of sin and its remedy, pressing home two mistakes Naaman made. First, he went to the wrong person, for the king could not cure him. Secondly, his pride and pre-conceived notions prevented him from accepting the prophet's remedy till faith conquered.

The results have fully justified these efforts. Here are the figures of one week's return of meetings held in Co. Cavan from the book before me. Monday, 170; Tuesday, 160; Wednesday, 250; Thursday, 255; Friday, 260. This is about the best week we have had outside Belfast. To show how the interest grows, 35, 49, 60, 63, and 75 were the numbers in another place.

May I now tell of some interesting cases I have come across in my work?

We had a very successful mission in the Midlands, attended by a good many Roman Catholics, amongst them was the maid at the rectory where we were staying, a very bright intelligent girl. I think she was there the last three nights and was greatly impressed. The seed had evidently been sown in good ground. I met her mistress some nine months later in Dublin, when she told me Mary had left the Church of Rome soon after our visit, and that when she began to attend the services of the Church of Ireland her friends and relatives gave her an awful time of persecution and disowned her. The result was that she had to leave the district secretly, and has now a good situation

in the outskirts of Dublin where she is happy and doing well. It is the fear of persecution that keeps many seekers from coming out and confessing Christ.

I have now in my mind a man, and a fine chap he was, who had been for months on the border line. He attended our meetings in the North, and the night I gave the "Pilgrim's Progress" talk he was under deep conviction. When we came to where Pilgrim got rid of his burden at the Cross and he saw it no more, the curate who was sitting next to him said, "Now you come and do likewise," and thank God he did, and is now rejoicing in the knowledge of Jesus as his own Saviour.

We were re-visiting a parish we had worked three years before when a lady said to me, "I suppose you heard about X," naming a local publican who had attended our meetings last visit. "He was there at the temperance story and was so influenced that he made up his mind to get out of the business. He sold out and has gone to live in Dublin." That cheered my heart. We saw beside all waters, and it is refreshing when the Lord shows that the labour is not in vain. "Be not weary in well doing."

Here is another instance of the power of Gospel lantern work, this time in the West. In one of our lectures, the heroine of the story, an old woman, lies dying. Just before she passes away she raises up her hands and says, "Friends, sing a song of victory when I'm gone." Imagine the effect on a large audience at that solemn moment, when an

old man seated in the front dropped on his knees and putting his hands together exclaimed aloud, with tears running down his cheeks, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, have mercy on her poor old soul." No amount of preaching could make an impression like that.

In conclusion I would tell a unique experience. In an isolated district, miles from the nearest town, we were to have three meetings in an old school house, now used as a home for two brothers, converts from the Church of Rome.

I was told by the rector that the attendance might not be more than half a dozen, but that there was a chance that the "locals" might come in who were related more or less to these converts. Imagine our joy when we drove up to the house, to find a good crowd waiting. The sitting accommodation was very limited, most of them having to stand, both women and men, the women with shawls over their heads, just one eye peeping out, as though afraid of being known. I wish you could have seen that audience. Even after all my experience I was a bit scared, for I said, "If they turn rough what chance have we in this isolated place." The jarvey who drove us, the two converts and ourselves were the only Protestants amongst the nearly 50 present. While we were putting up the sheet and getting ready, Dick, the old convert, said to me, "I believe that you come from Dublin. Did you ever meet a convert named Father Connellan?" "Yes, Dick," I said, "and heard him often, a grand

man." "Well, now," he said, "He was down here some time ago speaking, and I asked him if in the next number of his paper called the "Catholic" he would tell us who is the caretaker of purgatory, for you know the Church of Rome has invented purgatory, yet she never told us who is the caretaker. We know it cannot be Peter, for didn't our blessed Lord give to him the keys of Heaven? He cannot be the doorkeeper of Heaven and the caretaker of purgatory at one and the same time. We looked for the answer in vain in the following months. He never told us, so perhaps you will in your talk to-night to all these people (waving his hand towards the listening, waiting audience); for they don't know who is the caretaker."

"Well, now Dick," I said, "If Father Connellan, as he was known, could not do so, you can hardly expect an answer from me, Dick."

I said to myself, if these good folk can stand talk like that, they will not be upset by anything from us.

Well, we had a glorious time. They came four nights instead of three, for Friday was fearfully wet and stormy and only a few could face the weather. So I said to Dick, "We are free to-morrow, Saturday, and if they like we will come out and have another lecture." He spoke to them in Irish, and the answer was "Come and welcome," and we did. This old convert had a wonderful influence in the district and was greatly respected, but the sequel is very sad and reflects no credit on the Church of Rome.

Some months afterwards he was taken ill. After his lying six weeks and being nearly unconscious, some over zealous Roman neighbour took his brother and pushed him out of the house, and sent for the parish priest who received him back to the fold of the true Church, and buried him a Roman. When the Church of Ireland clergyman heard of it, he protested that the man was a member of his Church, but it was no use. What fair-play can Protestants get in isolated districts?

This is some of the work the Irish Church Missions is doing in all parts of our land. Last year from October to April we reached through the means of our Evangelistic Missions with the lantern over 5,000 souls, and the year before 7,000. Who can tell the result?

Will you pray that all our workers may be kept faithful, faithful to God, faithful to the Gospel message and faithful to those to whom we deliver it? If you cannot do such work yourself, perhaps you can send a little practical help, to hold up the hands of those who are doing it, and please send it now.

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