

Great Evangelists and Temperance

IX—DR. F. B. MEYER

By Victoria Grigg

"I have no ill-will against publicans as a body," wrote Dr. F. B. Meyer, "but I have learned vehemently to hate the trade, and the facilities which abound so plentifully for the sale of intoxicants. What might not England be if only this accursed traffic were stayed! **When will the Church of God in our land arouse herself for one good determined effort to break the thralldom by which myriads are being continually dragged down to perdition?**"

God raised up His witnesses for the temperance cause from among the great evangelists of different Christian denominations. Dr. F. B. Meyer was a distinguished Baptist, who became President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Like others, he acknowledged his indebtedness to godly parents, particularly his saintly mother whose parents had been Quakers. Losses in his father's business caused the family to move from a beautiful home at Brighton to London when he was 15. Later, he regarded this as a blessing in view of the contacts it brought him, and the necessity of having to obtain a commercial position. The experience gained in business he regarded as a most valuable preparation for his ministry.

After carrying out much Church work in his spare time, he was eventually accepted as a student for the Baptist ministry, and commenced his pastoral work in Richmond, Surrey; this being followed by a term at York. It was at York, during Dr. Meyer's pastorate that Moody and Sankey began their evangelistic work in England in 1873. And a glimpse was caught of the larger life in which denomination-ism has no place; but men were measured by the standard of their devotion to, and knowledge of Christ.

This mission also helped to stimulate his temperance enthusiasm as it did later that of Dr. Wilfred Grenfell.

His next pastorate was at Leicester where he began his great work among prisoners, paying great attention to their spiritual and physical rehabilitation on their discharge. He stated that he felt that he failed in his early years at Leicester, because a certain idea of the dignity of the ministry hindered him from entering freely into the life of the people. His great "prison-gate" work began when a young girl of his church asked him to meet her father when he came out of gaol, and save him from the companions who would be awaiting him. The man he went to meet had been transferred to another prison, but he saw one prisoner come out who was met by two women, who straightaway led him into a nearby public house. Meantime, a second prisoner came out,

who had no one to meet him, and, not knowing what else to do, followed the others into the public house. Dr. Meyer turned to a group of men standing near on this occasion and said: "Lads, is this the type of thing that happens most mornings?"

"Yes, sir," they said, "mostly."

"But," said Dr. Meyer, "if a man comes out of yonder gaol door, and goes into the door of the public house, he appears to me to go out of the gaol by the front door and go into it again by the back door; for I reckoned that the public house is the back door to the gaol."

"Well," said they, "what's a chap to do? When he comes out of that 'ere place, there's nowhere else for him to go but the public."

Dr. Meyer was informed that the custom of these discharged prisoners had greatly enhanced the purchase price of the public house, and he determined to do his part to lessen the yearly revenue. The Government money that the prisoners had earned by months of industry and good behaviour was squandered in a few minutes on drink.

From that day, Dr. Meyer came to the prison gate regularly to meet discharged prisoners as long as he was in Leicester, and persuaded nearly 5,000 men and women to have breakfast with him at a neighbouring coffee house. There he took a real personal interest in each one, and, through the Holy Spirit, was the means of many of them beginning a new life with Christ as their Guide and Saviour. This great man of God was eminently practical. All possible avenues were explored to give the men a fresh start in life as bread-winners, a notable one being the sale of firewood. A great work was carried out also to help young lads who were in danger of becoming prisoners.

While in Leicester, Dr. Meyer led a crusade to reduce the number of licences to grocers. He regarded this as one of the worst ways of encouraging drinking amongst women, and his crusade was carried out successfully in spite of intense hostility from the grocers.

The great work at Leicester was followed by a most fruitful pastorate in London, and there, each Sunday afternoon, he and members of his Church would go round the public houses to induce their customers to come to their meeting as soon as the public house doors closed. On Saturdays there would be midnight marches parading the streets, raiding in a friendly fashion the bars, and holding suppers for the "drunks," both men and women, lads and girls.

He was equally vigorous against the gambling evil, as he did so much to deal with the wreckage after each race meeting. Boys who had plundered the till for money to make their bets or pay their losses—women and men in similar trouble. "Let the Church of Christ lead the crusade against this gigantic evil," he said, "by discouraging all appeals to chance, by ousting every form of gambling from sales of work, and by refusing to court the patronage of any who foster the system."

Concerning the drink evil he wrote:

"What a marvellous accession of spiritual and moral power would accrue if all Christian people would rank themselves on the side of total abstinence as a safeguard for themselves and their children, and as a protest against the giant evil of our times, the mother of all woes."

One of the worst characteristics of a liquor seller is his callousness as to the fate of drink's victims and the misery suffered by their relatives. It is left to Christians like Dr. Meyer to give their money and time to lift the drunkard from his degradation and restore peace and harmony to homes made wretched through drink.

"SACRIFICE"

Ethel Piper

Who fouls his hands and strains his strength

To meet the needs of man, at length,
Though not inscribed in halls of fame,
Yet adds a lustre to his name.

Who buys not finery, but feeds
The starving ones, she sees their needs;
Her gifts, a sacrifice most sweet;
"An-hungered, but ye gave Me meat."

The world has needs, she has them now;
So, pass them not; to these we bow;
Amidst our plenty, this suffice,
"To Him belongs our sacrifice."

So great deliverance was seen,
For at our gates the foe has been;
Unscathed our land; untouched each town;
While dear ones fought to save their own.

We only give for what was given,
Our gifts are signed and sealed in Heaven;
Lest, when these times of need be past,
We disappoint our Lord at last.