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GEORGE WILLIAMS.

FOUNDER OF THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION.

Few men in the city of London, says the "Sunday at Home," are more widely known and more highly esteemed than George Williams of St. Paul's Churchyard. In his business, he is head of the great drapery establishment of Hitchcock, Williams & Co. The imposing facade, with its tempting windows, and well-stocked show-rooms, are familiar to multitudes of visitors, both metropolitan and provincial. But the retail department forms only a small portion of the premises, which reach back into Paternoster Row, and buildings, and square beyond. Altogether, it is one of the most remarkable of the mercantile firms of the city; with many directing heads of departments, and giving employment to multitudes of assistants and workers. Between five and six hundred dine in the house every day, and above one thousand workers are engaged in the factories. A library, reading-rooms, and other advantages are provided. A chaplain conducts daily service, a Churchman and a Nonconformist in alternate weeks. There is also a Missionary Society maintained in the house.

It is not, however, as a man of business that Mr. George Williams is now referred to. He is a leader in many efforts of Christian work and practical philanthropy. He is on the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and of the London City Mission, and a director or generous supporter of the Church Missionary Society, the Religious Tract Society, and many other institutions. He is president of the "Warehousemen and Clerks' Provident Society." The "Aged Pilgrims' Almshouses," and similar agencies have in him a liberal friend. But, above all, he is known as the founder and president of the "Young Men's Christian Association," in itself one of our most important religious organizations, and the parent of many societies with the same object, both throughout England and on the Continent.

Born at Dulverton, in Somersetshire, in 1827, George Williams began his mercantile career at Bridgewater. He came to London in 1841, to better his position, and found employment as an assistant in the firm of "Hitchcock and Rogers."

After he had been in St. Paul's Churchyard a very short time, he was much concerned about the moral and spiritual condition of the many thousands of assistants and clerks in the business houses of London. Many of them came from the country, like himself; and comparatively few of that period were connected with any church, or had the least concern about religious observances or moral conduct. The days had passed when the heads of firms resided at the places of business, and the young people in their employment, left to their own resources, were exposed to all the temptations of the great metropolis. Finding a few

young men of like mind, and who retained the piety of their early years, it occurred to George Williams that good might result from the formation of a society for mutual improvement and for spiritual communion. In June 1844, twelve young men met in his bedroom, to talk the matter over, and to join in a prayer union. They there continued to meet, and from this small beginning sprang the "Young Men's Christian Association." They had, doubtless, much opposition at first, and had need both of patience and faith to carry out their purpose, but God prospered their efforts. It appears that Mr. Hitchcock himself, on hearing what was going on, was so struck, that he gave his attention to religious concerns, with the result that he himself became a leader and director in every good

are societies and leagues on the side of virtue and religion among the young.

But we must here confine ourselves to a brief statement of the history and progress of the institution founded by George Williams. The Association at first found a home at Radley's Hotel, from which the headquarters were removed to Gresham street, and again to Aldersgate street, which is still the principal centre in the city. The Society was happy in obtaining as its first secretary the late Rev. T. H. Tarlton, afterwards Rector of Lutterworth, the parish ever famous for its association with Wycliffe, the great English Reformer. Equally fortunate was it in having as his successor Mr. W. E. Shipton, a man wise, devout, and sensible, who was as a father to many a young man in the first plunge

Y.M.C.A., for there had been delivered many Courses of Lectures and Addresses in that place, by men most eminent in science and learning, as well as in the churches. One of these lectures was given by Sir Richard Owen, the greatest of modern men of science; and the names of many of the most eloquent and popular divines and notables of the reign of Victoria will be found in the twenty volumes containing the "Exeter Hall Lectures to the Y.M.C.A."

It is not our purpose to give details of the various works carried on in connection with Exeter Hall under its new ownership. The Great Hall and the Lower Hall are still available for public meetings. The members of the Y.M.C.A. have reading-rooms, classes, and many privileges; while many of them also enjoy the advantage of a well-equipped gymnasium, in Long Acre, for athletic exercises, every encouragement being given to physical as well as educational training.

TO THE RESCUE!

"You've got a happy face, skipper. I think you must be a Christian."

So said I one fine evening to one of the most sunny-looking sailors I think I ever saw. He had a broad ruddy face, weathered by the North Sea breezes; and as he leaned over the pier rails, looking seawards, I felt drawn to the man. Faces do not always tell the truth, I know, but some faces are unmistakably Christian, and as I looked at him, I felt no doubt that he must be a Christian man, and so I hazarded the remark which opened this paper.

I was right. No one likes to be recognized as a Christian unless he is one. He prefers, of course, to be called by his own name, especially when it is a good one. And my sailor friend was not a little glad to be recognized. His face broke into the happiest of smiles as he said—

"I don't know about my face, mister, but my heart's right, thank God! If a chap's right there, I s'pose it gits out in the face somehow."

After a little more conversation, he asked me if I should like to know how he came to be converted. If so, he said, he would tell me all about it.

I was, of course, only too glad, and I told him so.

"Well, sir," he began; "if there wor any man sailing out o' this 'ere port as needed convertin' I wor that man. I wor a bad lot, an' no mistake about it. They used to call me 'Bad Bill,' for in my cups, I'd stick at nothin'."

There wor three on us as had shares in a small fishing boat, and there wor n't much to chuse atween us for badness. We wor all swearers, an' all drinkers, an' all godless. But somehow, though we had used to quarrel w' pretty nearly everybody, we got on pretty middlin' w' each other. I don't know for why it happened so.

One day 'twas in November, I remem-



GEORGE WILLIAMS.

work. Those who are old enough to remember that time, know how great were his services to the cause of the Gospel, and also will admit how great is the contrast between the condition then and now of a large number of the London shop assistants and clerks. The majority may still choose evil rather than good, but none who wish to live honorable, moral, and pious lives, need lack the help and encouragement of an institution so well organized, and with so many branches, as the "Young Men's Christian Association." The success has been contagious; for there are now also other successful institutions with similar objects, not only in connection with public bodies, such as the "Church of England Young Men's Association," but also in many of the great houses of the city, there

into London life. Their names will be ever remembered, along with that of the founder and president of the Association.

In 1880 a great step in advance was taken, in the purchase of Exeter Hall, which then came into the market for sale, a place long associated with religious and missionary anniversary meetings, and the centre of many philanthropic and useful activities. The £25,000, required at the outset for securing the property, was contributed by Messrs. Williams, Samuel Morley, Allcroft, Denny, and Bevan the banker, who each subscribed £5,000. The Hall was opened on March 29, 1881, by the Earl of Shaftesbury, who gave a most interesting summary of the objects and the work of the Association.

Exeter Hall was not wholly new to the