

THE MISSIONARY WORLD.

THE GOSPEL AFLOAT.

From the Nineteenth Annual Report of the McAll Mission we append a few statements which will interest all who are watching the new developments of this work. The missionary boat on the Seine has found the door open wider than ever in France. This was a new experiment in the heart of the vast city. Moored at the well-known Pont de la Concorde, it was wonderful to descend into the cabin on a summer afternoon, and find everything orderly as in a regular place of worship, and hear the hearty singing, and mark the reverent attention pervading the crowded assembly, composed chiefly of men; then, so soon as one meeting was ended, to see a new audience eagerly rushing in and filling the cabin a second, third, and even fourth time. What a resistless evidence of a widespread desire to listen to the Gospel message! The gross attendance, during the seven weeks, was 23,500, comprising all classes of society, and many, evidently, hearing the Gospel for the first time in their lives.

By a vessel permanently connected with our work the Gospel could be conveyed not only to the cities and towns, but to a multitude of remote places where, as yet, its glad sound is never heard.

Every year brings new proofs that, so long as the workers, whether for young or old, keep strictly to the faithful declaration of the Gospel, and the direct effort to win souls to Christ, the people will never grow weary of listening to them. Our special work during the "Exposition Universelle" evidenced this anew; each of our two temporary halls at the gates has ceased to be temporary. In each a little permanent congregation of residents remained after the Exposition had closed. We re-entered the large salle of Avenue Rapp with the New Year, the influx of these new comers having rendered the neighbouring one of Avenue Bosquet too small, while the little room at the Trocadéro has been retained. In both we have the joy of recognizing a certain number of true converts.

Another striking indication that the present is a peculiarly favourable time for Gospel work here is found in the fact that in two of our central halls in Paris—those of Rue Royale and "boulevard Bonne Nouvelle"—the gross attendance during 1890 (omitting all extra meetings) exceeded that of 1889 by 24,300, and this without any novelty of procedure or special attempt at publicity.

Mr. M. L. Dodds has written: "Never before did this 'Salvation Navy,' as the newspapers call it, attempt to take Paris by storm, nor dare to cast anchor and hoist flag just below the Pont de la Concorde. Soon, however, the curious crowd gathered, and were welcomed to the nicely fitted-up saloon. The hours of meeting were at first from three to four and from eight to nine. They were gradually extended, till three meetings occupied the afternoon, the saloon emptying and refilling each hour—hardly emptying, for often there were a dozen or more people who did not stir, and who the longest discourse did not frighten away; people who seemed rooted to the spot—both sexes. The greater number are men—men of all classes. One quite young fellow sat in his place from half past two till six, and again from eight to nine, magnetized, as it were, by what he was hearing. He was a Catholic, from the North, and had never been to meetings of this sort before. Many took the thing less seriously; they like to wait their intellects on the discourse. 'These are good things,' said a young man to his companion, as they went out, 'but one takes and leaves.'

"Anything like steadiness of attention did not, of course, come all at once. At the first there was a great deal of coming and going, sometimes a little staring and laughing; some were amused at the faint sickly swing of the boat as other vessels passed it. Some found the steep companion-ladder ridiculous—'fit for English people,' they said—these Parisians do not see these ladders as often as they do in England. Some tried to join in the hymns, and sang out of tune, amusing the others. Some came only from curiosity, which being satisfied, they retired, never to return. In short, the meetings on the boat began exactly as those first meetings in 1872 began. If any one wanted to stand again, in imagination, at the cradle of the mission, he could have seen the same curiosity, the same criticism, the same bewildered questions, the same falling off of wayside hearers, the same process of selection by which others stayed, and returned, and listened, and wondered, and often received life for their souls.

"The French daily papers, describing the work, gave us lengthy advertisements for nothing! Think of it! Advertisements are expensive in France. With what gold should we have bought a column and a hall of the *Figaro*?

"The French papers were talking about our *Bon Messenger*. Under some such title as 'Le bon Dieu sur l'eau'—'La religion à voiles'—'Une chapelle flottante,' they gave a piece of clever and not ill-natured banter, and sometimes of not too inaccurate description, which helped to send hundreds on board. *Le Monde Illustré* had some capital comic sketches. The crowd pressing down 'en queue'—the saloon filled with people—the lady open-mouthed at the harmonium—the orator keeping time with his hymn-book—were all represented. Even the texts could be deciphered in full in the pictures. *Le Monde* made a mistake, however, in giving us too many old ladies in the front seats; but that may be passed over.

"The *Rappel* said:—

"A yacht is moored below the Pont de la Concorde.

To its masts is attached a large ensign, white, on a blue ground, 'Evangelical meetings every day, free entry.' A fixed gangway gives access to the yacht; by a steep staircase we reach the cabin, transformed into a meeting hall.

"A dignified English lady, a little leather bag hanging on her arm, gives you a red book. The title is 'Popular Hymns.' You are warned, by a notice on the cover, that the book is not for you. Comfort yourself—you will get other presents! There are tracts for all tastes.' But—enough. The speakers and players are in turn described or caricatured. The singing and reading is carefully described, then the address by M. Mabboux. Then it is naively remarked, 'The meeting is closed with a prayer, which must be said with the eyes shut'; for to close the eyes during prayer strikes these people as a new and peculiar action.

"The *Figaro* also describes the steep ladder, and the hall, 'which might contain about two hundred persons. It is a meeting hall, with a reading desk at one end; wooden benches arranged in order, and all around the walls are little sentences setting forth the advantages of having to do with God (commerce avec Dieu), such as 'God is your refuge.' Jesus Christ said: 'Venez à moi vous tous qui êtes travaillés et chargés et je vous soulagerai.' 'The Lord is my Shepherd,' etc. These go all along the cabin, in French and English.

"One tract was given down-stairs, and one Gospel on deck. The tract was usually offered by a lady to each one going out, and within its cover was placed a complete list of the mission halls in town, so that any one could choose the hall nearest to his place of residence if he wished to attend. On deck a young man offered a copy of a Gospel. Sometimes curious but rapid conversations took place with those going out.

"A lady, being offered the Gospel of John, said she would like that of Matthew too. 'It is not here to-day, madam, but would you like to buy a New Testament?'

"A New Testament? What is it?'

"It contains all the four Gospels, and other matter.'

"Ah! then I should like that; is it expensive?'

"Four sous.'

"And it was bought.

"Miss B—— gave a tract to a lady, who stopped, and said abruptly:—

"Then what must I do to get to heaven?'

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. His death saves you.'

"Yes—but what must I do?'

"Just what I told you—believe.'

"And then?'

"Then you must read His Word and do His will.'

"Do you believe in hell and purgatory?'

"According to that, we are all condemned.'

"We are. Only Christ saves us.'

"Are you saved?'

"But a rush of people through the narrow doorway, up the ladder, separated the two. Others had to be attended to. Will she come back again and enquire further? Who knows!

"They get good speaking on the bateau, and they get plain speaking, too. These Frenchmen make a noble use of a noble language. Some came from the country to help, as Messrs. Mabboux, Vernier, and Sainton. When possible, four or five took turns in the course of the afternoon. And they rose to the occasion. The best gave their best here. I suppose the sight of those wistful faces appealed to them, and they 'stirred up their gift.' What the people got was the simple Gospel, suited to their needs. Christ was exalted as Saviour and as King of kings."

M. J. Sainton, who laboured very earnestly in the meetings, adds: "The audiences were very mixed, from the consequential lady and gentleman to the street urchin; but, with few exceptions, after the first moments of surprise, our listeners were respectful, attentive, and even sympathetic. By these meetings on the boat we have reached a new contingent of sinners in the midst of our Parisian society, till then strangers to the Gospel. Had this been the only result, the work carried on had been a real success, for we should have been carrying out the commandment of our Master, 'Preach the Gospel to every creature.'

"But, besides this, we can say that from this time the work of God has begun in very many hearts, a work which the Holy Spirit will deepen unto salvation.

"One day a young man, with a fine open face and well-dressed, said to me, 'For several days I have been without work, my savings permitting me to wait and look out for a good place. Meanwhile, I am profiting by your good conferences, where I am glad to hear, in regard to religion, things quite new to me, and which I desire to know more about.' Since then I have seen this young man several times at our evening meetings. He has become one of our regular attendants.

"Another young man, whom I had noticed at different times, and who always appeared most serious, said to me in reply to a question, 'Yes, sir, I begin to understand that what you say is the truth.' Later on, I spoke to him again and he said, 'Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ. I want to live according to the Gospel, and not only that,' added he, with as much seriousness as naïve simplicity, 'but I wish to become a preacher like you.'

"Another day a young man came, accompanied by some companions, and with a mocking smile on his lips. By degrees his expression changed. After two or three meetings his companions dropped off, but he returned alone. He always sat in the same place, and sang and listened quite

earnestly. I asked him one day about his spiritual state. He could not answer, but I felt that a good work was going on in his heart. He told me that since coming to our meetings he has ventured into a Protestant church, and that the simplicity and beauty of our religion had greatly impressed him. I gave him the address of the hall near which he lived, and he said to me that he would certainly attend the meetings there.

"Another time a gentleman, a merchant from the Provinces, waited for me at the door. That day we had to some extent touched on controversy on the subject of 'confession of sins.' 'It is the first time,' said this gentleman, 'that I have been present at your meetings, and I wish to tell you with how much interest I have listened to you and your colleagues; but,' added he, 'I should have liked to see our Catholic priests defend their points, and to know what you would have replied to them.' 'If the priests,' said I to him, 'do not accept the Word of God as the common ground of discussion, we would not argue with them, for God has not given any other foundation for our faith in the doctrines of the truth. If, on the contrary, they accept it, all discussion is quickly settled, for not only can they not base the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the Word of God, but they have against them numerous and striking texts.' Then followed a most interesting conversation, which ended in the gentleman declaring: 'I also have had religious convictions from my childhood. In youth I rejected certain ordinances of my Church without abandoning the faith, and I see to-day that I am much more Protestant at heart than Catholic.'

"Unfortunately I did not think of taking his address, and he has probably returned to the provinces, for I have not seen him again."

Pastor Aubanel, of Paris, says of the missionary ship at Fécamp: "The meetings held at Fécamp during August, 1890, on board *The Herald of Mercy*, were especially noteworthy because of the number of hearers, and the earnest attention with which they listened to the fundamental truth of the Gospel. For some days they were led by Pastor Cresseil, of Paris, but he had to leave, to conduct the evangelistic work at Trouville during the bathing season. The committee sent me to replace him. Every day, aided by the captain and Mlle. M——, I held a meeting and proclaimed a free salvation through repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ to a number of sailors and their families.

"Perfect order reigned on board during the whole time. The mission-room was constantly full of attentive and interested hearers—often too small to hold all who wished to come, so that the deck also was crowded with persons eager to hear the glad tidings—which they could do, as the skylights were open; many also stood on the edge of the quay. On those days it is estimated that as many as 250 were present. The average was 180.

"A plentiful distribution of tracts and Scripture portions was made at the end of each meeting. New Testaments were on sale at the low price of one penny for the small edition. The people were so eager to buy that the stock on board was soon exhausted.

"When I took leave of the audience after the last meeting, very many of them, with a warm shake of the hand, said how sorry they were that the meetings were over, and how much they hoped that they would be begun again in the near future."—*Rev. Dr. McAll, Paris.*

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