Chapter Four

Doing Good

The sun looked down 011 the night's dark frown;
'I must do good' said lie.

William Luff
(1889)

Above and below: two illustrations taken from an article by the Marquess of Lorne, Governor General of Canada and husband of Princess Louise, describing the homes founded in Canada by "that noble lady, Miss Rye", to which orphans and destitute girls were sent from England as child emigrants (May 3, 1884).

An interest in "doing good" is something which the present-day teenager has in common with those of the eighteen-eighties and 'nineties, as the charity walks, sponsored swims, decorating of old people's houses, and conservation activities prove; but the need to rouse and activate the individual conscience in the cause of social need can never have been greater than in the era in which the *Girl's Own Paper* was born. Looking back over the first thousand issues, the Editor wrote in the February number of 1899:

> Influenced, as the Editor knows [readers] to have been, in the direction of true charity by the writings of some of our contributors, they have tried in their turn to be of service to others, and through the medium of *The Girl's Own Paper* have done much useful work for the community. They have, for example – at the suggestion of the Countess of Aberdeen, who has ever taken a great interest in the magazine, notwithstanding her high public and official positions – established a working girls' home in London; also, they have reestablished the Princess Louise Home for Girls, subscribing with touching readiness and liberality to each of these schemes in actual cash over a thousand pounds. They have besides made periodical grants of warm clothing for the poor, sent dolls in great numbers to brighten the dull hours of sick children in hospitals and in many other ways shown a good sisterly interest in those less happily circumstanced than themselves.

The Princess Louise who gave her name to the Home for Girls was the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria. A series of articles entitled *The Princess Louise Horne*, "A Special Appeal to Our Girls", by Anne Beale, began in February, 1882. The author describes the country house, "Woodhouse", in the village of Wanstead, Essex, close to Epping Forest, where nearly eighty girls are fed, clothed, and prepared for domestic service:

> It is pleasant to hear their young voices ringing through the old-fashioned and somewhat dilapidated country house in song or talk, and to realise that

they are, so far, rescued from evil homes and company. For this abode, which bears the name of a queen's daughter, is also called "The National Society for the Protection of Young Girls", which implies that its inmates have been snatched from peril and placed in safety.…

There are a score of vacant beds. Wherefore? Because money is needed to maintain the girls who might occupy them. In many instances they must be refused admission on account of the incapacity of friends or benefactors to pay the £13 per annum demanded for them by the Society.…

The appeals for [the girls'] reception are often very pathetic, and come from Sunday school teachers, church deaconesses, and Christians of all denominations resident in various parts of England. Among those of the past year is one from a clergyman, who states that the girl is most anxious to get away from an immoral atmosphere and to "take refuge in the Princess Louise Home. She is not badly disposed, and is amenable to discipline and order," says the letter. "She must either be rescued now or, I fear, never. The only difficulty appears to be the smallness of the father's contribution towards her support. He will only contribute one shilling a month" …

The cry is now raised, both at home and abroad, of "How shall we save the girls?" and the answer is ready, "Use first the means at hand – support existing institutions; then extend them, spread them, until all our young sisters shall, if willing, be protected and prepared for the battle of life."

Not only does our well-beloved Queen lead the van in this warfare against sin, but her Royal daughters raise their standards close behind her. In days gone by, the name of the illustrious Prince Consort – of "Albert the Good" – headed the reports of the Home of which we write. Now it is the Princess Louise, of whom it is the name-child; and she is not merely a nominal sponsor. She visits the girls from time to time, examines their works, talks with them, encourages them and their teachers, and makes, both literally and figuratively, "A sunshine in a shady place".

Anne Beale takes her "youthful readers" on a tour of inspection through the airy and well-scrubbed rooms of Woodhouse, to see the girls at work;

> They look bright and rosy as they stand, scrubbing-brush, broom, soap, saucepan, or pump-handle in hand, to return our greeting. But – low be it spoken – they are in sad need of new garments. Their frocks and pinafores are darned to extinction.… We shudder to think of the homes they came from, and are not surprised to hear that when they leave Woodhouse they look back upon it, and not on their previous abodes, as their home.

A letter from one of the "old girls" is quoted:

> My dear madam, I thank you for all your kindness to me while I was in the Home, and for all your kind instructions that you gave me when you used to talk so nice to the girls at prayer-time. 1 always remember what you used to tell us about looking at our work after we done it, to see if we can find any little fault with it.

The Home's devoted secretary wonders whether the magazine's readers might send their handiwork to a bazaar to raise funds. "No sooner proposed than seconded," says Anne Beale, and goes off to the Home's London Office, where the suggestion of a bazaar with contributions from *G.O.P.* readers is very well received. "Again, no sooner said than done"; and Anne Beale hurries off to the "learned quietude" of Paternoster Row:

> We are at the Religious Tract Society directly, and having mounted three flights of stairs, we have the audacity to "beard" that friend of girls, the Editor, in his very den. He can see a thing "straight off", and understands "our case"

THE SUNBEAM OF THE FACTORY.

A STORY FOUNDED ON FACT.

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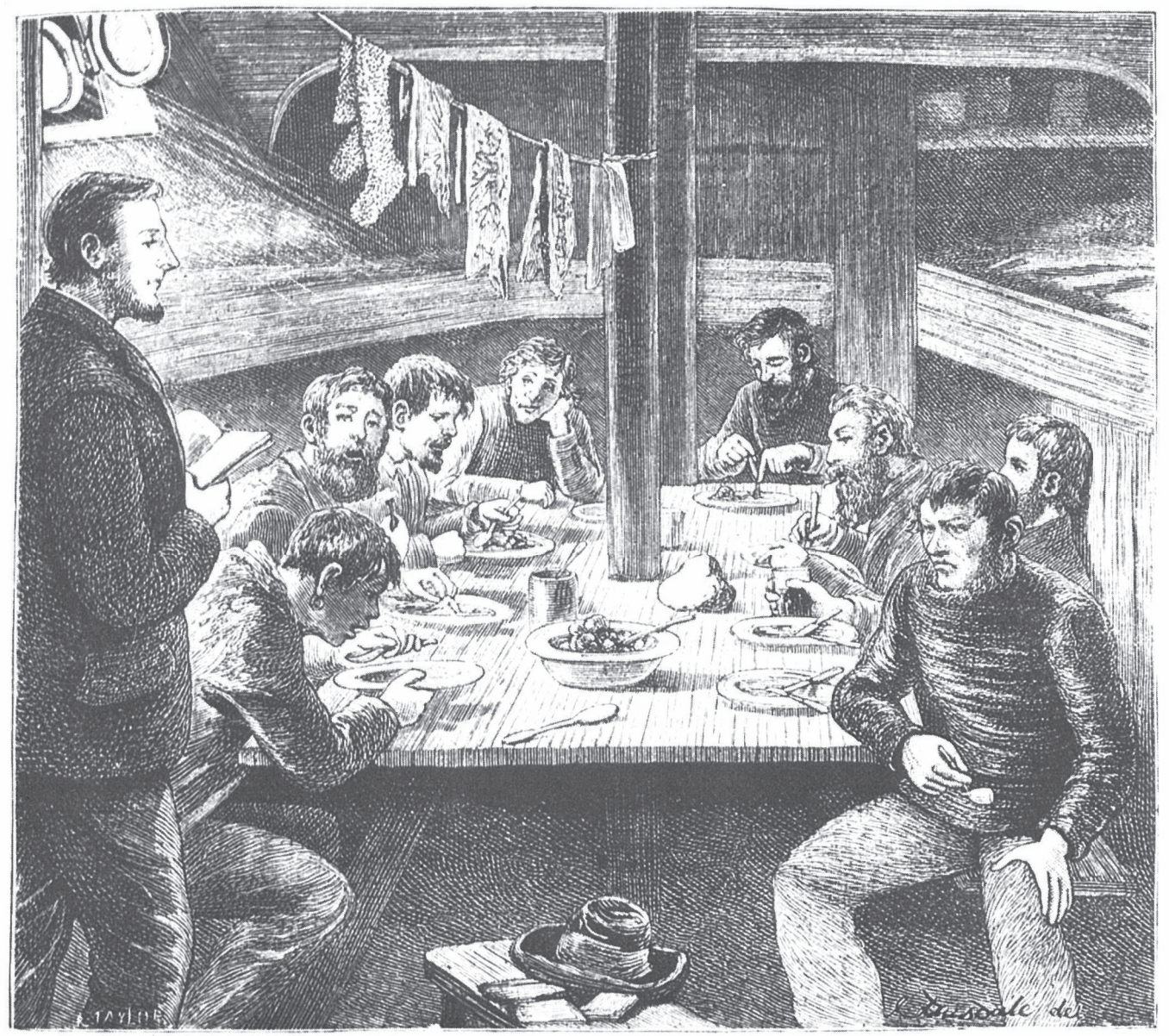
at once. "Yes, you may make an appeal for contributions of work to the readers of *The Girl's Own Paper*," he says, "provided I have permission to inspect the articles sent, and that each worker's gift is duly acknowledged"…

And now, my dear young friends, we have only to appeal to you for immediate assistance. Time presses, and your sisters, who arc in peril of soul and body, must be saved.… We shall hope, by the kind permission of the Editor, to give our readers monthly particulars of how we progress, and we trust to be able to report that such as may not have time to manufacture even [a] "penny pincushion"… will at least send us the penny, to expend in materials. If those who have no money will give time, and such as have no time will give money, we will somehow manage to "make both ends meet".

Above: the concluding episode of one of the shorter G.O.P. *serials. Katie Morton, a factory girl in poor circumstances, is converted at a night school class to which she is taken by a cheerfully unrepentant friend, Bridget, and finds the strength to do her duty by a harsh stepmother (July 30, 1881).*



Above: the work of the Thames Church Mission, described by Anne Beale (April 28, 1883). Readers made sailors' library bags ("fully appreciated by Jack Tar") and gave Bibles and Prayer books to fill them. "One likes to think of the sailor, in the intervals of his dangerous labour, taking some instructive book from its pretty receptacle, and reading maybe of his Creator."

Two years later, in 1884, comes an article entitled *What Girls Can Do to Hush* "The Bitter Cry"*. Among the suggestions made are sewing for the poor, making dadoes of Christmas cards for workhouse schools, toy-making, holidays for poor children, and teaching games in pauper schools:

> They might, by regular, hearty work, turn the London play-yards into what the playing fields of Eton and Harrow are.… Among the poor and sad there is such a dearth of pleasure and play that a whole army of pleasure-creators and play-makers could not meet all their needs. There are entertainers wanted at parish and congregational parties – not people to necessarily sing, play and perform, but those who, in bright gowns and with the halo which rest and

* *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, a contemporary report by a group of Nonconformist missionaries, which revealed the horrors of slum housing.

Above: an illustration from the serial Her Own Choice *by Ruth Land) (August 2, 1884). The heroine, Hilda, and her friends try to do their part in helping those who have been thrown out of work.*

refinement give in the eyes of the work-worn and rough-living, will mix among them, making the picture-book interesting with gay chat, and the game of some importance, because played against such a keen opponent.

In the same year an article called *Parish Work* shows a sympathetic and intelligent attitude to the question:

> It is no unusual thing to find the lady district visitor think that she may leave all her lady's manners behind her in the drawing-room when she goes out to pay her daily calls at the cottages of her poorer neighbours. There is no greater mistake than this in the whole sphere of parish work. People of the working classes, and more especially the women who belong to them, have in their rank and degree quite as many tender, delicate places in their hearts and minds, and quite as much proud reserve as the highest lady in the land. Therefore, when a woman of position and education far above their own enters their houses pouring forth questions tuli of noisy curiosity, or sits by their fireside criticising freely their dress or furniture, or roams, unasked, all over their dwellings, prescribing all sorts of improvements and changes, they naturally enough either grow rude and impertinent, or else shrink into a shell of timid, injured silence.

Earlier, in Dora Hope's *My District and How I Visit It* (1880), the same point is made:

> Before I began district visiting on my own account, having had no experience whatever of it, I thought it prudent to accompany a friend round her

district who had been engaged in the work for some years. I knew that she was a thoroughly good woman, and was most anxious for the spiritual and temporal good of those she visited. But as we entered house after house, I noticed that her manner was as though she considered that the poor people were of a different race from herself, and that they ought to be overwhelmed with gratitude at her condescension in visiting them. She marched into their rooms without any regard as to whether it was convenient, and the inhabitants wished it or not. I think it must have reminded them of the visit of a detective armed with a search warrant. For some inscrutable reason also, she invariably raised her voice and addressed the people in a commanding tone, which frightened the children, and offended the mothers.… I learnt a valuable lesson that day, and there and then made a resolve to treat any poor people with whom I had to deal with as much consideration and politeness as I should use towards my own friends.

… The habit of promiscuous alms-giving in the street has been too often denounced to need enlarging upon here; the true way of helping such beggars is to take their address, visit them at their homes, and if their tale be true you will soon find it out, and by getting them employment, or other assistance, you may benefit them for life, and perhaps help them to become respectable members of the community, instead of encouraging them to live as professional beggars.

Below: a young helper at a village hoys' club giving a lecture on botany. First introduced in the hope of quelling the noise for a few minutes by catching the boys' attention, these lectures, according to Dora Hope, proved so successful that a proper series of classes was set up, to teach the farm boys reading, writing, arithmetic, poetry, music—and needlework (February 21, 1885).

After the treatment of district visiting in these earlier articles it is rather disappointing to read the less sensitively written *On Being a "Visiting Lady"* in 1890:

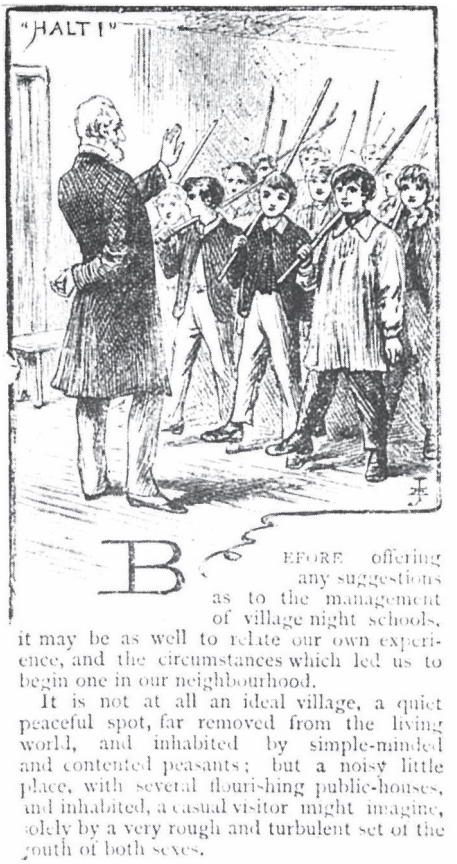
> With very few exceptions, one has to consider and treat the poor – the women portion at least – very like one treats children; that shrewdness and sharpness and general suspicion, which comes from early contact with the world and its wickedness, and which is so characteristic of the London poor, is in no way incompatible with the most wildly irrational reasonings, and the most wonderful and elaborate misconceptions of the simplest facts; and their determination – as it seems to the uninitiated – to take offence at the most out-of-the-way things, and twist insults out of nothing at the slightest provocation, even from relations and the very best of friends and neighbours, is as startling as it is incomprehensible.

Our Girls and Parish Work by A Middle-Aged Woman (1887) deals with some of the types of girls occupied in "doing good": the girl in a continual flutter after curates, the girl devoured by the wish to be a person of importance, the girl who is all eagerness and devotion at the start but rapidly loses interest, the girl who overtaxes herself to the extent that there is no time for any relaxation or for any activity which is not clearly parish work. The author says:

> Do not be too ready to urge others to add to their responsibilities, or too hasty in condemning good women who, while manifestly adorning their Christian profession, in other respects seem backward in taking up outdoor work. On the other hand, do not, when you read this paper, run over in your minds your friends and acquaintances, and try to settle which of the characters sketched above will suit them. Consider instead if any one of them reflects yourself. If that cannot be because you do no direct work for God at all, ask yourself if there be any good reason for such a state of things. It is quite possible, as I have shown, that such a reason may exist, but it is also true that many who ought to "Come to the help of the Lord", are kept back by nothing but sloth. Self-indulgence, indolence and careless frivolity eat up many a young life, and destroy in the bud many a promising career.

William Luff, the author of the lines quoted at the beginning of this chapter, wrote the verses Two Pictures which appeared in the *G.O.P.* in 1884 and which have a heavy moral, if not a great deal else:

> A lady sat in her easy chair
> 'Mid the odour of luxury, free from care,
> Bedecked with jewels, and gems, and gold,
> In embroidered satin with many a fold.
> A favoured child, with a thousand charms,
> She slept her life in kind Fortune's arms,
> And scarcely thought of the houseless poor
> Who begged in vain at her mansion door.
>
> A maiden sat in no easy chair;
> Though young, she was burdened with many a care;
> Through a busy week from the dawning light
> She had toiled and toiled till the shading night.
> Yes, while "my lady" is taking her ease,
> She will be teaching "the least of these" –
> The dirty, the wayward, the troublesome, still,
> Teaching them sweetly the Father's will.


"HALT!"

BEFORE offering any suggestions as to the management of village night schools, it may be as well to relate our own experience, and the circumstances which led us to begin one in our neighbourhood.

It is not at all an ideal village, a quiet peaceful spot, far removed from the living world, and inhabited by simple-minded and contented peasants; but a noisy little place, with several flourishing public-houses, and inhabited, a casual visitor might imagine, solely by a very rough and turbulent set of the youth of both sexes.

Above: Dora Hope opens her account of setting up a village boys' club, when prayer meetings in a local cottage are disrupted by local rowdies. Another illustration appears on the facing page.