The Story-Telling Lady

By FRANCES L. GARSIDE

STORY-TELLING has graduated from an improvised story told by mother at dusk to story-telling as a profession and an art, but nowhere in the world was it used as a means to interest children in the Bible until such a plan entered the brain of Miss Margaret Hall, church visitor and children's worker of a Methodist Episcopal church in Brooklyn.

But, you may argue, this has always been done in Sunday school. True, but not as Miss Hall tells it. For instance, she begins the story of the loaves and the fishes with "Once there was a little boy who wanted to go fishing, and his mother didn't want him to." Naturally, every ear in her audience is cocked wide open, for all children have wanted to go fishing under just such conditions. And her audience is not little girls and boys, sitting on benches in a Sunday school, primly and starchly dressed, conscious of their Sunday clothes and manners; her audience is made up of little children on the East Side in New York City, some of whom have not had their faces washed since a week ago Tuesday.

Miss Hall telling Biblical stories to children on the streets of New York.

And the "Sunday school" is a street corner! "Here comes the story-telling lady!" That is the cry of an East Side child as she spies a young woman coming around the corner. In a moment other children come running. Grasping the hand, arm, skirt—those who are nearest her, and the others clinging to the fortunate ones or straggling along in the train—the smiling lady and her retinue seek an unoccupied corner of the parked triangle which New Yorkers call a square.

There really is not an inch which is not filled, but perhaps you have seen children, like a swarm of bees, choose a place to settle, and all else finds business elsewhere. So it is that presently there is a ring around the smiling young woman.

"What you gonna tell us tonight?"

"What would you like to have me tell?"

"Tell us about the feller and the lions," says one child, so Miss Hall tells them the story of Daniel in the lions' den, making it as dramatic as possible, and seeking at its close to drive home a lesson suitable to the children around her. Seldom has any one so intent an audience. And the interest is not confined to the children, for since the first evening when the group collected, a fringe of elders has gathered until sometimes they have been in the majority.

Strange religious work, you say; but there are thousands of children whose parents are not of any religious affiliation. To find them, and not to proselyte, is Miss Hall's aim.

The teachings of the Socialists and anarchists have taken such root that in some sections the children, after listening to the story, have refused to sing "America" at the conclusion. At first, Miss Hall was in despair, but two weeks of story-telling and teaching won out, and the children not only sang with a will, but asked for the song when she purposely omitted it to see what would happen.

One day when she told the story of the loaves and the fishes, a boy of five attracted her attention by his intense interest. When she had concluded, one single word was hissed through his closed lips, and that word was "Magic!" From one so young such a comment was most amusing. The favorites are the stories of Naman, the Leper; of Ruth, of Esther, of Noah, of Daniel in the lions' den, of Moses in the bullrushes, and of Samson, the last named story causing such intense interest and reflection that the barbers began to complain.

"You are putting us out of business," they said; "the children want to grow strong so they can tear down houses, and refuse to have their hair cut."

Some of the stories Miss Hall tells are so long that she tells only half at a time. On her second appearance she is greeted with such requests as this: "Give us the second reel on Esther!" or "You know what we want, we are Esther fans. Go on with the film!"

They never tire of hearing of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, not so much, Miss Hall thinks, because of the story, but for the reason that the names have a jingle that appeals to them. For a similar reason the story of Nebuchadnezzar is appealing; they like to say his name, and are very proud when Miss Hall writes it on a blackboard she sometimes carries with her, and their recognition of it is immediate.

The children do not have to be urged to go to a second story-telling. Sometimes the curbstone is the only place for the gathering, but then the crowd usually blocks the streets and the policeman has to interfere. But when he discovers what is going on he good-naturedly pilots the way to a location where traffic will not be interrupted.

In the beginning Miss Hall was the only street Biblical story-teller, but now there are nearly fifty story-telling centers in New York City, and almost every afternoon and evening when the weather permits, each worker visits several places. Children whose religion does not prevent are invited to attend Sunday schools or classes where more definite training may be given, and the child often leads father and mother back into a religious contact forgotten or deliberately abandoned.

Beginning as an experiment, it is now counted as a signal success in evangelistic work in New York City. If one doubts it, one should follow Miss Hall. Her audience is always intensely interested.

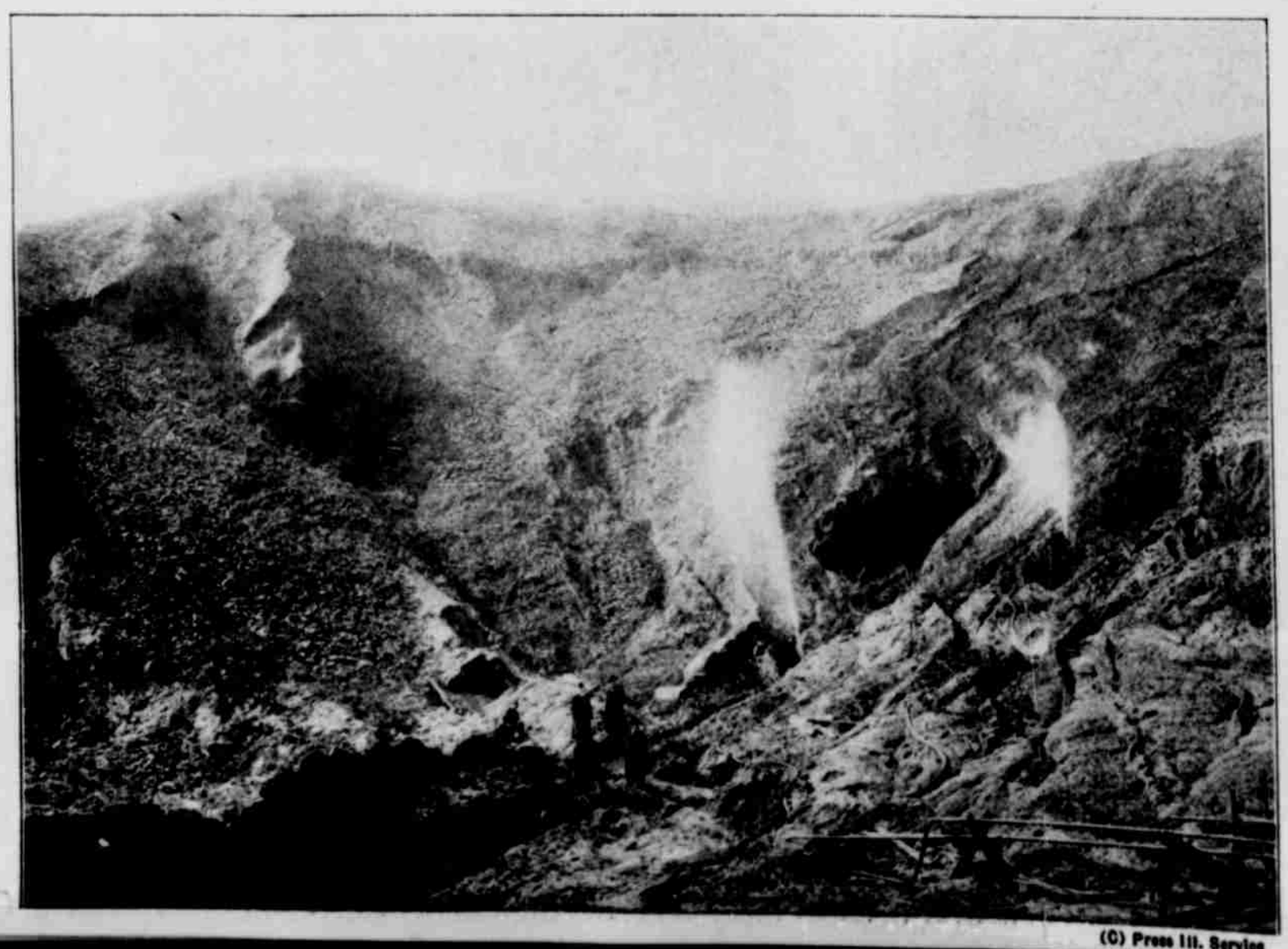
The children do not have their minds distracted by their Sunday clothes, or a brighter ribbon on some other child's hair, or a new chain or finger ring. They are there, just as they looked when they paddled around a leaky fire hydrant a few moments before, or chased after the police patrol, or rode on the tail of an ice wagon. There is nothing to distract them; for there is nothing going on behind them in the street, be it ever so exciting, that it is not an old familiar sight.

The new thing, the newest thing they know, and the most absorbing, is this pleasant-faced young woman who visualizes the dramatic incidents in a Book filled with them; who is translating the Bible into terms in which it may be understood—and eventually loved—by the children of the streets of New York.

They Are Now Reclaiming the Coal They Threw Away

WASTE is the one great word of economic condemnation written against the name of the American people. There are many European nations that could subsist comfortably on what the American nation throws out of its back doors. Our lavish resources and quick returns have allowed us to take the sirloin and throw away the rest. Almost the only meaning the word "save" has for us is related to money. We know what it means to save money; we know almost nothing about saving that which gives money its value.

Here is a photograph showing the coal waste which was permitted in the vicinity of one mine. Mining has always been one of the most wasteful of processes. This mountain contains coal and dirt mixed, and until the coal famine came no effort had ever been made to separate the two. The coal was in pieces too small to be bothered with! But now it well repays bother. The picture shows how streams of water are played upon the mass in order to wash the dirt away from the coal. Special grates have to be used in stoves for the proper burning of this small coal, but necessity makes this agreeable enough and the business of selling waste coal brings in a revenue. Indeed, had there been no profit in it the coal would never have been reclaimed, whereas a proper sense of material values would have urged the use of the coal anyway simply because it was coal and a necessity of life in this climate. Coal wastes, however, go much beyond this. We are now learning that to burn coal at all implies vast chemical waste. Every stove wastes gases and chemical substances of immense value to the world. That is to say, coal is more than fuel; it contains the basis of dyes, drugs and other useful elements. If these values were first extracted from the coal, there would be just as much heating power left. Raw coal is high-priced just now, but not as high-priced as it will be when the actual value of coal is commercially computed. It is sincerely to be hoped that an advance of economic method will accompany the advance of chemical method, for if fuel were recognized as public property it could be very easily arranged that the by-products of coal should pay all the cost of mining and delivery to the consumer of fuel. That is to say, a wise social system would extract the wealth from the coal itself and not from the man who must have a fire for his family. Fuel coal would then be refuse; it would be, in a way, the ash of the laboratory.



(C) Press Ill. Service