

Goodwill Center Memo. of Interview August 7, 1930

I had not seen Francis Heran for nearly seven years until yesterday. I went over to the Goodwill Center to see how things were going with him. Outwardly the Goodwill Center has not gained. It is still the bare, brown, ancient church - still the severe addition- still the unadorned, meagre exterior, neat walks and ever since in use in by the Chapel, eleven o'clock in the morning and before the council a class for the youngsters, perhaps, was in session. As I passed through the hall I looked in on a sewing class of twenty or thirty little girls. All over the place activities were silently going <sup>on</sup>/this blistering morning. I found Mr. Heran upstairs in his study - office - a long narrow room with an awe about it, in spite of its worn furnishings- perhaps because of it. I have always been impressed and by little evidences of taste, a feeling for good things in this man and I have a sense of how much he must have given up, personally, to do the present work. He is the kind of a man that loves good books, fine bindings, etchings, he could have been a collector - a Century Club man, but he has put behind him severely, unconsciously I think, His love of beauty and fineness. is in this room. I know many richly endowed institutions where the directors rooms have cost a mint of money/<sup>but</sup>have nothing of the awe and feeling of this dingy old club room of Heran's.

"Tell me about your neighborhood. You have been here seventeen years. I am sure you know how it has changed, or if it has changed."

"Well," he said, " a few weeks ago Mrs. Hickson (See note) and I had a warm discussion. She has been here years, devoted, you know. -the kind of a woman that will things until midnight, with a boy, rather than let him go home at ten o'clock when we ought to shut up, because she is afraid he might drop into a pool room and after twelve the chances are all in favor of his going to bed. She was down-hearted. She has been working here for seventeen years," she said, and this neighborhood is as vile as it was at the start."

"You are wrong," I said, "this morning's paper proves that you are wrong. Here is the story of the terrible ten that have been arrested. You look at the names and addresses and there is not one of these boys that belong to this neighborhood. Seven years ago all the chances are that everyone of them would have belonged to us."

The next morning Mrs. H. came to me with misery in her eye." "You are wrong," she said, "three of those boys gave false addresses - false names. They are our boys. Look at that." "Well, that night she had born for her side. Two doors away a terrible murder was committed and the next week we had a fight in the street - a child killed. When the police captured a refuge from the Auburn prison riot - a man who had been hiding six months on this block. There are not so many murders here often as they occur. There is not so much fighting. When I came here seventeen years ago I had to fight my way almost daily - they resented my coming, the gang, and stoned me often when I went out. The leader of one of the toughest gangs disputed my presence and one night in the entry, a small square opening off the street, which has been the

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scene of many a fight between Mr. Heran and the ungodly who wanted to get rid of him, as well as a favorite resort for those of the outside who wanted to settle their quarrels with the least chance of interfering by the police. The leader of the gang attached me - before he got through he had put three bullets into a big note book which I was carrying inside my breast pocket, but I got him down - beat him up. They told me the gang would take care of me, but the next week after that fight I was walking down a side street and walked into the gang. I thought it was up with me but I went straight ahead as if nothing had happened. Interesting how they respect a well turned fist, for those actually surrounded <sup>me</sup> took off their hats, saluted and said, 'Here goes the Pope.' "That reputation lasted a long time, but I supposed it was all forgotten. Not so very long ago I walked into a street war between two men, rather they sprung up on each side of me as I was walking by and began I thought it was all up with me. I was scared as I could be, but I walked straight ahead and the guard walked out untouched. The other day one of our boys, who by accident had been near the scene of a <sup>gang</sup> riot and had attempted to run when the police arrived, sent word from jail, 'Hee needed help.' "Why did you run," I asked. "It was the most foolish thing. You could have explained your presence." "Well! he said, "I was scared." "One paid me an unexpected compliment. You are the only man in this neighborhood, Mr. Heran who will let them shoot at you and laugh at them. That is reputation - not facts. But I saw that my old halo had been brightened up. In my argument with Mrs. Hickson I

insisted that there were not so many fights. And it is true. But we do have them. That very week I was called on three times by fights at the entrance. Generally I don't interfere, but when I saw that it was a fight to the finish and if I did not one of them would certainly be killed, I went in. Then they both turned on me. One with a gun in his hand. I was able to give him a knock-out blow in time and to get the police. He was still unconscious when they came, but the pavement was partly responsible for that. A little later that very night at the entrance again, I had to prevent a policeman beating one of the toughest persons in this neighborhood from death. When I interfered the policeman was angry. "You don't know this man." "I do know him," Heran said. "You can send him up for the rest of his life and I will be glad of it, but I shall not allow you to beat him to death on my property." They will always defend their fights the or gangsters. I never touch drunks, only dangerous fights. Murders are still common, but not very many. Yes, the neighborhood has improved but you can't get around the fact that it is still pretty bad.

"Why did you ever come here," I asked him. For I knew years ago he had had a prosperous church, from the quality of his mind and spirit. "Well," he said, "thirteen years ago my church gave me a long vacation. I had my own plans for it. I owned a piece of land up the Hudson and I made up my mind what I would like most of anything was to go up there in that wild spot with a dozen tough boys. I had an idea that there was no boy so tough that there was a chance to touch something in him.- if you could

live close enough to him, naturally enough. A friend of mine who had a church in a bad neighborhood furnished me the boys. 'They are the toughest boys in the city! he told me, "and I took them up there. It was a wonderful experience. It proved <sup>all</sup> that I had believed. They couldn't be so familiar with crime, so initiated into it, but there wasn't a hope of touching some of those inner strings that it a whole life of people to even if they are ever

"Eighteen years ago and how about the boys", I said. "What has become of them?" "Ten out of the twelve have justified my belief. Ten out of those twelve are good men, well decent citizens. Two have gone bad but ten out of twelve is a good average. I kept them as long as my money lasted and wanted to keep them longer but the rich friend I tried to interest was shocked by their words, their profanity, their term of of reverence. He was a very religious man and easily shocked. It was that experience that made he know that hereafter I wanted to work with boys and girls and I was willing to take them at their I told about the neighborhood over here. (See Note.) Evil had driven the church out. It had been abandoned and I was able to arrange to open it as a headquarters of a center, for the neighborhood. As I told you I had to fight my <sup>way</sup> up here. These youngsters were a law among themselves, largely. Fighting and violence was their way of life. They knew nothing else but fighting, but it was murderer. I believe in boxes house caught the boys - this Saturday afternoon meeting. Invitations to boys clubs. First experiences with them. Boxing as a substitute for life.

Never told them you must fight. As a matter of fact, they must. They have no other way to satisfy their sense of justice. My only method with to them was to show them that fighting was only right when in defense of the right, and many a time they have come to me to a bout. We have separated them again and again and when it did not settle to their satisfaction I said, Go to it and I will be your umpire. - though fighting has been one of our methods of instilling justice. You see a group doing anything in such a neighborhood as this - they do it more or less on their own - a language which they understand. I taught them with movies largely. Every Saturday afternoon for years since the start we have had a meeting open to the whole neighborhood. We would get a thousand children here. Then comes the invitation to the Club and always there are a few that are curious and interested. / Hundreds of these youngsters become regular followers of our classes. and What do they get out of it, may I ask? "You never know," he said. Now there was Tom, one of my first boys up against ? eighteen years ago. Tom saw something - found out something - of himself. That, of course, is the most important thing. Make them discover the difference between the kind of thing we are living here and the kind of thing they have always known. founded out for themselves, if possible. Tom came to me one night for a talk. "Mr. Heran; he said, 'do you know my old man?' "No," I told him. 'Well, he ain't no good!' "I tried to read him a letter, on respect for parents but he was unshaken and told me a horrible tale of his own dwelling. 'Then there is my old woman. She ain't no good neither.

Mr. Heran, I ain't going to be like them.' "He had founded out for himself - he made up his mind and from that day he wasn't like him. He fought it through with the encouragement a man could give him and today he has a good position up state - a fine wife - two children and is a respected citizen. I could give you case after case like that - something touched one of those strings - the difference to fight it through. There are scores and scores and scores of such cases here. He took down a picture. Can't you see fine looking men between twenty-four and thirty you ever saw. They were here, some of them with their wives, the other night. We had this picture made. All but one of those boys came out of a homes that this city supports. They came to us as tough as environment could make them, but the strings were untouched - and we opened them. Now look at them. Fine open faces, respect for decency, good for a

One of them is a lawyer - two of them are studying medicine - two are completing law courses - two in business and decent - fundamentally decent. The strings are open in this center of good will.

Sometimes we think we have lost them - they are hopelessly bad and they will turn up. A few years before the war a boy left us to join the Navy gang - Navy street gang; not war. We thought he was gone for good. A couple of years ago over in New York I was going along the street and a fine young man saluted me. I did not know him. He laughed and took off his hat. Why, it's Frances," I said. 'Yes,' he said, and he told me how after two or three years with the gang he made up his mind he wasn't getting anywhere. He said every

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now and then  
 /one of the fellows would ~~be~~ be sent up - for life. One or two  
 got burned.

(Burned being the vernacular for electrocuting.) I  
 made up my mind that that life didn't get anybody anywheres. I  
 left my job, went to War and now I am doing well Mr. Hickson.  
 And he looked it. 'And I want to tell you,' he said, 'it is all  
 because of the Goodwill Center. Nobody had ever cared for me  
 before - nobody ever told me <sup>anything</sup> / but you people. And after I had  
 had a turn with the gang I knew you had it right.'

Again and again they come back, upstanding, straight  
 and tell just that. 'Nobody ever cared, but you people.'

Of course they are all taught. There are the thieves -  
 natural thieves - trained at home. Everything fixed for their  
 business. Right as a <sup>?</sup> needed a job. I got one of my  
 friends over in New York to give him a place. Told him that he  
 was a natural thief and to watch him. Finally he telephoned me -  
 'About Frances,' he said, 'we have been patient with him but we want  
 to keep the building. He has almost everything else and he will  
 have that if he stays.'

Of course, Frances had to go. We lost sight of him.  
 Not very long ago he came back. He said, 'I am alright now,' and  
 he looked it. 'Have a good position. I don't know why I did what  
 I did but finally I realized it was wrong - it took me a long time.  
 But I want you to know that you are the only people whoever took  
 any interest in what I did and I couldn't forget it. I found out  
 you were right and I have come back to show you that I am right.'

They crop up all the time that way - those fellows.

They make a great deal of Christmas at Goodwill Center. They take up a subscription. You give a penny - you give two pennies - you owe me a penny. That is to help those who otherwise would have nothing. Goodwill Center runs on very little money, remember. It has no rich patrons - there is no glamour about this dingy front. It doesn't describe - it just lives and works according to the need. It seems to have theory only a great faith in their strings and their keensense tells them that if they are to be opened it must be according to the nature of the particular individual, not to any extreme. And every boy, every girl is in touch with them and as I say they make much of Christmas. Everybody must take a part.

Tells the story of the boy with nineteen cents and his struggle to keep that part. Give a ~~allegory~~ first. Then five, then finally the last cent. Why do you give it all. 'Well,' he said 'I can't hide it from him and I have been trying to. He told us he sees everything - him being God. I wanted to keep it to myself. but I don't want him to see me doing it. And so the of nineteen cents.'

Santa Claus is a living issue at the Goodwill Center. There are great discussions about him <sup>Do</sup> -/they believe in him? Two or three years ago there was a strong group of skeptics into the discussion. That's all bunk. No such person. But one good little creature sprang to his feet. 'Tain't so, there is a Santa Claus. I know there is a Santa Claus! And you could see from

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his statement he was ready to fight for him. How do you know?  
 Did you <sup>think you</sup> heard anything last year? <sup>With</sup> / head hung down, 'no.' What  
 did he bring you two years <sup>ago?</sup> The little head was still down.

'He didn't bring me nothing.' Did he ever bring you anything?

'No.' But I know there is a Santa Claus, because he brought other  
 fellows something.'

It was too much for Mrs. Hickson - this faith.

And the of the front of the Christmas tree that  
 she made Virginia out of her own resources <sup>will go down as</sup> / one of the great  
 additions of Goodwill Center. A tree was her own  
 Christmas money in buying things for the boys. They were put  
 on a tree in a little room and at the door was pasted this notice:  
 "This tree and presents are for <sup>?</sup> and Gene D. Clark. I have  
 looked all over for him and can't find him. Signed, Santa Claus."  
 They got him out of the bed the next morning. Tell story of his  
 kissing presents. Story of affection between Gene and the old  
 woman with whom he lived. A broken heart that he calls Mother  
 and for whom he will fight if a boy speaks of her in a way he does  
 not like. The specifications of Mr. Heran being, he about  
 my Mother. A justification which Mr. Heran suspects is being rather  
 overworked at present. Wise man. He knows the weakness<sup>es</sup> of his  
 own policies.