

Skinner, James J.P.

Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by G. Bicheno

JAMES SKINNER'S life-story is of romantic interest. From the plough to the London Magisterial Bench seems a far cry, but step by step he has steadily advanced, every stage of the upward way bearing the imprint "Promotion by merit."

Mr. Skinner was born at Over, a Cambridgeshire village, on June 19th, 1864. One of a large small family, the feeding of all the hungry boys from the pittance of the father's wage was a matter of grave concern, and was only managed by the most skilful economies, combined with weariful toil, only possible to love.

If "the children's daily bread" were thus hard of winning, how elusive must have been any hope of the needed mental food and training which a proper schooling might have given! Almost as soon as a boy could toddle he was set to farm work, even his threepence per day being a consideration to such a family exchequer.

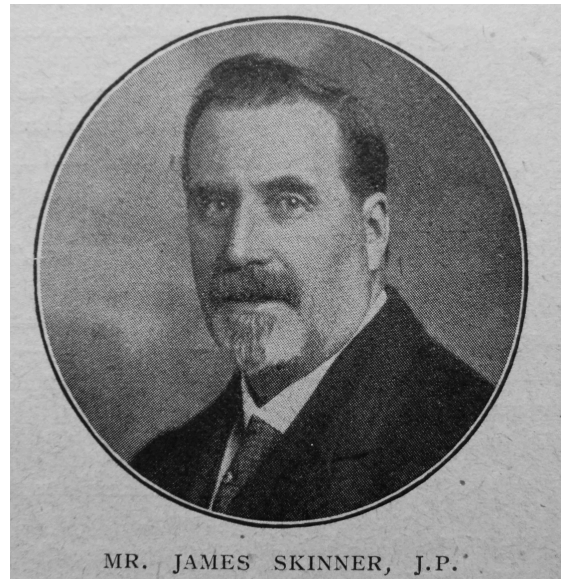
Yet this household shewed the marvel of eight boys growing up in lusty strength of body, and a fine example of self-improvement and growth of mind is attested in our friend's onward progression to his present position.

A capital physical heredity through his parents, and the inheritance from his mother of a deep and strong strain of religious feeling have been grand assets in life.

To the Sunday school he owes an unspeakable debt. It largely compensated the lack of day-school education, provided mental pabulum and stimulus, inspired ideals, kindled the soul. He has ever lovingly and reverently acknowledged his measureless obligations to the Superintendent, the late Mr. James Bicheno.

Primitive Methodism has been the breath of life to him; by its means his very soul was gained and has been grown.

Of his own choice, in very early days he began attending the Primitive Methodist Sunday school and church, though his parents were not then associated there. Perhaps it were better to say that he was "providentially led" rather than "voluntarily came" for here those finer ambitions were first formed and those higher impulses were set stirring in his life from which all its choicest issues have flowed. This church lent him a hand, found for him a fellowship and provided him a sphere of service as no other could, and presently in its opportunity and call for sharing in the prayer-meeting and class-meeting, and in earliest attempts at preaching, it gave him a life-start and a vision that were



priceless. It should be gratefully recorded that it was during the ministry of the Rev. W. Franks, his conversion took place.

The writer clearly recalls once remarking to his father when James Skinner, the lad, was walking ahead in the village street, "How upright he is!" That bodily uprightness has been typical of his whole life-conduct. Coming to London as a youth, he was soon engaged in the hardest kind of insurance work, but the raw countryman quickly outdistanced his fellows, and was given early promotion.

His business *uprightness* made him trusted. He was *there*, he was dependable; he was *all* there, he was enthusiastic. Both qualities have been abiding. To-day, with sane judgment and exceptionally wide experience, he yet maintains a singular freshness of view. He is never *blasé*, never cynical. Life to him is good; he can be no other than kind. Thus he escapes the frequent sin of the successful — hardness; his sympathies haply springing of the remembrance of those early deeps of life from which he had to climb with heavily-clogged foot-steps by reason of educational and other disadvantages.

He has been for several years, and is, one of the most confidential as well as successful of the Prudential's superintendents, areas like the City of London, the world's very centre, having been under his supervision.

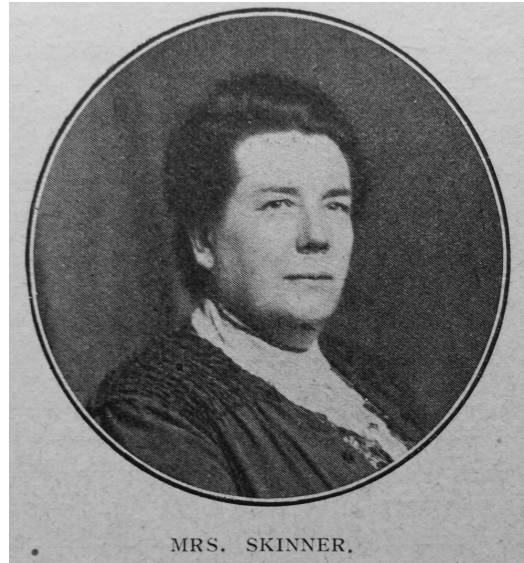
To recount the services and triumphs of the years would require a volume, but the most glowing touches of this romance of a life are connected with Surrey Chapel. This was his "first love" on removing to London when eighteen, though lodging miles away. Since then, whether living North or South, near or far, he has kept his troth. The thirty-four years' record are a glory of faithful effort; they too, signally manifest the man's *uprightness*.

Shade has mingled with shine; days of darkness came when the burden of huge and unwieldy debt and difficulty of many sorts appeared to crush all hope, and threatened the very existence of the place.

That this great centre of light "in Darkest London" is at last redeemed for its great saving work, is very largely due to the persistence and self-sacrifice of Mr. Skinner. "Surrey's" minister, the Rev. J. Tolefree Parr, a far-famed Free Church leader, is Primitive Methodism's President-Designate, and it is a joy that this red-letter year has seen the debt completely eliminated.

The many offices Mr. Skinner has held at "Surrey" do not measure his work or influence. The man has always been bigger than the office, leading others forward, communicating strength to the weak, discovering an unfailing fund of cheer to hearten the despondent.

Early this year an illuminated address was presented to him by his brother officers and all the members of the Surrey Chapel Central Mission, commemorating his twenty-two years' toil as Trust



Secretary, and twenty-one as organising Secretary of the Annual Bazaar. "In these positions," it states, "as also in those of Junior Circuit Steward, Local Preacher and Secretary of the Samaritan Society, by your remarkable business ability, rare fidelity, and self-sacrificing devotion you have rendered invaluable service." Recently our whole Church has congratulated him upon his appointment as a Justice of the Peace for the County of London, and for some time past he has been a member of the London Insurance Committee; he is on the Islington Tribunal, the War Pensions Committee, a Schools' Manager, and serving with distinction on the Children's Care Committee.

All his business qualifications have been stintlessly placed on the altar of the Church to which he owes his all. Last year he was President of the London Council; he is Treasurer of the Local Preachers' Aid Fund, and a valued member of the committee, having in hand the great interests of our Publishing Department and the Book Depot. Even this striking tale of the output of his energies is suggestive rather than exhaustive.

One happy item of his usefulness, coming under observation only of the few, is the catering for the great Annual Missionary Luncheon at "Spurgeon's Tabernacle," thus making a large yearly sum for the Missionary Committee.

His generousities abound. They are judiciously considered and bestowed with grace.

Last year they were revealed in his Chairmanship of the great morning of the May Missionary Meetings.

In every high activity he is inspired and assisted by his excellent wife, who has done incalculable service at "Surrey" all the years, and is a loyal and enthusiastic leader in the Women's Missionary Federation.

She, too, is the noble product of Over Primitive Methodism. All the family faithfully adhere to the Church of their father and mother. Two of the boys are at present bravely serving with the colours.

Certainly our friend's call to the highest honours the Church bestows cannot be long delayed, and probably he would before now have filled the Vice-Presidential chair, but for chivalrous withdrawals after nomination. He is one of those who do not covet place for its own sake, but rejoice in it when given, as an opportunity for doing good. Thus when honour comes he can wear it gracefully and use it well; if withheld, ambition cannot either fret the mind or sear the soul.

With a large share, we trust, of life unspent, and riches of experience and power of position combining to make the future's possibilities opulent and glorious, we say for him in prayerful assurance, "The best is yet to be."

References

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