

## John R. Clapham, of Yarm

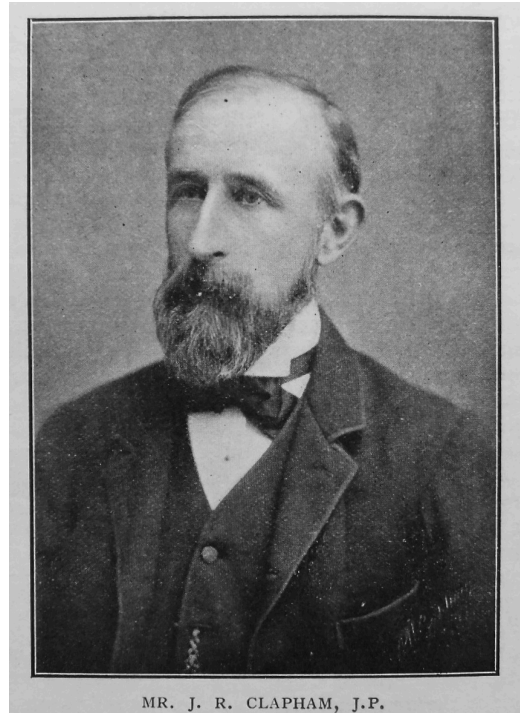
### Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Douglas Durham

ALEXANDER SMITH in one of the essays in "Dreamthorp" has this prescient reflection:—"You may have seen at country-fairs a machine by which the rustics test their strength of arm. A country fellow strikes vigorously a buffer, which recoils, and the amount of the recoil — dependent, of course, on the force with which it is struck—is represented by a series of notches or marks. The world is such a buffer. A man strikes it with all his might: his mark may be £40,000, a peerage, and Westminster Abbey, a name in literature or art; but in every case his mark is nicely determined by the force or the art with which the buffer is struck. Into the world a man brings his personality, and his biography is simply a catalogue of its results."

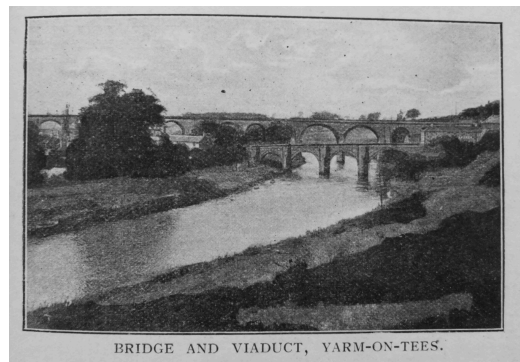
The steward of the Stockton station is an illustration of this. He is a shrewd, practical, eager, restless, daring man. With all his might he struck the buffer. He is striking it every day and in every direction. The force of his blows is seen in the positions he fills and the successes he has achieved. In business, in civic concerns, in the political arena, but most of all in religious and Church affairs he has made a distinctive and honourable place for himself. He is certainly a "stalwart," and no one in our ranks is more worthy of appraisal.

Yarm-on-Tees is his native place and his home has always been there. For four-and-sixty years he has been identified with all its interests. It is an old-world country town, of venerable architectures, and haunting appearance. Who can forget the sight of the great main street and the railway viaduct spanning the town? There was a time when Yarm was a great business rendezvous. Stockton was known as "Stockton near Yarm." Almost opposite the Manor House, the home of our friend, stands the house in which the promoters of the Darlington and Stockton Railway met when the line was actually projected. This was the first railway venture in the world. The historic spot is now commemorated by a fitting tablet. Mr. Clapham's father was known Connexionally as "Robert Clapham of Yarm." The geographical addendum is now associated with his son.

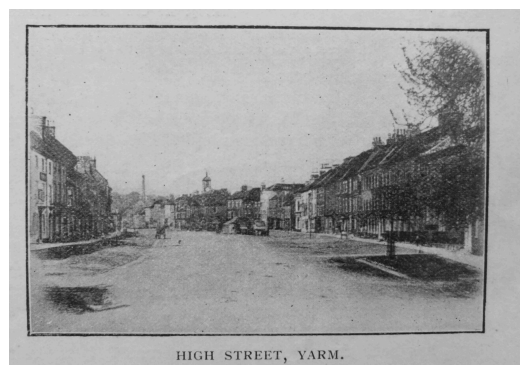
Mr. Clapham's success in business is the sequence of persistence and wisdom. He never lags. Things must go. His rope and twine works are interesting places to visit. The supports of the rope-walk would themselves delight the antiquarian and astonish the archeologist. We would advise visitors to



MR. J. R. CLAPHAM, J.P.



BRIDGE AND VIADUCT, YARM-ON-TEES.



HIGH STREET, YARM.

Stockton to ask for the Ropery and take the “walk.” But it is in shipping that Mr. Clapham’s genius finds its scope. There are ups and downs in that, we have often been told. Fortunately, he has weathered the “downs” and seized the “ups.”

He is immersed in the public services of the district. For twenty years he has been a Poor Law Guardian. He is an Overseer and a member of the District Council. He has a place on the North Riding County Council, and is also a Justice of the Peace. To the duties of these manifold offices he gives assiduous care, yet he never seems perturbed. Having the mastery of self, he is able to proceed from duty to duty with consummate ease and freedom.

Of his Radicalism he has given fine proof. Even the strain of the Budget deepened his interest and loyalty in the Liberal party. He has the sense of social justice, an unfailing sympathy with the toilers, a passionate love of right. He has the courage of his convictions, too, and takes the platform when the principles of progress need to be championed.

But it is in religious ways that our friend’s life finds its highest expression. He sees the Kingdom coming, and he is keen to speed its approach. The loyalist to his own Church is always the man with kindly solicitude — for others. That is certainly true of Mr. Clapham. All the churches have found encouragement in his presence and enrichment in his gifts. Primitive Methodism has no truer devotee than he. He believes in his own communion. He cherishes its spirit. He admires its history. He believes in its future. All that is distinctive of our denominational life is akin to his heart. The passion for evangelism, the care of the children, the democratic sympathy, the audacity and courage which characterise Primitive Methodism, these are the factors of his own religious life.

It is impossible to state all that he has been enabled to do for the Stockton Circuit. In all the circle of the Circuit’s life he is known as “the Steward.” For twenty years he has held the place of honour. He may well be proud as he thinks of the record of these years. Twenty years ago there was but one minister in the Circuit, and the membership was less than four hundred. Now there are three ministers and a hired local preacher, and the membership has been doubled. More and more, we admire the statesmanship which has marked the Circuit policy. New churches and schools have been built. The sites were the very best in all the neighbourhoods and the buildings are commodious and beautiful in the highest degree. New organs have recently been placed in four of the churches. The church property is now valued at £21,000, and the debt remaining is a little over £3,000.

We do not know the total of Mr. Clapham’s bounties to the station. Every trust has been the object of his concern. Many thousands of pounds have been given by him. For the past seven years he has paid the salary of the fourth preacher and the arrangement is to be continued for the next five years. The Circuit has three debtless manses, another proof of his wisdom and liberality.

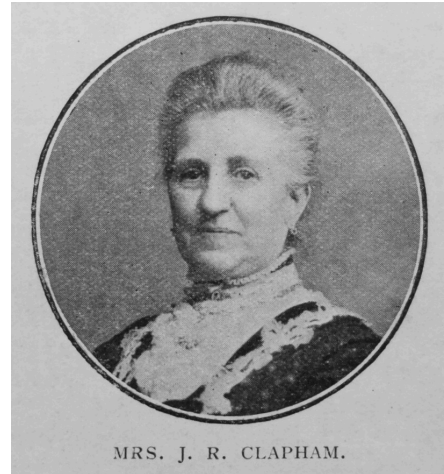
His latest beneficence has reference to the proposed new church in Newtown, a recently opened suburb of the borough. The site is his gift, and he has promised £500 towards the structure. A further generous promise has just been made by him for an organ for this church. He has offered to give half of the cost. It is not merely the magnitude of the gifts which is worthy of record, but the generous spirit which prompts them and the wisdom of the objects encouraged. His heart and mind seem continuously engaged for the Circuit’s weal. He is the “steward” indeed.

The Manor House is a home of Courtesies and hospitalities. The leaders of our Church speak gratefully of its kindness and warmth. It is a spacious and lovely home, palatial in its appointments and adornments, but there is the home feeling and greeting.

Mrs Clapham is a layoff charm and refinement, an ideal wife indeed. thinking of her we are reminded of Lowell's lovely lines:-

"The many make the household,  
But only *one* the home."

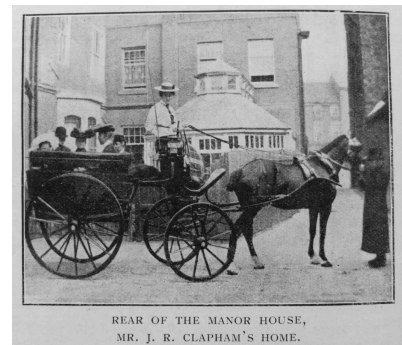
As wife and mother she has nobly fulfilled her life. She has known the cares of children, but her mother love has borne her through. It is a pleasure to speak of her interest in the services and her delight in the expansion of all good causes. Some of her children are around her still. Others have homes of their own, in England or abroad. One of her daughters is the wife of the Rev. G.J. Lane, the popular minister at Saltburn.



The Yarm Society is the especial care of Mr. Clapham. He is the Superintendent of the Sunday School, a Class Leader, the Society Steward, and the Treasurer of the Trust. Except when preaching, he is always there, the keenest and kindest of listeners. In the prayer meeting on the Sunday night he is at his best.

He is a capital speaker, abounding in ideas and with an ample vocabulary. He is essentially up-to-date and full of common sense. Practicalness is the chief quality of his public utterances.

In all our denominational life he has an absorbing interest. At District Meetings and Conferences he is always seen. The Orphanages lie near his heart. Many and secret are his benefactions. He is one of God's stewards and faithfully he fulfils his trust.



Our friend is delightfully unconventional. With the utmost ease he passes from one society to another, untrammelled by prejudices and conventions. Surely he has the secret of perennial youth! He is fresh and buoyant, believing and keen.

We are glad that he has joys. They are all around him. He has joy in his home, joy in the success of the Circuit he has so largely helped to make, and joy in the grander England which is springing up around us.

May the best of blessings abound and abide with him and his!

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1912/444