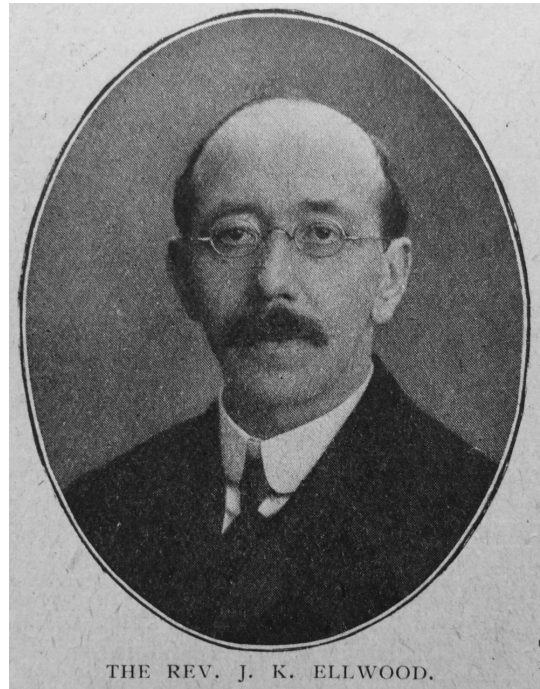


The Clapton Mission

Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. Jacob W. Richardson

EVERY man in his own order. There's the round hole and the square hole, and a peg for each. The Rev. J.K. Ellwood, superintendent of the Clapton Mission, in the East End of London, is of distinctive mould; so is the Mission. It is a clear case of man and mission fitting each other to a nicety.

If every Primitive Methodist does not know the Rev. J.K. Ellwood it is not because he is not well worth knowing; it is rather due to Mr. Ellwood's unostentatious and self-depreciatory disposition. It is common for men to *do* less and *say* a good deal more, and to loom more before the "public eye." He has, a healthy aversion to advertisement, especially of himself, and is free from, that universal and virulent disease: the itch for popularity. He positively trembles before the glare of the footlights whenever a friend admirably switches them on to him. Yet one never meets Mr. Ellwood without confronting an advertisement that is more eloquent than printers' type—and that advertisement is his transparent sincerity and worth.



The Mission itself is a reflex of the man. You go expecting to find a majestic structure imposing itself at a corner of Clapton main thoroughfare. Instead you have to wind your way behind the show and glitter of the main roadway to find a modest looking building squatted in the midst of the great and sobbing need to which it ministers—the merit of appearance being left to the Anglican Church on the other side of the street.

"How long have you been superintendent of your mission, Mr. Ellwood?" | asked as we reposed ourselves in the study after tea.

"Thirteen' years come July," he answered, with obvious pleasure, and in tongue and idiom that made silent chords in me vibrate again—for we both claimed the "canny North" as our motherland.

"And don't you sometimes wish you had a change —a breath of country air — escape from the poverty and squalor, the smoke and fog of this great Babylon?"

It was the answer I expected. "Sometimes; when duties submerge me and I'm not well in myself. But, you know," he added, after a few moments' gaze into the glowing embers, "I love the work; I love the people; and *things go well*. Where could I do better work for our Master?"

I agreed. And I reflected in myself: who is there could do it better? He lives for his mission; it is his work; it is his recreation; it is his hobby. He has no sympathy with the gadding about that is such a temptation to the city minister. It is quite common for him to live six months inside his "parish" — excepting for an occasional half-holiday at the General Committee.

"You believe in, and do a good deal of social work?" I interrogated. But I was hardly prepared for the emphatic and conclusive reply which he threw at me in brusque North-country fashion:

"No self-respecting minister could live in East London without doing social work. It is an absolute necessity under present conditions. Until Governments are intelligent enough to serve the interests and respond to the needs of the socially down-trodden and outcast the Church simply must do it."

A glance at the thirty-fourth annual report of the mission is eloquent of the sincerity of his judgment on the social work of the Churches. During thirty-four years, no less than half-a-million free breakfasts have been given to poor children in the immediate neighbourhood! Gifts of coal to keep the home fires burning have been a priceless blessing to countless half-frozen families. The annual report modestly says: "On a bitterly cold and foggy day in November a year ago we heard of some old people who were absolutely without coal or fire of any kind. We at once prepared a list of very poor and needy cases and took it to our coal merchant, requesting him to send coal to each case. This was done and continued fortnightly from November to the end of March. It is not possible for us to say how much this ministry was appreciated. For then, as now, the price of coal was such as to be far beyond the slender incomes of the aged and poor folk whom we assisted.. There is no need for us to picture the misery of the life of the old person in London in the winter time without a bit of fire. Yet there are many such sad experiences. We have been glad of the privilege of relieving many cases of this kind."

Then, numberless parcels of groceries have gone by surprise to drive the skeleton of hunger from the cupboard and despair from the soul—meat tickets, bread tickets and milk tickets to those who specially needed them. Only those who have lived in the heart of the squalid and grimy East End of London can appreciate the meaning of the week's holiday by the sea, which Mr. Ellwood has for years afforded to these outcasts of Britain's social order. And this is but a glimpse of the Christ-like ministry which daily pours forth from this throbbing centre of practical Christianity.

"You don't advertise much or appeal to the Connexion for support," I observed.

"No, not so much, only on one or two special occasions each year. The fact is my own people give splendidly. And I teach them to give. But I do get considerable help from outside; the people throughout the Connexion do not by any means forget us. Though if parcels of old clothes and gifts of money were to pour in I could use every bit of it and still want more. The poverty and misery makes one's heart ache."

I was forcibly struck with the fact that, as prominent and valuable as is the social work of the mission, the spiritual is paramount and holds first place. So I enquired what was the principle that guided him in this two-fold ministry.



POOR CHILDREN'S PICNIC AT THE ORIENT FOOTBALL GROUNDS.

"To me," he replied, "social work is not an end in itself. I simply could not live on a mission that is limited to what is called social work. *I must have a church.* The church is the chief thing and all else is a means to that end. You mustn't tempt folk to seek after the loaves and fishes; you must give them these things because they need them, and use the gift as a means to winning the soul for Christ."

That is really the striking thing about Clapton Mission. It isn't a mission with empty pews on the Sunday, and spiritual life at low ebb. It is a church in the highest and best sense of the term. Mr. Ellwood is always "fishing" for some exceptional preacher or platform speaker, and he quickly "hooks" any celebrity, lay or ministerial, who ventures within the London area. And not chiefly to make money by them. "I believe in giving my people the very best," he observed.

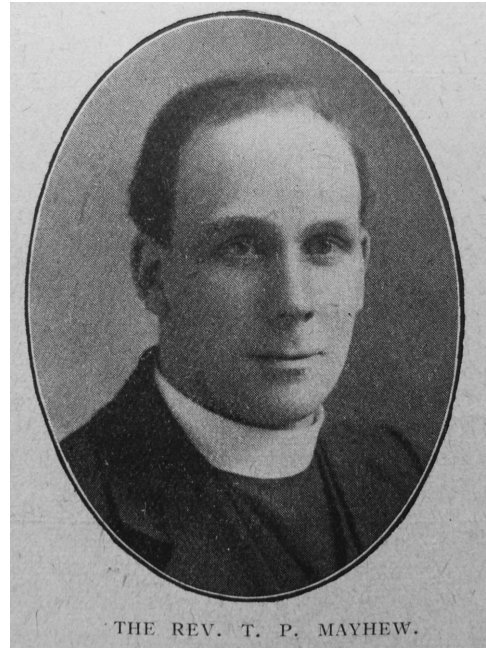
"And you give speakers and preachers the same," said I, "for your congregations are always large."

"Yes, I always impress upon my people the duty and privilege of worshipping in God's House. And then I am very careful whom I ask to serve; I take care never to 'let them down.' "

It was that same red-hot earnestness running through everything. Other churches may plead War-time conditions for empty seats, but you will always see a good congregation at Clapton Tabernacle, and feel the Power. Even the choir turns out nearly full strength for the Sunday morning service. And the fervour of the singing assures one that it is no paid professional vocalism, but praise with the heart and understanding also.

Mr. Ellwood would make no pretensions to being a remarkable or popular preacher. He is not specially interested in the scholastic side of ministerial work; he prefers to leave that phase of ministry to those whom God has specially called so to serve. His book-shelf is a practical one. But the eloquent fact stands that through the years he holds a congregation such as many would be proud to

minister to, and is continually adding to the Church such as are being saved. During his work at the mission he has received hundreds of new members. And there is nothing slipshod about his method. There is no roping in everybody and anybody for the sake of reporting an increase. Each prospective member is interviewed personally at the manse; the sacredness, privilege and obligations of membership are solemnly impressed on the mind. The sacred duties of paying class-money and attending the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper are among the pledges which the candidate for membership is enjoined to take.



"You place an unusual amount of emphasis on attendance at Sacrament, considering you are a mission church," I observed.

"And why not?" he retorted. "This was a solemn injunction of our Master, and poor and rich alike should obey and rejoice. Our Sacramental Service, I am proud to say, is among the best attended and spiritually the most powerful. At the first Supper of our Lord this year, we had a hundred and fifty present."

"I notice that your mission stands on the border-line between a respectable working-class population and the most squalid poverty and vice. Your social work is done chiefly in the latter area, I presume. Do you find that your social benefactions bring these submerged people into vital contact with your church?" I enquired.

"Yes, that is so," he replied. "Of course, the bulk of our membership is of the former class; but our social work is richly blessed in bringing the lowest within the church. You see, our work, though varied in character, is *one work*. Our cripples' parlour provides an evening's enjoyment to the poor cripples; our boys' and girls' clubs keep the young people off the streets; our Pleasant Saturday Evenings are a counter-attraction to the public-house; our P.S.A. and Women's Own supply their special need; but all these institutions are co-ordinated towards one end—the saving of the soul and the upbuilding of the Church."

"You must find it very taxing to keep in touch with all these varied activities," I suggested.

"Well, yes," he hesitatingly admitted. "But I have a splendid and loyal band of officials. They are magnificent. Then my colleague, the Rev. T.P. Mayhew, is a right down good fellow, and serves most effectively; though his work lies largely in the other two churches."

"I presume that Miss Ellwood is an invaluable help to you in the work?"

"Ah, I'm glad you mention that. You cannot say anything too good of her. Among the women and girls she does a splendid and successful work."

The interview had to be concluded; time was flying fast. He would fain have held me longer—not to talk about himself, not to talk politics, or War, or literature, etc.—*the church* was his absorbing

concern. Could I (!) give him any suggestions? Did I find my Intermediate C.E, a valuable institution in my own church? Then he also would start one! . . . Always learning, always doing, this great soul toils on, caring not for the praise of men, desiring not his own ease and comfort, but rescuing the perishing, caring for the dying, making long-silent chords in the human heart vibrate again to Him who loved us and died for us.

As I travelled homeward I felt that I had sojourned that evening with one who humbly and faithfully follows in the footsteps of Him who “went about doing good.”

References

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