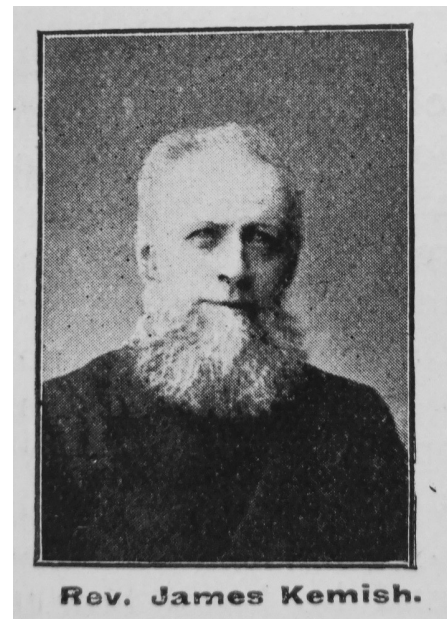


## James Kemish

### Transcription of Obituary in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by John Smith

James Kemish was born on the first day October, 1835, at Headbourn Worthy, Hants, and died on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of March, 1902, at Dover Court, Essex. Between these dates is a record of service in quality and measure which entitles him to an illustrious place in the ministry of Methodism. It would seem that both his parents died whilst he was yet a child, so that he was deprived of the gentle restraints of a mother's kisses and a father's counsels, the sweet influences which go to strengthen and enrich tender childhood. He spent his boyhood under the care of his grand parents, amid very plain and poor circumstances, and it goes without saying that he received no education worthy of the name. But fortunately for James Kemish, and multitudes of lads similarly placed, the theory of ethics that makes character the product of circumstances, is a theory of mist and mud. The creative



springs of character are always internal, not external. The most unfavourable environment may be the cradle of a most dainty life ever expanding in flower and fruit. The Spirit of God meets all souls as they enter the world with the gift of grace, the undying fee of all wrong tendency, and low forces and temptations; a creative force which enables a man to seize upon his environment, however rude and hard, and make it subservient to the noblest ends.

But I am not writing a book, but briefly sketching a christian life, in which there must ever be found a place for personal will choice. The moment of personal choice is the turning point in the soul's moral life and destiny. Happily for James Kemish the supreme moment came in the seventeenth year of his age, when he heard the voice of Christ calling for love and service, and he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. In that vision of the glorified Christ his spiritual life had its birth, and it grew into more life, beautiful and fruitful with "a light that never was on sea or shore." Following the first impulse of his new life he entered at once the fellowship of our church at Winchester. The doctrines and economy of the church commended themselves both to his intellect and heart as at once scriptural and practicable in the great work of soul-winning. By divine grace, and manly merit he mastered all the disadvantages of his early life, and by intense and incessant effort won an honourable place in that aristocracy of service which laid the ground work on which our churches stand to-day strong and stable.

The capacity and fervour which qualified James Kemish for the ministry of the word could not be hidden, and were soon warmly recognised by the officials of the Winchester station, who gladly gave him a place on their preacher's plan. And the work of preaching the Gospel was a blessing to him for it gave a grace and tone to his spiritual experience such as nothing else could afford. Capacity for service, like character, is a growth, and both time and opportunity are essential for its strength and fullness. And the door of opportunity to a wider sphere and greater usefulness was speedily opened on the Hadleigh station where our departed brother spent fifteen months as a hired local preacher.

Then in 1860, he was called by the Colchester station into the regular ministry, and during all the forty-two years intervening he served the numerous and varied interests of our church with a devotion that never tired, and a loyalty that was incorruptible. The whole period of his ministry was spent in East Anglia, and mainly in its more rural parts where the stations are very wide and the journeys long. Twenty-one years of his ministry were spent on three stations, viz.: Watton five years, Wisbech seven years, and Downham nine years. This shows that he kept his stations well, and served them with general satisfaction and success.

A careful study of the records of his stations will reveal that he did a much larger and better work than is generally known. During the term of his probation his stations, Colchester, Thetford, and Ipswich, reported an increase of 210 members, and his first two after probation, reported an increase of 110. In fact the records testify to a life of intense activity in the purchase of land, the erection of chapels, the reduction of debts, the renovation and improvement of old chapels, and to great successes in manifold forms of ministerial labours. The cause of missions, and especially our African missions, commanded his complete sympathy and enthusiastic support. He always succeeded in increasing the missionary revenue of his stations, and sometimes in doubling that of former years. He was diligent and painstaking in the discharge of the duties of a superintendent, whether great or small, joyous or irksome. Official positions outside his own stations had but little charm for him. Still, he did serve his district as Building Committee Secretary, preside over its annual meetings, and represent it in three conferences. But the whole trend of his nature was against mere officialism, while at the same time the daily tasks of a station minister were most gracious and genial to him.

There must be something strongly marked in a manhood which can make its own way, and create such a career, in spite of early disadvantages. What was the secret of James Kemish's success? It was by no means an accident. I venture to think that the source and reason of his success are to be found in the cherished conviction that there can be no substitute for down-right hard work. Our brother carried that conviction into all the enterprises to which he set his heart and hands. It coloured and moulded all the duties and relations of his ministerial life. It entered into all his preaching and his preparations for preaching. Though as a preacher, he did not possess what are commonly called, brilliant pulpit gifts, nor aspire to be a pulpit orator, or a great theologian, or a philosopher, he was always sound and sensible and practical. His sermons were generally addressed to the conscience and heart, and he knew how to drive home a truth. No preacher knew better than he how to tell a story or incident, and it was always to the point; and served to illustrate or emphasise the truth in hand. As a platform speaker he was always fresh and suggestive. In manner he was calm and self-poised, in attitude quick to see and feel, ever *en rapport* with his audience and the occasion, no one found him unprepared. Those who were near enough to James Kemish to hear and feel his heart-beats were never in doubt as to his invincible intention to do his best under all circumstances.

It has been said that there is a bit of poetry about every man. He may seem cold and prosaic, but somewhere there is the singing of birds and the bloom of flowers. The home life of James Kemish was his poetry. It was delightful in its domestic felicities. The law of kindness held sway and ruled out all alienations of affections and troublesome domestic differences. It is equally true to say that the relation between him and his colleagues was close and cordial. Those who have been his fellow-

labourers testify to the fine fibre of his personal loyalty. A large space of the *Aldersgate* might be filled with the touching testimonies of his ministerial brethren. He loved and was loved.

His end was marked by ideal coincidences. He was eager and tireless to the last. There was no thought of the nearness of the goal when he left his home on the 9th day of March, to attend a round of missionary meetings in the Colchester stations, and yet it turned out to be his last week of active work. Thus the last week of ministerial service was spent on the very same spot as the first week of his probation forty-two years before. So in this case life literally turned upon itself. The coincidence was strange but beautifully fitting. He returned home at the end of the week not feeling quite so well as usual, and on the Sunday, March 16th, the doctor ordered him complete rest, stating the case was very serious. On the 26th, he was taken suddenly much worse, and said to Mrs. Kemish, "we must make up our minds to part, one always must go before the other, but we shall not be separated long." About 2 o'clock on the following morning, "he was not for God took him." The same morning the postman brought his application for superannuation, and whilst I was reading it, a telegram was handed me announcing the departure of James Kemish, the beloved minister of the Harwich station. Again the coincidence was strange and yet beautifully fitting. The gracious Master had so ordained that his old servant should know no superannuation, nor hardly a break in the continuity of service, but pass at once from the fruitful activities of his faithful ministry on earth, to serve him day and night in His temple, where he shall linger no more, nor thirst any more, and where the sun shall not light upon him, nor any more heat, and where the Lamb shall feed him and give him to drink of living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes. Therefore we will not sorrow for our beloved brother as they sorrow who have no hope. He is at home with the Lord, and we will look forward with joyous anticipations to unbroken fellowship with him when-

The night is gone  
And with the morn those angel fares smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

---

## References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1903/747