

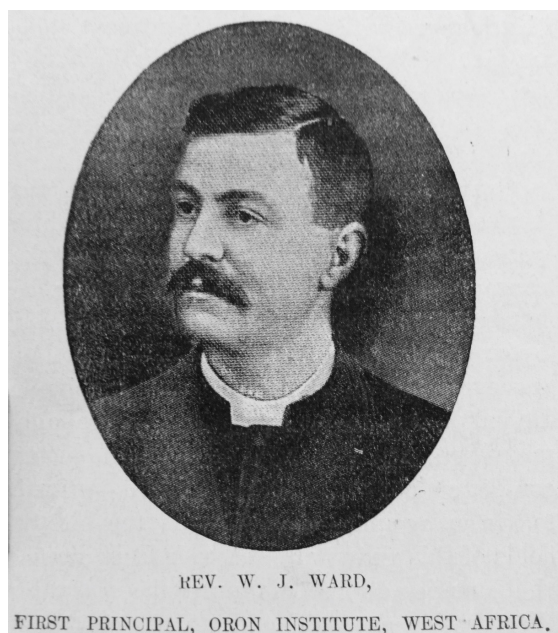
An Interview with the Rev. W.J. Ward

On his departure from Liverpool for a third term of African service and as the first Principal of the Oron Institute

Transcription of Interview in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by W Shipley

WHILST “the proper study of mankind is man,” the study of the missionary man is of special interest to the Christian, for in spite of the cynic’s sneers, the missionary still remains the hero of the Church. Whilst the poet and the painter, the philosopher and the statesman claim our attention, the Christian missionary with all his hopes and fears, his struggles, and strifes, his joys and sorrows is specially worthy of our contemplation.

The Rev. W.J. Ward, like John G. Paton, and many another famous missionary, is the product of rural life, being a native of Guisborough, a picturesque little place nestling at the foot of “Roseberry-Topping” in Cleveland, Yorkshire. Guisborough boasts of the ruins of a fine old Abbey, and of a Market Cross, at which the missionary’s gospel is often proclaimed, and is the head of a vigorous little Circuit.



Mr. Ward is a self-made man, in the sense in which we use that term, the son of parents moving in humble circumstances, but who live godly and devoted lives, and enjoy the highest esteem of all who know them. It was in the Guisborough Circuit that the writer first met Mr. Ward when a youth, and had the joy of influencing, in some measure, the direction of his life.

Nature and grace have alike endowed him richly with those qualities which go to make a successful missionary.

Healthy in body, being agile and of noble build, and well proportioned in every respect, vigorous in mind, as the rays of intelligence sparkling in his eyes indicate, and spiritual in heart, as he has already shown by his arduous and self-denying toil as a pioneer missionary.

Mr. Ward arrived in Liverpool on Friday, August 11th, and the writer being honoured by being his host for the night, availed himself of the opportunity of interviewing him *re* his career and work. He found him very communicative, for out of his great missionary heart he spoke freely.

“As you Well know, Mr. Ward,” said the writer, “many of our most celebrated missionaries were converted when quite young, and that, I believe, was so in your case.”

“Yes, when barely fifteen years of age I was led to give myself to Christ.”

“And did your call to foreign missionary service come to you early in your ministerial career?”

“Before I entered the ministry I had longings to be a missionary, and in filling up my document as a candidate for the ministry, which, by the way, I did in your house when you were travelling in Whitby, I offered for either Home or Foreign service. Then in the fourth year of my probation I volunteered and was accepted to open Jamestown Mission on the west coast.”

“Should I be right in stating that you are entering upon your third term of service in Africa?”

“Yes, that is so.”

“The results of your previous terms of service must then have been satisfactory as you are returning again?”

“Yes, all things considered, the results have been most cheering, and I am a more convinced believer in foreign missions than ever.”

“If I understand aright the work you are about to undertake this time in Africa is, if not solely, at any rate, primarily, educational?”

“No, rather religio-educational. And the Missionary Committee, I may say, is very anxious, and not more anxious than myself, that the emphasis should be put upon the religious, rather than the secular side of the work. Indeed, I am not sure that I should have felt called to the work if it had simply been a scholastic institution.”

“Did you not win a scholarship when a boy at school?”

“Yes, if it be not considered immodest, I must plead guilty to having done so, and the fact that I did so helped me in securing my education, and the training requisite for the teaching profession.”

“As an ardent ‘Endeavourer’ it must be very gratifying to you to know that the cost of the Oron Institute has been defrayed by the ‘Christian Endeavourers’ of the Connexion.”

“Yes, I am more than delighted, as I believe it to point first to our young people’s faith in missions and to indicate, secondly, the possibility of tapping undeveloped resources for lifting our, at present, unsatisfactory missionary revenue to an amount more worthy of us as a great Connexion.”

“What number of students are likely to be placed under your tuition, and at what age is it proposed that they should enter and leave the Institute?”

“When the Institute is full it will accommodate between forty or fifty pupils. There will be no definite age limit, as the Institute is primarily for the training of youths who are not only likely to make bright scholars, but who have strong spiritual tendencies, and give promise of becoming valuable acquisitions to our native staff of workers.

“Have you definitely decided upon the character of your curriculum?”

“The education to be given is intended to reach the equivalent of the sixth or seventh standards of our English Council Schools.”

“Will there be any Government inspection of any sort?”

“Certainly not, for that would mean a Government grant, with all that that entails. The Institute will not, I need not say, have any convent exclusiveness about it, for we shall welcome any proper investigation. Our chief purpose, however, will be to give such a training as will specially contribute to Primitive Methodist missionary enterprise.”

“Are your wife and family accompanying you to Africa?”

“No, the doctor forbids Mrs. Ward’s early return, and the climate is altogether unsuitable for children. Mrs. Ward will reside at Hornsea, in Hull, and it is a comfort for me to know that she will there have many kind friends.”

“Then it will also be a great comfort to you to feel as you do, that the Connexion is praying for you, and your dear wife, in her noble self-sacrifice in giving you up for African Work?”

“Yes, that is emphatically so, and the numerous letters I have received this week have been, and will be, a great consolation to me.

“As a delegate to the last Conference at Scarborough, I think you expressed your approval of the appointment of a deputation to visit our African missions?”

“Yes, it will be an unqualified encouragement to all the missionaries to have their work examined on the ground, and especially in the spirit in which they feel sure the deputation will do it.”

“You will agree that the gentlemen appointed as the deputation enjoy the fullest confidence of the Connexion, and are in every way suitable for their work?”

“Unquestionably so, and I am hoping that they will have their Christmas dinner with me.”

“What is the name and character of the vessel in which you sail in the morning?”

“The ‘Sekondi,’ which is a very fine vessel, and singularly enough the one in which I returned from West Africa the last time.”

“When is she expected to arrive at Calabar?”

“On the 2nd or 3rd of September.”

On the following morning, August 12th, his late superintendent, the Rev. J . Watts, and other officials from the Hull VI. Circuit, and a number of the Liverpool ministers, and other friends met by the Mersey - where so many pathetic scenes are constantly occurring, to bid Mr. Ward "God-speed." As the ship steamed off, and he waved us "Good-bye," we felt that we were gazing upon a brave man, leaving, as he was, in this country, not only parents, aged and broken in health, but wife and children, to teach for a third time, amid all the dangers of a foreign climate, the great principles of the glorious gospel of the Christ. As he passed out of sight, our prayer was, -

"Go, messenger of peace and love,
To nations plunged in shades of night,
Like angels sent from realms above,
Be thine to shed celestial light."

Of the fitness of Mr. Ward for the post to which he has been appointed we have no doubt.

A manly man is he, delightfully brotherly, judicious and courteous, and evincing on occasion a truly boyish spirit. He is thoroughly interested in the young, both in their play and their prayers, their work and their worship.

He will capture his students by his enthusiasm, his capability and devotion. A tutor in the truest sense trains character, develops manhood, and magnetises those near him by his strength.

Half-an-hour of Chalmers' blood-earnestness is said "to have been worth a library of books."

Mr. Ward will transfuse his moral and intellectual energies into the young men about him, and they will leave his presence proud of him and thankful for his work.

References

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