

### THE CHURCH'S WORK IN "DARKEST ENGLAND,"

At the annual conference of delegates of the Church Guilds Union of London, England, held last month, after the usual formal business had been disposed of, the meeting applied itself in good earnest to that all absorbing subject of discussion, "The Church's Work in 'Darkest England.'"

The president, Mr. John Trevarthen, said they had selected for the subject of their annual conference a topic which had lately caused a considerable amount of discussion. It was a subject, moreover, in which he ventured to think the members of the Union were especially well informed, seeing that they had been for many years engaged in work among the masses. They were not there to discuss General Booth, or Boothism, or Mr. Booth's book, but the question of 'The Church's Work in Darkest England'—what the Church had done, was doing, might do and ought to do. It was a very difficult question, he admitted, but, whilst not claiming that the Church had done all that it could do, it had certainly done more than it received credit for (applause). If they could only find the sinews of war, which sometimes meant money, and sometimes men, there would be every just reason for hope and encouragement. He trusted that the result of the conference would be good. It should be profitable as well as interesting. He was surrounded on the platform that evening by those who had personal and practical knowledge of what the Church was doing. Such a title as 'Darkest England' was not an appropriate title to give to their country, because for many years England had never been so forward in Christianity as it now was. On this he was persuaded that if there were such a thing as 'Darkest England' their excellent friend the Bishop of East London knew what it was. He had much pleasure in calling upon his lordship to address them.

The Bishop of Bedford, who met with a cordial reception, said that he was very glad they had not met together that evening to discuss Boothism, for he could assure them that he was heartily sick of it (applause). The result of the score had shown to him that money and wisdom were by no means always connected, and he doubted very much whether those who gave money to the scheme had any more wisdom than those who were going to try to carry it out. As he had said before, however, they were not there to discuss Boothism, though he might say in passing that, coming from the East of London as he did, they knew very little either of the Salvation Army or of 'Darkest England' (applause). He very well remembered the Army starting there, but it always had a cherished tendency to move westwards, towards the land of the setting sun—(applause and laughter)—and he sincerely hoped it would not return. It had been said that the East end was in a worse condition than formerly. To that statement he was in a position to give a most absolute and emphatic denial. He had lived among the people for many years, and had witnessed, he was thankful to say, many changes for the better in their condition and circumstances. Their condition, he maintained, could not be gauged by accounts given by persons who posed as 'amateur casuals' or 'waifs and strays.' On the contrary, the fact was that the East end was infinitely better off than it was, and he ventured to add that it would be still further improved if people would only let it alone. He for one, and many of his brethren, clerical as well as lay, knew more of the real sentiments of the people than any 'amateur casual' possibly could do. During the eleven years he had lived among them in his parish at Spitalfields, he had seen a wonderful change come over the people. That change

had reference not only to the people's way of living, but to the manner in which they now regarded religion and religious teaching. Nowhere was the great mission of the Church of the Incarnation more heartily recognized, or its ministers more trusted and welcomed. The East-end was not worse, but eminently better, although they had to contend with hard times, and if they had been left more alone would have been better still. If in the dock strikes, for instance, they had been left to themselves they would have been better off. The people had, in fact, come to regard the Mansion House Fund as one that did them no real good. The Church had taught them to be more thrifty and self-reliant, and his hearers would have noticed that during the severe weather they had gone through recently the people had existed without appealing for outside aid. It was true the resources of the people had been reduced to a very low level, but happily the fine weather had come just in time to save them. Such facts as these brought him to the conclusion that the number pertaining to what were called 'the submerged tenth' had been very greatly overrated. The clergy of the old-fashioned Church of England had always been endeavoring to relieve them. Of course they might by attracting a number of people to one of the London bridges, discover that they were congregating there at a certain hour of the night (applause and laughter). Much of what had been done was attributable to the steady, persistent work which had happily been going on for so long a time. The parochial clergy had visited, literally by night and by day, and year after year. He was proud to say that he himself had visited them by day and night (applause), and it was only individual work like that—close personal contact with a people—which could possibly influence them for good. And what did they find in the East-end of London to-day in comparison with former times? Not 'waifs and strays' now, as then. And why was that? Because the Church had gone forth in her Divine mission to look out for souls, and save them in His dear Name. The Church had been constantly engaged in rescue and preventive work, and the clergy had themselves spent tens of thousands of pounds in sending people back to the country who were looked upon as unfit for London life, and in helping others to emigrate to the colonies. So much interest did the parochial clergy take in this work that he knew several who had spent their holidays last year in Canada on purpose that they might find out for themselves how their proteges were getting along (applause). Not alone, however, was the Church looking to the bodily welfare of the masses, but she was attracting them to her services. But all this was unknown to the world; it was done in a quiet and unobtrusive way, none the less effective, however, because the clergy objected to advertise themselves or their work. He did not believe that there was any part of England where the Church's work is more to the fore than in the East end of London. In what were called the 'slummy' parts, he believed that the Church was the only real minister for salvation and the parish clergyman the only welcome visitor. She was doing a great work for God. Her sails were set, her course was clear, and the result would be more lasting than those of any new-fangled scheme, even though it were backed by £100,000. Rescue work among fallen women was done, he need scarcely tell them, in a better way than it could be effected by any other denomination of Christians. Indeed, the question might truly be asked, what was the Church doing if she could not take in hand such a work as that? Then, again, their East end friends were attracted to the services of the Church, and joined in the worship with marked indications of reverence and earnestness. It was, surely, a most enjoyable and impressive sight to go into their churches and see, as often they could do, the

sons of toil kneeling before the Bishop for the solemn 'Laying on of Hands.' When such sights as those presented themselves, let them go back, if they dared, and say that the Church of England was not what some called 'in touch' with the people. A great lee-way had been made, hearts had been touched and lives influenced, and the whole work must prosper in God's own good time and way (applause).

Mr. David Howard, described by the Chairman as a large employer of labour at the East-end of London, said that all his life he had lived just outside the East end, and was well acquainted with its needs and all that had been done to meet them. He could assure those present that he was in a position to express his entire approval and give an emphatic assent to everything that the Bishop of Bedford had said. He, the speaker, could think, and very thankfully too, of much that had been done in the way of Church extension. He had then in his mind a place—not long ago a market garden—whereon there was now a church and 15,000 souls being tended by the clergy of their beloved church. And what as to the success of the work of the Church in that district? The good that had been done, and would still go on, was most striking from every point of consideration. In that and many other districts the zeal and energy put forth by the clergy and lay workers led to results which might well stimulate to the renewal of incessant labour. One vicar said to him only the other day, 'See how the faith of these people triumphs over difficulties!' And well, indeed, might he say so, from what he (the speaker) knew of that district and its circumstances. From personal knowledge of the East end people, and the loving self-denial which they exercised to such a marked degree, he was convinced that there was more Christianity oftentimes to be found in an East end common lodging house than in a West end palace (applause). In pursuing their work for God among such a class, he was persuaded that they did not need great excitement or violent emotional appeals. The clergy were nobly, manfully doing their work, and he felt constrained to say that he considered the laity were to blame, and not the clergy, for any work that remained yet to be done. Why, he would ask, were the laity allowing the clergy to be in some instances single-handed in such vast districts? Why did they not let them go forth 'two and two' as their Divine Master sent them? The real truth was that his brother laymen had yet to realise in a larger degree that they were members of one body. The work would be good and Christ-like in proportion as it was vigorous, unselfish and patient. Patient, quiet work would far outdo all noisy movements. He had seen earnest work done for God among what were called very widely differing 'schools of thought.' As the good Bishop had said, it was personal influence that was needed in the East end; and if they wanted real Christian friendship they must go to the poor and not to the rich to get it [applause]. He would urge them to feel the reality of Christian brotherhood. The Church stood before the living and the dead at that moment, and the Church, and the Church alone, was the safeguard.

The Rev. J. G. Deed, secretary to the Additional Carates' Society, followed. He considered that dark England did exist, but 'Darkest England' as a parallel to dark Atria had no existence in fact. The Church had been hard at work in the home mission field in various ways and by means of various agencies. 'The Official Year Book of the Church of England' would do a great deal to dispel the apparent ignorance as to what the Church was doing.

Mr. J. A. Winfield (Home Missions in East London) believed that the outlook was not so bad as it was sometimes painted. There would always be a submerged tenth, so long as drink and impurity prevailed. It was said that the clergy did not visit the people. If that were