

SSM21

VICAR AS "TRAMP."

VISIT TO A PRESTON SHELTER.

MAYOR'S REPLY TO CRITICISMS IN A PAMPHLET.

STEPS TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

The annual meeting of subscribers and supporters of the Shepherd-street Mission, Preston, was held at the Guild Hall, Preston, this afternoon. The Mayor (Alderman W. M. Margerison) presided, and was supported by Sir John Kirk (chairman of the Ragged School Union), Major Stanley, M.P., Mr. George Toulmin, M.P., Mr. W. Parker, and others.

The Mayor submitted the 34th annual report dealing with the various operations of the mission. "The past year," the report opened, "has not been one of the most pleasant for the Shepherd-street Mission, many things having taken place to cause worry and discouragement. With the various branches of the mission, and a family of nearly 50, the work is very difficult within the fold; but when the mission is attacked in a most shameful way from without by such men as the Vicar of Crossens, the Rev G Z Edwards, and the most abominable untruths written and published, it is enough to make anyone hang their harps on the willows, and it is hard work at times to believe that 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'"

The Mayor, in commenting on the report, said the joy of the work had been damped owing to the attack which had been made by the Vicar of Crossens, who, as an amateur tramp, came into the shelter. The hard times through which they had been passing had brought along to the shelter quite a large number of men who were without the requisite three-pence that would admit them to the shelter and rough bed of a lodging-house. Many of them were without even a penny, but by means of that mission's work they were given the task of cutting wood and then supper and a lie down in a warm shelter. That shelter had sheltered on an average, nearly 43 men a night.

THE CONDITIONS AT THE SHELTER.

The conditions were not ideal; they had been complaining of the conditions and begging the people of Preston for years past to give them money to enable them to erect a shelter to carry on the work efficiently. The people of Preston had not responded up to the present moment, but he thought they would respond.

Twelve months ago, seeing they had land occupied by houses, they said, "This work must be done," and £1,100 had been spent on building a very good shelter.

Mr. Edwards, in a pamphlet which he had issued, entitled "A Vicar as Vagrant," had made many mis-statements in connection with the work, and he (the Mayor) was requested by the committee to read the following addition to the report:—

The committee's attention having been drawn to the above, a letter was sent to the vicar asking for an apology and the withdrawal of the chapter relating to the Shepherd-street Mission Shelter, but in his reply the whole thing was shelved, and no apology rendered. The matter was then put into the hands of our solicitor, and he is now dealing with it.

The only fault with the shelter is, it is too small, and those who come to these meetings, and those who read our reports know that for four years we have been struggling to remedy this, and now it is accomplished, as will be seen by this report.

"May I say for myself," added the Mayor, "and without any word from the committee, that if the Vicar of Crossens would only call upon me I shall have very great pleasure in going and showing him the work that was in progress long before he came to visit our old shelter and show him he has made a very great mistake."

The Mayor added that the work was being carried on on careful lines, on Christian lines, and on lines that if there was a spark of goodness in a man it should be helped. (Applause.)

Sir John Kirk, in moving the adoption of the report, emphasised the need there was for a work such as was being carried on at that institution.

Major Stanley, who seconded, said he had no direct association with the Shepherd-street Mission. From all he had heard of it he thought the words the Mayor had used in refuting the attack that had been made had not been at all too strong.

He did not suppose that everything was perfect, but he thought when an attempt was being made, such as was being made in this case, to raise the fallen, it was not necessary to make attacks upon it which could not be absolutely and entirely substantiated.

The report was adopted.

Mr. Geo. Toulmin, M.P., moved a resolution:— That this meeting commends the Shepherd-street Mission and Home for Orphan and Destitute Children to the liberal support of the community, believing it is doing a good work among the poor children of our town.

WORK WELL DONE.

Mr. Toulmin said reference had been made to the criticism of this mission, but he, as one who saw something of what was going on, would say that rather than criticise the mission and its helpers he should like to see a little more criticism of those who were not helping. (Applause.) There was a great deal more left undone by the community, and a great deal more criticism might be passed because that was left undone, than could be passed on the methods of those who were carrying on this work.

They were doing a little, but they were doing it well, and, therefore, if anybody wanted to criticise, let them criticise by coming and helping and improving, because from what he knew of the ladies and gentlemen connected with that mission, they were always willing to better what they had done in the past. (Applause.)

Referring to the report, in which it was stated that two children were working and living in the home, Mr. Toulmin said that from what he knew of Preston the greatest need of the town at present was a working boys' home and a working girls' home, and if anyone wanted to criticise let them start such a home as that.

There were working boys' homes which were carried on by charitable persons belonging to one of the great religious communities—and they were doing a good work—but there was room for others, and he called upon critics to start one, and take up work which they could not expect Mr. Williamson with the resources in this case to carry on. (Applause.)

The resolution was carried.

SHEPHERD-STREET MISSION.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "LANCASHIRE DAILY POST."]

SIR.—Will you do me the favour of inserting these lines in the interests of the above. As a former worker at the mission for 12 years, as a minister of the gospel, and as one who is conducting special gospel services at Shepherd-street each night this week, I have had ample opportunity of seeing the beneficent work that is being done by Mr. Williamson and his helpers. It is a work very dear to the heart of Christ; it is fulfilling his command as given in the preface to the parable of the Great Supper, to call the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind, to the feast. To any person who will spend an hour or two in examining the good work at its heart, and who will watch its many-sided and helpful progress, cannot help but feel "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

In the rescue of the waifs and strays from homes of wretchedness and vice, and their transformation to respectability and usefulness, as seen in the 40 children in the home at Crow Hill House, Oxford-street; in the sheltering of from 30 to 60 penniless men each night in Laurel-street, in the suppers and dinners given to thousands of men, women, and children, who would otherwise be underfed or starving during the winter months; in the Christmas morning breakfast to a thousand poor children; in the provision of clogs and clothes to the ill-clad; in the provision of temporary employment for destitute men and boys—we see a mighty work going on in our midst for the social betterment of broken and maimed humanity.

The work goes on year in and year out—week-days and Sundays—from early morn to late evening, and, when children in the orphanage are ill, even in the middle of the night. There is no paid official—although an evangelist is much needed. But Mr. and Mrs. Williamson and their helpers spend their time, their strength, and their money wholeheartedly in the interests of the poor. And it is a credit to the many generous subscribers that they see the value of the work being done; it is worthy of even a much-increased support. It ought to have twice the income it has—even that would not do all the work that ought to be done.

But there is a deeper need than money—much as that is required. The chief necessity is earnest service from humanitarians. Altogether inadequate is the staff of workers. "The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few." The churches ought to send of their very best members to share in this Christlike work. Not the weakest, but the strongest of Christ's people are needed for this "angels' work below." Yet how few there are engaged in the noble work Shepherd-street Mission is doing! Who will come to the help of the Lord against the mighty? May the Lord of the harvest thrust forth labourers into the harvest. Christians, social reformers, lovers of human brotherhood, political economists—here is a sphere for you. And this work is worth while—it shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.—Yours, &c.

J. W. DICKSON.

Preston, 19th October, 1910.

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