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## Lay Evangelism and Pastoral Work in a City Parish

BY THE REV. J. G. HUNTER, M.A.

### I. *Background to the problem*

Social movements which affect the destiny of nations almost inevitably draw their strength from the loyalty of the labouring masses. Communism, Socialism, and Christianity started, not in the social circles that people aspire to, but among artisans: and with the support of a few intellectuals permeated the environment into which they were born, and overthrew the domain of thought that sought to resist them. They triumphed, and in triumphing recreated the mental outlook of their environment. This characteristic is an important consideration in any discussion on the Evangelization of England.

Most of us are aware that Western Civilization to-day represents a zone of thought independent of Christianity. It is deeply influenced by the greatness of its religious past, no doubt, but its ideals are expressed in humanistic rights and freedoms, which exist in their own right, torn from their Christian parenthood. Although not barren in themselves, these ideals are powerless when set against the sinfulness of human nature. And it is the struggle that is produced by this very tension that has done so much to destroy the healthy political life of our own times, and to generate that cultural crisis that is a feature of contemporary life, a crisis whose voice could be heard crying in wartime, "What are we fighting for?"; and more bitterly complains to-day, "What are we living for?"; a crisis that only can be overcome, both in England and on the Continent, by the rediscovery by the masses of that power that transcends both rights and freedoms, and gives to human life its ultimate meaning and purpose.

The rediscovery of this power is an individual experience worked out in a collective setting. The discovery of a spiritual aim is a gift of God following the surrender of a man's life to Him. When this happens *en masse*, Europe and England will overcome their spiritual crisis; but such a rediscovery made on a scale wide enough to influence the culture of our societies must have its roots in the working masses of our country. Failure to win their allegiance only leads to something of passing interest which leaves the bulk of our people content to live and die in their sins.

The Anglican Church has not only the message to save people, but the means; the means to court the ears of the masses. Her parochial system reaches into every home in the land, however proletarian or humble, her ministry provides a full-time exponent of the Faith in every locality, as well as a corps of believers. It is indeed this corps of believers that holds the key to the future of the Church. This is not to say that it is held by a handful of people who come down to their church once a week, but rather by a worshipping community that is

dedicated to the winning of their fellows by all the means in God's power. In this context "dedicated" means being prepared to use themselves in prayer, in study and preparation, by giving, by time spent, in visiting, in love, to bring these lost flocks for whom Christ died to the feet of their Lord.

The Evangelist may sow the seed, but the faithful must prepare the ground. Until the *ethos* of the parish is conditioned to the Gospel, attempts at evangelism will have but spasmodic success; and even the individual successes will in many cases soon sink back into the spiritual lethargy from which the mission has temporarily roused them.

Such preparation, however, cannot be undertaken by an Incumbent alone. A task of this magnitude will be obviously beyond his powers. To saturate the parish with Christian teaching, to change the mental background of the people, such a task under God can only be undertaken by all active members of his flock, united in a fellowship of Christian service. This will mean their inspiration and training, their direction and leadership. They will look to him for all these, and he will guide and pray with them. They will be his ears and eyes, covering remarkably accurately the whole parish, and so enabling him to build up a picture of the parish impossible in any other way.

But let us look at the state of the average parish. The general outlook of our parishioners to-day is largely secular. We may say with real regret, yet knowing it to be true, that the *ethos* of our parishes is pagan. This is not to say that the people are against the church; that would be far from the truth. But it would be misleading to suppose that their basic assumptions and judgments bear any real relationship to the ethical and moral demands of Christianity. They are indifferent to our creeds and careless of our sacraments. Behind their occasional appearances at weddings and funerals their patterns of thought are purely secular; the mysteries of baptism are as interesting and incomprehensible to them as the inner workings of a solicitor's office. They listen to what we say and continue to live as they did before; the authority of the Church has vanished, and they know us no more.

The basic task that must always be kept clear in the mind of the Anglican parson is that the *ethos* of his parish, as a parish, must be christianized. His people must come to have a Christian standard of judgment and expression; only then can they become dissatisfied with the world as they find it and seek after God. The parish must be seen as a group-personality to be convinced of sin and converted. It is only then that the field will be white for individual harvesting; which will lead to sanctification and the building up of a sturdy Church life.

This means the creation of a sense of loyalty and duty towards God and the Parish Church, and this in turn will grow out of a sense of belonging to the Parish. The lack of a sense of belonging is one of the great characteristics of modern society. The individualistic nature of modern entertainment where masses gather, not for social intercourse, but to watch a spectacle, reinforces the individualistic nature of the modern workshop. Only the Church can satisfy the "need of belonging" which transcends work and leisure and provides a common focus for all life.

The need for belonging can only be satisfied as the people come to

experience that the Church cares for them, even as Christ cares; once it is axiomatic that the Church does care, then the people will be loyal to the Church. This mutual caring must spring from the mind and soul of the parson, as the representative and vicar of the God who cared sufficiently for the world to send Christ to die for it. Such a conception is a fundamental assumption of the Establishment; each vicar is responsible for the souls of all who live within his boundary. Anything less is non-conformity, indeed congregationalism, a conception totally out of accord with the mood of the modern world. So the parson becomes the focal point for the sense of belonging of the people of his parish.

Such a task is made doubly difficult to-day by the very nature of many of our city parishes, whose very boundaries are in many cases a hindrance, having been drawn without any reference to the community to be contained within them. In addition, people's occupations and interests are also diverse, each demanding its own loyalties and social prestige, and their beliefs similarly are divergent. Yet all are within the parish, and although they may not all be constrained to enter within the walls of the Parish Church to worship, they should feel themselves part of the parish, knowing the vicar and welcoming his lead in the affairs of the community.

A further difficulty that the majority of incumbents will feel they have to contend with, is the divorce that exists between the parish and the congregation. In our larger cities to-day, Churchpeople have lost their loyalty to their parish church and had it replaced by a loyalty to their form of Churchmanship. The zealous, loving clergyman finds himself faced with a congregation drawn from half a dozen parishes, while in his visiting he discovers many sturdy Church folk who refuse to be seen near their own parish church. Such a state is not to be encouraged, although for tender conscience sake it may be condoned.

A final and most obvious obstacle is that any attempt really to penetrate the parish thoroughly means time and energy expended in regular visiting and able preaching. Dr. Garbett relates how his custom was to spend two hours reading and four hours visiting every day, and it would be most valuable if in the modern parish, with its shortage of clergy, its multitude of organizations and specialist calls upon the incumbent's time, this were possible to-day.

For this reason, if for none other, the Church is forced to mobilize all its manpower for the solution of the problem. As Bryan Green has said, "In the purpose of God it is the total life of the Church that is intended to be the evangelizing agent". The incumbent, instead of being the total force in person, becomes the leader and inspirer of the laity in their work in the parish.

The laity become workers together with the parson. Worship is linked with service and thus the royal priesthood show forth the praises of Him in a practical way in the darkness of their own parish.

## *II. Practically Speaking*

In the parish of Bradford Cathedral, two and a half years ago, this problem was faced and the challenge accepted. The task was conceived on a five-year basis: the first year to be exploratory, the

breaking down of suspicion and the building up of confidence between the worshipping congregation at the old parish church (the Cathedral), and the parishioners who never entered the church ; the second year to be spent in developing contacts made ; the third to draw the parish towards the church socially and for worship ; the fourth to contain an evangelistic mission and the fifth to see the consolidation of the work.

The parish concerned is one of 5,000 souls, living for the most part in " back to back " houses set in dismal cobbled streets in the heart of this large industrial city. The people are goodhearted, but largely alienated from the Church, many being foreign to the city—Poles, Asians and Irish, some owing allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, the rest preferring loyalty to themselves alone. Many are morally corrupt ; adultery and " living in sin " being for these the norm, for the majority tolerated, and for the handful who come down to the church, deplored and ignored. This is as barren a field as one will find anywhere.

We realized that in the context of the ordinary parish, this conception of an evangelizing congregation must first be achieved in the mind of the clergy. We had to see our aim—to change the ethos of this parish—clearly ; we had to pursue our object—to achieve the aim together with our people—relentlessly. Failure to do this, or willingness to compromise with the many competing calls on our time, would ask for scepticism in the parish and disillusionment in the congregation.

We knew also that the team of visitors that we gathered round us must also know what their aim and purpose was. They too must be prepared to work for the spreading of Christ's Kingdom ; anything less, the distribution of magazines or Christmas benefits, would fail to cut any ice with the toughened parishioners outside the Church. Perhaps the awakening of the sense of responsibility in the hearts of our people, and the training of them in the arts of visiting was the greatest task we had to face, yet not an impossible task, for many Churchfolk to-day long to be able to labour effectively among those who are outside the Church ; they look only for a lead, and for training.

Our people who were called, were not called to social work, nor to philanthropic generosity, but to pastoral and evangelistic work, as befits those who are priests and kings unto God. Those who were called were in number about fifty, and ranged from lads of seventeen to housewives of sixty, of different trades and professions, having only in common a devotion to our Lord and His Church. It was this factor that bound them together as a fellowship in service, that kept them loyal and regular in their labour, that gave them a message to those whom they visited. Anything less, an interest in social work, a desire to support the vicar, a wish to be in the swim, would have led only to frustration in the person concerned and a failure to inspire those whom they visited. Selection of visitors is always a difficult responsibility; especially as we wished to see the work extended as soon as possible, and the parish adequately covered.

The first step taken was a preliminary survey of the whole parish, which for this purpose was divided into four natural areas, and subdivided into streets, or groups of small streets, each being given to a visitor or pair of visitors as their own " parish ". After instruction in

how to approach their "flock" the visitors were provided with a small card, suitable for standing on a mantelshelf, giving a list of services and activities of the Church and declaring in bold type that "Bradford Cathedral was their Parish Church".

Following the survey, the visitors reported back and an analysis of the parish was made, and sheets typed for each visitor's "Parish" containing the name, address and religious allegiance of all within the area. These were set in loose leaf spring-back notebooks together with a sheet for the notes and instructions of the clergy, and the reports of the visitors. Then followed regular monthly visiting of all Anglicans, and those Non-conformists and Roman Catholics who welcomed us.

Each month the visitors hand in their completed reports which are filed, relevant information being transferred to the card index of the parish, and on to the staff's visiting lists. It is of course to be assumed that the clergy will follow up the reports of their visitors, reports of illness, new people, of births, matrimonial difficulties, cases of hostility, and those needing spiritual help. Opportunities flood in; opportunities to be grasped, but the Church never to be cheapened. The Gospel must not be peddled or folk will disdain it. Faithful and careful ministering produces a clergy who are respected and loved, as they move about the homes of the parish, welcomed by the children in the streets, or mothers out shopping. The task is heavy, and we find difficulty in keeping up with the work; yet we are aware that nothing could be worse for the parish than for a visitor to make a report that is never followed up. The people become cynical and the visitor disillusioned. Nothing, on the other hand, is more encouraging to the visitor than to see one of his flock brought to acknowledge the Saviour as the result of the working together of the visitor and clergy, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is hard to change the habits of a lifetime, and that is what it amounts to with many of our people; yet love, or sorrow, or joy, in the vital moments of life, can through a well trained visitor be used to make a Christian, and to strengthen the Church.

To assist the visitor in his or her regular monthly visits a small magazine was devised called the *Parish Paper* which sold at 1d. This was initially a charge on the Church, but it provided an excellent excuse for a regular monthly visit. Visits which in the first place required courage on the visitors' side, meeting as they did mainly hostility, surprise and suspicion, were made much easier by this tangible offering, and in many cases initial copies of the Paper were given free.

But the Paper was much more than an excuse; it was in itself a weapon to mould the ideas of the mass. Each month, besides the Provost's letter, containing a straight message or Christian challenge, each issue contained nine or ten items of topical interest, often comments and reports on secular activity taking place within the parish boundary; in some cases the paper anticipated the local press with items of news, and this became a feather in the cap of those parishioners who were beginning to show signs of a sense of belonging to the parish. The news was reported always in a Christian context, each item being used to drive home the message of the Church or at least her presence

in the midst of her people. In addition the Paper was used for definite teaching, one article of the Creed being explained each month or the Church's teaching on marriage or the sacraments. Items of Church news, as such, were not allowed to erupt too freely into its columns, as this was a paper for pagan and not Christian readers and was designed to be read. The Paper was used to welcome new residents, or lads home from Korea, to speed parishioners to the Antipodes, to announce their engagements, as well as the usual Parish Register of births, marriages and deaths. By last month it had had its price and circulation doubled and was paying its way. The aim of the Editor is to make the paper as much a part of the lives of his people as the pools or the pubs are at present. In so doing it will not only be of interest to them, but will teach them quietly and imperceptibly to look to and love their Church, and as such it is both a preparation for, and a follow-up to the call of the visitor.

It is this personal visit that is the most important weapon in the Church's attack on the parish. The visitors' task is first and foremost to bring the Gospel to these people, not only in speech, but in life; by their real Christian love for the "flock", illustrated by the kindness and interest of their approach, and in the obvious sincerity of their faith. Witness of words without love is of little value in this work. Many of the visits have been without any obvious spiritual results for many months, some have yielded results almost immediately. One of the most interesting concerns a visitor who had the door slammed in her face on the preliminary visit, yet by her consistency and sincerity is now welcomed each month, and the head of the home has started to come to church. As might be expected, times of difficulty, accidents, sickness, or economic distress, when met by genuine sympathy and practical help, have resulted in a real friendship being developed between, not only the visitor, but the clergy, and the people concerned. Many of the visits are inevitably on the social level, but always the visitors must be ready to exploit a turn of conversation which will lead to spiritual opportunity.

For this, the training of our visitors was important. Most Church-people, regrettably, are very confused in their own minds as to the doctrines of the Church, and the plan of God for salvation. That the visitors might not be blind guides, they had to be trained. In the first place they were given a *clear aim* as to what they are endeavouring to do, and this aim must be kept at the forefront of all their visiting. Failure to do so reduces the value of their service and leads to their own disillusionment. This aim is the opening of the eyes of their people, and the leading of them to Christ; and all their training and talking has this as its focal point.

The visitors met first of all once a month at the time of the issue of the Parish Paper for prayer, and a talk on visiting or personal preparation, with a discussion to follow on the current situation in the Parish. This was strengthened by a second meeting each month for Bible study and prayer. A visitor who does not know his Bible is not likely to be as effective as one who does. Talks on personal work, together with suggested texts of value to be learnt, were given at the same time. But undoubtedly the fellowship in prayer that such an

opportunity affords is the essential factor for a well-grounded hope of any spiritual response among the parishioners. A further and most valuable opportunity for study was given by a training week-end at a country house in Wharfedale, where the visitors had a competent evangelist as leader and a member of staff as Chaplain. Places at this week-end home were strongly competed for and provided an intensive course of training, cradled in worship and fellowship together.

This training not only repaid itself in the increased effectiveness of the visitors' work, but also in their added zeal and interest. They felt that they were being appreciated and that they were being given the means of accomplishing something close to the centre of their Christian life and worship.

In the winter of our second year, a practical expression of the training was made. Each Sunday after Evensong a group of five went out into the parish for a home meeting, a different street being chosen each week, in order to discourage the development of a mission church, and to encourage all spiritual impetus resulting from the meeting to be directed towards the worship of the parish church. The service was conducted by the laity (i.e., those who hadn't a pecuniary interest in evangelism) and for the laity. Hymns, prayers, the talk and witness were shared by the visitors and the Youth Fellowship. The clergy remained in the background except to administer the blessing and to guide the discussion.

These meetings not only produced regular new members for the Sunday School but in one case led to one old tippler forswearing her bottle! In the summer, open air meetings were held during the Octave of St. Peter (our dedication). At this series of six services the evangelistic address was given by a fully-robed member of the staff supported by choir and cross-bearer, with a brass quartet for the hymns. We believed that in taking the Church to the people in this way, it lessened their sense of strangeness to the Cathedral. On each occasion, a good group of local folk gathered around, not out of curiosity but rather a sense of loyalty, for it required courage to attend a religious meeting under the curious stares of less religious or Roman Catholic neighbours.

But the great event for the parish is becoming the Christmas "Family Pew" service, when more and more of our people are learning to come down to the old church with all their relatives, grandparents and grandchildren. The church looks different when filled with folk sitting in families, the older folk giving of their money and the younger of their toys to the babe Jesus, and singing together to His Glory.

On the social side, in our third year, a great "Family Party" was held at Shrovetide, concluding with a time of preparation for Lent. This was an immediate and astonishing success. It was as if the pent-up work of two years was suddenly released as the visitors started to sell tickets. In a few days the entire seating capacity of the Hall was taken, and the Party became the most talked-of event of the parish for years. We used the film *Barabbas* to pin-point the challenge of Lent which leads to Calvary, so that our people went back to their homes with a vivid message of our faith in their minds; to be followed up by the visitors on their next round. All these efforts are designed to concentrate the parishioners' attention on the Church which is in

their midst and on the message of the Gospel which it proclaims. Little has been done on the social side because we believe that the call to *worship* is the central call of the Church and social gathering should be the expression of the fellowship which springs from corporate worship. The task is arduous but it has its rewards and results.

For the future we look forward, not to expanding geographically but in intensity. As the parishioners start to come down to church, so they will be drawn into a group on whom the future of the work will largely depend. Each street should provide a family or home which may be used as a base for the Church's witness. This home will be the starting point for the mission when it comes, it will be the centre for any development of a "cell" movement springing out of the mission, as well as being a continuous witness to God in the street.

We envisage a group of twenty to thirty people who will meet for their own training and prayer, not only at the Cathedral but also away at a week-end where they will be able to experience the fellowship of the Gospel in an evangelistic and devotional atmosphere, and where they may learn how to work effectively among their neighbours.

### III. Conclusion

It is tempting at this point to look around and see how far we have been able to succeed in our original aim, and to try to ascertain if the visiting has made any appreciable impact on the parish. In practice little enough can be observed after two and a half years. Easter is still celebrated by drunks rolling up Church Bank well on into the early hours, keeping godly heads from sleep in the clergy house. The vast majority of people still sleep in on Sunday morning, and devote the day to tasks of their own devising; life goes on much the same. Yet to the visitors there is a change. At first they met misunderstanding, but now suspicion has softened into trust, and hostility into interest. This change is most obvious to the clergy who in their visiting find themselves welcomed by all the Anglicans, and in not a few Nonconformist and Roman Catholic homes—a change from the hostility or surly apathy that is wonderful to experience. They are welcomed by a people who, two years ago, had no contact with the Church except at death, who were often unbaptized, and whose marriage had taken place at the Registry Office.

This breaking down of suspicion is however merely the outer crust of the work that has to be done. The core of the problem—the thinking of the people—has as yet been little disturbed. All the old influences of environment and propaganda are still in action, and all that stands against them is the witness of this living Church, its Paper and its visitors, questioning the wisdom of the world, and witnessing to a different way of life. In so far as we have been able to make the people aware of the Church not as an archaic instrument but as a beneficent and interesting organism, living in their midst and demanding their loyalty and affection, that is our greatest achievement up to now.

As might be expected, the first obvious result of the visiting was an increase in the size of the Sunday Schools, especially at the junior end, which doubled its size within twelve months and has since continued to grow steadily. All children born within the parish now have the

challenge of baptism put to their parents and thereafter are closely followed up by the visitors and Sunday School teachers. Of course in such an area often the best and most rewarding families continually move out to the new suburban estates, and such are commended to their new vicars who will reap the rewards of our labour. People too are coming to church, howbeit occasionally, for special services: Harvest, Family Pew and Easter, and so the Church is losing its strangeness for them, and they are beginning to feel a sense of belonging to the parish.

The steady visiting has made its mark on the other Churches. The Methodists discovered what was going on after nine months and instituted a house-cleaning Christian Service campaign. The Roman Catholics have been impressed by the zeal of our people, cheerfully illustrated by one who is visited regularly, saying to her visitor, "Don't ask the minister to call as it may make for trouble, but every day I lights a candle for the visitors in my church". The non-Roman shopkeepers are the hardest nuts to crack, being frightened of having anything to do with the Church in case a whisper of it reaches the Roman clergy and they find their trade vaporising. Apart from these, the visitors now meet with nothing but friendship, a contrast to the early days when they first set out to tramp those dismal streets.

In a way, the present time sees the conclusion of a phase of the work here and the opening up of a new phase. The great work of the past has been from the worshipping congregation to the parish; we now see the parish beginning to wake up and to start working itself. We look forward to seeing members of our parish itself drawn out for special training and instruction, so that they will be the basis of the Church's efforts among their neighbours, and will provide bases for the evangelistic mission which we trust, under God, will see many new members added to His body.

Yet each phase has its own difficulties and problems, and there is much in a Cathedral Parish that lends itself to use by Satan! The social status and hypocrisy attached to attendance, the problems of Cathedral worship for a people unused even to normal C. of E. services, the mixing of the locals with the congregation, the moral citizen's judgment on the evil liver, and the local who wants the best of both worlds.

Fortunately for us, Churchgoing is "not done" in our parish, and so that temptation has not yet arrived. The problem of familiarizing the outsider with the liturgy and our form of worship is reduced in so far as many of our people attended the old Church schools (now closed) as children; for the rest a special easy-to-follow outline of Evening Prayer is printed in the front of the congregation's Psalters. In any event we have grasped the nettle firmly and refused to hold non-liturgical evangelistic services as a regular feature of our worship. We believe that the essence of worship is an attitude of mind toward God which is far more important than the means whereby it is expressed; and furthermore that the Church must be loyal to its liturgy as the finest way of expressing worship, and so must seek to train its adherents and enquirers in its use. This worship all may experience at the Cathedral, and they come to love the form of service by regular use,

although at first they may have to rely on the parish visitor beside them for guidance. We believe that "people's services" held regularly are half-way houses which never take people the full way. Or are, like the Communist's "dictatorship of the proletariat", transitional periods which last for ever! Our experience is that people brought to church by the visitor expect the office of Morning or Evening Prayer, and feel badly done by if they are provided with a Nonconformist type of service.

Much more pressing, however, are the problems that arise in the daily running of the parish. Many of the people whom the Church contacts or influences are at present living lives totally out of accord with the Christian ethic, and expect to be able to continue in their old ways while enjoying the comfort and inspiration of the Cathedral worship. As such, a rich field for the development of scandal opens up. Many are the varieties of this problem; but perhaps the case of a scarcely repentant lady of doubtful reputation wishing to have her baby baptized in order to "legitimize" him is typical. These are problems that can only be dealt with individually and by visiting.

A similar type of problem arises in the relationship of the visitors to the morally minded nonchurchgoer on the one hand, and the evil-liver on the other. Most of the former are horrified that the Church should soil her hands with the latter. At the time of house meetings a scandalized head of a family weightily dissociated himself with a meeting that was to be held in the home where matrimonial relations had been far from easy. Similarly the older temperance people will not touch a home where there is a suspicion of drink: "Not a drop 'as crossed our lips these fifty years, an' we wouldn't be seen dead in that 'ouse, thank'ee". For those who have learnt to defend moral traditions by social sanctions, the example of the Church breaking those sanctions comes hard. Yet the Church must follow her Lord, and trust that her example will lead to a reconsideration of the foundations of those moral traditions people are preserving.

Finally the influx of parishioners, so different from the bulk of our usual congregation, into church itself makes for difficulties. It is not that they are dirty; some are, but none are verminous. It is not that they smell; a few do, but none who yet come to church. It is rather that their habits and ideas are different, they want to sit in front of the sturdy bourgeois congregation in their most shewy clothes, and this is an offence to some. Admittedly these lost sheep may be "pretty poor mutton" when captured by the love of God. But they are what they are, God's creatures to become His children. Full of their own ideas, conceit if you like, fond of a good sing rather than psalms, slow to learn reverence; yet many of their faults springing from a sense of inferiority and a feeling of strangeness in their own parish church. The answer lies, not, we are convinced, in hiving them off into a mission, but in leading them to understand and love our worship. Indeed the visitors themselves by calling for them and sitting beside them help to reduce the mental conflict occasioned by their appearance, and so unite them in the worship of the Church.

The Church *in* England has the responsibility and privilege of being the conscience of the Nation. And all Christians, no matter what

denomination or sect, have the task and the right to seek to influence their neighbours in the way of righteousness. The Church of England, as the Established Church, has this burden laid upon her in a very special way. The Church must round up the sheep, and she requires all her members to assist in the work. To-day the climate of opinion is far more favourable to the preaching of the Gospel than before the War. People are spiritually unsure of themselves and are willing to be led in a way in which they were not in those pre-war days. But the Church must conscript all its manpower to cope with the task if it is not to miss its opportunity, and must ensure that the tradition or *ethos* or Church-conscious community is created around it. And we offer this experiment at Bradford, not as a universal panacea but as a practical suggestion, that the vicar, his magazine, and visitors may under God achieve it.

### CITY EVANGELISM—II

## Methods of Approach at a Mission Boys' Club

BY THE REV. T. DUDLEY SMITH, M.A.

THE Mission in question is in Bermondsey, and was founded nearly fifty years ago, to do medical, social and spiritual work among the people of the district. With the passing of the Insurance Act and the coming of the borough health service the provision of medical facilities was no longer needed, and the Mission began to concentrate most of its energies and resources on its boys' club. Before it was destroyed in 1940 there was also a smaller separate club for girls. Since the war the boys' club has again been the Mission's main responsibility: it caters for anything from two to three hundred boys between the ages of ten and eighteen, and it offers all the usual club amenities. Indoors, in a hall where cricket and football can be played, with a P.T. instructor once a week, a table tennis room, billiards room, workshop and crafts room and a canteen, provide plenty to do. And according to the season we send out a number of football or cricket teams, and offer nets, swimming, athletics and street running. The club is manned by two full time workers and a body of voluntary helpers, comprising students and young business men resident at the Mission, old club boys still working in Bermondsey, and a few local friends and supporters. We are affiliated to the National Association of Boys' Clubs through membership of the London Federation, and we are also a Christian Mission with evangelism through the club as its over-ruling aim. Before going into details of the way in which this is attempted, we must sketch in the background.

Not for many years can the young people of Bermondsey have been as prosperous or as well looked after as they are to-day. Far better schools than their fathers knew retain them for longer than ever before: