

# Mr. Gordon Palmer

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The most interesting stories are often found in unlikely places. Few people passing a little shop in Lymington Road, Highcliffe, with the name "Palmer's Stores" above it would suspect that inside is a man who could have been famous. His name is Wilfred Gordon Palmer.

In the trenches, in the East End, and even in the underworld, Mr. Palmer always found people to help and advise. He doesn't regret it. "I've enjoyed every minute of my life," he says, and now, blind as he is, he still enjoys it. It's difficult to explain why, but I think it's a combination of two things: his fine fighting spirit and his deep-rooted faith in Christianity and all that is good.

Brought up in Brighton, where his father was a well-known auctioneer, he was a member of a large family. When he thinks of those early days he smiles and says: "Any successes that came my way through life were the result of my early home influence."

He was clever and found good jobs when he left school. Then one day he threw up his job as secretary to eleven joint stock companies and went to France to do church work with British colonies over there. He met the famous evangelist, Jockey Jack Jennings: together they did a lot to bring Christianity to all kinds of people.

Prize-fighters, jockeys, even bookies. The famous Steve Donoghue was racing over there one year. "Come on Steve," Mr. Palmer used to urge. "You come to my Bible classes and then the rest will."

"Damn you, Palmer," the jockey would reply. "I want an afternoon off." But he always used to attend—and so did the rest.

Ask any middle-aged Frenchman if he remembers the "Entente Cordiale Reunion Sports." The answer will be "Oui." Held each year in France, it was the only day that all race tracks were closed. Leading athletes from France and Britain competed for valuable cups which the French President, M. Raymond Poincare, would present. Mr. Palmer organised these sports each year. The proceeds went to mission work.

Doing all this work for other people left Mr. Palmer in a bad way. He decided to keep it up in his spare time and get a job. He landed one as a reporter on the New York "Herald" staff. He didn't know it then, but doing that saved his life.

When war came Mr. Palmer found himself on espionage work. On a mission behind German lines he was arrested and questioned. He bluffed his way out by showing his old "Herald" credentials and declaring he was an American.

The war over, Mr. Palmer still kept busy. In the East End of London he became Diocesan Secretary to the Bishop of Chelmsford and did a lot of work for youth. He started the Brockley Boys Club, which became the most popular in London.

"My health was beginning to fail so I moved to Reading," he recounts. "I joined the Boy Scout movement and became Assistant County Commissioner."

When he lost his sight, Baden Powell wanted to take him on a six months' cruise.

Politics began to interest him then. "I decided to stand for the Council, as a Conservative, in a Labour-held ward—and I won," he said.

Under his leadership Conservatives gained the majority on the Reading Council. Twice he was asked to be mayor, but each time he refused.

Still busy on his mission work, he was at this time secretary of the Police Court Mission and

the After Care for Prisoners Society.

Then the blow came. He lost his sight and his money. "We were in a bad way," he declares. "We gave up everything and left Reading."

That is how he came to Highcliffe.

Life has given Gordon Palmer plenty of ups and downs. But that is how it would be if he had his chances all over again.