

## **Ruth Clark in the Land: One of the Three Misses Clark** **Kai Kjær-Hansen, International Coordinator of LCJE**

### ***High Leigh 1951***

Last night I gave some glimpses from CMJ's Summer School at High Leigh 1949, when Ursula Nehab participated. Tonight is about High Leigh in August 1951, when Miss Ruth Clark, Headmistress of the CMJ's Girls' School in Jerusalem participated.

My sketch of Ruth Clark tonight is qualified by the phrase "one of the three Misses Clark". The fact that the three sisters together put in work in LJS's/CMJ's service for about 125 years should not be ignored and deserves a comment. It began in 1902 and ended 60 year later in 1962. All three were active in educational mission. And all three were alive in 1951.

### **Margaret and Olive Clark**

In 1902 *Miss Margaret L. Clark* was sent to Constantinople as a teacher. In 1907 she was joined by her sister *Olive*. During the First World War their paths separated. Margaret spent most of the time in England. After that she was in Jerusalem for a short period. But due to a serious accident in Palestine in 1919 she had to retire, and returned to England. 17 years of service, this is indeed something but compared to the number of years her two sisters served, one is tempted to say "only" 17.

After some years in Constantinople (from 1907) and after some months' furlough in England in 1913, *Miss Olive Clark* took up her duties as Headmistress at the Girls' Day School in Jerusalem from October 1913. She then becomes boss for her sister Ruth, who had worked there as a teacher since 1909. Olive Clark's stay in Jerusalem was to be a short one. In mid-September 1914 she is evacuated to England because of the outbreak of the First World War. But already at the beginning of 1915 she is on her way to a new destination, namely LJS's work in Tunis [Tunisia]. Here she concentrates all her efforts for the next approximately 45 years. All in all it was to be 54 years of service.

Olive Clark became famous for her so-called *Trousseaux Class* for young women. A *Trousseaux* was part of the dowry and the outfit of a bride, including the wedding dress. This could be bought, of course, but it was expensive. In Olive Clark's class the young women could make it themselves. At the same time as they learned needlework they were taught the Bible. As it is said in CMJ's *Review of the Year 1950*: "A condition of membership is that each applicant must be able to recite the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah by heart, which means in practice that the members of the their families become familiar with it while the girls are learning and reciting it at home." – Well, that is also a way of evangelizing.

In 1951 the article "Our Oldest Missionaries" has this about Olive Clark: "Due to retire last year [1950], she characteristically offered to stay on until someone could be found to take her place [in Tunis]." An attractive attitude in a missionary. What did it mean in practice? An extra ten to eleven years! She did not retire till 1961, when she settled in her native country England, where she waited for Ruth, this evening's main character, to retire from her work in Israel.

### **Ruth Clark – from the heights to the bottom**

*Miss Ruth Clark* came, as already said, to Palestine in 1909 and taught at CMJ's Girls' Day School in Jerusalem. At the outbreak of the First World War she was evacuated to England. She returned to Jerusalem in 1918 or 1919, and soon after she became the leader of the school. She reports that at the end of 1923 there were 120 girls at the register of whom 100 were Jewesses. In the obituary in 1966 it is said: "In the old days she had been in charge of 250 girls of whom 150 were Jewish." This was the height of her career. And it was history when she spoke here at High Leigh in 1951. The bottom was hit at the beginning of the school year in the autumn of 1948.

The United Nations' Partition Plan for Palestine was adopted on November 29 1947. After this the riots between Arabs and Jews increased. Terror and snipers etc. had made Jerusalem a dangerous town to live in. So dangerous that it would be irresponsible to send Jewish children to school at Christ Church inside Jaffa Gate. While the non-Jewish children stayed on at Christ Church the Girls' Day School was moved to West Jerusalem. Ruth Clark commented on this in 1951:

Our School then came to the English Mission Hospital, and up to Passover [in 1948], just before the British withdrawal, we had about one hundred children, but the number steadily diminished and when we closed in July, there was practically no school. We only had forty-three children on the last day of the term and we were practically without staff, except for myself, but one person cannot run ten classes. When I began in the autumn we were reduced to six children. It was a bitter disappointment, but I felt we could not say no to those little ones who came.

Disappointed, yes; but also: "I felt we could not say no to those little ones who came." The situation is captured beautifully in a photo in CMJ's magazine, September 1948. Here you see Ruth Clark sitting at her desk which had been moved out of doors in the hospital ground – teaching four of "those little ones". *Four!* In the autumn of 1948 there were as many as six! And in 1951 she says, "Well, the School is going on; we have eleven children this school year. We dare not close the school just because the numbers are small. It is impossible to foresee the future."

In 1948 Ruth Clark could have said: I am about 60 years old. I have been here for about 40 years and of those close to 30 as *the* Headmistress of the CMJ's *big* Girls' School in Jerusalem. I have done my bit. A person at my age does not start from scratch. Shalom – and all the best to younger people!

She did not do that, and in this she is an example to all of us. I like those character traits in Ruth Clark which are reflected in her words at High Leigh in 1951. She speaks openly about her "disappointment" and does not try to conceal the low number of pupils by being silent about or by distorting or by embellishing the fact; she continues to feel commitment to her calling; she refuses to be dominated by "numbers"; she has stubbornness and willingness to begin all over – even from scratch. In my opinion she is "great" in her small school. It is true that it takes drive to embark on something new, and it certainly takes a great deal of work to lead a big, growing school, but to restart a work ruined by outward circumstances takes much more.

### **Ruth Clark's story about Esther at High Leigh 1951**

Although there are disappointments and it is a far cry from past big numbers of pupils in the Girls' School in Jerusalem, Ruth Clark manages to retain her faith and confidence in the future. And if she cannot be a teacher and a missionary for many "little ones", she can be delighted at one "little one",

a former pupil who is now a “missionary” in an Israeli school. Her work has not been in vain. This is the story about Esther which she told at High Leigh, August 1951.

I would like to tell you about one little girl called Esther. She had not been with us very long, when her brother, who was in the Haganah, returned on leave from the defence of Jerusalem. When he came home, he asked after little Esther, what school she was attending, etc. When he learned that she was going to the Mission School, he nearly had a fit, exclaiming: “What, do you mean to say I have been defending our city from foreign control and you send my sister to a foreign school!” There was a terrible scene and the child was taken away; in fact, a Jewish welfare worker who was there came for her that very minute

Well, as you know, the devil oversteps himself, and in the Jewish school little Esther found some of her friends and she found lots of children who had not heard the lovely stories she had learned in school. So she told them these stories and she let them read them for themselves in her little Hebrew New Testament; but she only allowed each child to have the New Testament for one night – just one night each. You know, if people keep a book they have borrowed, they do not read it – they just give it back for very shame. But one night Esther came to ask for a Hebrew New Testament for herself – her own was already lent. Of course, we gave her two or three.

Now in the Jewish school they teach the Old Testament by heart and the children have to learn long passages. I think this is a very good thing and I can never be grateful enough for what I learned by heart when I was a child. This child can recite Amos and most of Hosea, so when the master refers to various passages, speaking of the Coming of the Messiah, Esther will say: “Our Mission School told us all that.” She is told to sit down and be quiet. They can speak of the Messiah, but when it comes to the question of Jesus, it is another matter. Once the children were taken to the birthplace of John the Baptist. Here the master said she could tell them what she knew, to which she at once replied: “They know already, I have told them and they can read it in the New Testament”. He flushed, “Never mind that, tell them again,” and she told them that he was the forerunner of the Messiah, he was sent to prepare the way before Jesus came.

### **Retirement, success and continued work**

Ruth Clark resigned from the school in Jerusalem in 1959. At that time she was about 70 years old and the school had about 60 students. But she did not retire from missionary work. She moved to Tel Aviv and took up work in the mission’s book room and library “where she was able to renew contact with many former pupils”. In 1962 she returned finally to England after 53 years in CMJ’s service.

Here her sister Olive was waiting for her. As mentioned earlier, Olive Clark had retired from her work in Tunis the year before, in 1961 – after 54 years in CMJ’s service. Impressive!

Back in England Olive Clarke took part in the Summer School here at High Leigh, of course. “We managed,” it is said in a brief note in *Jewish Missionary Jews*, “to keep her out of the dining hall for a time one day, while we collected about £10 for her, and this was presented as just a little token from High Leigh. And the note goes on:

Her sister, Miss Ruth Clark (Israel) hopes to retire next year after a similar term of service. Miss Olive Clark is looking for a flatlet for the two of them and she hopes to buy two really good mattresses with the gift. So far they have no furniture. The mattresses will be wonderful for them as they both suffer from bad backs.

Missionary methods change with the times. Due to many outward circumstances educational mission understood as traditional school mission is not possible today. But there is no denying that many pupils were met with the gospel and came to faith through the old-fashioned school mission. My own view of school mission has become far more positive thanks to Olive and Ruth Clark's work. They were teachers but teachers who wanted to do more than teach English and instruct the girls how to make a *trousseau*. They were missionaries, which clearly emerges from what Ruth Clark said here at High Leigh in 1951:

All the girls who have passed through our school have heard the Gospel. There can be no misunderstanding – we are all sinners; they know it; if only the time would come when the Lord would convict them of sin, they know the remedy.

Kelvin Crombie writes about Ruth Clark: “The influence of Ruth Clark cannot be over-stated, as hundreds of young, mostly Jewish girls were drawn to Jesus through her ministry.”

Ruth Clark died in 1966. Shortly after her return from Israel she was awarded the M.B.E., i.e. Member of the Order of the British Empire in the New Year Honours in 1963. When announcing this *CMJ News* 1963 writes: “Described as a ‘British subject recently resident in Israel’ this honour is surely a tribute to her gracious work of reconciliation over so many years.”

So Ruth Clark received recognition for her work. So did Mother Theresa, the Nobel Prize Winner in 1979. I have quoted her before and am glad to do so again. On that occasion she said: “God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful.”

I have a feeling that Ruth Clark might have said something similar. She showed that not least in the difficult years around the establishment of the State of Israel. More important than success is faithfulness. When I have difficulty living up to that, I remind myself of the picture of Ruth Clark at her outdoor desk – with her four “little ones”.

And if I one day should be in doubt about what to give a retiring missionary as a leaving present, I will think of what they did at High Leigh in 1951 – and buy a good mattress!

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*Kai Kjær-Hansen*  
*lcje-kai@post4.tele.dk*