



Wilts Friendly Society Meeting

One of those gratifying meetings which of late years have been of such frequent occurrence in this county, took place on Tuesday last at Trowbridge, to celebrate the Easter festival of the branch of the Wilts friendly society established in that town,- the proceedings upon the occasion will we are sure been made with satisfaction by all who are desirous all contributing to the happiness and moral elevation of the working classes, showing as they do the rapid progress of this excellent institution, which within a short period of four years as increased the number of members from 213 to upwards of 3,000! and has at present a of more Than £5000!

About noon, a large number of persons, consisting of the Honorary and benefit members of the branch, with many of their friends, met at the mansion of Mr. Stancomb, on the Devizes Road, to await the arrival of Mr. Sotheron, and thence to escort him into the town. A procession was then formed; and headed by an excellent brass band, the members proceeded to pay a visit to John Clark, esq., after which they marched in orderly array to the scene of festivity - the new and spacious school-room recently erected opposite the old Church, the interior of which was tastefully decorated with flowers and fitted up with every convenience that could add to the comfort of the guests. At the upper end of the room was placed a cross table, (at which sat Mr. Sotheron, Mr. J. Clark, Mr. W. Long, Mr. Stancomb, Mr. Ravenhill, Mr. H Butcher, the Rev. Mr. Mansfield, and the Rev. Mr. De Moleynes) and from this two lines of tables extended the whole length of the building, terminating with a raised orchestra, occupied by the band. The middle of the room was graced by the presence of the female members of the Society.

After partaking of an excellent dinner, consisting of joints of every variety, roast and boiled, plum puddings, &c. with an abundance of ale - Mr. Sotheron (who is in the chair) called upon the company to join him in testifying their loyalty, by giving three hearty good cheers to the Queen and the Royal Family; and this appeal having been answered with right good will.

Mr. Sotheron rose and said -I am going to ask you, my friends, to do honour to those Gallant countrymen of ours, who, by their bravery, have been upholding the British name on the other side of the globe; - to that gallant army in India, which has so recently been engaged in repressing the unprovoked attack of a hostile band, who, taking advantage of our unprepared situation, dared to trample on British soil and threaten those living under peaceful reign, with rapine, burning, and death. I feel as deeply as any man and sinfulness of a war, occasioned by any other cause than that of self-defence; and it is right that we, as Englishmen should bear in mind that in this struggle, we have not been the aggressors, but the attacked; and that in an unexpected way, which required the utmost energy and the greatest bravery of our soldiers to repress; and right gallantly have they answered the appeal - for more desperate struggles than those three or four which have lately taken place in the North of India were perhaps never fought by any army in the world.

We who sit at home, protected from even the sight of the smallest misery that war brings with it - let us, who enjoy peace and tranquility, not forget that we are indebted to our fellow countrymen who have been supporting in a distant country the authority of the British name and adding glory to our dominions. After a few more remarks, the Honorable Gentleman called upon the company to show their respect they entertained for our noble defenders by sea and land, by giving them 3 gallant cheers.

The call was cordially responded to.

Mr. J. Clark then presented himself, and said - I rise with great pleasure to give us a toast "Success to the Wiltshire Friendly Society, and the health of T.H.S. Sotheron, esq. the honorary secretary of that Society, or rather, I should say, the honorable founder of the institution":- a gentleman we are always pleased to see amongst us, and one who, in all the various relations of life, does credit to himself and spreads happiness on all around him. Of him it may be truly said - he makes the poor man's heart leap with joy, going about good and seeking those to whom he may be of service (cheers). Many now in youth will, when in the decline of life, give thanks to Mr. Sotheron, who has enabled them, by contributing a few pence, whilst health and strength lasts, to secure to themselves a comfortable maintenance in infirmity and old age. I say, many there will be who will have reason to be thankful that there existed such a society as that to which I have alluded- and that there was a Sotheron to be the founder of such an institution.

The toast was drank amidst the most vociferous cheering.

My friends! (said Mr. Sotheron, in reply), I am not so vain as to appropriate to myself, or take as if true, the compliments Mr. Clark has been so good as to pay me; but I will not go to the other extreme, and deny that it is a matter of the greatest gratification to me, to see before me on this day such a proof that the society over which I have watched for 18 years is producing in this place, as well as in others in this county, such satisfactory evidence that our labours have not been thrown away (cheer). Let me remind you (for there are many probably here who know little about it) that it is now 18 years ago that I was first taken by the hand in this town by a gentleman whose name can never be mentioned in Trowbridge but with respect - I allude to Mr. Waldron - (cheers). He, seeing the object I had in view, and that the institution was calculated to benefit those among whom he was living, took me (then a young man, just beginning to take an interest in public matters) by the hand, and we together endeavoured to do that which at the time we did not succeed in doing, but which, after a lapse of 12 or 13 years, I saw realized in this county. It cannot be wondered, then, if I now feel pride and pleasure; but that pleasure and that pride is unalloyed by personal vanity; it is the pleasure I feel in meeting you here, and hearing how prosperous your branch club is going on; of seeing your numbers increased, your funds increased, your confidence in the institution increased; and I would hope, too, your good-will towards each other increased.- There is no personal vanity in this; it is a matter of too much importance- a feeling far too high, to allow any man, who knows what he ought to be, to entertain anything of personal vanity- (loud cheers). You are aware that on Thursday next the annual meeting of our Society will be held, and at that meeting a report will be laid before the members present of the course the Society has taken during the last year, together with a statement of our accounts. It would not be right for me to make public that report previous to its receiving the formal sanction of the annual meeting, but I can tell you pretty nearly (what I know you will be glad to hear), our position as to pounds, shillings and pence; and as the accounts have been audited, I have had a sufficient number printed that each of you may have a copy.

Allow me, then, just to tell you in round figures how we stand. At the end of the year 1844 the total contributions of members amounted to £1223; last year they were nearly doubled, being £2124. In 1844 our receipts from honorary members were £60; for the year 1845, they were £133- more than double; so that as far as relates to the pounds, shillings, and pence part of the story, we shall be enabled to give a tolerable report. Altogether, our total receipts from various sources during last year amount to £2777. There has been sick pay insured to 519 members; 19 have died; a small sum of money has been returned on endowments; and the whole of our expenses have been £1486 - The capital in the public funds bearing interest at 4½ % was, on the 31st of December 1844, £3024; there has since been invested £1000; and our annual interest, payable half-yearly, amounts to £160. Deducting, then, the expenditure from the receipts, we have £854 to be invested on last year's account, and when that is done, the whole capital in the funds will be £5038; and I may add that £500 were invested yesterday.- Therefore the capital of the society, in which every one of you are interested, and have a share, has been raised from £3588 to £5038- an increase of nearly £1500 (loud cheers).

There have been formed in the course of the past year, (up to the 31st of December). 9 new branches, viz.- Heytesbury, Tollard, Rushall, Enford, Wilton, Wyllye, Chippenham, Castle Combe, and Westbury; and the number of new members admitted have been above 1200. Observe, then, the rapidity of our increase; In the year 1842, only four years ago, the number of members of which our club consisted, amounted only to 213; our numbers at this moment is 2746. That is, indeed, a very rapid increase; and what is more, it is an increase which is constantly augmenting; for I must remind you that the date from which I am giving you these figures is 31st December last; since which I have enrolled about 500 new members so that we may with certainty say, at the moment the number of our members is upwards of 3,000; and our funds beyond of £5000 -(cheers).

Two years ago, when I came to urge you strongly to join this Society, I told you it was taking root in so many places, that in the course of a short time you would find it difficult to put your hands upon any place in the county where there was not some branch of it established, - And what has been the fact? As its objects have

become known, confidence in its security has gradually been working itself into the public mind and the anticipations I ventured to express, are almost daily being fulfilled.

This is a noble prospect; for I know nothing, with the exception of the Saving Bank, which can stand in comparison as an institution of public utility, with the Friends Society. Mr. Sotheron then drew a comparison between the two institutions, observing, that though he thought Savings Banks deserving encouragement, and was anxious that he might not be misunderstood, as wishing in any way to speak against them, still there was this difference between the two, that in the one of the poor man had merely afforded him a place of security where he could put the little he laid by from his earning's during health, but which, when sickness or accident prevented him from getting his livelihood he was impelled to exhaust in keeping himself and family; the other gave him an independent certainty of being sheltered in times of hardship, and the common misfortunes of life to which all, both rich and poor, were alike liable. You will, I hope, excuse me (continued Mr. Sotheron) if I now advert to a matter that I have endeavoured to make the great business of my life. What I have before been advocating as one of the great objects of our society, is the defence it provides against poverty in times of sickness and misfortune; but great as they may be, it is to my mind inferior to the one I am about to lay before you: - I say, I hold all the other objects of our institution inferior to that which tends to knit together the different classes of this county in one bond of good fellowship and sociability. Therefore, to tell you the truth, I do not think any branch complete unless it has its feast once a year - (cheers). I think any branch which drily carries on its operations year after year, acknowledging no principle of good fellowship, nor giving its members the opportunity of meeting each other in a convivial spirit, excludes one portion of its usefulness. I rejoice, then, to see such a meeting as this, where all intemperance is banished; where master employer, and artisan, meet together on terms of friendship and brotherly kindness. This, to my mind, is calculated to produce a moral kindness. This, to my mind, is calculated to produce a moral good, greater than any other benefit we can imagine; and I hope the ladies will join me in saying that it is one great point we have gained - (loud cheers). I do believe there is any other society in existence that gives to female members an opportunity of sharing in its benefits and its feasts. Here they partake in both; and right glad am I to see them among us today- for we all know enough of the influence of women upon society to be convinced that when they take part in any matter with hearty good will they give the greatest encouragement to the society they patronize - (loud cheer). One word to you, upon the progress of your branch club, and I have done.

Your members during the past year, have, I find, doubled, and there hardly passed a week that I do not find three or four more proposed. It is delightful to me to see this. - I like to see a branch progressing equally. - I like to witness that dropping in week by week, quarter by quarter. It shows that the people understand the benefit of the institution; but of all things I deprecate that any man should be cajoled into joining us. And I trust that no person will become a member until he has deliberately thought the matter over, and made himself acquainted with the nature of the benefits we hold out. After a few more observations, the hon. Gentleman thanked the company for the patience with which they had listened to him, and sat down amidst enthusiastic cheering.

As soon as silence prevailed, Mr. Stancomb rose and expressed his regret at the unavoidable absence of their other county member, Mr. Long. He was, however, happy to say his loss was somewhat made up by the presence of his son; and it gave him (Mr. Stancomb) a great deal of pleasure to see him there and to introduce him to them, especially as he had recently followed a good example, and had brought into the county a lady of whom they heard much good report. It was, therefore, with much pleasure that he proposed the health of Mr. Walter Long (loud cheers).

In returning thanks, Mr. Walter Long said- Ladies and gentlemen! I thank you very much for the kind reception you have given me, and I am sorry that my father is unable to be present upon the occasion. An unavoidable engagement in Bath is the sole reason of his absence, and he desired me to express to you his sorrow at being prevented joining your party. He is, I am sure, anxious to give every assistance to this Society, and is fully persuaded of the benefits it holds out. I regret, therefore, that he is not present, and that he has not a better substitute than myself (cheers).

Mr. Sotheron then, in a speech that must be highly gratifying to the feelings of Mr. Stancomb, proposed the health of that gentleman, (loud cheers).

Mr. Standcomb, in the course of an address of considerable length, gave some very gratifying accounts of the benefit this society had conferred upon those who had subscribed to its funds in the town of Trowbridge, instancing cases where families had been saved from poverty by its means. From his last remarks we were glad to hear that the number of benefit members in the branch to which he devotes so much of his attention is now 170, with 45 honorary members (among whom are several ladies of the town). Mr. Stancomb

concluded by proposing the health of Mr. Ravenhill, a gentleman who from its first formation had taken a lively interest in the success of Society.

The toast having been cordially responded to, Mr. Ravenhill said - His friend Mr. Stancomb, had very truly stated that he (Mr. R.) had long felt a deep interest in the success of the Society; but he could assure them that never had that feeling been more lively than it was at the present time. Within the last few days, it had been his duty, as the auditor of the institution, to examine its accounts, and he was therefore enabled to draw his attention to a fact they would find recorded in the papers which had been handed round - viz., that the Society had never been in a more prosperous state than it was at present; and that that state of prosperity had not suddenly come upon them, but had gradually been growing during the last few years (cheers). He well recollected the first meeting that was held to establish the Society - (for to him, and to Mr. Sotheron it was a period of peculiar interest, being the first public business with which they had connected themselves in the county), - the Lord Lieutenant of the County was in the chair, the two county members were present - indeed, everyone who was looked up to as likely to give success to the institution was assembled; and great were the anticipations that were formed, not only of its complete, but of its immediate success. Mr. Waldron, of whom Mr. Sotheron had to deservedly spoken, in terms that must have found a response in the bosom of every man in that room, was among their number, and well did he remember the sanguine expectations expressed by that worthy gentleman, that all the old clubs in his town would immediately join the County Society; in short, so manifest did he consider its advantages, that it was impossible to doubt of their being almost instantly accepted by the people at large. A twelvemonth passed; the first annual meeting was held in Devizes; and never should be forget the long faces of the committee, when it was found that instead of numbering their members by thousands they could scarcely be told by tens; never was disappointment more humbling than was felt upon that occasion. The truth was this; they had anticipated what they had no right to expect; they had forgotten that time must elapse before their views could be comprehended by the people; they threw out of consideration, that, good as the Society was, it was still merely a human undertaking-that success must in this life be sweetened by labor, and earned by the sweat of the brow. From that time they began to learn that it was only by degrees the Society could be brought under the notice of the people. Year after year, however, passed away; and he believed it might truly be said not only that Mr. Sotheron had been its original founder, but its nursing father under whose fostering care it had survived through all its struggles. In the hands of almost any other man it must have tumbled to pieces; In fact, things had been in so extreme a state that the motto adopted by the Humane Society - "Lotent sciafillula fursan," (probably a little spark of life may yet remain) - had actually been verified. He had continued to fan the flame when all others had given up hope of its surviving; and at length, through his unwearied endeavours, the advantages of the Society were brought to light; and it was now annually adding thousands, not only to its members but to its pounds. The Honorable Gentleman then alluded to the progress the Society had lately made in the district with which he was more immediately connected (Warminster,) and after making a few observations upon the encouraging prospect now before it, resumed his seat.

Mr. H. Butcher proposed the health of the Magistrates, with 3 times 3.

Mr. J. Clark returned thanks.

Mr. Ravenhill, then, in a neat speech, gave "Prosperity to the trade of Trowbridge, and the health of Mr. T. Clark, one of its principal manufacturers," a toast which was responded to with hearty cheering.

In reply, Mr. T. Clark expressed a hope that he might always have a good trade and good pay, and that as manufacturers, they might be deserving of their good opinion. He then proposed the health of Mr. H. Butcher, the secretary to the Parent Society, which was cordially received.

Mr. H. Butcher having returned thanks, entered into an interesting statement of the progress of the Society since he had been acquainted with it, and particularly referred to Table No. 5, for the endowment of children, which he considered formed one of the most important features of institution. He concluded by calling upon them to drink to the honorary members of the Trowbridge branch, and the health of Mr. John Webb - (loud cheers).

Mr. Webb, in returning thanks, said, he would not trouble them by going into details, but he wished to allude to one item in the statement of the accounts; and he could not help expressing his surprise that so small a sum as 30s. only, should appear as coming from honorary members at Trowbridge, a large manufacturing town; whilst at Christian Malford, a small agricultural place, there appeared the large sum of £7 5s. He hoped the manufacturers would make the society more generally known among their workpeople. In his opinion the agriculturists had more foresight than the manufacturers.

Mr. Stancomb explained that the 30s. alluded to by Mr. Webb was sent in after the accounts for 1844 were closed, consequently it was entered in the account of the subsequent year. It should have appeared in the 1844 account and been added to £8 15s., the amount of the subscriptions from honorary members in the past year. Mr. S. then spoke in flattering terms of the great attention that had been paid to the sick members by the surgeons, and proposed their health (cheers).

Mr. Sylvester returned thanks. The Chairman and Mr. Ravenhill had spoken of the prosperity of the society; he could not speak as to the health of the members; - and it would be gratifying to them to know there had been only 10 members ill during the year. He contrasted the health of the Trowbridge branch, with that of Urchfont, where 25 had been ill, and for a much longer period.

Mr. J. W. Lawson, after a very able speech, proposed the health of the Rector, which was drunk with great respect; and the Rev. Mr. De Moleynes, in the absence of the Rev. Mr. Hastings (the rector) returned thanks.

The Rev. Mr. Mansfield dilated on the advantages of the Society, and, on his proposition, the health of Mr. Giblett, the Steward, was drunk with cheers; and Mr. Giblett acknowledged the compliment.

Mr. Ravenhill, very gallantly proposed the health of the Women of Wiltshire, particularly alluding to the lady of Mr. W. Stancomb. - Mr. Stancomb returned thanks.

A letter was then read from the Rev. Mr. Hastings, expressive of his regret that urgent business had deprived him of the pleasure he should have felt at being amongst them on that day.

The meeting broke up about half-past 6 o'clock; and it is gratifying to know that amidst all the excitement of the occasion not a single instance of disorder could be discerned during the whole of the day or evening, and that every one, both rich and poor, retired from the scene happy in the remembrance of the events of the day.

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