



Ashton Gifford

PRESENTATION TO THE HIGH SHERIFF OF WILTS.

On Saturday last, Mr. John Ravenhill, of Ashton Gifford, presented with his portrait, in the Town-hall, Warminster in testimony of the manner in which he had discharged the duties of chairman of the Board of Guardians of the Warminster Union—a post which had been held by him for period of 35 years. The circumstances which led to this presentation may be briefly described. On the appointment of Mr. Ravenhill in the spring of 1870, to the important office of High Sheriff of Wilts, he was compelled by law to relinquish the chairmanship of the Board of Guardians and all other administrative offices held by him in the county. Mr. Ravenhill's resignation was thought by the guardians a favourable opportunity of conveying to him some mark of their appreciation of his services to the Union, and of their personal respect and esteem towards him. The plan was quickly matured, and it was resolved not to confine the subscriptions to the existing guardians, but to throw the list open to the ex-guardians, officers connected with the working of the Poor Law in the Union, and to personal friends. A sufficient sum having been raised, it was resolved, with Mr. Ravenhill's consent, to present him with his portrait in oil. The work was entrusted to Mr H. Weigall, who has executed his task in a masterly manner, and has produced an admirable and striking likeness. The picture is a three-quarter length, painted in an easy pleasing style, and its total cost was about 200 £.

The presentation was made by Lord Heytesbury, in the Town Hall, in the presence of a large and influential assemblage. Among them were Lord Heytesbury and party, Lord H. Thynne, M.P., Mr. Ravenhill, Miss Ravenhill, Mr. W. Ravenhill, Rev. H. E. Ravenhill (Chaplain to the High Sheriff), Mr. and Mrs. John Ravenhill, Colonel Ravenhill, Mr and Mrs. Prescott, the Misses Seagram, Miss Bleeck Lye, Mr. Everett and Miss Everett, Colonel and Mrs. Everett. Mr. N. Barton and Mrs. Barton, Mrs. and Miss Temple, Mrs. George Temple, Rev. E. Eliot, Rev. John Baron and Mrs. Baron, Mr. Bleeck, Mr. Albert Bleeck, Rev. Prebendary Morrice, Rev. J. H. Plowman, Rev. G. F. S. Powell, Rev. John Knight, Rev. W. Gray, Mr. W. Morgan and the Misses Morgan, Mr. T. and Mrs. Davis, Mr. W. Davis. Mr. Grubb, Mr. Hinton and party, Rev. Z. Walker, Mr. H. P. Jones, Mr. Rowden, Mr. Sidney Smith, Mr. William Chapman and party, Rev. J. Wightwick and party, Mr. F. W. Bayly and party, Mr. H. J. Wakeman, Mr. Willcox, Mr. W. Melsome, Rev. R. U. Todd, Rev. H. C. de St. Croix, Mr. Hewitt, Mr. Hitchcock

(Chitterne), Mr. Blake (Chitterne). Mr. Thomas Pope, Mr. W Snelgrove, Mr. C. Sly, Mr. Millard (Shute), Mr. John Parham (Sutton), Mr. Parham (Deverill), Mr. Bedford, Mr. Bull, Mr. William Pullen, Mr. Pullen (Upton Scudamore), Miss Hardick, Mr. John Toone, Mr. J. C. Harding, Mr. Harding, jun., Mr. H. Morgan, Mr. G. Wheeler, Mr. Davis (Tytherington), Mr. Knight (Corsley) Mr. Knight (Warminster), Mr. R. W. Melsome, Mr. G. M. White, Mr. Ford, Mr. J. K. Harris, Mr. Lampard (Heytesbury), Mrs. and Miss Elling, Mr. and Mrs. Merrick, Mr. Jameson, Mr. Jones, Mr. Hussey, Mr. Fielder, Mr. Styles Jeffreys, Mr. E. Ford, Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, Mr. John Coles and Mrs. Coles (Brixton Deverill), Mr. J. Dean (Imber), Mr. John Chisman and party. Mr. W. J. Stent, Miss Scard, Mr. Halliday, Mrs. and Miss Wilkins, &c., &c., &c.

Lord HEYTESBURY, in making the presentation to Mr. Ravenhill said that he had been requested on behalf of those present and of many absent friends and neighbours, to convey to him their warmest congratulations on his restoration to health. (Loud applause.) Mr. Ravenhill had been for nearly forty years a most active and efficient magistrate; and during that long period he had performed the multifarious duties devolving upon him with great energy and zeal. (Hear, hear.) He had done much service to the county and district by furthering the administration of justice, and had gained the respect and good feeling of all around him. (Loud applause.) It was a great satisfaction to all his friends to see him elevated to the office of High Sheriff—one of the most ancient and honourable offices in the county—and to find that he had discharged its important duties to the satisfaction of all and with honour and credit to himself. (Applause.) It was a matter of regret to all in that neighbourhood that, on Mr. Ravenhill's accepting the office of High Sheriff, he was required to give up the Chairmanship of the Board of Guardians, which he had held for the long period of 35 years—in fact, from the very establishment of the board under the New Poor Law. When that retirement was made known among his friends, a general wish was expressed that his valuable services should be recognised, and the proposal once made was readily adopted; and they were met there that afternoon for the purpose of carrying it into effect. Previously to the passing of the New Poor Law Act, 35 years ago, the administration of the poor law was under the Act of Queen Elizabeth, which had been in force about 250 years. During that time abuses had gradually crept in. Relief, in some cases, was given lavishly, and without discrimination, while, in other cases where it was really needed it was not obtainable. Pauperism, rapidly on the increase, was sapping and eating the wealth and industry of the country. The government of that day met the difficulty, and passed, in the face of much opposition and prejudice, the existing Act. Under the old Act the administration of the poor law was in the hands of the parish authorities, chiefly of the overseers, and, while not wishing to detract from the general character of those bodies, it could but be admitted that affairs were rather loosely looked after. Under the new Act the administration of relief and other important duties, were vested in boards of guardians, who had done their duty well. (Hear, hear.) It was only natural to suppose that many who were elected on the new board would be imbued with prejudice, believing that the Act would be unfair and harsh in its operation; while many others would shrink from it from the knowledge that it would involve a great many difficulties, alterations, and legal questions. He was sure that when those circumstances were considered it would at once be seen how thoroughly essential it was to find as chairman a gentleman of high position, and of legal attainments, and, above all, a conciliatory manner. (Applause.) The Warminster Union was, indeed, fortunate in finding such qualities in Mr. Ravenhill. (Much applause.) Great regret had been felt at that gentleman's retirement, as the result of that meeting would show. There was probably no one present who could better speak of the services rendered by Mr. Ravenhill than he (Lord Heytesbury) himself could do. He was open to confess that his own attendance at the Board had not been so frequent as it ought to

have been, but Mr. Ravenhill's attendance had been most constant. He was never absent except through illness or particular business elsewhere; and at the first formation of the Board his labour was truly formidable, many difficulties constantly arising which caused him much thought and anxiety, and necessitated much correspondence. There was another point to which he (Lord Heytesbury) must allude, and that was the perfect harmony which had prevailed at the Board from its earliest commencement. They all knew how much that depended upon the tact, coolness, and consideration of the chairman. (Hear, hear.) As he had before said, the Act met with much opposition at first, but Mr. Ravenhill, by giving an attentive ear to every appeal, and due consideration to every complaint, secured the harmony of the Board, and the respect and esteem of all around him. (Applause.) In presenting Mr. Ravenhill with his portrait, on behalf of the subscribers, he (Lord Heytesbury) did not wish him to accept it simply as a token of consideration for long and valued services, but rather as a mark of the personal regard, esteem, and friendship which had grown up from long personal intercourse with him. (Much applause.) They had known him as a kind neighbour and a warm-hearted friend, and they all felt that he had discharged the duties of his station in a manner that had bound him to them by the closest ties. (Applause.) It was a great pleasure to him (the noble lord) to be allowed to take part in the proceedings of that day, and to give expression to those feelings of friendship, which, he was sure, animated them all. He was the oldest acquaintance of Mr. Ravenhill in that room, and he could recall circumstances which had no doubt been long lost to that gentleman's memory. He recollected, as an Etonian, coming to Warminster in the coach, where for the first time he met Mr. Ravenhill. A conversation arose between them, from which he learned that that gentleman was an Etonian also. On that occasion Mr. Ravenhill, by his kind and manly bearing, quite won his heart, and their friendship had been close and intimate ever since. (Applause.) In the names of all present, and of the many warm friends who were unavoidably absent, he begged Mr. Ravenhill to accept that portrait. He (Lord Heytesbury) was quite sure that he would value it as a spontaneous expression of gratitude for his long and valuable services to that district and as a mark of their personal regard and esteem. (Loud cheers.)

Mr. RAVENHILL, who was received with continuous applause, and who spoke under the influence of deep emotion, said that he had not unfrequently in that room, in the course of a long period of public work, been called upon to return thanks for compliments paid to himself or those with whom he had been associated, and upon those occasions he had frequently failed satisfactorily to express his own feelings, he felt quite unnerved at the position which he at that moment occupied, for he knew how little to his own merit, and how much to the magnifying kindness of his friends and neighbours, he was indebted for the gift before him. He found it impossible to convey to them the feelings with which he was animated. He believed that Lord Heytesbury was almost the only person present who recollected when his own connection with the business of the county and district commenced. He came to Warminster at the end of the year 1826. It was there that he first made the acquaintance of Lord Heytesbury. He had been in his company only about a quarter of an hour, when they found out that they were both Eton boys, so they talked over old associations, and spent a pleasant hour together. From that time to the present, he was thankful to say, he had enjoyed the continued friendship of one of the most intelligent and one of the most active and generous noblemen in the land. (Loud applause.) The alteration in the Poor Law, of which Lord Heytesbury had spoken, was caused in a great measure by the agricultural element. Within two years of the passing of that Act, he was placed in the Commission of the Peace, and was subsequently elected as chairman of the Second Court of Quarter Sessions for the Warminster district. On the adoption of the new poor law, it was anticipated that the father of the noble lord, who had settled down at

Heytesbury House, and was looked up to as the leader in the affairs of the neighbourhood, would have undertaken the chairmanship of the board; but immediately on the formation of the board, the court spoke to him (Mr. Ravenhill), and said that he must take the chair. Lord Heytesbury proposed him, and Thomas Lord Bath, who was aged and ill, sent to the court by his agent, Mr. Davis, requesting to be allowed to second the nomination of Lord Heytesbury. He was then placed in a very difficult position, as he was young, and but little known. He counted, however, and not in vain, upon the active sympathy, advice, and co-operation of those who placed him in the chair. He experienced great difficulty in first organising the board, the Poor Law Commissioners being very strict and very sullen, and many and important were the questions that were constantly raising. During the thirty-five years he occupied the position, he had met with most considerate treatment and hearty co-operation of the guardians, the support of the holders of property, and the respect of the poor throughout the district. It was to him a most gratifying circumstance that Colonel A'Court should have been instrumental in placing him in the chair, and that now the noble sire should give his sanction to what his father had done a great many years ago. (Applause.) It was a matter of great gratification to him that the noble lord had so identified himself with that movement, which acquired additional value on that account. It was evident from the approbation which all extended to the noble lord's remarks that what he had expressed found an echo in their hearts. With regard to the portrait, it was clear to him from the expression of opinions of persons competent to judge that it was an admirable work of art, and he could assure them it would be deeply prized by him and by his family after him. He felt that it was impossible to disassociate himself from the board, for although the observations of the noble lord had been chiefly addressed to him, he could not but claim the proceedings of that occasion as a demonstration in favour of the guardians generally. (Applause.) He could not refrain from saying that, from the formation of the board to the present time, they had been very fortunate in their selection of officers. Their officers had been, and still were, a high class of men, who had their hearts in the work, and did it thoroughly and conscientiously, and the duties of the board were thereby rendered more easy and agreeable. (Applause.) Harmony always prevailed at the board, the opinions of all being treated with respect and attention. They had been sometimes blamed for having occupied too much of the time of the board, but it had been their endeavour to do justice to the ratepayers, to do justice to the poor, and not only to do justice but to show mercy. (Applause.) He regretted the necessity which had led him to separate himself from the board. His appointment to the office of High Sheriff was the immediate cause of that separation, but he had for some time previously felt that he was unable to discharge the duties devolving upon him in a manner satisfactory to himself and to the guardians. (No, no.) He hoped if he had any strength left him for public work, that he might be able, occasionally, to show himself at the board, and give all the advice and assistance in his power. (Applause.) He again begged most heartily to thank them all for coming forward on that occasion, and expressing their kind approbation at the way in which he had discharged the duties of Chairman of the Board of Guardians for the last 35 years. (Applause)

Mr. BLEECK, as a former medical officer of the Board, and a retired guardian, bore eloquent testimony to the conduct of Mr. Ravenhill. He said it was arranged when they came into the room that several of the guardians should follow up and supplement the remarks of the noble chairman; but Lord Heytesbury had so fully and so admirably expressed their feelings that they felt they could add little to his remarks. When he was connected with the board as medical officer, he recollected saying to Mr. Jones, relieving officer, that he felt there was a great risk that every one of them connected with the administration of the poor law would become hard-hearted, cruel, and uncharitable, from being continually brought into contact with many of the worst characters of the parish, and

having to deal with them; there was a great risk that they would be led to deal towards the deserving poor in a hard and indiscriminating manner. That, he believed, was a difficulty that would always require to be guarded against. He was proud to say that Mr. Ravenhill had come out of the board, after a service of 35 years, with a heart as soft and charitable as when he entered it. (Loud applause.) Mr. Bleeck concluded his remarks by inviting the company to partake of refreshments which had been provided by Mr. Ravenhill's family.

Mr. RAVENHILL said he could not leave the room without publicly conveying to Mr. William Morgan his acknowledgement of the valuable assistance he had given him at the board. For the last 25 years of his chairmanship Mr. Morgan had filled the vice-chair, and he was proud to say that on his own retirement he was appointed chairman,—an office for which he was peculiarly qualified, and he trusted he would fill it for many years to come. (Cheers.)

After some remarks from Mr. MORGAN in reply, Mr. GRUBB conveyed the thanks of the meeting to Lord Heytesbury for presiding, and the formal proceedings of the meeting terminated.

The company then partook of the refreshments which had been provided, and which included an ample supply of tea and coffee, fruit and ices, champagne and sherry of the choicest kind.

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