



The Urchfont Festival of the Wilts Friendly Society

Few things are more delightful at this season of the year, than a day of rural festivity in some picturesque locality; and thanks to the kind supporters of our Country Friendly Society, such opportunities of enjoyment are by no means of rare occurrence.

The branch clubs in our towns hold their festivals, and amongst each other exercise the offices of benevolence and sympathy; but it is in our villages - in those sweet spots where the bright Heaven above seems especially to smile on the flowery verdure with which the country is clothed, that these happy re-unions come peculiarly home to their feelings. Such a meeting, in a spot surrounded by all those associations which tend to please the eye and indulge the imagination, took place on Friday last at Wedhampton, in celebration of the anniversary of the Erchfont branch of our excellent County Society: where, by the kind courtesy of Mr. Lewis, the grounds surrounding "Wedhampton Cottage" were permitted to be the scene of entertainment. And perhaps a sweeter spot for such a purpose could hardly be selected.

Here, then, after attendance at the parish church, were assembled on Friday last between three and four hundred persons of all classes, including the clergy and gentry of the neighbourhood, with their wives and families - the young and lovely - the old yet happy - and (for to them the day was especially appropriated) the honest labouring population of the surrounding villages belonging to the club - all bearing countenances which betokened the pleasure they felt in the enjoyment of so rational a holiday. In the midst of the meadow stood a spacious marquee; and when, soon after 2 o'clock, upwards of two hundred (forming a happy combination of almost every rank of life) seated themselves around tables covered with substantial old English fare, enjoying the feast and the attendant merriment, we could not but feel the truth of the observation of the worthy chairman (Mr. Lewis) - that in these meetings, where all classes of society mixed together in social intercourse, and by the kindness and sympathy renewed and cemented that bond of union which ought always to exist for the rich and the less fortunate, we had the best guarantee for good government and good order.

A minute detail of the speeches which followed the repast we will not attempt. This we may say, that loyalty to the Sovereign and devotion to the Church were not less conspicuous at Erchfont than at other meetings of the Society; that the gratitude we owe to the Defenders of our Country was not forgotten, and that a hearty welcome (after 40 years absence from England) was given to an old friend and native of Wiltshire, in the person of Colonel Moule.

With regard to the progress of the Society in this particular locality, we learned from Mr. H. Butcher who (in the unavoidable absence of Mr. Sotheron in London) entered into a clear exposition of the general affairs of the institution, that with the exception of Warminster, Urchfont has more benefit members than any other branch in the county - being at the present time upwards of 200 in number,

whose annual payments amount to £128; that sickness has visited its members with a lenient hand during the past year; and, in short, that Erchfont has every reason to be thankful for its flourishing condition. The general state of the Society our readers have already had placed before them in previous reports. It is, therefore, unnecessary that we should again allude to it; though one new regulation may be mentioned, which has not, we believe, been before noticed. This is the addition of another table, under the head of "sick pay." Formerly, the highest amount of weekly allowance for which a person could insure was 7s. a week; but as many mechanics who are earning high wages have (considering the sums too small) declined entering the society, it has been agreed that the maximum amount of weekly sick pay shall henceforth be raised to 10s. 6d.; an arrangement which, it is hoped, will extend the benefits of the institution to a class who stand much in need of aid, in times of illness.

The business part of the afternoon's proceedings having been disposed of, a bumper was filled, amidst cheers out of number, to the health of the excellent gentleman whose urbanity in the chair had diffused so much pleasantness and hilarity among the company; and to whom, indeed all were indebted for the use of the pretty grounds in which they were assembled. Another, to the ladies, whose presence gave a charm to the scene; and a third, to their "next merry meeting"; when the tent was deserted for the more alluring pleasures the grounds presented - and where, animated by an excellent band of music, the company terminated a day that will live long in the recollection of those who had the good fortune to be present.

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