



## The Dauntsey Charity

To the Editor of the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette

Sir:

Since this subject first received public attention, the proceedings of the various parties concerned present incidents of great and instructive interest.

The inquiries originally instituted were opposed and supported with much vigour. The chief legal luminary who opposed investigation commenced by declaring that "under the Dauntsey Will the Mercers' Company were the absolute owners of the property of the Dauntsey Charity," and that they would cease their contributions to West Lavington if enquiries were prosecuted; but he was converted from the error of his opinions and ultimately declared that "the parish was legally entitled to the full value of the property held in trust for the Charity by the Mercers' Company".

One of the results of the enquiry was to show that the property to which the parish is entitled is worth at least £120,000, and probably a much greater sum.

After an incubation extending over seven years, the Charity Commissioners produced a scheme under which they proposed to give the Mercers' Company an indefeasible title to the whole property upon their handing over £30,000.

The inhabitants of the almshouses were to have their income reduced by £50 per annum, the school at West Lavington was to cease to be a free school and the total amount allowed for its support was £85 per annum. The parishioners of West Lavington screamed so loudly over this proposed robbery that their cries were heard at Westminster and Parliament rejected the scheme. It was then intimated on the part of the Charity Commissioners that they would not give us any further "assistance". This dreadful threat was maintained for four years but ultimately they propounded another scheme which is now before the public.

Under this scheme a sum of £2,000 a year will be available of which £260 is to go to the inhabitants of the almshouses, and £290 in scholarships, thus leaving £1,450 for the schools instead of £85 as proposed in the first instance by the Commissioners. This sum is ample to provide free education both in the elementary and agricultural schools for "all who can conveniently resort thereto".

But instead of giving free education to those who are entitled to benefit under the Alderman's Will, a charge for day scholars is to be made of from £4 to £8 a year, which it is obviously impossible for a man to pay on wages of 9s. to 10s. a week. The charge for boarders is still more unsuited to the locality as they are to pay "not less than £40 or more than £50 per annum". Thus it is clear

that what the Commissioners design is not a practical working establishment for the sons of working-men, but a high-class school in which the upper classes will obtain sixty pounds worth of luxury for £40. Of the £290 per annum devoted to scholarships, £200 a year may be given to two young gentlemen to enable them to enjoy themselves at the Agricultural School at Cirencester. This £200 a year would provide 33 workmen's children with scholarships of £6 each.

When we objected to the first scheme which provided £85 per annum and a dozen governors for an elementary school at West Lavington, we were told that if we did not accept it we should never get anything. We are now assured that if we object to the present scheme the Charity Commissioners will again strike and leave us to our own devices. The repetition of these threats is neither dignified or effective. So far as the working-men are concerned they have nothing to lose by the withdrawal of the scheme. The chance of something better in the future is worth as much as the certainty of nothing now or hereafter; and as to our upper-class friends, they will probably secure education for their sons out of some other charity if they fail to plant them upon the Dauntsey bequest.

It is contended that the children of the working-men may obtain scholarships which will entitle them to free admission as day scholars or to a reduction of fees as boarders. It is quite true that they may present themselves for examination with a moderate certainty of being defeated by children who have more advantages. But if successful, what would be the good of a working man's boy getting into a school which is arranged for gentlemen's sons and where he would be looked upon as a pariah?

Besides, it is clear that the Commissioners do not intend the school to remain at West Lavington. Writing in 1884 the Commissioners say "it is obvious that the village of West Lavington, six miles from a railway station, and with only an agricultural population, is not well suited for what ought to be an important middle-class school".

"A man convinced against his will  
Is of the same opinion still"

and therefore the Charity Commissioners declare that the school "shall at first be established in or near the parish of West Lavington; *but* if the Commissioners think fit may, under an order of the Charity Commissioners, be removed to any other suitable place in the county of Wilts." This is a very important "but", and under all these circumstances he must be a very sanguine man who expects to see the school established at West Lavington, especially as out of 19 governors the Mercers' Company are to appoint 10 and the parishioners of West Lavington only two.

It is quite true that at West Lavington there is "only an agricultural population" with wages for the most part of 9s. to 10s. a week. Therefore, why not adapt the school to the circumstances of the locality? Make it "free" in accordance with the terms of the Will and give the scholarships not to the rich but to the poor.

The school will then be furnished with scholars, and can hardly fail to be a success.

To the young people of the locality let there be added, from other places, any number of day scholars or boarders at cost price, and thus will be established an institution of great benefit to West Lavington and the whole county of Wilts. The question to be settled by Parliament and the public when this scheme is considered, will be whether bequests for education are to be made available for working-men, or to be utilised exclusively for the wealthy classes.

Yours Truly

William Saunders

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