

(No. 5.)



1866.

T A S M A N I A.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, HOBART TOWN.

REPORT FOR 1865.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Whyte, and ordered by the Council to be printed,
July 31, 1866.



REPORT of the Committee of the BENEVOLENT SOCIETY of HOBART TOWN for the Year 1865.

THIS has been a trying year to our Society, as well as to most other public institutions dependent for any part of their pecuniary resources on the voluntary contributions of the public. Dearth of employment has caused more destitution than usual, and therefore an increased demand on the funds of this Society. It would appear, moreover, that—as in 1864—adult male labourers flocked hither from the adjoining colonies in search of employment in much greater numbers than others had departed from it; the population of Tasmania having been augmented from this cause in 1864 by 666 more adult male “arrivals” than “departures,” and in 1865 by 505 more. On the other hand the badness of the times, with other less reasonable grounds, caused a diminution of the subscriptions and contributions to the Society’s funds.

At the commencement of the year, after all the expenses incurred for 1864 were liquidated, we had in hand, firstly :—The Reserve Fund of £500 worth of Debentures, laid by as a nucleus for a building fund, most part of it having been contributed specially for that object, or being legacies. Secondly :—A clear balance to our credit in the Bank of £177 12s. 3d.

The Treasurer’s account to the 31st December, 1865, annexed hereto, shows that our account was overdrawn by £163 2s. 3d.; but that there was due from the Government £76 10s., which, when paid, would reduce the Bank’s claim to £86 12s. 3d. On the other hand, the cheques issued in the present month (January, 1866) for expenses in December, amounting to £127 13s. 9d., would increase the debt to the Bank to the sum of £214 6s. To secure the advances from the Bank we were compelled to pledge the Reserve Fund, in the confident hope that the Government would assist us to prevent the sacrifice of the Debentures, by advancing early in the year 1866 the sum unconditionally granted by Parliament during its last Session to this Society. This hope was not unfounded, and the Government has acceded to the request of the deputation appointed at the last quarterly meeting of the Committee to the above effect,—the Colonial Treasurer heartily and promptly undertaking to second the application made through the Chairman of the Executive Committee and the Secretary of the Society. Subsequently, £200 of the £400 has been paid to your Treasurer by the Government.

We have, however, thus only staved off present difficulties; for the additional sum of £400 voted by Parliament can only be paid to the Treasurer of the Society on proof adduced that he has had an equal amount paid in from voluntary subscriptions, &c. Unless, therefore, the subscribers promptly pay their subscriptions for 1866, and the public at large come liberally forward with fresh contributions, the existence of the charity will be again imperilled, and no means will be left for the support of the numbers of destitute poor that must necessarily exist in a community,—from the various ills which flesh is heir to,—than by enacting a poor-rate, a result which has always been found to demoralise the recipients of such relief, as well as to deaden one of the holiest impulses of humanity, in personally and voluntarily aiding to feed the hungry and comfort the afflicted.

The Committee, therefore, most earnestly urge all those who dread a poor-tax to bestir themselves, and to voluntarily contribute generously and expeditiously to the support of the Benevolent Society, and at the same time to use their best endeavours to get their friends and neighbours to do likewise.

Especially are such exertions required by well-to-do residents in the country districts, who have not hitherto contributed a fair proportion to the Society's funds, seeing that the destitute in the country habitually flock into the towns for eleemosynary assistance.

1865 bears the palm of being a year less afflicted with sickness and death than any year before recorded. Nevertheless, from the roving unsettled habits of most of the labourers, and desertion of families, large numbers of women and children are constantly thrown on the support of the community. Intemperance, too, is ever reducing large numbers of helpless beings to a state of destitution and dependence upon the charity of others, while no effective legal remedy at present exists to punish the delinquent parents, or to enforce from them a due provision for their offspring.

When the year commenced there were 64 cases on the books from the previous year receiving weekly relief. 245 fresh applications were carefully investigated, 81 of which were refused. Of the remainder, 65 were caused by illness, 13 by accidents, 14 were widows, 2 were blind, 21 waiting to be invalided, 27 were aged and infirm, in 13 cases the husbands were undergoing imprisonment, in 30 husbands were away, in 30 husbands were out of work, 13 others were cases of absolute destitution. The individuals relieved amounted to 832, of these 271 were male children, 258 female children, 110 adult males, 193 adult females. Many of the adults were very aged, the oldest being a couple of 86 and 66 years old respectively. The Queen's Asylum for Destitute Children, the Male Invalid Asylum at the Brickfields, and the Female Invalid Establishments at the Hospital and the Cascades, have all been kept so completely filled during the year, that we have constantly had numbers to assist while waiting for vacancies for admission. Moreover, the Government has had to give pecuniary assistance to a large amount in cases of the like nature. This system, though it may meet temporary emergencies, we consider to be fraught with much evil. The money thus given we have found frequently to be squandered away in dissipation, and the children neglected, and forced to beg or steal for their daily support. Several instances of this kind have been brought under the notice of the Executive Government.

The condition of the vagrant and neglected children, we have so often before deplored, has undergone no improvement since last year's Report. Before Parliament met, we urged upon the Government the necessity of introducing an Industrial Schools and Reformatory Act, and the Executive most readily responded to our suggestions, and a Bill was drafted by the Attorney-General which met with our warm concurrence, and was zealously supported by most of those who have been prominent actors hitherto in measures of this nature. The Mayor of Hobarton, *ex officio* our President, presented a petition to the House of Assembly from us to the following effect:—

“That your Petitioners have long regarded with sorrow and apprehension the deplorably neglected condition of large numbers of children in the Colony growing up without education, and daily acquiring habits of idleness, mendicancy, theft, and other immoralities.

“That your Petitioners firmly believe that the establishment of Industrial Schools and Reformatories is urgently required to repress this rapidly increasing evil, and to save the Colony from being inundated with a costly mass of ignorance, pauperism, and crime, which will press most heavily on the resources of Tasmania.

“That your Petitioners highly approve of the scheme proposed by the Government in the draft of a Bill, intituled ‘A Bill for the Amendment of the Law relating to Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders,’ now before your Honourable House; being firmly impressed with the belief that, if the Bill should be enacted, its provisions are admirably adapted to save great numbers of children from destruction, and convert them into virtuous and industrious citizens, to their own temporal and eternal welfare, and the glory and advantage of the Colony,” &c.

This Petition had 57 signatures attached to it; amongst which were those of the Bishop of Tasmania and most of his clergy in Hobarton, the Vicar-General of the Roman Catholic Church and all the Priests in Hobarton of that denomination, most of the Ministers of the other religious bodies, most of the Medical Practitioners, Legal Practitioners, Bankers, Merchants, and other influential citizens, together with the members of the General Committee of this Society. The Attorney-General moved the first reading in the House of Assembly in a long and excellent speech, but the members received the Bill with so much apathy and opposition, that it was withdrawn on the second reading; and thus again have our hopes of a remedy for the evils we have depicted, and which harass us in all the operations of the Society, been defeated and indefinitely postponed.

It is a fact, patent to the members of the Executive Committee, and others seeing much of the children infesting the streets of the city, that while this Bill was expected to be enacted, the children generally were behaving much better than usual, but no sooner was the Bill withdrawn, than the

old habits broke forth with renewed force; and the unruly and vicious conduct, now of daily recurrence, fills us with sorrow and apprehension as to the future of large numbers of our youthful population.

So many cases of girls apprenticed from the Queen's Asylum, maltreated and ruined, and appealing to the Society for support of themselves and offspring, came under investigation, that the Executive Committee were induced to bring the subject under the notice of the Government, so that more efficient protection might be obtained for them while in service. Our suggestions were responded to, and we hope that the steps taken will be productive of good.

The bread and meat issued to the recipients of the Society's aid have been supplied by tender, renewed quarterly. The supplies have been generally good. Of the former, 71,856 pounds were expended, being 13,658 more than in 1864. Of flesh-meat, 25,792 pounds were issued, including that made into soup, being 1719 more than in 1864. Of tea, 94 pounds more were expended than in the previous year. Of sugar, 264½ pounds more. Of oatmeal, 1543 pounds more. Of rice, 135 pounds more. 15,511 pints of soup were issued, being 2870 more than in 1864. The soup-kitchen proves an invaluable means of giving relief, and checking much attempted imposition. £3 16s. 4d. worth of soup was paid for. Twelve pairs of blankets were provided for persons wanting them, and most of them were paid for subsequently by weekly instalments. Fuel, in the form of firewood, was supplied where requisite. Lodgings, as well as food, had to be paid for in 6 cases.

The Committee were indebted to the Principal of the Queen's Asylum for a large supply of old bedticks, clothing, &c., which were gratefully received by many poor families to whom they were distributed. Contributions in bread and groceries were made to the value of £20 5s. 6d. from several friends of the charity.

Church collections were made during the year by the following religious denominations:— Wesleyan, Melville-street, £7 10s. 11d.; St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Macquarie-street, £14; Primitive Methodist Church, Collins-street, £1 2s.; Independent Church, Brisbane-street, £11 0s. 6d.; Hebrew Congregation, Argyle-street, £4 11s. 6d.; St. Matthew's Church, New Norfolk, £3 6s. 11d.

Circulars had been sent asking such assistance from all the religious bodies in the Southern half of the island. It is to be hoped that those who failed to aid us in 1865 will do so liberally and promptly in 1866.

Throughout the year the Executive Committee has, according to rule, been elected quarterly, and consisted of members of almost every religious denomination in the city. They have worked together most harmoniously; and the first and fundamental rule of the Society, "That the objects of this Society be to relieve the poor, the distressed, and the afflicted, and thereby to discountenance, as much as possible, mendicity and vagrancy, and to encourage industry among the indigent, irrespective of religious creed or denomination," has been most scrupulously adhered to.

The Registrar of the Society, Mr. Witt, was indefatigable in the execution of the duties entrusted to him. He paid 823 visits during the year, in ascertaining the circumstances of all fresh applicants for assistance, and in supervising all those receiving aid. By this means, some cases of abuse were detected and struck off. Many of the members of the Executive Committee, also, devoted much time to visiting personally at the homes of the sick and destitute.



HOBART TOWN BENEVOLENT SOCIETY in Account with the Treasurer.

Dr.		Cr.	
1865.	£ s. d.	1865.	£ s. d.
June 30. To payments as per Pass Book,		Jan. 1. By Balance	267 4 10
Six Months.....	728 2 3	Feb. 2. Cash, Government Balance last	
Dec. 30. To ditto	835 2 4	year.....	45 11 8
		May 19. Ditto, Government.....	200 0 0
		June 6. Ditto	200 0 0
		" 9. Ditto, repayments	10 15 10
		Sep. 26. Ditto	200 0 0
		Dec. 30. Ditto, Private Collections for	
		the year	476 10 0
	<u>£1563 4 7</u>	" " By Balance, Debtor	<u>163 2 3</u>
1866.—January 1. To Balance.....	£163 2 3		<u>£1563 4 7</u>

Examined and found correct.

GEO. SALIER, }
 HUGH M. HULL, } *Auditors.* Jan. 29, 1866.

THOMAS GIBLIN, *Treasurer.*