

(No. 14.)



1881.

TASMANIA.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

HOBART BENEVOLENT SOCIETY:

REPORT FOR 1880.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Moore, and ordered by the Council to be printed,
July 19, 1881.



TWENTY-FIRST Annual Report of the HOBART BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, for the Year ending 31st December, 1880.

“WITHOUT natural affection” seems to be the characteristic of many of the cases that come before the Committee of the Hobart Benevolent Society. Husbands desert their wives and families without the slightest compunction, and leave them to the tender mercies of a benevolently-disposed public. Sons and daughters seem to seek only their self-gratification, and to have only one desire,—to escape their responsibility of contributing to the maintenance of those who gave them birth. But the most unnatural disposition that is oftentimes developed is, for mothers to desert their children, which, upon very trifling difficulties, many threaten to do, and to leave them at the door of the Benevolent Society, or that the Government could do what they liked with them.

We are not singular in Tasmania in these respects, for all the Colonies are suffering from the same heartless conduct; and it seems that the Colonies are arousing themselves to the necessity for concerted action, and that not alone for felonious conduct, but for the extradition of wife deserters. It appears that at Christchurch, New Zealand, there are 37 cases of wives deserted, left with 116 children. We believe that the Conference of Delegates from the Australian Colonies have in contemplation the taking up the subject of wife desertion. The number of cases on the books at the close of 1880 in Hobart is 20.

Many poor persons seem to have the impression that the Governors and their ladies are fair game for their attempts to obtain money-relief from them. The late Governor, Mr. Weld, fully appreciating the benefit of our Registrar's (Mr. Witt's) knowledge of the begging fraternity, most continuously availed himself of his services as his almoner, giving Mr. Witt authority to relief as he saw needful, and he would refund him. Mr. Du Cane also always at the annual meetings of the Society spoke in the highest terms of the services rendered by Mr. Witt in saving him from impostors by referring the cases to him.

When His Excellency Sir J. H. Lefroy arrived to take the administration of the Government of this Colony, a deputation was appointed, of Dr. E. S. Hall, (Secretary), Mr. J. Withrington, and R. A. Mather, (Chairman), who, accompanied by Mr. Witt, waited upon His Excellency to ask the favour of his patronage of the Society, taking with them, for His Excellency's perusal, the 20 years' Reports bound up, and drawing attention to those parts in the Reports in which attention had been drawn to the attempts that had been made upon the Governors and their ladies to extort money from them. His Excellency kindly and pleasantly accepted the office of Patron, and expressed the deep interest he felt in such institutions, and gave a substantial cheque towards the funds. His Excellency said that he thought Lady Lefroy would like to see the deputation, and very courteously introduced her, whom he thought might possibly be victimised. Lady Lefroy was very pleased with the interview, and told the deputation that she had a visit from a woman, naming one well known to the Committee as a most importunate beggar, who stated that she was a widow with so many children. Lady Lefroy, on questioning the woman as to how her children were employed, finding that they were all remuneratively engaged, then said, “You surely cannot be in the necessitous circumstances you represent;” and with the assurance that inquiry should be made, dismissed her. This woman, who for many years has been known to the Tasmanian public, thought Lady Lefroy fair game for trying her propensity upon, but found one quite equal to the occasion. His Excellency has once since, in 1880, been applied to, but being referred to Mr. Witt, the matter was met by the Society, it having been an old Government Imperial case.

By an arrangement made with the Government on the 24th February, on the 1st March the Society took over the administration of out-door relief to paupers, as was the case up to about 1866, when all the poor of the city were relieved through the one channel, the Government allowing a certain sum for the purpose, and in case of any extremity giving additional aid. At that time every legitimate claim was met; none were permitted to want. The Society also had entrusted to its care the boarding-out of children,* and the admission to the Invalid Depôts of infirm and poor persons.

* This duty has been transferred to a Central Committee since the year opened.

The exchange was effected without the recipients of relief being put to any inconvenience, all the alterations being made by the Committee with such despatch that the usual cash payments and issue of rations was made on the regular day of issue. The work has been carried on in a very satisfactory manner, and we believe to the entire satisfaction of the Government. By care the boarding-out cases have been reduced, through obtaining work for the children over 12 years physically fit for apprenticeship, and the cases of out-door relief have also been reduced, although 18 cases have been transferred from the Society to the Government books. No really necessitous person has been permitted to want. In all the cases transferred to the Government the Society have continued them for over three and sometimes for four months before transference to ascertain that they are really permanent.

In dealing with the boarded-out cases, the importance of the regular attendance of the children at school has never been lost sight of, and the children's attendance at school has been insisted upon as essential to the obtaining the weekly payments. Furthermore, prior to the Committee taking the care of these cases, the parents receiving relief were in the habit of sending their children for rations, &c. during school hours, and this practice had to be put down by vigorous action, and it has succeeded. In dealing with relief cases by a Committee's investigation, the party is requested to appear before them and to give an account of his or her circumstances, when the Committee individually have the opportunity of examining them, and by their answers to the questions proposed, by the knowledge of the particular case by some member of Committee, or by the demeanour of the individual during examination, a pretty correct conclusion is arrived at; enquiry is then further ordered through Mr. Witt, our Registrar, and temporary aid is in the meantime rendered. It is often found by examination that the party has thought that because such a one is obtaining relief that therefore they may as well have a try for it. The Committee have had a case in which the party would not submit herself to the examination of the Committee, and, though receiving relief before from the Government, the case was at once struck off. The family being reduced to straits; and the husband being subject to heart disease, came before the Committee, and the relief was again granted; but his wife would not appear.

The Committee have recently had a case before them of a widow with four children, who came from Melbourne, their passage having been paid by subscription, no doubt thinking it was a cheap way of disposing of the case; the mother of this woman, for years before the arrangement was entered into with the Government respecting the three months' continuance, was on and off the books of the Society continually, showing that the pauperised spirit which had influenced the mother has been transmitted to the children: it is thought to be an easy way of supplying their wants without labour.

For a long time before the Society took charge of the cases for invaliding in the Hobart district, it had frequently been put to heavy expense in providing lodgings and food for invalids, for whom no room was to be obtained in the Asylums, but since, by careful examination of applicants for invaliding, many have been found able, though unwilling, to gain their own livelihood, and consequently never since has there been want of room for real cases of need. This may be also in a measure attributed to the superintendence of Mr. Withrington, who so well understands organisation and arrangement.

On the books of the Society brought forward from 1879 were 38 cases, comprising 128 individuals. 191 cases have been investigated through the year, numbering 460 persons; in these are included 70 adult males, 158 adult females, 115 male children, 117 female children. Sixty-five were cases of illness, 26 widows, 20 husbands away, 8 husbands in prison, 44 destitute, 11 accidents, 6 for children alone, 7 aged and infirm; in all 191 cases.

Casual relief has been given to 38 individuals going up the country to seek work or going into the Invalid Depôts.

Work has been granted to 90 men in the woodyard, many of these with families, until they could procure better employment. The men are allowed at the rate of 4d. per hour for two hours' work, when they leave and are succeeded by others; thus several sets of men can have work in the morning and earn food, which is charged to them at the cost price, sufficient to supply their families, and afterwards look for other work about the city.

One hundred and twenty tons of wood and two tons of coal have been given to the Society by kind friends; for which grateful thanks are tendered.

Twenty-five tons of wood have been purchased by the Society for extra cases and sickness. One hundred and fifty-four dozen bundles of kindling wood have been sold during the year. Persons applying for relief have the opportunity of working in the woodyard; and this test of labour is very important in connection with the Society, as it is most desirable that men should earn their food who are able to do so. In the case of men who need food first before they work, they are sent into the soup kitchen, half a loaf of bread is given to them and a pint of soup, after which they can have an hour's

work ; and they are continued for a few days while they turn themselves round. It is also ascertained by this test if they are willing to labour ; and many cases are found where the men will not take the work. In cases of sickness relief is at once given, and it is continued so long as the Committee see it to be needful. Temporary relief is given to destitute persons at once, and the case is then enquired into, whether further aid is necessary ; so that no persons are allowed to starve who present themselves to Mr. Witt. Children pleading hunger are always at once fed. In some cases, where parties cannot be entrusted with food for their own children, as they would make away with even their children's food to satisfy the cravings of drink, the children are fed upon the premises.

Lodgings tickets and rent have been paid to the amount of £26 15s. ; and cab-hire for the conveying sick persons to the hospital, £2 13s. 6d.

The issue of stores has been 35,114 lbs. of bread, 477 lbs. tea, 5384 lbs. sugar, 1231 lbs. rice, 5275 pints soup.

For the making soup, 3814 lbs. of meat, 406 lbs. rice, 408 lbs. barley, 592 lbs. peas have been used. The soup sold has realised £2 3s. 3d. No soup tickets have been sold ; and the Committee are surprised that the public do not avail themselves of this means of giving relief, instead of giving money.

Mr. Witt had always encouraged the poor people who came to the Dépôt to prepare by saving for warm covering for the winter, by making deposits in his hands, as they could spare the means, for the purchase of blankets. The amount so saved has been £5 17s. 9d. The blankets are supplied at a reduced rate, being the wholesale price paid by the trade.

The usual visitations of the cases have been made by our Registrar, Mr. Witt, who has also done the work of a collector without any charge to the Society.

The Committee must not omit to mention a very handsome donation of £100 made by Mr. Ehrenfried, who was kindly introduced to the Chairman by our respected townsman, Mr. L. Susman.

We have it on record from the highest authority, that "the poor shall never cease out of the land." The great Jewish lawgiver has said :—"If thy brother be waxen poor and fallen into decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him ; yea, though he be a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with thee." And again—"If there shall be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother, but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and give unto him sufficient for his need. For the poor shall never cease out of the land ; therefore I command thee thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land ; thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him, because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto." And one greater than Moses has said—"The poor ye have with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good." Shall we not then recognise our responsibilities and our privileges, and carry on the work which has been delegated to us, and may we remember that we must not close our hand against our poor brother of that which has been given to us.

Thanks are due, and are sincerely tendered to those who have kindly assisted the Society by their donations, either in money or goods ; and we would earnestly beg a continuance of their help for the ensuing year.

It has been the good fortune of the Society ever since its institution to have at all times the kindly support of the press of the Colony, which it has ever been desirous of meriting.

R. ANDREW MATHER, *Chairman Executive Committee
Hobart Benevolent Society.*
