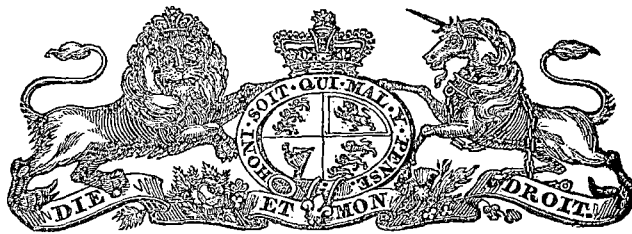


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1878.

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**BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, HOBART TOWN:**

**REPORT FOR 1877.**

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Laid upon the Table by the Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed, July 16, 1878.



*EIGHTEENTH Annual Report of the Committee of the BENEVOLENT SOCIETY,  
Hobart Town, for the Year ending 31st December, 1877.*

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THE records of the number of cases investigated through the past year as compared with its predecessor gives a practical illustration that pauperism and destitution have much increased, notwithstanding the apparent material prosperity of the Colony through the various mining industries established amongst us. Never was there greater difficulty experienced in procuring help in all classes of labour than at the present time, and as a consequence it would reasonably be expected that there should be less necessity for such aids as this Society and the Government so largely render, but the experience of the past year is the reverse. In 1876, 152 cases were investigated and dealt with, and during the past year 247 cases were brought under the care of the Society. The profligacy and intemperance of many husbands and mothers inflict a grievous injustice on those whom God has given them to maintain and educate, as without seeming to have the least sense of their responsibility, and apparently without natural affection, these persons with the utmost indifference throw off these claims upon them and leave their children to the tender mercy of the public, and commit their education to the streets.

A case occurred only a few days since, showing how lightly some persons esteem their position, and the charge devolving upon them. A man arrived here recently from Freemantle, Western Australia, apparently a hale, hearty-looking man, bringing with him a family of five or six children. He stated that in that place he had been in the police, and subsequently in the commissariat; that grief at the loss of his wife made him leave Freemantle, where he was receiving four shillings per day, rations at contract price, and quarters to dwell in. He was informed that he could have food for working for it in the wood yard, and that he would have time to look about for employment, but that it was not to be supposed that he was to come here and expect the Society to support him, an able-bodied man, and his family, without labour. He stated he wanted to be relieved of his children, as they tied his hands so much. The unwisdom and injustice were pointed out to him in leaving a good employment, with a young family, and coming to a strange land, when he coolly said that if he could not be relieved of his children he would have to leave them.

An artizan, aged 29 years, who had been two years in constant employment at £3 10s. per week, becoming careless and dissipated, had his wages reduced to £3, which he refused, and left; was out of employment for several weeks, and then took work at a greatly reduced rate for about three months, when he left, went off to Melbourne, leaving his wife and four children utterly destitute, to be supported by this Society first, and then probably to be thrown upon the colony.

The necessity for the Legislature taking action in this matter has for many years been continually brought forward by your Committee almost from the first year's experience, and we now find by a leader in the Melbourne *Daily Telegraph* of the 19th inst., that the Melbourne Benevolent Society is suffering from this monstrous imposition and unnatural evil. The article states:—"It is found that a large number of husbands have deserted their wives, making no provision whatever for their maintenance, and the Committee are under the impression that if they can check imposition of this kind the various Benevolent Societies throughout the colony will be relieved of one large and unnecessary drain upon their resources. It is therefore proposed to secure the passing of two Bills with the following objects:—

1st. To compel parents and sons who are of age and able to do so to support their children or parents as the case may be, when such relations from age, infirmity, and sickness are unable to support themselves.

2nd. To endeavour to secure the passing of a Reciprocity Act, by which the Police will be enabled to arrest in any part of Australia husbands who have deserted their wives and children."

The article goes on to say—"There can be no doubt, so far as wife desertion is concerned, a very stringent measure is urgently required. It is monstrous that men in the full blush of vigour should be allowed to walk off whenever they may think fit, leaving their wives and children for the public to support. Such unnatural scoundrels deserve no consideration whatever, and it is to be hoped that the other colonies will display no hesitation in co-operating with us to remind such men of their responsibilities in a manner that will not readily be forgotten."

The Committee hope that our own Legislature will not lose sight of this most important measure. Difficulties have hitherto been in the way of arresting in the other colonies, through the indisposition of the police to aid in the matter our local police when sent on duty to arrest, or, when warrants have been sent, the Australian Police refusing to execute them.

Persons who are brought under the operation of the law are frequently not only themselves thrown upon the Government for maintenance during their incarceration, but the families are committed as a legacy to the Benevolent Society, which is compelled to maintain them if their period of detention is three months or under. After the expiration of three months, if the term of imprisonment exceed that period, they are transferred to the Government books for supplies of rations. It not unfrequently happens that the Government are compelled to grant a money allowance for rent during imprisonment of husband.

The Committee has not been so much troubled during the past year as the previous years, on account of the stringent nature of the regulations now enforced in the Invalid Depôts, that persons who are received shall remain three months unless discharged by the medical officer as fit for light work, or are taken out by some person who is an employer of labour, and who undertakes their care. The detention is now strictly enforced. This was brought about principally by the representation of this Society to the Government of cases of persons giving continual trouble by only remaining a few days and then coming out again, and in a few days seeking admission anew. Cases occur now of parties claiming their discharge on the expiration of the three months who the same day apply and are sent to another depôt. All who are discharged by the medical officer, or are taken out for work, if they break down in health, or are unable to labour, are supported until they can again procure admittance; but if persons insist on their discharge, or abscond, they receive no rations or lodgings, nor any encouragement whatever, but are told to get back as quickly as they can. In the early part of the last year, during the Reibey Administration, the Government were of opinion that from the knowledge of the Executive Committee of this Society a great saving might be effected in the charitable allowances if the Executive Board were constituted a charitable commission to enquire into all cases, against whose decision, under certain limitations, there should be no appeal: but the change of Administration caused the measure to be laid aside. The business of the Committee consists principally of many cases of distress, some real and severe, through affliction, but more often the results of dissipation and idleness, and frequently attempts at imposition are detected. Many friends of the Society are saved from being imposed upon by obtaining information of Mr. Witt, the Registrar, who has records of cases known in the city for eighteen years, and who is authorised by the Committee to show them to any person who is desirous of information upon any particular case. Many persons who present themselves before the Committee seem to think that His Excellency the Governor and Mrs. Weld are the court of Appeal, should they not be successful with the Committee, as often the Committee are told by parties that they shall go to the Governor; but His Excellency and Mrs. Weld know how to obtain information if cases are truly deserving of charity, which if so are never turned away. Only a few days ago a woman upwards of 70 years of age, without relations or friends, a cripple on crutches, insisted upon her discharge from the Female Invalid Asylum, notwithstanding the remonstrance of the Superintendent, the Medical Officer, and her own clergyman, and the next morning went begging to Government House.

The number of cases transferred from the previous year was 31, representing 97 individuals. During the year, as already has been stated, 247 cases were investigated, of which 234 were relieved and 13 refused. The number of individual persons was 543, namely, 114 male and 169 female adults, and 118 male and 142 female children. The statistics of the cases show 71 illness, 15 widows, 30 husbands away, 6 husbands in prison, 12 aged and infirm, 73 destitute, 20 accidents, and 7 for children alone where the parents could not be trusted with their children's food lest they should dispose of it and deprive them of it.

Casual relief has been given to 50 individuals going into the country to seek employment, or waiting to be sent into the Invalid Depôts.

The wood-yard is still proved a valuable means of testing persons whether they are willing to work for their food, and 51 men, mostly with families, have been enabled to obtain food for themselves and families by working for it until they could obtain better employment. These labours are estimated at 4d. per hour, and the people get food at the Society's cost value, so that a man can obtain sufficient food for a family for a day, and the rest of the day he can seek other employment.

The wood brigade still carries on its operation in preparing kindling wood, which is disposed of in the city in small bundles to parties giving orders, and is a great convenience to many. There has been an increase in the sales, though not very important as a revenue, but sufficient to show that the little labour is appreciated. Large orders from Government House help this branch of work, which used to be performed by boys; but the demand for labour for jam-works and box-making has absorbed most of these, and now poor old people, who cannot cross-cut logs and split wood with an axe, can sit and prepare these bundles of kindling wood.

Your Committee, just before the winter of last year, purchased 20 tons of wood in logs for extra cases of sickness, whilst some kind friends also supplied the yard with 52 tons and one ton of coals. Prayers for blessings on the kind donors ascend from many houses of the poor in the winter months, and many an one is enabled to work for his food and for his family's support who does not desire to eat the bread of idleness, whilst the worthless and the idle are compelled to work if they would eat.

The Registrar begins, soon after the year turns, to open his book to receive contributions from poor persons towards the purchase of blankets when the cold weather sets in; and he is much encouraged by the gratitude of many for this help which they receive, in his caring for them, saving for them that which would otherwise be wasted, and supplying them with good, warm, heavy blankets at the wholesale cost price: the frugal and the provident are thus helped to help themselves. The wretchedly destitute, even those whose habits will not allow them to keep an article of their own, are not forgotten. They are also helped by loans of blankets for the sake of their children, but the blankets are so branded that no pawnbroker would receive them, and anyone purchasing them would know that they were committing an illegal act and were liable to punishment.

The Superintendent of the Queen's Asylum has kindly forwarded parcels of clothing, which are useful to the very poor, and have found thankful receivers at the hands of the Registrar. These donations have been acknowledged.

The sums advanced for lodgings and rent for casuals and persons waiting to be invalided have been unusually large. During last winter large numbers had to wait long before their time came to be received; the wards of the hospital being first relieved of all invalid cases when vacancies occurred. Those waiting for invaliding have food presented to them, or are supplied at the soup kitchen. If the charitably-disposed public would try the plan of contributing to the Benevolent Society's funds and make it the medium of communicating help to the mendicant class, many would be saved from imposition, and the vagrancy and pauperism that infest the streets would be suppressed.

For the conveyance of poor sick persons to the hospital, £3 has been expended. This is generally upon the certificate of some member of the Committee, as to the inability of the party to pay, which was also oftentimes done by clergy of all denominations, and the city missionaries.

The sale of soup has increased again this year by £1 2s.; £10 14s. 7d. has been received under this head.

The Committee has no record of any receipts for the sale of soup tickets, at which they are much surprised, for if this means of helping the poor was encouraged by the public, much of the alms dispensed daily would be saved from the drinking dens that abound, and the people benefited instead of injured. Many of the vagrant poor are powerless to resist the temptation to indulge in drink when they can gather a few coppers.

The arrangements with the Government with reference to the lying-in cases of unmarried women is working satisfactorily, while poor married women are kindly helped by the Dorcas Society.

Care is always exercised in inquiring into cases seeking help from your Committee that the children are sent to school; if such is not the case, aid is instantly withdrawn from the parents, and the children fed at the Depôt until the parents produce certificates of weekly attendance.

The Registrar, Mr. Witt, is most indefatigable in his visitations; he spares no trouble in helping worthy, deserving people, but dissolute, worthless deceivers receive no encouragement from him, and he will not excuse himself any inconvenience by inquiry and self-examination to detect deception. During the past year Mr. Witt has also fulfilled the duties of collector, and many of the old friends of the Society have been pleased at being waited upon by him for their subscription. Mr. Witt receives no commission for this extra duty.

The Superintendents of the several Invalid Depôts very kindly send in weekly returns of those who leave the Depôts, stating upon what ground they do so. From these returns a register is compiled, so as to detect those who leave for the purpose of begging. Thanks for this attention is tendered to those gentlemen.

