

Mr. Chamberlain on Provident Societies.

Mr. Chamberlain, M.P., took part on Monday in a meeting at the Birmingham Town Hall to celebrate the jubilee of the Cannon Street Provident Society, one of the kind in Birmingham. Mr. G. Whitehouse, president of the society, occupied the chair, and Alderman Kenrick, M.P., was also amongst those present.

Mr. Chamberlain, who was heartily received, said:—Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I have been asked to move, "That this meeting desires to place on record its satisfaction with the vast improvement in the social condition of the industrial classes during the last 50 years, which, aided by wise legislation, has been followed by the spread of habits of thrift and self-help, as exemplified in the growth and development of provident societies like the Cannon Street; and this meeting would venture to express the hope that the enormous advantages to the community in general, and to the working classes in particular, which these instances afford may be secured in perpetuity to future generations." This is certainly an extremely interesting and very important occasion, and I think it a privilege and an honour to be invited to take some part in it. Your chairman has told you that the occasion is the celebration of the jubilee of the Cannon Street society, a society founded 50 years ago, in a very modest and humble way, by a few Sunday School teachers and scholars, and which has in the interval that has elapsed become a great institution with 8,500 members, with an income of £17,000 a year and invested funds of £76,000. I do not think that the pioneers of this organization could possibly have foreseen the extent to which it would develop. If any of them fortunately survive they will have the happiness of knowing that in the course of the half-century, as the president has just said, more than 20,000 of the artisans of Birmingham have enjoyed the advantages of the institution. They have been relieved from the pecuniary anxieties which add so much to their sufferings from sickness and from death; in the case of the poor they have been spared in times of misfortune the necessity of appealing for Poor Law relief, and have been encouraged to make some provision for the enforced idleness of their old age. In considering what we ought to bear in mind—that the circumstances in which they lived were very different from, and very much less favorable than, those in which we now find ourselves (hear)—I have often thought how interesting and useful it would be if we could photograph a nation as we photograph an individual. In that case we might from time to time look back to different periods of our history. We might see what manner of people we then were. We might make comparison of the progress achieved, and we might derive, perhaps, the hope and the confidence which are needed as a stimulus to further exertion. Unfortunately that cannot be done; but, failing that, I have thought that to-night it might perhaps interest you if I endeavored to supply the place of such a material picture as I have suggested by a picture in words of the condition of things both in Birmingham and in the country 50 years ago. Now as regards our own town there is no difficulty in the matter. We have the materials to hand collected by the skill and care and ability of the historian of the corporation, Mr. John Thackeray Bunce, and I have taken most of my materials from the very interesting volume in which he describes the state of Birmingham previous to the institution of the Town Council.

CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY 50 YEARS AGO.

Now let us turn from Birmingham to a more general survey of the state of the whole kingdom. In reading the histories of the time, especially those which refer to the period between 1830, before the Reform Bill, and 1846, when the Corn Laws were repealed, one thing, I think, particularly strikes the observer, and that is the constant allusion to the turbulence of the times. Riots seem to have been of almost daily occurrence, and those riots were accompanied by long periods of exceptional distress. In the manufacturing districts there were disturbances, and those disturbances were generally accompanied by the destruction of machinery and plunder of bakers' shops, and I think you will agree with me that those are very significant facts, because they point at once to the ignorance of the people and also to their destitution. In the agricultural districts the state of affairs was, if possible, still worse there. Indeed there was not actual riot, but the outrages took the form of incendiarism, and on many occasions and during long periods the country districts were lighted up at nights by the burning of ricks and the burning of barns; and shopkeepers, especially the small shopkeepers, were almost ruined by excessive taxation and by bad debts. The working men had to toil for excessive hours and for an insufficient subsistence. In the country the agricultural laborers did not even obtain the barest subsistence, and they were compelled, not by way of exception, but as a matter of rule, to eke out their wages by the assistance which they derived from the Poor Law. Pauperism reached perfectly frightful dimensions. At one time in 1833 the poor rate amounted to 22s. per head of the whole population. Last year I think it was something like 5s. 10d. Crime rose in the same proportion as pauperism. In 1842 it had reached its highest level, and there were 31,000 committals for trial in a single year. Last year, with a population which has nearly doubled, the total number of committals was only 13,000. In a single year—in 1834—480 human beings were sentenced to death. Last year 35 were sentenced to death, and 21 suffered the penalty of the law. The ordinary workday life at the time, as I have said, was excessive.

IMPROVEMENT IN THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE.

Legislation has done much; philanthropy has done something; the intelligent efforts of the working classes themselves have done more. All these things combined have helped to make our country a healthier, a happier and a better place than it was half a century ago. (Hear, hear!) Education has now been brought within the reach of every working man's child, and within the means of every parent. Protection has been afforded against excessive toil and overwork, and proper conditions of labor have been universally enforced. But I have endeavored to take out one or two figures which illustrate what I have said. Mr. Giffen, who is probably the most eminent living statistician, made a careful inquiry some time ago as to the rise in wages, and he found that in the 50 years they had advanced from 50 to 100 per cent. In the same time the hours of labor have been reduced on an average by 20 per cent. Men work no longer for 12 hours. Bread is 20 per cent. cheaper on the average. Sugar is 60 to 70 per cent. cheaper; tea 75 per cent. cheaper; clothing is 50 per cent. cheaper. Only one article of con-

sumption of great importance has increased in price, and that is mutton and beef.

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES.

No doubt much has already been done, but much remains to do. In these same 50 years the depositors in the savings banks have multiplied 10 per cent., and the amount of the funds which have been placed there for security has increased from 13 millions to considerably over 100 millions. In addition to that we have the co-operative societies with a million of members, and 14 millions of capital. We have the building societies with 50 millions of liabilities, and we have the friendly societies, of which you are one, and which, therefore, deserve a few words of special mention. (Cheers.) The friendly societies have grown up very gradually. They seem to have been in some sort the successors of the old trade guilds of the middle ages, which sought by mutual help and assurance to secure for their members some of the advantages which you provide. When the friendly societies were first started they were very large institutions for goodfellowship, and goodfellowship was thought to be secured by meeting in the public house, where, I am afraid, a good deal more money went than was given away in the shape of sick pay or benefits. (Hear, hear.) But that was in the early stages, and now at any rate no charge of that kind can be made against, at all events, the great majority and the better class of these societies. They have reached their present position almost entirely by the unassisted efforts of the working class themselves.

Mr. Gladstone on the Pope.

It is questionable, says the *Echo*, whether the Irish Home Rulers would have been quite so enthusiastic in leading their flocks to vote against Mr. Parnell and for Mr. Gladstone if they had read Count Campello's late account of his conversation with the English Liberal leader. The Count, as many will remember, was formerly a Canon of St. Peter's at Rome, and is now at the head of the Italian Old Catholics, a body small in number, but including a great host of secret sympathizers. His relations with the Roman nobility, his former intimate clerical connection with St. Peter's, and his intimacy with the leaders of the Italian National party, give him a range of knowledge concerning the two rival Italian camps—the Papal and the National—to which few of his countrymen can pretend.

In the last number of his *Labaro* the Count prints an interesting record of a conversation between himself and Mr. Gladstone on the prospects of the Papacy. "Gladstone said," he tells his readers, "I have been assured that the number of Papists in Rome is now greater than it was before the fall of the Temporal Power of the Pope." To this the Count replied that "The Roman Catholics in Rome are probably much more decided in their views than they formerly were. But I denied in the strongest terms that their number had increased. In Rome," said he, "the religion which really prevails, or rather rules like a Sovereign, is sheer indifference, so far as attendance at public worship is concerned. All the principal churches have a desolate look upon the Sunday. The most significant proof of the attitude of the Romans themselves towards the Papacy is the alarming decrease of Peter's Pence. The highest yield of Peter's Pence in Rome is 17,000, and it must be remembered that there are about 40,000 Papal pensioners living in Rome."

Count Campello then made the strong assertion that "the Papacy, in its religious aspect, is actually dead in Rome, and that it is only active in its political character." Hereupon Mr. Gladstone interrupted him by saying "Thiers once made the singular confession of religion—I am a Papist, but I am not a Catholic." The English statesman then asked Count Campello whether he did not think that a Papacy separated from the Temporal Power, or purely ecclesiastical, would not be acceptable to the Italians? The Count replied, "The Papacy must either be accepted as it is, at its own estimate of itself, or it must be rejected altogether. The Papacy is incapable of any reformation. It has more concern in its direct and indirect temporal power, whether with or without monarchical dignity, than in the welfare of souls."

"But," Mr. Gladstone suggested, "suppose a Pope with patriotic Italian sympathies were elected. Would not such a man content himself with his spiritual authority?" The Italian patriot answered, "A Pope with Italian sympathies is no longer a possibility. The intrigue and power of the Jesuits would not tolerate him. In Italy, you must remember, the very name Roman Catholic is now the title of an Anti-National party. Besides, the Papacy, in its spiritual privileges, is no longer acceptable to any thinking man or to any believing Christian. Since the Vatican Council (which really exalted the Pope into the absolute master of every Christian conscience in faith and morals) there is no longer a fit place for the Pope in Italy—no, nor in the world." The Count added, "Gladstone expressed his full agreement with what I had said."

At Wortley, near Leeds, during a New Year's entertainment in the parochial schoolhouse, the dresses of 15 little girls, consisting of white cotton wool, caught fire from Chinese lanterns they carried, and they were severely burnt, some, it is feared, fatally.

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