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VIGOROUS PROTEST

Against Vicar's Criticism Of Shepherd Street Mission Preston.

Speeches at the Annual Meeting

The 34th annual meeting of the Shepherd-street Mission and Children's Home was held in the Guild Hall on Thursday afternoon. The Mayor (Alderman W. M. Margerison, J.P.) presided, and he was supported by Sir John Kirk, J.P. (chairman of the Ragged School Union and the National Federation of Christian Workers among the Poor), Major Stanley, M.P., Mr. G. Toulmin, M.P., Rev. L. D. W. Spencer, Mr. W. Parker, J.P., Mr. F. Calvert, J.P., Mr S. Lee, J.P., and others.

The Mayor submitted the committee's annual report, and referred briefly to the chief points it contained. The mission, he said, had been doing a capital work during the 34 years it had been an existence, and, added his Worship, he had known the work intimately ever since its inception. (Hear, hear.)

The opening paragraph of the report read as follows:—

The past year has not been one of the most pleasant for the Shepherd-street Mission, many things having taken place to cause worry and discouragement. With the various branches of the mission, and a family of nearly fifty, the work is very difficult within the fold, but when the mission is attacked in a most shameful way from without, by such men as the vicar of Crossens the Rev. G. Z. Edwards and the most abominable untruths written and published, it is enough to make anyone hang their harp on the willows, and it is hard work at times to believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

The joy of the work said the Mayor, had been a little bit damped during the past year because of the attack which had been made upon one branch of it by the vicar of Crossens, who as "the amateur tramp" paid a visit to the shelter. That mission had now nearly 50 children and young people dependent upon it, who had been gathered there under very difficult conditions, and were being shepherded into a good life, and nothing but praise ought to be given those who undertook gratuitously that very difficult work. (Hear, hear.)

Those who had been accustomed to attend the annual meetings had heard of the difficulties there were in connection with the shelter work. They had had a small shelter in Laurel-street, and the hard times they had been passing through recently had brought along quite a large number of men who were without the requisite threepence that would admit them to the shelter and rough bed of a lodging-house. Many of them were without a penny, but through the agency of the mission in return for a little wood chopping they were provided with a supper and a lie down in the warm shelter. The shelter had provided a refuge on an average for nearly 43 men a night, and the conditions he admitted were not ideal. The committee had been complaining of the conditions, and had been asking the people of Preston for years past to give them the money to enable them to erect a shelter to carry on that work more efficiently, and the people of Preston had not responded up to the present moment, but they would respond, and in faith of that, twelve months ago, the committee, having the land, said the work must be done, and £1,100 had been expended in building a very good shelter. (Hear, hear.)

FROM THE REPORT.

Referring to the attack on the shelter by the vicar of Crossens, the report contained the following:—

The committee's attention having been drawn to the above, a letter was sent to the vicar asking for an apology and the withdrawal of the chapter relating to the Shepherd-street Mission shelter, but in his reply the whole thing was shirked and no apology rendered. The matter was then put into the hands of our solicitor, and he is now dealing with it.

The only fault with the shelter is, it is too small, and those who come to these meetings and those who read our reports know that for four years past we have been struggling to remedy this, and now it is accomplished, as will be seen by this report.

"May I say for myself," continued the Mayor, "and without any word from the committee, if the vicar of Crossens will only come and call upon me, I shall have very great pleasure in showing him the work that was in-

bute to the self-sacrifice and devotion of the workers connected with the mission, especially of Mr. and Mrs. Williamson, who, he emphasised, were not paid, but gave their whole services free. (Applause.)

"GOOD WORK."

Sir John Kirk moved the adoption of the report and balance sheet, and said his heart went out towards the good work which was being done by the Shepherd-street Mission, because every department detailed by the Mayor he had been familiar with for many years. With respect to the criticism of the shelter to which the Mayor had referred, he did not intend to go into that at all, except to say that it was nothing new for ragged school workers to be criticised, and after all he did not know but what they were the better for it. (Hear, hear.) He was, however, quite sure of this, that the earnest words spoken by the Mayor would carry conviction to the hearts of the people, and that the institution would stand higher than ever in the affection of the people of Preston. (Applause.)

The great work in which Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were engaged, viz., helping the bottom dog, was one which he warmly commended to their support. The whole country would be better for the work which was being done amongst the class to which he referred, for the problem of the out-of-works and derelicts was a very serious one. Many of those poor people have been enabled to regain their self-respect and to become once more respectable members of society. Such a work, carried out as it was, on national lines, deserved all the support and assistance that could be given it, for even from the economic and ratepayers' standpoint it could not be ignored. One eminent statistician had estimated that every person reclaimed from a life of degradation meant a saving to the country of £1,000, and had they, asked Sir John, ever considered the amount the Shepherd-street Mission had been the means of saving.

Sir John, continuing, referred to that branch of the mission which comprised the feeding of the children, and said that as the great need of England to-day was men—good workmen, good war-men, and good navy-men—he contended that on national grounds that institution deserved their loyal support. Its work was also imperial, and speaking of the emigration work associated with such institutions, Sir John referred to the excellent testimony they had of its efficiency in the letters Mr. Williamson had received from the children who had gone to Canada and been given a good start in life there. In conclusion, he commended the work of the Shepherd-street Mission to the hearty sympathy and support of the people of Preston.

A WORD OF TRIBUTE.

Major Stanley, M.P., in seconding the adoption of the report and balance-sheet, said he wished to pay a word of tribute to the good work that was done by the Shepherd-street Mission. He considered that any mission which had for its object the raising of the fallen to a position of self-respect and extending a helping hand to those who were in danger of going under, deserved all the good that could possibly be said of it, and deserved all the prosperity it could possibly have—(hear, hear)—and even more, especially so when, as in the case of the Shepherd-street Mission, the work was all being done by voluntary effort, he thought they could say of them that they were engaged in the noblest work it was possible for mankind to do, viz., to raise those who had fallen and give a helping hand to those who were going down to raise themselves. (Hear, hear.)

There came, he thought, in many men's lives a time when attacks were made on them; in fact, he fancied there were very few men who escaped them. The Mayor had referred to the attack which had been made on that mission. Personally—and he regretted to have to say so—he had had no direct association with the Shepherd-street Mission, but from what he had heard of it he thought the words his Worship had used in refuting that attack had not been at all too strong. (Hear, hear.) He heartily seconded the resolution proposed by Sir John Kirk, and asked to be allowed to wish all success and prosperity in the future to the Shepherd-street Mission and all connected with it. (Applause.)

The resolution was unanimously carried.

COMMENDATION.

Mr. G. Toulmin moved the following resolution:—

That this meeting commends the Shepherd-street Mission and Home for Orphan and Destitute Children to the liberal support of the community, believing it is doing a good work among the poor children of the town.

Reference, he said had been made to certain criticism passed on that mission, and seeing as he did something of what was going on he must say that rather than criticise the mission and its helpers he would like to see a little more criticism of those who were not helping. (Hear, hear.) There was a great deal left undone by the community, and a great deal more criticism might be passed because it was left undone than on those who were doing their best to do it. (Hear, hear.)

Referring to the home connected with the mission, Mr. Toulmin said that to his mind one of the greatest needs of Preston to-day was a working boys' home and a working girls' home, and to anyone disposed to criticise he would say, "Start one of those." There was a working boys' home carried on by one of the great religious communities in Preston, and was doing a good work, and to critics he would say, "Let them establish a Protestant boys' and

great mistake in connection with it. (Applause.)

According to the report the committee were able once more to close the year with a balance in hand on each account, but unfortunately they could not this year, as in years gone by, carry a good balance from the home and refuge to the extension account. This was owing to the demolition of three cottages and other buildings, the rent of which brought in £50 a year, for the purposes of the erection of the new shelter. A jumble sale in May realised £32 17s 6d, and since 1894 £470 3s 9d has been raised by these sales. A cake and apron sale in September realised £13 10s 6d.

Meetings are held in six lodging-houses every Sunday evening, and over 20,000 tracts and periodicals have been distributed in these places during the past year. Band of Hope meetings had been continued weekly, as well as fortnightly lantern lectures, and the total abstinence pledge had been signed by 211. Sunday school and Sunday evening services had been conducted, while over 650 gospel, Band of Hope, cottage, and open-air meetings had been held during the year.

POOR CHILDREN ENTERTAINED.

The Whitsuntide treat took the shape of a visit to Bretherton, where the Rev. G. Wood kindly afforded all facilities. On Christmas morning 1,300 of the poorest children in Preston were entertained to breakfast, and each child received a present, given by a gentleman who desired to remain anonymous. The usual New Year's treat was given on the Sunday school afternoon, while from November to the middle of March 26,678 free dinners were provided for poor children.

During the year 15,677 men were found shelter and work, and 7,890 for supper, breakfast, or dinner. The previous year's figures were 15,165 for shelter and 8,234 for meals. The sales of firewood this year had been 287,875 bundles and 4,177 bags.

The children's home is still doing its good work, taking in the lost and the helpless, bringing them up, training them, and sending them out into the world prepared to fight life's battles honourably and successfully. At the close of the year there were 34 children to maintain. During the year 10 had been admitted to the home, one sent to Canada, three returned to their friends, one sent out to service, four sent to other homes, and two are at trades in the town and living at the home.

The Mayor, in conclusion, paid a warm tribute to the committee and their staff, and expressed his appreciation of the work they had done during the year.

his speech regarding the work of kindred missions, Sir John had referred to the saving of the rates, but that was not why he (Mr. Toulmin) wanted the work to be done. If the ratepayers were not doing their duty, and in consequence that work was done, he did not want to subscribe in order to save their pockets. There were more than 500 children in Preston under the control of the Poor Law by out-relief, and these were imperfectly looked after, and some of the work Mr. Williamson was doing was caused by that work not being properly done.

Mr. Barrow, of Manchester, seconded the resolution, which was carried.

THANKS.

On the proposition of Mr. William Parker, J.P., seconded by Mr. Sam. Lee a hearty vote of thanks was accorded the speakers.

At the kind invitation of the Mayoress, those present partook of afternoon tea, after which Sir John Kirk explained the objects of the National Federation of Christian Workers Among Poor Children, of which he is the chairman. He pointed out that the objects were to unite all agencies dealing with poor, neglected, and crippled children, without in any way interfering with the freedom of any affiliated society. There was a good deal of mystery and doubt, he said, as to how to adapt their arrangements to the new order of things, and if the various agencies could only link themselves up in some way the benefit and experience they would get in that way must be of great advantage to the general work.

It was decided to form a branch of the federation.

In the evening a meeting of workers, collectors, and friends of the Shepherd-street Mission was held in the Assembly-room, and was addressed by Sir John Kirk and others. The Mayor (Alderman Margerison) had very kindly arranged for an exhibition of his beautiful lantern slides.

PRESTON MAN'S DEATH AT BLACKPOOL.—At an inquest on Saturday at Blackpool on the body of George Anderton, a kitchen porter, it was stated that he was a native of Preston, had been in employ at Blackpool during the summer season, and received notice of his dismissal on Friday. On the same day he was found hanging by a rope in the cellar of the hotel. A verdict of "Suicide whilst of unsound mind" was returned.