

THE FOLKESTONE CHRONICLE

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LIFE INSIDE THE ELHAM UNION

The Christmas Treat to the Inmates

On the summit of a steep hill, named Eachend Hill stands the Elham Union. The approach to it from Folkestone reveals a most charming prospect, which whether in Winter or Summer pleases the eye. Passing through Cheriton, you come to the beautiful place known as Beachborough, the seat of Charles Brockman, esq., and from there you ascend a rising road, at the crown, of which is the Poor House. The eye gazes all along the way upon a fertile valley, intersected with watercourses, and interspersed with woodland, and bearing every sign of profitable cultivation.

One forgets the heat and toil incidental to the ascent of the hill, in the attractive view which on every side can be seen. The Elham Union appears almost like a blot upon the landscape. This plain, redbrick, hard, stem featured building, outwardly gives one the impression of what in reality it is, the Home of Necessity. The workhouse is such a distance from Folkestone, that we are sure few of the ratepayers have seen an institution to the support of which they largely contribute their rates. Those who have acquaintances or friends there, must, for the same reason, be compelled to make their visits to the place few and far between.

We wish to give our readers a description of this building. A workhouse is a world in itself, and an inspection of one conveys the most serious reflections. It is the last refuge of the improvident; the home

of worn out old age; the resort of the idle and the vicious; and the shelter of bereaved orphans. It would not be, perhaps, pleasant reading to give our readers a description merely of the hard routine of every day life there, but we shall introduce them on an occasion when pure Christian benevolence has illuminated this home of poverty with the sunshine of joy and festivity. The Rev. H. P. Gregg, curate of Christ Church, is the Chaplain of the Union. An earnest, devoted, clergyman, he strives to make the inmates forget their sad lot by leading them to think on and hope for a higher and better life; and with such success that his ministrations are highly valued and his visits anticipated by the inmates, especially by the aged, the sick and the infirm, with genuine delight. This year, as on previous years, a treat was given to the inmates. The Chaplain, and several ladies connected with Christ Church, solicited contributions from friends, and substantial viands of various descriptions were contributed. The interior of the building threw off its sombre and depressing appearance; the rooms were gaily decorated; the feast prepared; and the old, the middle aged, and the children were on Tuesday last all invited to throw dull care away, and to accept the hospitality of their friends.

On arrival at the Union, and before the festivities of the afternoon and evening commenced, we were invited by the schoolmaster, Mr. Major, to go over the house with him. We commence with the playground, and certainly do not see it at its advantage, for it is a cold wet afternoon. There are a few lads and girls out, however, who are enjoying some frolicsome

game, with thorough youthful vigour. From here we adjourn to the boys' dormitory; they are called in and v/e see seventeen well fed, warmly clad, healthy looking lads. They evidently live in no fear of their schoolmaster, for they reply with respectful appreciation to his playful sallies and kindly expressed enquiries; and there is no doubt that upon many his fatherly attention and care, will have in after life, a pleasant and lasting impression. We now enter the girls' dormitory, where there are thirty as nice and well behaved children as we could wish to see, and whose excellent behaviour is due to the careful training of their schoolmistress, Mrs. Major. They are of all ages and sizes, from the girl almost ready to start from this small world into the great world beyond, to the tiny pretty little child she carries in her arms, whose feet have but just learnt to tread the ground. Interesting as the sight is, it has its sad and touching aspect. Here are children of tender years who have never known a mother's love or care. No sisters or brothers to share their young affections and confidences; no bright home associations to sweeten the memories of later years; and a world before them in which, whatever desirable friendship they make, must be contracted in years to come. The friendships made amongst their companions are very brief, for whether it be boys or girls they must soon separate, and go their different ways, most likely never to meet again. Some will delve the soil, some plough the sea, the army will find recruits in others, and the girls will go into domestic service. They will all go forth to labor, and others will supply their place in the Union. This may be straying into a sentimental view on the subject, but certainly a useful one. For would it not be well for

those who take these boys and girls in their employ to remember their misfortune, the character of their early training, and to endeavour by kindness and home comforts to bring to them that light and experience, which, under any circumstances, they must now miss. Boys or girls transplanted from this place to a home where good example, generous

treatment and a sympathetic and helping hand is stretched out to them, encouraging them to rise in life, are recipients of a kindness which blesseth those that give, as well as those that receive.

Our guide leads us through the cooking establishment where the meals are prepared. We inspect the rooms where the able-bodied men and women dine and live, and then we enter the old women's day room. In this place the old ladies assemble and pass their time away - well just the same as the outer world consumes time - in gossip. Imagine what a small field the workhouse must be for news, and such reports as the scandal monger delights in, and yet nowhere is this bad propensity more largely indulged in, and ending often in scenes of tongue warfare and strife. Time's chariot wheels have made their carriage marks on the faces of the old ladies we see before us, but the progress of years has increased their garrulous propensity. In the course of conversation with one old lady the following remarks were made:

Visitor: Well, I suppose you live here very comfortably together. You can converse, and enjoy one another's society.

Old Lady: But, Sir, we do quarrel so.

Visitor: Quarrel! what can there be to quarrel about?

Old Lady: If it was myself, Sir, I could be as happy as the day is long, for I will say this, as deny it who can, I am of a happy disposition. But one says one thing and another another, and then we begin to argufy.

Visitor: But what do you want to argue about?

Old Lady: There is one woman here, Sir, as is awful. Her timper is houtrageous.

Visitor: What sort of temper? Perhaps your's is not a good one.

Old Lady: I have the most forgiveingest timper. But she's a nagger.

Visitor: (aghast with astonishment): What is a nagger?

Old Lady: Well Sir it is as this, a morose timper I likes; a revengeful timper I loves; but a temper that goes a nag a nag a nag I hates and abhors, and that's her timper and I don't care who hears me say so.

One tale is very well until the other is told. In the evening The Visitor happened to meet the individual designated by the name of the "nagger", and she straightway began to talk about her detractor, alleging that "she was the deceitfullest women anyone could meet with. Yes, Sir, deceit is as plainly written on her face as that nose is on your'n. "

We are taken into the old men's day room, and see several around a fire, whose appearance would answer to the descriptive lines: -

"A venerable aspect I Age sits with decent grace upon his visage,
And worthily becomes his silver locks. "

Here is the aged soldier, who in his relations of his experience of warfare "shoulders his crutch and shows how fields are won", the worn out sailor here tells of dangers he has escaped by sea, and the landsman of his experience of town and village life. For, remember, these men in their conversation live in the past. Their present surroundings but engender strife, for like the old ladies they quarrel tremendously. They are jealous if they think any favouritism is shown; they imagine a slight where none is intended; and realize the idea of "querelous old age. " But we must think of them charitably, remembering that some of these old people are the victims of adverse circumstances, for some of them have seen better days, and have swam, in their time, on the river of prosperity, to reach in the end the rapids which have plunged them into the gulf of poverty. We pass through the rooms where the able bodied men and women are, and we are shown into the washing and drying room. And here, we may notice, how scrupulously clean every thing is, almost oppressively so. We inspect the old men's bedroom and the pantry, and what may be termed the "arrangements of the house, " and then through a well-lighted corridor we pass into the Hospital. Here are men and women suffering from various diseases, and some old men in the last stage of decay. It is an inexpressibly sad sight, and we will not enlarge upon it. We were pointed out a place where women who have lost all that is beautiful in womanhood, are suffering from the evil fruits of their sin and shame. Oh! if those who embark upon such a sad career of sin, could but see into futurity and behold the awful results, they would surely hesitate before they made the fatal plunge. Our guide points out to us the vagrant's ward, and then we adjourn to the Board Room. Here the guardians meet and discuss the management of the Union, Folkestone being well represented by Messrs. Hoad and Coules. Seldom has a room, to our thinking, been put to better use, for here the representative of the "Chronicle" enjoyed one of the best teas he ever sat down to, and from his large and varied experience, he is able to give an

authoritative opinion on such matters. From all we could glean the Master and Matron of the Union are highly respected by all the inmates. Mr. and Mrs.. Horn conduct this establishment in a manner that reflects the highest credit upon them.

And now, reader, we must remember the object which brought us to this place. Wherever we turn we see signs of gaiety. The walls of the various rooms are decorated with holly, pictures, flags, texts and mottoes, arranged in an attractive style. Between three and four o'clock it was a sight to behold Mr. George Searancke, preparing the feast, who brought into play all the powers of his gigantic mind. He was in his element, whether it was in brewing tea, cutting bread and butter, or carving meat. He was a most efficient General of the Commissariat Department. Amongst those present who rendered active assistance were Major Deedes, Mr. and Mrs. and the Misses Du Boulay, Mrs. and the Misses Clarke, Mrs. Kerr, Mrs. Heel, Mrs. Tasker and Miss Tasker, the Misses Armstrong, Miss Lilly, Miss H. Boykett, Miss Morton, Miss Peck, Miss Lewis, Miss L. Eastes, Mr. Wightwick, Mr. Seaman, Mr. Charlton and Master Monger. Special praise is due to the following ladies for their exertion and taste in decorating the rooms, Mrs. Tasker, Miss Morton, Miss Beck, Miss Lewis and Miss Green. A handsome contribution of delicious buns and oranges was sent by Miss Osborne. When the tables were all prepared, the inmates were asked to the feast. Never was a meal more heartily enjoyed. The eyes of the children sparkled with delight as they gazed upon the good things, which soon disappeared under their strenuous exertions. The old people were particularly happy, and with their food, consumed an astounding quantity of tea. This beverage was

much patronized by the ladies, one old lady remarking as she received a cup of extra strong, "We have so little tea, Ma'am, in the house. And oh! I do likes a good cup of tea. " The meal was prolonged to the utmost duration, and it was a most interesting sight to see the ladies ministering to the comforts of the aged, chatting kindly and pleasantly with them, and striving by gentle acts and words to make them as happy as possible.

A general exodus through the Hall of the House, reminds your representative, that he must be in time, if he wishes to get a seat at the evening's entertainment. This is held in the Chapel, or schoolroom, for it serves both purposes, every inch of which is filled by an expectant audience. A Magic Lantern has been kindly lent by the Rev.

C. Bosanquet, and which is exhibited by Mr. Hunt, who displays considerable skill in his manifestation of the lantern. Before the exhibition, the hymn "Come to the Saviour, make no delay", is very sweetly sung, the Rev.

H. Heel, presiding at the Harmonium. The first series of slides represent animal sagacity, and was kindly lent by the Rev. C. J. Taylor. A most humorous description was given by Mr. Gregg, of wonderful things done by sagacious animals. It was charming to witness the great joy of the children. Heartier laughter was never heard, or more enthusiastic

applause. Ho children ever seen at a Pantomime at Drury Lane theatre, could show or feel more intense delight. They seemed to live for that evening in fairy land, and the exclamations of "Oh, " "Look at that", "Is'nt that beautiful! " and similar expressions testified their appreciation of the entertainment. Much amusement was caused by the exhibition of the photographs of Sergeant Reynolds, the Town Sergeant, in state livery, Tom Cockett, the crier,

of Folkestone boys, all of which were kindly lent by Mr. Weston. When the photograph of Mr. Gregg was displayed, the audience rose and gave a most hearty cheer, after which followed the likeness of the Queen.

The Rev. H. Heel, played the Harmonium at intervals during the display of the magic lantern. At the conclusion of the entertainment the Rev.

H. P. Gregg, addressing the inmates reminded them that their thanks were due to those who had so generously provided the entertainment. He referred to the pleasure it gave the inmates to hear from their friends outside. He regretted that there were some in the House, that had relations who never came to see them or to communicate with them, and he trusted that they might be aroused to a sense of their duty in the future. In a few touching words the Rev. gentleman spoke of the unkindness and bitterness existing in the world, and illustrated how we could all by acts of kindness and love make smooth one another's path in life. After expressing his pleasure at being with them that evening, the company sang most effectively "Safe in the Arms of Jesus", and adjourned to the girls schoolroom. This was the scene of the evening. Two large Christmas trees, illuminated with numbers of candles, were waiting to be stripped of their treasures the children were frantic with delight, as toys of every description, boxes of sweets, books, and dolls, were distributed

amongst them. There are many in Folkestone who have in their possession toys, pictures, interesting children's books for which they have no further use. Had they seen the joy expressed in the countenances of these little ones on Tuesday, they would be able to estimate the delight that a present of such things would give to them. All the toys left over were entrusted in charge of the schoolmistress, for the benefit of the children during the year. Packets of tea were given especially prized by the old ladies, and

tobacco distributed amongst the men. There was never a more ecstatic look seen upon human countenance than that which lighted up the face of an old man on receiving a paper of tobacco. It is he said "so comforting. Once now and again I gets a penny to buy some; its more than food and drink to me. " The distribution of gifts created much amusement, and when all was disposed of, the lights were blown out a hearty "good night" and "God bless you" is heard on all hands, and the visitors take their departure.

It is a dismal, rainy, dreary night, but all in the omnibus and cabs that wend their way towards Folkestone feel happier and better for this intercourse with the poor and the needy, for whom, in the name of all our readers, we wish, A very Happy New Year.