



Wiltshire Friendly Society Annual Meeting

In good old England, with its variable skies, we cannot be sure of always having a fine day just as we want it, whether for work or play. On Monday last some of the good folks of Bishop's Cannings wanted a fine day to make their hay, some to shear their sheep, some for both; but all, we believe, wished for a fine day because it was the annual meeting of their Branch of the Wilts Friendly Society; and a right merry branch it is. If any one were disposed to doubt this, it is a pity he was not at Bishop's Cannings on Monday, and he would have seen, how in spite of the rain (which in the literal sense of the word was a damper for some time), they shewed that as holidays are not so very plentiful, they would not lose theirs for the sake of the weather, and that rain or shine, they were met to enjoy themselves, and enjoy themselves they would. We alluded the other day to a carter, who told us that in common with some other young fellows, he left the Society because "there warn't life enough in it." We did not of course say to what branch of the Society he belonged; but we feel bound to state that he never had anything to do with Bishop's Cannings, or ever attended any of their meetings, and as we wish all success to the Society, we should just like that carter aforesaid, and all who think with him, to get an invitation there for once, and we have no doubt they would quickly change their opinions. It is no good to say "we will tell you all about it," for we cannot pretend to give you more than an outline of the proceedings, and advise you to go next time and see for yourself. It was rather a cloudy morning, but so it was on Sunday, and that turned out a fine day. This we hoped would be the case with Monday, especially as a friend of ours, in whose opinion we have great confidence, said to us that he generally observed, that in respect of weather, "as with the Sunday so with the week." However he was not quite right this time, and lucky for us we remembered that there are exceptions to every rule, and that our grandmother, being as is said "otherwise" rather than "weather wise," had always allowed a choice of opinion as to taking an umbrella when it was wet, but never admitted it could be right to go without that useful article when it was fine, and so happily we took one; for before we reached the school-room at Bishop's Cannings, down came the rain and up went the umbrella, and in common with many other umbrellas, forming a goodly array of all sorts and colours, we marched down to church to the music of Ransome's band.

The Curate said the prayers, and a very suitable and excellent sermon was preached by the Rev. J. Copner (the curate of Devizes), who took for his text, Acts xx. 35. As it still continued to rain a little, though not so heavily, the band did not play so long as usual at the Vicarage, but having been fortified against the wet without, by a glass of the Vicar's sherry within, marched back to the schoolroom – which, for prettiness of decoration and display of flowers, beat most things we have seen of the kind: as the worthy Vicar (the Ven. Archdeacon Macdonald) observed in proposing the health of The Ladies, of whom there were many present, and of those in particular who had decorated the room, "it must have taken a great deal of time and trouble to execute the various devices." For ourselves we

can only simply say we were indeed surprised at so good an effect being produced, and never remember seeing flowers look so well, though herein we allude more particularly to the artificial flowers with which the lettering was done. -The dinner (all hot as usual) was furnished by the host of the Crown, and therefore we need say no more, -than that herein he maintained his good reputation, and especially as regards the plum-puddings. The chair was taken by the Ven. the Vicar, having around him most of his leading parishioners (who are all supporters of the Society), and a fair sprinkling of visitors: while his Curate (The Rev. William Savage) and Mr. William Brown occupied the vice chairs. It sometimes happens that when the rich and poor meet together, as they do on these occasions, there is a feeling of restraint on the part of the latter, and the talking goes on chiefly at the upper end of the table. That was not the case, however, on this occasion, for if we may judge from the laughing and noise, the lower ends had the best of the fun. Benefit members don't care for long speeches at these meetings, and we believe they are not much read in the newspapers, we will only add that after dinner there were a few short and sensible observations made, enough to satisfy all of the prosperity of the Society, and of their own branch in particular, and to pay honour to those to whom honour is due. If all did not speak, we know for a certainty that all cheered at times most lustily, particularly when the founder's health was drank.

Dinner being over, those who had a mind to stay in the room and have a friendly chat remained, while others moved off for a dance in Mr. William Sloper's barn, which, in consequence of the wet, was kindly lent for the occasion. However, just at this time, the clouds broke away, and the best weather judges pronounced for a fine evening; so as the barn could not conveniently accommodate all, another move was unanimously voted for the Vicar's meadow, which lies hard by the school room.

It is true the grass was wet, but what of that? it could soon be danced dry. The band struck up - away went the dancers right merrily - there was the "light and fantastic toe," and the hob nailed and iron shod heel, hand in hand, down the middle and up again, poussetting, and ever so many times round. If the light and fantastic did occasionally find the hob nailed toe not quite so ready at executing the more intricate movements of the dance, still, thanks to the all prevailing fashion with the gentle sex, there was an outward fence of goodly circumference which was able to withstand the accidental push or jostle without any serious inconvenience, and with lots of good humour and laughter on both sides. Never did we see on any such occasion dancing carried on with more spirit and enjoyment; and those who did not dance seemed to find an equal pleasure in looking on; but all things here have an end, and though the dancers might not be weary of dancing or the band of playing, still the shades of evening must needs close in upon every day, and so with Monday last - a day which will long be remembered at Bishop's Cannings, as one of happiness and enjoyment to all who, like ourselves, were fortunate enough to be present. May the like success attend their next and every future meeting.

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