

THE HISTORY

OF THE

Halifax Industrial Society,

LIMITED,

FOR FIFTY YEARS.



TO COMMEMORATE THE

CELEBRATION OF ITS JUBILEE

In January, 1901.



BY MONTAGUE BLATCHFORD.

P R E F A C E .

ALTHOUGH this little history has occupied four-fifths of my working hours since midsummer, and I have had the willing assistance of Mr. Edmund Wood, the president of the Society; Mr Handel Tetlaw, the secretary; and Messrs. James Parker, E. Gaukroger, Jas. Haigh, W. Thompson, and T. Illingworth, the other members of the history committee; of Messrs. John Shillito, Joseph Thorpe, John Shaw, and many other old officials, not forgetting the voluminous recollections of Mr. Leonard Storey; I am not entirely satisfied, even now, that justice has been done to the subject. For fifty years is a long time, and when I mention that the ninety-nine half-yearly balance sheets alone could hardly be squeezed into eight volumes, each the size of this, you will see at once what has been the main difficulty: that of deciding what could best be left out.

My entire ignorance of the history of the Society, and of almost all the men who have made that history, is not such a drawback as some might suppose, as it not only compelled me to learn the history for myself, but enabled me to do so without that bias or prejudice which a writer with a personal interest in the subject might have been tempted to display. Knowing nothing of the subject, I have had to rely upon the written records available, and have, for nearly six months, literally wallowed in minute books, ledgers, deeds, old letters, balance sheets, and newspaper reports, aided by the recollections of the old members who have been so willing to assist; and I have not admitted anything that, in my judgment, the written records of the Society fail to support.

My instructions were to present, as far as possible, a chatty history, in narrative form, and those instructions I have done my best to carry out. Being also limited as to space, I have endeavoured to give the essence of the history, rather than a complete and detailed record of mere facts, names, and figures, which

I fear would have made but dreary reading even to enthusiastic co-operators. Consequently there are no names mentioned that the facts did not call for, and, though there are very few figures, I believe none have been omitted that are necessary to a clear understanding of the great financial fluctuations the Society has experienced.

It would have been easily possible to fill the space with personal reminiscences of the hundreds of men who have played active parts, in official positions, for longer or shorter periods; but this is the history of the Society, rather than of its prominent members. And though there are probably scarcely more than a score of men who have cut their names deep on the Board Room table, in the past fifty years; a list of the presidents, secretaries, and directors for the greater part of that period, will be found at the end of the book, by those who take an interest in details.

I cannot conclude these personal remarks without thanking the jubilee committee for the compliment they paid me in placing this commission in the hands of such a wild, visionary, revolutionary person as I am—I hope erroneously—supposed to be. Had I written this book on my own responsibility, it might have contained some expressions of opinion that under the present circumstances are better omitted; for while the committee have given me almost complete freedom, I have felt that the members of the Society would hold them responsible for the views expressed, and have endeavoured to tell all the truth without offending even the prejudices of the comparatively few people who see offence where none is intended. And, though I am conscious the task might have been better done, I have at least tried to be honest and helpful; for if I must confess to having commenced the task with a feeling of indifference, I conclude it with one of sympathy and respect for the men who have, by patience and industry, achieved so much; and will, in the coming century, achieve so much more.

M. BLATCHFORD.

Halifax, November, 1900.



Halifax and its History.

CHAPTER I.

HALIFAX is not only one of the most thriving of the manufacturing towns of the West Riding, but also, from its situation, one of the healthiest and most picturesque in the Northern district. It is not a very ancient town, nor has it much to boast of in the way of striking historical associations; having grown slowly and quietly from a cluster of houses, round its old Parish Church—situated at the foot of what was, in the memory of men still living, a green and well-wooded hill—until it has spread, through the industry of its inhabitants, over the hills to the North, South, and West, in a network of very steep and rather narrow streets, punctuated with towers, steeples, and innumerable factory chimneys. The good old town, as its inhabitants, without any particular reason, persist in calling it, owes its picturesqueness to the hills it is built on, for it is an exceedingly hilly town, and indeed, some authorities contend that its very name denotes that it is the home of the “hilly folks,” in which they are no doubt as near the truth as the other authorities who maintain that this contention is sheer nonsense.

It could not be seriously said that Halifax, or indeed any manufacturing town, is, or could be pretty, though there are times—as on a sunny day, when the atmosphere has been washed by heavy rain, or on a clear dark night, when a thousand lamps are twinkling on the hillsides—when Halifax has a picturesque charm, compared with which, most of the manufacturing towns of Lancashire, and even Yorkshire, look dismal beyond description.

The Halifax of to-day is a vastly different place from the Halifax of a hundred years ago, for what was in those days its extreme Western edge, is now in the centre of the town. Even one generation has seen vast alterations in its architectural features, whole streets having been swept away, and their old, quaint but inconvenient buildings replaced by others more adapted for modern commercial pursuits; while the old, dark,

narrow streets have been considerably increased in width, though they might have been made still wider, with advantage. And though it is not all it might be, yet, in character, architecture, and convenience, Halifax will bear favourable comparison with any town of its class in the two counties; for its streets are fairly wide and moderately straight, its buildings, all of stone, are convenient and substantial, while some of them—as the new markets, and the new bank, in Commercial Street—are actually handsome.

And so what were the rural suburbs of the old town, are now the centre of the new one; while the old town, in the precincts of the Parish Church, has been gradually overtaken by shabbiness and decay. And thus, whatever Halifax may be on a closer acquaintance, to the stranger who approaches it by railway, through the old Halifax of bye-gone days, it presents a picture of gaunt forbidding ugliness, that is calculated to appal the boldest. On the one hand, the stranger sees an ugly jumble of grimy unhandsome dyeworks, coal yards, and wool warehouses, huddled along the banks of an unpleasant sewer-like “beck” or stream. On the other, the gaunt cinder strewn Beacon Hill rises, steep, featureless, and forbidding, with a few rows of dingy cottages and untidy hen-houses clinging to its bare sides and perched on its steep shoulders, looking down on the dun-coloured canal that creeps round the scarlet gasometers at its dirty foot; the drear despriting picture being surmounted by a writhing cloud of dark brown smoke, the principal contribution of commercial prosperity to the pictorial effect.

And though this is a truthful sketch, and cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called a prepossessing one, most visitors, when they improve their acquaintance with the town, admit that it betters their anticipations, and has, like the people who made it and live in it, many good qualities and picturesque characteristics, that do much to efface their first impressions. These visitors may sometimes complain that our Town Hall is over-decorated, and too carefully concealed from observation; that our one fine bridge has no water under it; may complain of the dense factory smoke that hovers over us, in spite of nuisance inspectors, and penal bye-laws that are somehow seldom invoked; may hint that we have a more than ample supply of publichouses, but no good hotels; may profess to be amused because we have built a magnificent municipal market for the sale of trivial articles; and may laughingly assert that we have an elaborate coat of arms, as to the origin or significance of which no two authorities were ever known to agree, but which almost everyone admits to be utterly unappropriate. Yet in spite of all these

critical remarks by jocular visitors, they are bound to admit, on a closer acquaintance, that Halifax is a good place to trade in, and not by any means a bad one to live in; and more than that it would be unreasonable to expect of anyone who does not view our town through the glamour of old association. And now for a brief and not too serious sketch of the Halifax of bye-gone times, which is respectfully offered to the readers as a semi-jocular presentiment of historical facts, which are, at best of doubtful authenticity.

Halifax has little in the way of historical associations, and is only known to the outside world by its old harsh and repulsive gibbet laws, and a ribald verse which couples it with Hull and the nether regions, as a place the sinner prays to be delivered from. As to its name there are many conjectures, none of which are satisfactory. Camden, the antiquary, who was in this neighbourhood in the sixteenth century, refers to Halifax as a very famous town, but neglects to mention what it was famous for, and admits that its name "is of no great antiquity." It appears to have been inhabited, in very early times, probably by ignorant savages who didn't know any better, for it is said that earth mounds and stone implements have been discovered on the moorlands of the neighbourhood; explorations of which have brought to light some burial urns containing burnt human remains, that may, or may not, be relics of a primitive cookery. The owners of these baked fragments are supposed to have been sun worshippers from the far east. It is also said that they had no temples, but worshipped the rising sun from the hill tops, though it is impossible to burk the fact that a locality where the sun is often invisible for weeks together, was peculiarly unsuitable for the exercise of those religious duties.

The Romans appear also to have passed through this locality, but only on their way to other places, not, it appears, being impressed with its desirability as a place of residence. Roman coins have been discovered in some parts of the Parish, and there are remains which indicate that the iron stone was worked and smelted by the Romans, no doubt on account of the plentiful supply of dwarf oaks on the hillsides, which made admirable fuel. It is also supposed that a Roman road, like the men who made it, passed through Halifax; but no vestiges of it are now discoverable. There is evidence however that the Anglo Saxons settled in the valley of the Calder, but allowances should be made for them, as they may have been compelled by circumstances to do so. And as the greater portion of the Parish was included, at that time, in the forest of Hardwick, where the

wolves and bears were said to have been fierce and plentiful, our Anglo Saxon ancestors must have had a rather anxious time of it. This may indeed have been the reason the Romans, in earlier days, only passed through Halifax without stopping; and why the Danish pirates only paid flying visits for the purpose of robbing the Saxons, and at once went away again. The common language of the people is evidence that in this neighbourhood they are mainly of Saxon descent, though Danish characteristics are common in the eastern part of the county.

The Norman invasion seems to have had little permanent effect on Halifax, though a large portion of the Parish is said to have been given to one of William's followers called Warren, while Elland and Southowram fell into the hands of another of the Norman freebooters, whose name was Lacy. It is also claimed that Christianity was imported into these parts at an early date, but could not have made a very deep impression on the Yorkshire character, and did not appeal so forcibly to the popular taste, as that bloody institution, the Gibbet, which had afforded them a fearful joy from time immemorial. By a law made, and possibly needed for this locality, the purloiners of property valued at thirteen pence, could be, and frequently were, decapitated, as a warning to other evil doers, and an exciting entertainment for the respectable people, whose misdeeds had perhaps escaped detection.

The people of Halifax do not appear to have done anything remarkable either in peace or war, though in the civil conflict that made Oliver Cromwell, the brewer of Huntingdon, into a famous general, and practically King of England, Halifax men took part, and on both sides; and unimportant battles were fought in the neighbourhood. Amongst the local heroes of this war, were Captain Sutcliffe, of Todmorden, who fell at Naseby; Captain Sunderland, whose father built that fine old mansion, High Sunderland, afterwards used as a farm by the Co-operative Society; and Captain Hodgson, of Coley Hall. The town was so unimportant that it is not even claimed that Cromwell found it worth his while to bombard it, or its Parish Church, from the Beacon Hill; or that, like the Romans, he ever passed through Halifax or even wanted to.

But if Cromwell was thus a stranger to Halifax, it is generally believed that Robin Hood was not, as he hunted a good deal in the vicinity, dwelt in caves that are still extant and must have been rather uncomfortable in bad weather, and actually died and was buried at Kirklees Abbey, as well as in several other places in different parts of the country. Whether Robin Hood came