

Fighting & Uproar on Feast Days 1852



To the Editor of the Salisbury and Winchester Journal

Sir,

As this is the usual time for the meeting of the clubs for the purpose of holding their annual feasts, I hope you will allow me a small space in your Journal to call the attention of managers and promoters of these useful societies to what appears a very serious evil. I allude to the practice of holding the feast at public houses which are usually - on those occasions in particular - the resort of all the bad characters of the neighbouring parishes, who, more or less, are brought into contact with the members of the club at a time of excitement and merriment, when they are least guarded in their conduct. The consequences of such occasional associations under these circumstances, cannot fail to produce very bad fruits.

The advantage of providing some more appropriate place than the village inn, has been thoroughly exemplified by the order and sobriety which have prevailed where these clubs have kept their feasts in private rooms, and the disorder which usually takes place where no such precaution is taken. The strongest exemplification of introducing to, and thereby familiarising young men with, the lowest grade of society - by taking them to the village inn for their club feast, has been shewn by the shocking and deplorable circumstances attending the death of a young man, a member of the club of Donhead St Andrew, near Shaftesbury, the particulars of which no doubt are already before the public in the evidence produced at the coroner's inquest.

The feast had been held the previous day at the inn, and, (as is usually the case when feasts are held), the wretched man returned the following evening (as many do perhaps for the rest of the week), during which he was induced to go outside with a woman - one of that degraded class which are always present on such occasions in such places; and in the darkness of the night, both tumbled into a cesspool. The woman was able to extricate herself, but left the wretched man immersed in filth, to perish, without offering assistance or making alarm, so that when he was discovered it was only to be dragged forth to die.

With such an awful instance of a fellow creature's untimely end, called to his account in such a state and under such circumstances, surely every one who is either interested in these societies, or has any control over their management will not fail to use every means to free them from the contagion and the vice which their members are subject to, when their rendezvous is made a focus by the abandoned and dissolute of the surrounding districts.

The good effects of providing private rooms are sufficiently evident by the decorum and sobriety which marks such arrangement.

Semley, the parish adjoining the one where the revolting catastrophe occurred, held their meeting on the 3rd inst., the day before the other parish, in their private room, and both during their attendance on Divine service and throughout the day the strictest harmony and order prevailed. And although it is impossible to prevent objectionable characters from being present where clubs meet, yet the contact and contagion is materially, if not altogether, avoided when their place of meeting is private, and not open, like a public house, to those moral pests who trade in and live by crime.

It is worthy of remark, that while everything was conducted with the most creditable order at the room of the Semley club, the village inn adjoining was resorted to by the vagabonding idlers of the neighbourhood, and became the scene of fighting and uproar, from which, as well as the debasing language which always accompanies pugilistic encounters under such circumstances, the members of the club were happily removed by the judicious arrangement of the managers.

Trusting you will find space for these few hasty remarks, and that they may attract the attention of those who have it in their power to apply a remedy. I beg to subscribe myself, Sir, Yours very faithfully, CAMBRAY

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An inquest was held on Saturday last, at Donhead St Andrew, before R M Wilson, Esq., coroner, on the body of a man named George Rawkins. It appeared that on the preceding evening the deceased was at the Arundel Arms Inn, Donhead, and having drunk pretty freely, he lost his equilibrium, and fell head-foremost into a drain connected with a cesspool adjoining the Inn. He was promptly rescued, but death ensued in about an hour and a half after the occurrence. The jury returned a verdict of Accidental Death.

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