

SELKIRK COLONIAL SOCIETY.

A great audience assembled at the gathering of the Selkirk Colonial Society held in the Picture House at 7 o'clock under the presidency of Mr John Jack, Edinburgh, holiday from India. At the close of introductory remarks a tribute was paid to the memory of the fallen by the audience standing for one minute in silence. The following was the programme:—Chorus "Hail, Smiling Morn"; song, "The Flower of the Forest" (modern), Mr A. Reekie; song, "Memories," Miss C. Brown; song, "Hail, Caledonia," Mr A. Johnstone; song, "The Border Maiden," Miss N. Johnston; song, "The Border Ballad," Mr Jam Kemp; song, "Home, Sweet Home," Miss Jean Thomson; "God save the King." The accompanist was Mr W. Lindsay. After the burning of the colours by Mrs Nichol, Australia, the flag was taken in charge by the Standard Bearer, Mr James Nichol.

The Rev. J. A. Somerville, West U. Church, was then called upon to deliver the address. He began by saying that to many it might seem presumptuous on his part that he should stand there that night. For sad to say, he was not a true Scotsman although he had for 18 years been more or less closely associated with the public life of the community. The angel, whose office it was to bring the little children to this weary world, must somehow have made a mistake in geography, and deposited him on the wrong side of Minchmuir, on the bank of the Tweed at Innerleithen instead of the Ettrick at Selkirk. (Laughter.) While proud of the place of his birth, he could not help regretting that fateful circumstance as long as he lived. (Renewed laughter.) However, the committee in charge of the proceedings that evening had kindly decided to overlook that disadvantage on his part, and although he was a mere "Incomer," they had entrusted him with the responsibility of delivering the oration by which the proceedings were supposed to be enlivened. (Laughter.) Perhaps they had been influenced by the consideration that he had spent nearly ten years of his life in the Colony of New Zealand. (Applause.) And so, in spite of his not being a Colonial Souter, he might on that account be allowed to voice the sentiments of the poor exiles whose great regret and disability was the fact that leagues of severing sea prevented them from being present at the celebrations of that evening and the joyful morrow. Their feelings had been perpetuated by Robert Louis Stevenson in his imperishable lines:—

"Blows the wind to-day, and the sun and the rain are flying,
Blows the wind on the moors to-day and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are flying,
My heart remembers how
Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,
Standing-stones on the vacant wine-re moor,
Hills of sheep, and the homes of the silent vanished races,
And winds, austere and pure.
Be it granted me to behold you again dying.
Hills of home! and to hear again the call;
Hear about the graves of the martyrs the peewees' crying.
And hear no more at all."

A ministerial friend of his had once taken a walk on Blackford Hill, near Edinburgh, on a Saturday afternoon in spring when the boys were flying their kites. He noticed that one poor lad was blind, and said to him: "What enjoyment can you have when you can't see your kite?" "Ah," was the smiling reply, "but I can still feel its tug." So that night, there was a tugging at the heart-strings in many far-off lands, as the absent friends, who would gladly have been with them, pictured to themselves the Common-Riding proceedings. In his congregation in New Zealand there was a dear old lady who had started life in the Galloway, near Helensburgh. When she arrived at the wooded bay where now is built the fine town of Port Chalmers she had looked out of her cabin window and thought for a moment she was back in dear old Scotland. Then the sad reality had overwhelmed her and she burst into a storm of tears. Ever morning to the end of her life, these tears returned. That was the feeling in the hearts of many Colonials as each Common-Riding came round. (Applause.) The sons and daughters of Selkirk had talked with them the soul of the Borderland, he believed that the people of a country, well as individuals, built up a soul. At the Border soul was compact of old traditions of manliness and self-sacrifice secreted to none upon earth. They had seen something of the Border soul manifesting itself in the glorious behaviour of their young lads during those memorable days that succeeded August, 1914. And it had been weaving like leaven in the distant Colonies which Selkirk's sons and daughters had gone. (Applause.) The Kaiser made one of the greatest mistakes of his life when

despised French's "Contemptible little Army." He made a greater when he assumed that the Colonies would not rally to the support of the Motherland. For from all parts of the world the noblest blood of these distant lands had hastened to assert their manhood by withstanding the great enemy of freedom. (Applause.) The poet Masfield had a story in one of his books which illustrated the Colonial character. In Gallipoli, the day after the landing of April 26, 1915, an Australian captain was with his platoon of men in a trench up the hill. Suddenly there appeared an officer dressed in the uniform of an Australian major, who said: "Don't let your men fire to the front during the next half-hour. An Indian working party has just gone up." The captain noticed that the major's shoulder-strap bore a higher number, namely, 31, than that possessed by any battalion which had landed. This puzzled him; so he looked hard at the other and said: "Say, are you Fair Dinkum?"—an Australian slang phrase meaning "the genuine article." "Yes," was the astonishing answer, "I'm Major Fair Dinkum." Needless to say there was a court-martial and the prisoner died from an overdose of lead in the brain. He had taken the uniform from a dead major, and to avoid challenge, had reversed the number 13, making it 31, and at the same time giving the show away to an alert, practical observer. Young Colonials of that shrewd type, some of them with Selkirk blood in their veins, had come not only from New Zealand and Australia, but from all their Colonies in the spirit of self-sacrifice. (Applause.) It was the call of the old Border blood. (Applause.) Such, and such alone, was the spirit that had in it the hope of the redemption of the world. Their present freedom had been blood-bought at great and terrible price; and sometimes he wondered what their glorious dead, of whom Rupert Brooke had sung so nobly, were thinking of the present outburst of self-seeking and pleasure and impatience in much of their modern life. The spirit that lay behind the Common-Riding was the spirit of sacrifice and unity and world-brotherhood; and it was in that spirit they stretched forth that night to all their distant Colonial friends and well-wishers: "Hands across the sea." (Great applause.)

Mr Geo. Hills, J.P., senior magistrate of Footscray City, Victoria, Australia, and twice mayor of the municipality (1900-1 and 1910-11), moved a vote of thanks to Mr Somerville for his address and to the vocalists for their contributions to the programme.

A native of Bowden, Mr Hills, in the course of his remarks, referred to the interesting associations of the place and suggested to the compilers of guide books and the managers of hydropathics would render useful service by bringing to the notice of visitors its manifold attractions.

The vote of thanks was cordially adopted and the proceedings ended.

An interesting incident in the gathering was the presentation of the medallion to the Edinburgh Standard-Bearer by the Edinburgh and Midlothian Souters. This pleasant duty was performed by the Standard-Bearer's brother (Mr R. R. Stewart, Edinburgh), the medallion being pinned on by Miss Stewart of Edinburgh.