

Leeds Times - Saturday 29 May 1869

PRESENTATION OF THE WOMEN'S MIALL TESTIMONIALS.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable meetings ever held in the kingdom, and perfectly unique in its kind in every respect, was held in St. George's Hall on Monday evening, in order to present to Mr., Mrs., and Miss Miall, testimonials of admiration and respect from the women of Bradford. This, it may be remembered, was originated shortly after Mr. Miall's defeat. A few ladies formed themselves into a committee, and soon the services of sixty were offered to carry out a canvas in order to raise funds to present Mr. Miall with a fitting testimonial, and show that Mr. Ripley was not a general ladies' favourite, as had been asserted. Ultimately £600 was raised, including the pence and sixpences of the poor, as well as the gold, even up to £10, of the rich.

Mr. Miall's ultimate return did not in any degree check the ardour of the canvassers, as their object, though in some degree connected with politics, was not one to be lightly set aside; and they determined that what was commenced in gloom and adversity should be accomplished amidst sunshine and success. When Mr. Miall heard that a testimonial was in preparation, he declined to accept any sum of money, but suggested, if they felt determined to carry it out, that it should take the shape of a small library of books of reference, &c, a present which would be more congenial to his feelings. The two cases of books contained 375 volumes of the best standard works of our age in history, philosophy, poetry, theology, books of reference, etc., all well and beautifully bound, and enclosed in two walnut wood cases, richly got up, and on each case a silver plate was inlaid bearing the inscription, 'Presented by the women of Bradford, to Edward Miall, Esq., M.P., 24th May, 1869.' The present to Mrs. Miall comprised a beautiful gilt and ormolu clock, bearing a group representing the awaking of Cupid, and two equally beautiful candelabras in glass shades, and valued at fifty guineas, all provided by Mr. Davis, of Kirkgate, jeweller; whilst to Miss Miall the present was a beautiful piano in walnut case, made by Collard and Collard, and valued at 115 guineas.

Upwards of 4,000 tickets had been issued, wholly to females, as it was decided that none of the hirsute sex should be present, except those who took part in the proceedings, and those universally indispensable gentlemen the reporters. It was announced that the doors should be opened at seven o'clock; but by half past six o'clock crowds of females, gaily dressed, began to assemble, and in a short time, so great had the feminine crush become, that, to save chignons, and even many crinolines, from grief, the doors were thrown open a quarter of an hour before the time, and almost immediately both area and galleries were filled. The scene was literally imposing and magnificent, and as we have said, unique. Upwards of 4,500 well-dressed females, young and old, their faces mantled into smiles and redolent of good feeling, was, in itself, a highly sensational scene, such as was never perhaps seen before in connection with life's strange exciting drama. Reporters were pushed from their place in front of the orchestra into the area below, with seats fronting the speaker, which it was expected they would occupy; but even most of those seats were ruthlessly seized upon by strong-minded females, so that

the gentlemen of the press figured in no enviable position, some of them having to be accommodated with the legs of stools stretched horizontally across the floor, which felt as awkward as if they had been placed on the edges of blunt razors ; and yet that did not draw forth the sympathy of the 'ladies' who had usurped their seats. The address to Mr. Miall was beautifully illuminated by Mr. Ernest Renck, of this town, and the colouring and design were rich and chaste; and the gilt frame, in which it is enclosed, was in keeping with the address itself. When the chairman of the evening, Mr. Titus Salt, sen., and the speakers appeared, with the members of the ladies' committee, they were received with demonstrations of applause, not the lusty cheers, perhaps, which would have tested the lungs of the men, but still with some feeble cheering, and a waving of white handkerchiefs over the whole house, which resembled the whirling about of vast flakes of snow. The Chairman, on rising, said he did not feel himself competent to make any address, but he could assure the company that he felt highly honoured by being placed in the position he occupied ; and that he felt the object of that demonstration to be worthy of all the efforts the ladies had made. It was a great honour to Bradford, and the event would long be remembered in its history. (Cheers.)— Mr. Robert Kell, who rose to move the resolution below, said he had never the pleasure before of standing face to face with 4,000 ladies at once, and he had never previously been asked to speak in the name of such a large number as he was asked to speak then. So great a gathering of women had not taken place for small, mean, paltry objects. Men did not get the sympathies of large bodies of females unless there was something grand and good in the work which they performed. The resolution he had to propose was as follows:

'That this meeting of women gives its heartfelt thanks to the 9,243 electors who achieved at the last contest so great a victory for true Liberal principles, and warmly congratulates the inhabitants of Bradford on the return of Mr. Edward Miall as the colleague of our long-trying friend, the Right Hon. W. E. Forster.'

The ladies might well thank the 9,243 electors who did the work, for it was the work of the mass, and not of the leaders. The leaders did not initiate the second election of Mr. Miall, but they followed in the wake of the working men, who took the matter into their own hands, and the final triumph justified every preliminary step which had been taken to achieve that result. (Hear, hear.)— Councillor Turner seconded the resolution. The electors who had returned Mr. Miall had gained, a great victory over the forces which had always been opposed to the rights of the working man; and had gained a stand-point which entitled them to the admiration of all Liberals throughout the kingdom. (Cheers.) —Mr. A. Illingworth, M.P., supported the resolution in a brief but energetic speech, in concluding which he said that it was urged during the early part of the campaign that the ladies were not on their side, but on the side of their opponents. If that had ever been true, a change must have come over them now; but he would not libel the fair sex in Bradford by supposing for a moment that they were inconstant. In their modesty they kept in the background until they found Mr. Miall's friends thwarted and defeated, and then they came forward, with their encouraging looks and sympathy, and nobly sustained them, and carried them on to victory. (Cheers.)— The resolution was then carried with applause. Alderman Brown who was greeted with cheers, then said that the committee of ladies had done him the honour of asking him to read for them the address to Mr. Miall, which

had been prepared for that occasion. The speaker then entered into the history of the testimonial, which we have already given, and said that there was also a book in which all the names of the subscribers to the testimonial had been entered, with the statement of the sum each had contributed, and that book with the address and the library which they saw, would be presented to Mr. Miall; the time-piece and candelabra to Mrs. Miall; and the pianoforte to Miss Miall. After announcing himself in favour of the franchise being extended to unmarried women, the married possessing it already through their husbands, he read the address, which was as follows:

To Edward Miall, Esq., M.P. for Bradford.

Dear Sir,—Unusual as it may be for women to obtrude themselves in matters of public moment, we venture to hope that the peculiar circumstances of the occasion will amply justify our present course. It has been alleged during the recent political struggle that the sympathies of our sex were not with you Never was charge more unfounded; not only as aiding our husbands, brothers and sons but from our individual love of what is noble true, and powerful, we have ardently espoused your cause As women we have been intensely moved by the nature of the opposition you have encountered, though well aware that it could not permanently injure a reputation so firmly established as your own. Permit us now to express our unbounded admiration of your past course of life, and long devotion, amidst many sacrifices, to the advancement of civil liberty and religious equality, and of all which can dignify and bless humanity. Receive, dear sir, our heartfelt congratulations on the triumphant issue of our late protracted struggle. As a memorial of those sentiments, we beg to present to you, Mrs Miall, and Miss Miall, some tokens of our affectionate remembrance. 'We accompany them by the prayer that God may bless you with long life and extended usefulness, and may permit you to realise, to its largest extent, the accomplishment of the noble objects for which you have so earnestly laboured. We are, dear sir, on behalf of the subscribers, yours very truly,—Julia Myers, president; Annie Whitehead, secretary; Eliza Whitaker, treasurer; Ann Wyrill: Susannah Jackson; Annie Dowson; Mary Ada Clark; Beulah Keziah Hanson. Mr. Miall received the address amidst loud applause, after which he was presented with the book containing the names, by Mrs. Myers, the president of the ladies' committee, in a few appropriate remarks

Mr. Miall. M.P., who was received with prolonged cheering, said:

Women of Bradford, I have stood before as large an assembly as this when opposition has been raised against the sentiments I have wished to express; and I have stood fearless and unmoved. But this kindness of yours—this gentle welcome that you have given to me and mine, this expression of your confidence and affection, almost unmans me, and unfits me to discharge the responsible duty which devolves on me of thanking you in my own name, and in those of my wife and daughter, for that expression of your regard which you have given us this evening. I look upon these beautiful gifts of yours, in the first place, as the utterance of indignant womanhood in Bradford. Someone had taken liberty with your name, and woe be to the man who disposes of the will of a woman without having first asked her consent! They claimed you entirely to themselves, but they claimed you without having first put the question (laughter)

and in all matters of that kind, and in all matters where the will and pleasure, and may I say, the political or moral reputation of woman is concerned—in all such matters she naturally stands upon the dignity of her sex and will not allow herself to be disposed of as a slave. (Cheers)

You have been pleased to vindicate your own character, and your vindication appears in this assembly tonight so complete, so overwhelming, so crushing, that I pity those who assumed you had given ourselves to them. It is not as a member you are dealing with me. I have come here to receive that tribute of sympathy originating in your bosoms when I was your defeated candidate; and it was just at the moment when I was stricken down with unfair weapons and sent abroad to the world with as much ignominy and disgrace as could be thrown upon a defeated candidate as such — it was then that your sympathy rose up spontaneously in your hearts and whatever you may have felt for me before, however you may have approved of those political principles that I had advocated, the mere fact that I had been treated unfairly was sufficient to win your support. It was worthwhile going through that defeat to arrive at this victory. The gateway was dark, gloom and sadness pervaded the passage through which I had to walk; but when I emerge into sunshine, as I have done this night, and have seen such enthusiasm and affectionate attachment to me as the representative of certain principles, I may say that I bless God equally for what I have suffered as to what I now enjoy. (Cheers.)

I believe that you intended this meeting likewise to be the expression of your will to be associated with your husbands, and your sons and your brothers in any good work which they undertake. It is not for men who do not care for our principles to draw distinctions between you and them in the homes in which you dwell. They are much mistaken if they suppose that 9,243 men could bind themselves together on behalf of the principles which they love and which they wished to advance to triumph, if they had not peace, sympathy, and concurrence in their homes., I could not have done the work which I have done these seven or eight and twenty years past if I had been deprived of sympathy—that sympathy which dwells within the domestic circle. (Hear. hear.)

Depend upon it, whatever may be the ultimate sphere in which women will move in relation to political affairs, it is of the utmost importance that woman's mind and heart should be well acquainted with the great principles which lie in the basis of all political truth. Justice between man and man, equality as between all religions, faith sustaining itself by its own vitality, and love showing its power by its works of benevolence —these are the principles that are at issue in our day, and these are the principles that woman can thoroughly understand and embrace. Your homes will be more fully dignified when these principles pervade till politics and all the laws of the realm than ever they have been before. It has been the fashion of man to degrade woman by lording over her, and of course he, to justify himself in doing this, has assumed that the political sphere is a sphere altogether apart from that in which a woman ought to move. But we have our first lessons in morality from the lips of our mothers, and our chief support in adversity on the arms and bosoms of our wives, and he is the man who can accomplish little in this world, however he may set his heart upon the triumph of the right, who does not link with him the fond, pure, and affectionate counsels of woman.

Happy will be the day in England – happy will be the day throughout the whole world, when woman takes up her real and proper position. We shall have gentler politics when the gentler sex take to politic as they should. Women of Bradford, take your part, let your benign and genial influence smile away, as far as it can the asperities of party feeling; be present as it were, in the spirit at least, in all electoral contests, and diffuse your own sweet humour, as the humour which shall guide, and, as it were sway the hearts of those over whom you have control. I hope the time is coming when politics will tell more distinctly on our working-class homes than has been the case hitherto. The time will come, I trust, when neither in factories nor in other great shops of industry will woman's work be needed; when the husbands will be sufficiently rewarded for their toil-(cheers)-and when capital and labour will have become so far reconciled, the one with the other, so that men may do the work of men and women may be spared from that work, in order that they may more fully preside over the work of the household. (Cheers.) It will be a blessed day for you, and for all women in the land, when such is the case. We were condemned to work; you have been appointed rather to help us, who work, by your sympathy, your confidence, your care, and your love. And I believe that we are not so far distant from the realisation of this order appointed by Providence as the present aspect of society would lead us to suspect. At any rate, let us all work heartily towards that great and beneficent end.

And now, permit me to close these observations by addressing a few words of thanks, deep and heartfelt, to those who have been instrumental in bringing together this assembly, and in producing the occasion which has brought them together. I thank most heartily the ladies of the committee who have unitedly and enthusiastically laboured in my behalf—I thank all those who have been engaged in collecting the pence of the poor as well as the contributions of the rich towards this result. Women of Bradford, be pleased to accept my thanks. May your sympathy ever attend the work in which I am engaged; may my work ever be worthy of your sympathy. In the hour of defeat you came forward to sustain me; in the hour of triumph you have come forward to congratulate me. Never has public man been so honoured in this country as I have been honoured in Bradford, and when I die, like Queen Mary, who said that the name of Calais would be written on her heart— so great was her grief at the loss which this kingdom sustained when it was rent from it—so upon my heart will be round, not m characters of grief, but in characters of love and affectionate confidence and trust, engraven at the last – ‘Bradford women’.

The honourable gentleman resumed his seat amidst loud cheers.

After a little music, addresses were delivered by Mr. Angus Holden, who moved a vote of thanks to the Ladies Committee, and Mr. J. Pollard, who seconded it, and it was carried without a dissentient.

At this stage, after repeated calls for Mrs. Miall, that lady, leaning on the arm of her husband, came forward, and was received with loud cheers.—A vote of thanks to the chairman for presiding was then moved by Mr. W. WHITEHEAD, seconded by Mr. James Wallwork, and carried.

Mr Salt, after briefly responding, called for the National Anthem. The whole assembly then rose, and a portion of the anthem was sung in the most earnest manner, Mr. Hirst accompanying on the organ. The ladies afterwards struck up: '*When shall we all meet again,*' which was given with no slight energy, after which the vast assembly separated about a quarter after ten o'clock.