



LONDON'S HERITAGE IN THE CITY GUILDS.

REVISED FEBRUARY 1898.

ONE of the greatest obstacles to Social Reform in London is the crushing burden of the rates. Many a good work is stopped because there are no funds. Yet a property worth at least £20,000,000, clearly belonging to the people of London, is now secretly administered by the 1,500 members of the self-appointed "courts of assistants" of the seventy-four "livery companies," the ancient trade guilds of the City of London. The total income of these Companies (besides their valuable halls, plate, etc.) is at least

£800,000 A YEAR,

derived mainly from land and house property in London and elsewhere. They are, indeed, among the very largest of London's ground landlords. About a third of this income is devoted to special charitable trusts; some good—such as schools, almshouses, pensions to the aged, etc.—but needing democratic control; and some bad, such as pauper doles, City lectureships, etc. The balance of the Companies' income, probably producing £600,000 a year, is their corporate property, and is regarded by the members as being at their own disposal. Accordingly, whilst generously contributing about two-thirds of it to various public purposes (schools, technical education, charities, etc.), they divide the rest practically among themselves, about £175,000 a year being devoted to "management and maintenance," some of it paid to the 1,500 members of the respective "courts of assistants" in fees for their attendance, a large sum consumed in banquets, and about £60,000 in salaries of officers, etc.

Here is how some of the largest and worthiest of these Companies admitted to a Royal Commission in 1879 that they spent their money. Since then some Companies, such as the Clothworkers, have done much to reform themselves. Others, however, remain (so far as can be ascertained) as bad as ever.

Corporate Income.	Name of Company.	Court and other Fees to themselves.	Entertainments and Wine.	Salaries.	Management and Maintenance.
£		£	£	£	£
47,341	Mercers	8,766	4,909	5,643	7,729
37,736	Grocers	762	6,014	3,672	2,298
50,141	Drapers	4,984	6,112	4,149	16,576
16,395	Leathersellers	2,200	2,666	1,070	9,100
10,243	Saddlers	3,140	1,755	773	1,365

TABLE SHOWING THE CORPORATE AND TRUST INCOME OF THE
LONDON LIVERY COMPANIES, 1879-80.

TWELVE GREAT COMPANIES.

Company.	Corporate Income.	Trust Income.	Total Income.	Number of Liverymen.	Number of Court.
	£	£	£		
Mercers	47,341	35,417	82,758	157	30
Grocers	37,736	500	38,236	214	35
Drapers	50,141	28,513	78,654	302	29
Fishmongers	46,913	3,800	50,713	432	34
Goldsmiths	43,505	10,792	54,297	170	25
Skinners	18,977	9,950	28,927	190	30
Merchant Taylors	31,243	12,068	43,311	195	35
Haberdashers	9,032	20,000	29,032	460	38
Salters	18,892	2,148	21,040	173	27
Ironmongers	9,625	12,822	22,447	52	55
Vintners	9,365	1,522	10,887	220	18
Clothworkers	40,458	10,000	50,458	150	44
	363,228	147,532	510,760	2,715	400

THE TWELVE LARGEST OF THE MINOR COMPANIES.

Company.	Corporate Income.	Trust Income.	Total Income.	Number of Liverymen.	Number of Court.
	£	£	£		
Leathersellers	16,395	2,333	18,728	139	28
Brewers	3,157	15,482	18,640	75	30
Carpenters	10,378	940	11,318	134	?
Saddlers	10,243	1,000	11,243	92	24
Armorsers	8,026	60	8,086	66	21
Cordwainers	6,154	1,600	7,754	96	20
Coopers	2,420	4,700	7,120	170	20
Dyers	6,000	1,000	7,000	83	?
Cutlers	5,337	50	5,387	88	23
Stationers	3,170	1,576	4,746	312	?
Girdlers	2,932	1,374	4,306	91	24
Apothecaries	3,398	500	3,898	150	24
	77,610	30,615	108,225	1,496	300
Fifty smaller Com- panies, about	40,000	10,000	50,000	3,500	800
Total in 1879-80	480,838	188,147	668,985	7,700	1,500
Annual Value of Halls, Plate, etc.	100,000	—	100,000	—	—
Probable Increase in Income in 20 years... ..	100,000	40,000	140,000	—	—
Probable Total, 1899	680,838	228,147	908,985	7,700	1,500

Summarized from Royal Commission Report, C—4073, Vol. iv. (last lines added).

These Companies formerly discharged various public functions connected with their respective trades, and were once, doubtless, of great public utility. Every trading citizen, rich or poor, man or woman, could become a member, and was sometimes obliged to do so. The Companies are bound to teach the trade to all who come to learn, and to

PROVIDE FOR THE POOR,

infirm, and decayed out of the lands which they were by charter permitted to acquire.

It need hardly be said that the Companies themselves recognize no such obligations. The Goldsmiths' Company still exercises a vexatious and unnecessary "hall-marking" of gold and silver; the Fishmongers' Company still inspects and condemns stinking fish; the Apothecaries' Company maintains botanic gardens and grants inferior medical degrees; the Gunmakers' Company tests and stamps gun-barrels; and the Stationers' Company sells almanacks and maintains (most inefficiently) a register of published books. But these, with some feeble efforts of the Plumbers, Turners, Coachmakers, and a few other Companies, practically cover the surviving public services rendered in return for the magnificent public property administered by the Companies.

The necessity for reform has long been manifest. In 1884 a Royal Commission presented an exhaustive report, signed by such moderate reformers as the Earl of Derby, the Duke of Bedford, Viscount Sherbrooke, Lord Coleridge, and Alderman Sir Sydney Waterlow, in which they recommended the

IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION OF THE STATE

"for the purpose of (1) preventing the alienation of the property of the Companies of London; (2) securing the permanent application of a considerable portion of the corporate income thence arising to useful purposes; (3) declaring new trusts in cases in which a better application of the trust income of the Companies has become desirable." They also recommended that the Companies should be compelled to publish accounts; that their constitution should be reorganized; and that admission to the livery should cease to confer the Parliamentary franchise (C—4073, 1884).

But as the Companies now fulfil practically no useful functions, and can no longer be made open to all London citizens, there is no reason why they should still be permitted to deal with London's inheritance. Their functions, rights, property and duties ought to be transferred to the County Council or to some other public authority representative of the people of London. The first step is to pass through Parliament a bill to safeguard this public property from secret alienation, conferring upon the London County Council power to prepare a scheme for the management and distribution of the magnificent heritage of the people of London.

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