

Death and Funeral of Mr. Alfred Clare.



This year of dire mortality in the ranks of Bedford's prominent sons claims yet another of the worthiest townsmen, and this time one whom His Honour Judge Wheeler lately described as one of Bedford's most distinguished citizens. We received the melancholy news on Friday that Mr. Alfred Clare had died about eleven o'clock that morning at a nursing home in London, and the news was received with the deepest regret by his many friends in the town. For some time his health had not been robust. He underwent a serious operation in June, 1911, but this did not effect a cure, and for a long time it had been known to his family that his days were numbered, although his appearance and marvellous courage belied the fact to many. Mr. Clare had just moved from his country home at Lidlington, near Ampthill, to a house nearer London, when it was found necessary for him

to go to a nursing home, as was thought, for some slight attention. The end came very suddenly. The complaint from which he had been suffering was found to have increased its hold upon him, and nothing could be done to arrest its course. The family were summoned, and on Friday, All Saints' Day, all was over. Mr. Clare passed away most beautifully and peacefully.

The late Mr. Alfred Clare came of a family which stood in high regard among former generations of Bedford. He was born at Bedford, September 17 1851, and was the younger son of the late John Clare (who died when the sons were very young) and of Emma, his wife, who married as her second husband the late Mr. J. C. Conquest. He was educated at the Bedford Modern School in the sixties, Mr. Finlinson being Head Master. Mr. Clare concluded his school days by gaining a valuable leaving exhibition, and he was articled in 1868 to his step-father and future partner, Mr. John Carrington Conquest, who was then in practice as a solicitor in Duke-street. He was admitted a solicitor in 1873, and for a time acted as qualified managing clerk, ultimately entering into partnership. Thus was constituted the well-known firm of Conquest and Clare, and for forty-one years Mr. Clare was associated, in these three capacities, with Mr. Conquest in the legal profession, the long connexion being terminated by Mr. Conquest's death in August, 1909.

From his earliest years in practice Mr. Clare made his mark by his able advocacy in the Petty Sessional and County Courts of this and neighbouring counties, besides earning confidence in family practice. According to our recollection the practice in the local courts in the eighties chiefly fell to Mr. Clare and Mr. W. G. Carter Mitchell, and their numerous encounters were of a friendly description, though none the less keen for all that. Mr. Clare was both a shrewd and honourable practitioner,

and an eloquent and successful pleader. When he fought he fought to win, and no doubt there were occasions when the litigants who came off second best did not altogether relish it, but the whirligig of time often brings about pleasant changes, and Mr. Clare not seldom became the friend and champion of those against whom his forensic skill had been directed. Like the rest of his profession, he did not win all his cases, but he had a very fair share of success, and he was entrusted with some responsible business, some of it by ecclesiastical authorities who had a very great respect for his ability, notwithstanding that he was a Nonconformist. Needless to say, Mr. Clare was very loyal to his clients and the soul of honour. No one who did not know him intimately could estimate the zeal with which he threw himself into the responsibilities entrusted to him, and how much he gave of himself for those whose personal interests or property were in his hands. He also had a very high regard for the honour and etiquette of his profession, and nothing gave him a more lively indignation than practices which he regarded as dubious.

His professional skill, coupled as it was with sound sense and unimpeachable integrity, met with recognition. On the death of Mr. James Pearse in 1892, Mr. Clare was appointed Registrar of the Bedford County Court, an appointment which carries with it the Registrarship in Bankruptcy, and wider jurisdiction as District Registrar of the High Court of Justice. The office of High Bailiff was added to the Registrarship on the death of Mr. Spicer.

As Registrar Mr. Clare had a keen sense of his duty to the trading community. In the examinations of debtors he occasionally intervened with some pertinent questions which were helpful in elucidating the nature of transactions. Questions of account and many other important matters were referred to his arbitration by the Judge, and the care and acumen which he gave to the investigation of these disputes certainly commanded respect, and we have never heard that his judicial findings were questioned. He could be caustic in his animadversions upon shady transactions, but his censure was not without a note of restraint, and he was careful not "to speak without his book." At the same time no one could have been more kindly and sympathetic

towards error and misfortune, and often has he commiserated with the debtors who have been before him. He did much to uphold the dignity of the Courts, and the Judge attached great weight to his advice and to his knowledge of rules of procedure. Mr. Clare had the warmest admiration for the late Judge Bagshawe, and, when His Honour died, felt his loss as that of a personal friend. His relations with Judge Shortt and with the present Judge were not less happy. The speeches made at the bar in December last, when Mr. Clare retired, bore testimony to the respect in which he was held by the profession.

Mr. Clare held the clerkship of the Bedford Burial Board for upwards of 21 years, and we should say that the successful and profitable administration of the Cemetery owes a great deal to his sagacious advice. For six years Mr. Clare was an Alderman of the Borough, and was also for a period a Governor of the Harper Trust. He was also a life-trustee of the Barton Charity at Turvey, and Hon. Secretary since the death of Mr. Conquest.

Except through his professional connexion with the Liberal cause, when his late partner acted as district agent, and afterwards as chief agent in that interest, Mr. Clare was not at any time active in politics, although he had views of his own. He was never a partisan, but rather judged of public questions upon their merits according to his own high ideals, and he had a high regard for the efficiency and purity of local public life.

In private life Mr. Clare was a good friend to many, and those who knew him most intimately held him in the highest esteem and affection. There are matters concerning which Mr. Clare very strongly disliked anything in the nature of publicity, but it is impossible to write of him without referring to his interest in religious matters. For him and in him faith and character were inseparable. To the day of his death he owed allegiance to the Wesleyan-Methodism of his early youth, serving the cause in earlier life as Superintendent of the St. Paul's Wesleyan Sunday School, and in countless ways throughout his life. He had a considerable share in the building of the present Sunday School premises in Harpur-street. For one year Mr. Clare filled the office of President of the Bedford Free Church Council. He was also for a period President of the Sunday School Union in succession to Sir Frederick Howard.

On Mr. Clare's removal with his family in 1903, from his residence on The Embankment to the delightful house on the hill-side at Lidlington, he much endeared himself to the inhabitants of the place, unobtrusively doing good in things temporal and spiritual, being "always the same" to everyone. His addresses to a men's meeting held weekly on winter evenings for several years will long be remembered. Mr. Clare belonged to that high type of Nonconformity which allows to others the liberty it claims for itself, and recognises and rejoices in all manifestations of goodness and of truth.

Further, Mr. Clare was imbued with the highest spirit of citizenship and the best traditions of the town in which he had lived his active life. These sentiments found expression in the interesting speech, which he made when he was Chairman of the Old Modernians' dinner in 1899. He cherished the memories of his youth and schooldays; he lived to see the town make wonderful developments; and he desired to see that progress maintained on lines of wisdom and prescience. We believe his interest in municipal affairs was first publicly manifested in the question of finance reform, and led to his being elected an Alderman of the Borough. He carried with him into the Council Chamber all his keenness and ability, and he gave very close attention to municipal business. His powerful criticisms did a great deal of good and wholesome work. When the Corporation parted with Mr. Clare, the town lost the services of an administrator of good judgment and perfect integrity.

Soon after the death of Mr. Conquest, Mr. Binns became a member of the firm under the new style of Conquest, Clare and Binns, but a few months later Mr. Clare retired from the practice. Towards the close of last year he resigned the registrarship of the Bedford County Court, and was succeeded by Mr. Binns, who had for some time been acting as his Deputy. Mr. Clare had resided in the house at the corner of The Embankment and Bushmead Avenue, until he went to live at Lidlington. Quite lately Mr. and Mrs. Clare and their family went to live in London, and had been in residence at 9, Queen's Avenue, Muswell Hill, N., for only about a fortnight before the end.

There could not have been a better summary

of Mr. Clare's life than that which occurs in home words of his own: He would live wisely and well, he said, so that when the last call came he might be ready and glad to respond. And so it was.

In 1882 Mr. Clare married Miss Mary Catherine Hensman, who had previous associations with the locality, her mother having been daughter of the late James Sarjeant, of Hatch, Northill.

Besides his widow, Mr. Clare leaves surviving him his four children, Frank Conquest Clare, B.A., Alfred Douglas Clare, Phyllis Mary Clare, and Dorothy Clare; his only brother, Mr. Thomas J. Clare, B.A. (Lond.), of Tunbridge Wells, and his half-sister, Mrs. R. M. Pascoe. The loss two years ago of his sister, Miss Clare, was a great blow to him.

THE FUNERAL.

The funeral of Mr. Alfred Clare took place on Tuesday, the first part of the service being at the deceased's house at Muswell Hill. The Rev. F. W. Beaumont, the Superintendent Minister of the Muswell Hill (Wesleyan) Circuit, and the Rev. W. Charter Piggott, officiated, the lesson being read at Mr. Clare's express desire by his elder son. There were present, besides members of the deceased's and his wife's families and the domestic servants, Mr. Edmund Walker, Mr. P. N. Binns and Nurse Rhoades. There were few flowers, but the coffin was covered by the deceased's aldermanic and legal robes. The coffin was of unpolished oak and bore the inscription:

ALFRED CLARE.
Fell asleep
All Saints' Day, 1912,
Aged 61.
R.I.P.

The interment was in the consecrated portion of the Highgate (Old) Cemetery. Mr. Cecil Higgins and Mr. A. Talbot were seen at the graveside.

Mrs. Clare and her family have been overwhelmed with letters of appreciation and sympathy for which they are extremely grateful.

