

NOTE.

In the stamp upon the fragment of brick, there is a distinct, and, apparently, an intentional, separation between the left hand and middle strokes of the final n. This has led Professor Hübner of Berlin, Mr. Walter de Gray Birch, of the British Museum, and our friend and Secretary, Mr. W. H. D. Longstaffe, to come, independently of each other, to the conclusion that the lettering may indicate n corv, and not n con. The first n has a horizontal line above it, and all seem agreed that that letter of the inscription, without doubt, signifies "Numerus."

ON TWO SALT SPOONS FORMERLY BELONGING TO THE
"BEEF-STEAK SOCIETY."

READ 28TH FEBRUARY, 1883, BY T. W. U. ROBINSON, F.S.A.

HAVING lately become the possessor of two silver salt spoons, which belonged to the "Beef-steak Society," the distinguished members of which disliked to hear it called a club, I thought a few remarks respecting the same would be interesting to the members of this Society.

It must be regarded as a matter of historical interest, as it now numbers with the past, that, among the numerous clubs, social and otherwise, which, from time to time, have characterized "London life," none has been more renowned than the London Beef-steak Society.

The foundation of the Club, or rather Society, in 1735, was effected in this way:—When John Rich occupied a conspicuous position at Covent Garden Theatre, he was accustomed to arrange the "business" for his pantomimes in a private room; and here it was his habit to remain to dinner, and cook his own beef-steak on his own gridiron.

On these occasions he was frequently visited by persons of note, and amongst them on one occasion was Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough,



SILVER SALT SPOONS,
late the property of
THE BEEF STEAK SOCIETY.
now belonging to
THOMAS W. U. ROBINSON.

February, 1876.

who, after partaking of the humble meal, expressed himself so delighted that, on going away, he proposed a renewal of it on the following Saturday. The old Earl returned at the same hour the next week, accompanied by three or four men of wit and learning; and, although one historian records that the Beef-steak Society originated in the painting room of Lambert at the same period, the visit to Rich would appear to have been the circumstance which gave rise to it.

The Society being established, its meetings took place every Saturday in a room at the top of Covent Garden Theatre, and the food was rigidly confined to beef-steaks. The first twenty-four members were:—George Lambert, William Hogarth, John Rich, Lacy Ryan, Ebenezer Forrest, Robert Scott, Thomas Chapman, Dennis Delane, John Thornhill, Francis Niveton, Sir William Sanderson, Richard Metcalf, John Boson, Henry Smart, John Huggins, Hugh Watson, Edmund Truffnel, Thomas Salway, Charles Neale, Charles Latrobe, Alexander Gordon, William Tathato, and Gabriel Hunt.

As time wore on, the Society was considered an important element in the theatrical events of the day, and it became a matter of considerable difficulty to obtain access to it either as member or visitor.

Persons distinguished for rank and social and convivial powers have, through successive generations, been seated at the festive board as either guests or members.

At different periods we find mentioned, as members of the Society:—Theophilus Cibber, John Wilkes, Thomas Hudson, the artist (master of Sir Jos. Reynolds), Lord Sandwich, The Prince of Wales (in 1785), Sir J. Boyd, R. Eastcourt, John Kemble, Sir J. Scott, W. Linley, the Duke of Sussex, Judge Bolland, and Churchill, the satirist.

Formerly the members wore a blue coat with the initials B.S., and behind the president's chair was placed the Society's halberd. All furniture in the room, and the various articles used for the convivial purposes of the Society, were ornamented with the emblematical gridiron and the eccentric motto, "Beef and Liberty," both of which are engraved upon the two spoons, on the one in a ribbon round the gridiron, and on the other on a ribbon flowing downwards from the emblem. One spoon is stamped with the London hall mark for the year 1784, and the other for the year 1786.

Mr. Peter Cunningham, in speaking of the sublime Society, says:—"The room they dine in, is a little escorial in itself, most appropriately

fitted up; the doors, wainscotting, and roof of good old English oak, ornamented with gridirons as thick as Henry VII.'s chapel with the portcullis of the founder."

Some of the most celebrated wits and *savants* have been seated at its convivial table; and, as a strong feeling of brotherhood and sentiment of equality always prevailed amongst its members, one may readily suppose that the "Steaks" was an institution which its promoters and supporters "would not willingly let die."

That equality did exist amongst the members is illustrated by the fact that such men as Lord Brougham and the Duke of Leinster (who in their time joined the Society), were compelled, in their turn, to do butler's duty, by conveying wine from the cellars to the dining-room.

The Society came to an end in 1869, and on the 7th of April, of the same year, the whole of the furniture, portraits, prints, and plate belonging to the Society were sold at Messrs. Christie, Manson, and Woods. Amongst those present at the sale were several of the last members of the defunct Society, the most prominent being the Right Hon. Fox Maule, afterwards the Earl of Dalhousie, and Sir John Cam Hobhouse, afterwards Lord Broughton.

The lots were 132 in number, the first lot being the engraved portrait of Rich, the founder, and the last the silver gridiron. The entire sum realized by the sale was upwards of £600. Such was the end of the sublime Society of Beefsteaks, after a prosperous and eventful career of 134 years.