

## ***Bell's Life – 14<sup>th</sup> May 1837***

### **EXTRAORDINARY PEDESTRIAN FEAT. TOWNSEND AND DRINKWATER.**

The match between Townsend and Drinkwater, to pick up three hundred stones, a yard apart, the former with his mouth, and the latter with his hands, for £100 a side, came off on Monday, May 8, in Lord's Ground, according to appointment, and excited great interest among the admirers of athletic exercises. The celebrity of Townsend as a pedestrian has been sufficiently established by the performance of no less than two hundred and ten matches, in all which, with few exceptions, he has been victorious, and has thus established for himself the well-deserved title of "the champion of living pedestrians." His exertions have been called into action in almost every variety of running and walking; and we believe there is no man in England of the present day who possesses the powers of endurance in so remarkable a degree, although in short distances, in running, no doubt he has his superiors; taking him for his general properties, however, there is no question he stands unrivalled, and more especially when his age is considered — for in June next he will have attained his 45<sup>th</sup> year. His last trying match previous to that we are about to describe, was his race to Brighton against Berry, which, it will be recollected, he won triumphantly.

In the present case he was backed against a man doubtless of greater speed, but in lasting qualities his inferior. Drinkwater is a Lancashire man, of great celebrity in the north, but not much known in London, except from the fame he has acquired nearer home. His matches near London have been confined to a mile race with an old man styled "Bacon's Man," at Bromley, which he lost under unfavourable circumstances, and his recent match against time, noticed in our last, when, under the patronage of the Marquis of Waterford, he ran four miles in twenty-one minutes and some few seconds — a pace almost unparalleled in human speed. — His age, we believe, is six and twenty, his stature short, about five feet four inches and a half, and his form symmetrical; but, to look at him, few would give him credit for the fleetness which he has displayed. He is a quiet, unassuming man, and speaks with a broad Lancashire dialect. Townsend has an advantage in height of about an inch, but exhibits a frame of superior muscular development, and although longer in the body he is shorter in the leg, and necessarily shorter in the stride. Drinkwater was principally backed by his Sheffield friends, who came up with him, and evinced great confidence in his powers. Townsend, who is engaged as a gas lighter in the Westminster Gas Company, was backed by his Westminster friends in small sums each; and such is the confidence of those persons in his honesty and stamina that had twice the amount been required, it could have been obtained. His pride is equal to his abilities, and his ambition such, that for the merest trifle he would be willing to undertake the most Herculean labours. He is about to publish a history of his various matches, with their results, accompanied with a portrait of himself, the contents of which will, no doubt, be considered not only curious but highly valuable to the lovers of athletic exercises, and ought to be a source of great profit to himself and family, which comprises a wife and two sons, the latter "chips off the old block."

Soon after the match was made, Townsend went into training, under the care of Fuller, at Ned Neat's, at Norwood, and a more healthful situation, or a more watchful trainer could not have been obtained. Here he practised his forthcoming feat by doing short distances, but in one of his trials sprained the sinew of his right leg just above the ankle, which for some time created alarm for his success; the application of leeches, however, reduced the inflammation, and in order to keep his frame in healthful exercise, he laboured for several hours a day in digging a tank. Towards the arrival of the important period, it was thought he had gained too much flesh; and under the advice of Fuller and Neal, he took two severe sweats, on Friday and Saturday; the beneficial effects were obvious, and on Sunday, on coming to town, he was, to use his own phrase, "as right as a trivet." He slept at Tom Spring's that night, and rose in the morning with the vigour of a lion, although slightly affected with a cold. Drinkwater did not arrive in town till some time after the match had been made, but had been taking due care of himself preparatory to his four miles match. He took up his quarters at Childs Hill, Hampstead, where he lost no chance in fitting himself for the struggle in which he was about to engage, the result of which he fully anticipated would be in his favour, relying, as he did, upon his great speed; for according to his own friends, he had never attempted to pick up 300 stones, nor had he gone at any one time the calculated distance, namely 51 miles and 540 yards, to

which by computation, the frequent going and returning to fetch the stones would amount. His Yorkshire friends were not less confident than himself, but they did not come out freely in betting till the very eve of his labours, refusing to give the odds, 2/1, which Townsend's backers required. The first bet of any importance was one of £60 to £40 that the distance was not completed in eight hours and a half, from whence it was inferred that the Yorkshiremen deemed it very improbable that Townsend could accomplish it in that time, whatever might have been their opinion of their own man, who of course would have been prevented from reaching that speed with the view of securing the £40, unless driven to it to win the match by the close pressure of his antagonist. On Sunday night, at Spring's, Townsend's friends finding they could not get on upon their own terms, reduced their demands for odds, and a great number of bets were taken at the odds of to 6/5, 5/4, and 7/4, which, on the morning of the start, were increased to 2/1.

Lord's Ground we have stated, was the scene of action, and as this area is surrounded by a hard gravel path, admirably calculated for the purpose, with the advantage of being enclosed, ample scope was afforded for the accommodation of spectators. Mr. Dark, the proprietor, had taken every pain to secure the proper safeguards to prevent interruption, as well as to afford proper rooms for the refreshment of the men. The whole of the path over which the men had to run was enclosed by ropes, firmly fixed to stout posts, outside of which the spectators kept while the umpires only, of whom eight on each side were chosen, were distributed at intervals within, to see that the stones were not disturbed and fairly picked up. The ground had been accurately measured on Saturday, but on Monday morning at an early hour a further and more satisfactory measurement took place by means of a piece of wood, an exact yard in length, which was laid down yard after yard, and scratches were made to indicate the spots on which the stones were to be placed, which were afterwards whitened to render them distinct. As the scratch was made beyond the measure, it was found by this gradual increase, that at the end of the distance nearly two feet upon the whole distance of three hundred yards had been gained. The stones were deposited in the crown of the path, the first on the right hand side, being close to the billiard-room, near to the entrance of the ground, under which a room with a bed in it was prepared for the man who started on that side. These were carried round to the top of the ground nearly fronting the tavern, where the last stone was deposited. A space of five yards was then left vacant, and then commenced the deposit of the stones on the other side, which were carried round behind the pavilion to the corner of the wall of the outbuildings connected with the tavern premises. The paths were swept with a hand-brush as the stones were laid down, and the cricketers room at the back of the pavilion was set apart for the man to whom that course was assigned, a bed being laid down, and a fire lit.

At eight o'clock the men arrived, and for the first time saw each other. They shook hands good humouredly, Townsend saying he had beaten many Lancashire men before, and he saw no reason why he should not do so again. They then went over the ground, from an inspection of which it was obvious that the more favourable ground was to the right, especially for Townsend, who had to go down upon his right knee to pick up his stones with his mouth, and who, by keeping the inner side of the circle, would not only have found it more convenient to stoop, but would thereby have been enabled to shorten his distance, besides which it was more open, as the other path came between the high wall and the pavilion, and included a short ascent by the pavilion railing, which, when distressed, it would have been desirable to avoid. On discussing the choice of ground, Townsend candidly confessed his predilection, but as this could not be agreed upon, it was arranged to toss, and Drinkwater having won, chose the more advantageous path to the right. So far the preliminaries were adjusted, after which two baskets (butter flasks) were placed within a yard of the two last stones next to the tavern, from whence it was agreed their labours should commence, and into which each one was to be fairly thrown, and if it fell out, to be again picked up and replaced by the men. It was then agreed that at the sound of the pavilion bell each should commence his labours; stop-watches were set to assist in the precise time. The umpires and referee, with the friends on both sides, having done justice to a substantial breakfast, at half-past ten all was in readiness. The morning and day throughout was far from favourable, being gloomy, and attended with occasional showers. This was to be regretted, as the admission money, at a shilling each, was thereby greatly diminished, which it was agreed should be equally divided between the two men and Mr. Dark, for the use of the ground. The company, if not numerous, was highly respectable, and included many noblemen and gentleman of high rank. — Drinkwater's

stones were small round pebbles, about the size of a pigeon's egg, and Townsend's, which had been picked up on Brighton beach, were rather long, and were fixed on their ends, so as to afford him greater facility in taking them up in his mouth.

Precisely at fifteen minutes after ten o'clock, according to the stop-watches, the men were brought to their starting points. Both were attired in elastic cotton shirts; Drinkwater wearing drawers, and Townsend nankeen "smalls," with a small cushion of leather on his right knee, so fixed as not to impede the action of the limb. Neither wore stockings; but each had light shoes and caps, Townsend's flannel, trimmed with blue ribbon. On the bell tolling they commenced their labours, each pursuing a different plan. Drinkwater seemed to have made up his mind to take up each stone in regular succession from the first, thus lengthening his distance in every turn, and only in one instance did he deviate from this resolution, when he went forward and picked up a stone about midway. His pace was extremely rapid, and his step a full yard at each stride. Clearing the way as he went, he kept the crown of the path, and soon diminished his portion of stones of 100, including the distant one to which we have referred, accomplishing this part of his labour in forty two minutes and a half. Townsend adopted a more prudent, and as it afterwards turned out a wiser course, for after clearing away and depositing a few stones near the basket, he started off while yet vigorous, for more distant ones, and this course he pursued for several stones in succession; he then lessened his distance, and picked up stones at various points nearer home, as his wind appeared to serve him, and again shot out for the outsiders. By this mode he varied his labours according to circumstances, and put aside all calculations as to time or distance. His pace was rapid and steady, sometimes running, and sometimes walking; but throughout he was in high spirits. He kept close to the inner side of the path as he journeyed forwards and backwards, and taking up the stones with his mouth, dropped on his right knee, placed both hands on the ground, took the stones between his lips, and on rising took them in his hands. When Drinkwater had bagged 100 stones, Townsend had but deposited 47 of various distances, but many of these had been "long trots." At the end of one hour and three quarters, Drinkwater had picked up 164 stones, and then retired to his room, and stopped eight minutes, for refreshment. Townsend made no stoppage, but kept on "the even tenor of his way," having, at the end of 3 hours, picked up 102 stones, while in three hours and ten minutes Drinkwater had placed 200 in the basket.

At this period, it was calculated, we think, erroneously, that Drinkwater was four or five miles ahead, and 2 and 3/1 on his success were freely offered, although not so freely taken, as it was observed that Townsend went rather lame, and, in fact, he had strained his right leg in going down for the second long stone, and admitted that he felt its effects, although he still trudged on cheerfully, and soon took off "the limp." At ten minutes after two o'clock, having picked up 211 stones, Drinkwater began to show symptoms of distress, the distance began to tell upon him, and his early vigour and elasticity were much diminished. He again retired to his room where he remained eighteen minutes. Townsend still "kept moving," taking his refreshment freely — tea and occasionally a little beer — as he travelled. He changed his shoes twice, sitting on a chair in the open air, and never once entered the room prepared for him, where his wife was ready with a change of dress, if required; and, indeed, with the exception of sitting down for five minutes near the basket to drink some tea, he made no stoppage whatever, although he repeatedly varied his pace from a run to a walk. At twelve minutes to four the veteran had picked up 55 of his most distant stones, and this brought him almost in a straight line for the remainder of his labours, which was 140 yards in extent, with 125 stones to pick up, 21 of the stones nearest the basket having, at intervals, in breathing time, been picked up and carried home. The event was announced by loud cheers. When Drinkwater again came out, he had 80 stones at the long distance to pick up, and every one he lifted lengthened his succeeding runs. The policy of old Townsend's tack was obvious. He had not only got over the greater part of his task but instead of increasing, he gradually decreased his labours; and as his powers diminished, his task became diminished in proportion. He still kept dividing his runs short and long as he found his strength. When Townsend had 102 stones at comparatively short distances to pick up, Drinkwater had 47, long distance, to fetch. Ordinary calculation at once showed the advantage of the "old un." The Yorkshiresmen "dropped down on their luck," and there were no more odds offered, nor bets to be obtained, to the great mortification of Townsend's backers, who began to lament that their confidence had not been better displayed, as they lost the opportunity of picking up

a few hundreds that the "northerns" would have willingly sported. At the end of six hours and a quarter, Townsend had but 88 stones left, while Drinkwater had 40, and thenceforth Townsend was the favourite at any price. The friends of Drinkwater urged him to increase his speed, and the young man ran with astonishing quickness and heart, but he was frequently obliged to drop into a walk. Townsend saw this, and said he might walk also, as he was now sure of giving the Lancashire men another "tie up." At last Townsend had reduced his number to 23, and these were immediately behind the pavilion. He was reminded of the bet of 60 to 40 against his accomplishing his work within the eight hours and a half. "How much time have I left?" asked he. "Forty-five minutes," was the answer. "Then it's all right," said he, "I could do this and walk it." Precisely at the end of eight hours a distant shout proclaimed that Drinkwater had given in. He was coming up with his last stone, but was so much exhausted that it became necessary to support him to the basket, from whence he was carried into his room, completely worn out and incapable of further effort.

Townsend betrayed but trifling symptoms of fatigue, and was highly elated at the certainty of success. His friends cheered, and the pressure of the crowd became immense. At last he took home his last stone but one, having twelve minutes to spare of the eight hours and a half, when, turning round, he said, "I suppose it will make no difference, if I walk for the last backwards," and he actually walked several paces in that way. In a few seconds less than eight hours and 19 minutes he had finished his Herculean work, and was immediately hailed with enthusiastic cheers, and conveyed to the Pavilion, where he received the congratulations of his wife and sons, only blaming the former for not selling his pigs as he had desired her, in order that he might have laid out their value on the match. He laid down for a short time, and took some refreshment, but he was impatient to receive the mood of public approbation — dressed, and proceeded to Mr. Dark's long room where a large party was assembled, and where he ate a hearty dinner of cold roast beef, offering them to back himself to stand upon one leg for one hour, a task, which he was to have performed at Mr. Borer's, in Fetter Lane, but which his friends from humanity would not permit him to undertake. The same night he proceeded to Tom Spring's, and at three o'clock in the morning he returned home, where in the course of the same day he was looking after his gas lamps. Drinkwater was some time before he was "himself again," and the Yorkshiremen candidly admitted they had miscalculated his powers for a long distance, although from one to five miles they are prepared to back him for any sum against any man in England, the money being ready at Richmond's. The Westminster men have "picked up their crumbs" pretty considerably; but we suspect the Yorkshiremen have dropped their "sine qua non," to a heavy tune, at more places than in London. Had Townsend's friends been more confident they might have won "hats full of pewter." The weather continued unpropitious throughout the day, and latterly was attended with rain, which prevented many from witnessing the conclusion of the sport.

The match money will be given up at Tom Spring's on Wednesday evening and all bets paid, on which occasion it is to be hoped the veteran will receive substantial proof of the "golden opinions" to which he has entitled himself. Drinkwater has, at least, the satisfaction of having done his best, and of this his friends are fully satisfied.