

(Written for the "Canadian Illustrated News.")

THE POTTLETON SOCIAL.

BY EPHRAIM.

The little town of Pottleton was in a state of unusual excitement.

The public pulse beat with alarming rapidity. The social barometer indicated a change, and general appearances tended towards fever heat.

Groups of persons were standing on the public square, engaged in conversing upon some all important topic. The office of the Pottleton *Trumpet* was regarded with especial interest. The leaves were blown in the same direction, as if their presence was absolutely necessary, and small clouds of dust met them by appointment to discuss some prominent question. Even the hungry dogs were attracted thither by an unaccountable agency, and showed a total disregard for the safety of their lives, and a bold contempt for the city ordinance in which they figured conspicuously.

A stranger would have at first supposed it to have been the eve of an election; but on second thought he would have discovered his mistake—because everybody was sober. Elections seldom troubled Pottleton; besides it was a moral town, and always appointed its officers for lengthened terms of office; thus saving a large amount of money and a larger amount of time.

It boasted a railroad, a corporation, a town-hall and a bank. It possessed all the requirements a town of its size needed, and so far, was content.

The demoralizing effects of political excitement had not, as yet, contaminated Pottleton, and it rejoiced exceedingly in the high tone of its moral status.

The church clock had just struck the hour of 10 (A. M.) correctly for the first time in a month.

With commendable punctuality the office of the *Trumpet* was thrown open to a large and eager crowd, which set at naught the strenuous exertions of the constable, sheriff and town clerk, whose several positions were combined in the person of a weak and bald-headed official, who vainly endeavoured to maintain order by observing: "Do keep back, gentlemen, please, and respect the constable." Failing to obtain respect in that capacity, he would appeal in virtue of his office as sheriff, and, town-clerk as a last resource. Whether on account of the thinness of his voice, or a lack of befitting dignity of exterior to command respect, I cannot say; but he suddenly retired from the contest.

The cause of this excitement, which I will presently explain, is based upon the authority of the *Trumpet* itself, the "official organ of Pottleton and immediate vicinity," claiming a circulation (principally in unpaid subscriptions) greatly in excess of any other paper in the county, and, in consequence the best advertising medium (value taken out in trade to suit the convenience of advertisers) you could possibly select.

It was independent in its political tone, and its opinions were constantly changing. It exhibited a marked caution in its expressions and never left itself open to a prosecution for libel, as it was never known to assume responsibility in any shape whatever. As a proof of its importance as one of the institutions of the country, and illustrating its freedom of the press, it was full of typographical errors which were committed with a corresponding freedom.

In explanation of this overwhelming rush I refer you to the second column of the first page of said *Trumpet*, which I take the liberty of quoting:

"The POTTLETON LYCEUM.—The members of this distinguished society will give a grand, scientific, social and literary *congregation* at their Hall this evening, at eight o'clock prompt. Our local talent, of which Pottleton is so justly proud, will meet, *musée*, and we anticipate an array of literary and classical ability, seldom if ever equalled in the Province."

"Miss Arabella DeLaurey, winning a *bravura* from one of the Italian masters, in her most charming style; and Mr. St. Clair, the gifted baritone, will render his valuable assistance in a duet."

"It is worthy of remark that while we are happy in noting the admirable good taste shown by the committee in the arrangement of its programme, it is also observable that a higher tone of literary excellence and classic ability will be presented to a discriminating public than has hitherto been given by the society."

"We are always ready to admit that a becoming modesty ever characterizes true genius, but we should feel we were doing our citizens an injustice if we failed to predict that Pottleton may yet produce its Shakespeare or its Nilsson."

I regret my time will not admit of giving the whole of this interesting article which the editor had taken unusual pains to "set up" correctly.

With the exception of Miss DeLaurey's *bravura* and Mr. St. Clair's selection the programme was original.

Poems, articles on scientific subjects, papers on domestic economy were all possessed, if of no other merit, that at least of originality.

Never before had Pottleton held such a "feast of reason" for twenty-five cents a head, and it was to be expected such an occasion should be hailed with befitting enthusiasm. Every reserved seat was taken. The principals of the young ladies' seminaries had pro-

mised their pupils an intellectual treat of the highest order; combining instruction with amusement, not forgetting to charge said "treat" to their respective parents and guardians.

Dry goods stores and millinery establishments had a busy day of it. Every available inch of space had been engaged at the Slush House by families from the country.

The brass band, numbering eight pieces, exclusive of the drum and cymbals, was to "proceed" through the town and play in front of the Lyceum in the evening.

The performance was billed to commence at seven o'clock sharp.

At six juvenile patrons of art congregated before the door, and by half-past the side-walk was crowded. The pupils at the boarding-schools went without tea to enable them to be present in time.

Carriages, light and heavy waggons rumbled along the High Street.

The Slush House presented a brilliant appearance.

The Town Hall clock was illuminated in honour of the occasion.

A tasteful monogram, composed of the letters "P. L." was ingeniously constructed out of Chinese lanterns, and suspended in front of the Lyceum. An enterprising member had erected a transparency, with the words, "Literature, Science and Art!" boldly inscribed thereon. Below these magic symbols he informed the readers—"sign painting executed at reasonable rates."

The doors opened and the crush came. The constable wisely appointed three specials and presented them with refreshment tickets in consideration of their services.

As soon as the house filled it presented a brilliant appearance. Gayly-coloured dresses of costly silks met the eye at every turn, and contrasted finely with the sombre attire of the gentlemen. Jewels of immense value (if you could judge by the size of their settings) dazzled the eye. Varied types of beauty mingled together in one blazing galaxy of wealth and refinement. Blondes and brunettes outvied each other in the richness of the wardrobe, and the rosate tinge of their complexions. Pearl powder was at a premium. Roman noses buried themselves in elaborately laced handkerchiefs of gossamer fineness.

The unadulterated freshness of the school girls—some were budding into womanhood—mellowed the beauty of the scene. Bracelets of wonderful workmanship were displayed on arms of alabaster whiteness. Chignons of every size, hue, design and quality that you could think of, adorned the heads of the ladies. The atmosphere was permeated with a delicious odor of rare perfumes. Pottleton excelled itself.

The programme was selected with great care and read as follows:

PROGRAMME.

Overture The Pottleton Band
Introductory Address . . . E. Freshwater, Esq.
Paper entitled "Farming and Reform"

[Mr. J. Snugger
Bravura, from *Il Trovatore* . . . Miss Arabella

[De Laurey
Essay, "Thoughts on Keeping an Hotel,"

[A. Fogg, Esq.
Duet, "When Shall the Harvest be?"

[Miss A. De Laurey & Mr. C. St. Clair.

Recess to conclude with refreshment and social gossip.

The orchestra, which had been hard at work, opened the evening's entertainment. It showed evident signs of a premature fatigue. Some of the members presented a foreshadowed appearance from over-blowing.

The selection was fine; but would have been better appreciated had the bass-drum and cymbals not predominated quite so largely, as it marred the effect of the softer toned pieces.

This volume of sound was understood to be an instrumental representation of a battle scene, in which the bass-drum was supposed to be cannon, and the side-drum a volley of musketry. The shrieks of the wounded could be heard from the clarinet with horrible fidelity, and the charge was beautifully rendered by the 1st E. flat cornet.

After the last shot had been fired and the plaintive wailings of agony from the wounded had sobbed themselves to sleep, the overture closed amidst a gloomy and impressive silence.

E. Freshwater, Esq., came next in order. His appearance was the signal for one continued demonstration of applause.

He bowed repeatedly, thrust his hand carelessly through hair which wouldn't curl, coughed sympathetically, postured gracefully, and displayed his finger ring to the best advantage. Laying his hand somewhere in the region of his heart, but suggestively close to his vest pocket, he proceeded:

Ladies and Gentlemen:
When Art and Beauty meet here face to face,
Fair Science also claims of right a place.
With other aspirants to honoured fame,
Glorious Apollo bringing up the train—
Though last, not least, a willing prisoner sure
With graceful mien advances Literature.

(This happy allusion to the *Trumpet* was publicly acknowledged by its proprietor, who

exclaimed "Not at all," which remark slightly confused the speaker, who was doubtful in what sense the expression was offered.)

Then as we mingle in the busy throng
We pay our homage to the Queen of Song.
While different tastes their different subjects choose;

Some worship music—others court the muse.
And as I gaze around this beauteous scene—
Am I awake, or is't some fancied dream?
Can such things be! so lovely, wondrous, grand?
Or is't a romance from some sweet fairy-land?
What kindred spirits have I strayed among?
It is, it must be, classic Pottleton!

No flowery language can my thoughts express
Th' tumultuous heavings of my throbbing breast.
In weak and feeble words I but convey
The pride and happiness I feel to-day.
Then old and young, ye friends and patrons dear,
Thrice welcome all, a thousand welcomes here!

The poetic allusion to the "Queen of Song" evidently referred to Miss De Laurey, and took immensely.

It was several minutes before Mr. Freshwater recovered sufficient composure to bow himself off the stage.

Well might Pottleton be proud of such talent! As the enthusiasm had toned itself down, Mr. James Snugger made his appearance.

This gentleman had a matter-of-fact business air about him, which told greatly in his favour. With mature deliberation he slowly unfolded his manuscript and launched into business. His writing, like himself, was plain and easily understood. I will endeavour to give you an idea of the substance of his remarks:

He truly observed that a considerable quantity of land is annually wasted through extravagant farming. This is an age of progress; but although an age of progress it should also be one of economy. Mr. Snugger didn't believe in such lavish consumption of earth, and he proved, by carefully drawn-up statistics, that several million dollars are annually thrown away through the recklessness of short-sighted agriculturists. This, he considered, is a retrograde movement instead of a progressive one. He felt it his duty to point out these things, and although he was likely to meet with opposition from prejudiced persons, he was not to be deterred from his object.

Some people might say if he knew so much about these matters why didn't he give them the benefit of his experience? He would do so. Mr. Snugger then went on to show the different kinds of vegetables which would yield the best paying capital. (I will omit this portion of his subject, as it is purely technical.)

His concluding remarks were:
"Build your land on the perpendicular. You thus economize your earth surface and can grow a greater variety of produce."

"You will find this method to work exceedingly well. Get your neighbour to plant something on one side and you something on the other, and you will find your own crop double that of any year preceding. Should your species of vegetable be stronger than his, it is very probable an amalgamation will take place, novel in character as well as agreeable to the palate and useful to science at large."

Mr. Snugger retired, a triumphant smile of self-satisfaction suffusing his ruddy face.

Mr. Snugger's exit caused a general reference to the programme to see what was coming next. Double-barrelled opera glasses were levelled at the stage in expectation of Miss Arabella DeLaurey's entrance.

The *prima donna* made her *entrée*. With a bow of matchless grace she took in the whole house with one glance of her expressive eye; the soft patting of gloved hands brought forth a smile of singular sweetness, which revealed a set of magnificent teeth—not her own.

The lady was built in the Elizabethan style of architecture and of rugged proportions (vulgarily termed "scrappy"). Her age might have been either twenty or forty. Her face was oval and its expression *spirituelle*. The colour of her hair—or rather the hair she wore—was an intense auburn. Her forehead was broad and intellectual. Her eyes large and penetrating and dilated with belladonna. Her nose was of the composite order—Roman above the bridge, Grecian below it. Her waist—well her waist was considerable of a waste.

In one gloved hand she held a mutilated piece of sheet music, and, in the other, a pocket-handkerchief—with her right she arranged the folds of her drapery in the most approved style, and with her left slightly raised her skirt, showing a delicately formed foot encased in a number nine satin gaiter. She stretched herself to her full height, cast a look of contempt at the pianist, which ought to have annihilated him on the spot—but didn't—raised her eyes heavenward, toyed with her bracelet, shook herself together and went in heavy on the Italian.

As nobody knew much about the language everybody agreed upon the correctness of her accent. The only syllables I could hear distinctly were a *moor*, a *moor*, *noor* a *poco del forte* a *moor*, a *poco*. A gentleman who had been to Italy sometime in his youth said she was singing something about "a Dutchman going for a nigger."

Of course Miss DeLaurey was *encored* (that had been provided for beforehand), and she went through the same performance to the

delight of an intelligent audience. The way she rolled her eyes as well as her voice was truly thrilling!

Alfred Fogg, Esq., one of the thinnest men in Pottleton, succeeded the *prima donna*, and read a short essay—"Thoughts on Keeping a Hotel."

Mr. Fogg besides being thin was lantern-jawed and hawk-eyed. His appearance led you to suppose he had never seen the inside of a hotel in his life; but as he was going to tell us something about keeping one, the presumption was he would get fatter by-and-by. His remarks were listened to with much interest, probably because the subject was about something to eat. It made you hungry to look at him, it did indeed.

I will give you his closing remarks:

"I have made up my mind," he said, "that it does require a smart man to keep a hotel. With painful consciousness I am aware that I am not, in this connection, a smart man. I have tried it and ought to know; I have lost money at it, and my experience is from actual knowledge. We must creep, my friends, before we can walk. I crept and kept on creeping, but I never walked in the hotel sense of the word, though my customers did—they walked off without paying. It was a sorrowful stagger with me. I opened a restaurant—not a large one, my means being limited. For the first week I had no customers. The second week business was more encouraging. They came, but brought their own dinners, and I lent 'em the knives and forks."

"The third week I took in half a dollar. The fourth week, it was on Monday, a gentleman-looking person called upon me and made numerous inquiries. He became interested, and made himself unusually agreeable. I thought he had an idea of buying me out, and I was only too ready to jump at the chance. Feeling my way cautiously I inquired if such was his intention."

"Oh dear, no; by no means."

"Then why this interest in a stranger's affairs?"

"Look here," said he, "do you repose much confidence in human nature?"

"Some, I replied, but very little. Why?"

"Because if you do, repose that confidence in me."

"A transient smile suffused his face as he continued:

"Will you cook this sausage and lend me a quarter? Say, will you?"

"I did neither, and then I knew how sharp a man it required to keep a hotel successfully."

Mr. Fogg was allowed to retire, feeling persuaded that the audience sympathized with him in his great grief.

As soon as Mr. St. Clair appeared on the stage, leading in Miss Arabella DeLaurey, the opera glasses were again brought into requisition, and Mr. St. Clair was greeted with rapturous applause.

They then introduced the latest stage bow and looked at each other.

Mr. St. Clair made quite an extensive display of shirt bosom, wrist-bands and white gloves. He first drew public attention to the capacious dimensions of shirt bosom, (his idea evidently being to let people know he had one) then pulled down his wrist-bands to show they were not paper, referred to his collar, looked at his audience attentively, also coughed twice, glanced at the audience scornfully, wiped his moustache and turned to Miss DeLaurey, as much as to say: "I am quite ready, what are you waiting for?" The pianist received the customary scowl and played a prelude to the duet referred to in the programme. The prelude was finished. Mr. St. Clair then asked Miss DeLaurey in a deep tone of voice, "When will the harvest be?" She replied to his question, seemingly much hurt, by asking him, "When will the harvest be?" He deigned no reply; but a sudden inspiration seizing them both they simultaneously repeated the question. An elderly farmer in front "guessed they didn't know much about harvesting." The question was again asked, and the same gentleman expressed his opinion, rather loudly, that if the weather was good the harvest might be a week earlier than last year. This caused a laugh among those who heard it, and was the only answer that applied to the question.

This concluded the musical and literary exercises, and the lyceum adjourned to refreshment and social gossip.

The gastronomical abilities of the cook at the Slush House was severely tested. Ice cream, raspberry cakes, jelly cakes, fruit cakes, custard, coffee, sponge cakes, current cakes, pound cakes, plum cakes, tea, chocolate, apples, nuts, oranges, cold water and etceteras, were partaken of with a vigour that impressed you deeply with the capacity of the Pottletonian appetite. But eating and drinking must come to an end.

The *prima donna* received her congratulations gracefully, and affected the usual languid air those ladies are supposed to have at their command. She got up a stereotyped smile, which would have looked well in print, and never left her the whole evening. I am sorry to say I could not stay long enough to enjoy all the good things I saw and heard, but I went away fully satisfied that the social should not pass unrecorded.