

OUR LONDON LETTER.

LONDON, January, 1891.

The guests seem struck with awe in that dining-room, and solemnly bolt their food as quickly as they can. You would think silence was enjoined by the statute-book. You hear less noise in an American hotel dining-room containing five hundred people than you do at a French *table d'hôte* accommodating fifty people, at a German one containing a dozen, or at a table where two Italians are dining *tête à tête*.

The chief waiter at large hotels in the North and West is a white man; in the South he is a mulatto or a black; but white or black, he is always a magnificent specimen of his race. There is not a ghost of a savor of the serving-man about him; no whiskers and shaven upper lip reminding you of the waiters of the Old World; but always a fine mustache, the twirling of which helps to give an air of nonchalant superiority to its wearer. The mulatto head waiters in the South really look like dusky princes. Many of them are so handsome and carry themselves so superbly that you find them very impressive at first, and would fain apologize to them. You feel as if you wanted to thank them for kindly condescending to concern themselves about anything so commonplace as your seat at table.

In the smaller town the waiters are all—waitresses. The waiting is done by damsels entirely—and also by the guests of the hotel.

How grand this lady is, as she approaches you, darts a look of supreme contempt at you, flings a spoon and fork and knife down on the table in front of you, and turning her back upon you, gabbles off the *menu* in one breath.

In the large hotels, conducted on the American plan, there are rarely fewer than fifty different dishes on the *menu* at dinner time. Every day and at every meal you may see people order three or four times as much of this food as they could under any circumstances eat, and, picking at and spoiling one dish after another, send the bulk away uneaten. I am bound to say that this practice is not only observed in hotels where the charge is so much a day, but in those conducted on the European plan—that is to say, where you pay for everything you order. There I notice that people proceed in much the same wasteful fashion. It is evidently not a desire to have more than was paid for, but simply a bad and ugly habit. I hold that about five hundred people could be fed out of the waste that is going on at such large hotels as the Palmer House and the Grand Pacific Hotel of Chicago,—and I have no doubt such five hundred people could easily be found in Chicago every day.

I think that many Europeans are prevented from going to America by an idea that the expense of travelling and living there is very great. This is quite a delusion. The price of houses, clothing and servants is far higher than in Europe, but there the difference stops, I believe. For my part, I find that hotels are as cheap in America as in England, at any rate, and railway travelling in Pullman cars is certainly cheaper than in European first-class carriages, and infinitely more comfortable. Putting aside in America such hotels as Delmonico's in New York, the Thorndyke in Boston, the Richelieu in Chicago, as you would the Grand Hotel in Paris, and the Savoy, the Victoria, the Metropole in London, and taking the good hotels of America, such as the Grand Pacific in Chicago, the West House in Minneapolis, the Windsor in Montreal, the Cadillac in Detroit (I mention those I remember as the very best), you will find that in these hotels you are comfortably lodged and magnificently fed for from three to five dollars a day. In no good hotel in France, England, Germany or Switzerland, would you get the same amount of comfort—or even luxury, I might say—at the same price, and those who should require a sitting room would get it for a little less than they would have to pay in a European hotel.

The only very dear hotels I have come across in the United States are those of Virginia. There I have been charged as much as two dollars a day, but never in my life did I pay so dear for what I had; never in my life did I see so many dirty rooms or so many messes that were unfit for human food.

But I will just say this much for the American refinement of feeling to be met with, even in the hotels of Virginia, even in the "lunch" rooms of little stations; you are supplied, at the end of each meal, with a bowl of water—to rinse your mouth.—MAX O'RELL in *The North American Review*.

Christmas, bringing with it an unusual amount of snow and frost, has come and gone, leaving the London streets covered with a mass of dirty brown mud and filth. Skating has been going on on the Serpentine, in Hyde Park, for the first time for ten years. Now that Christmas is gone the pantomimes are in full swing—all the music halls have been deprived of their larger stars to provide a company for both the town and provincial pantomimes. A Drury Lane—where, in his twelfth pantomime, Mr. Augustus Harriss has surpassed himself—"Beauty and the Beast" is being played. Miss Belle Bilton (Lady Dunlo, future Countess of Clancarty) plays the Beauty, while the Beast, in his glorified shape, is enacted by Miss Vesta Tilley—"London's Idol," as she delights to call herself. Mr. Harriss always makes a specialty of his pantomimes. I am afraid to say how much he is reported to have spent yearly; but he is sure to get it all back again, for the Drury Lane pantomime is an institution, and every one, young and old, goes to see it.

In spite of the victory of the patriots in Kilkenny (there is some talk of it being disputed under the Bribery Acts), Mr. Parnell does not despair. To a press representative he is reported as having said: "The seat was hopeless; I never expected to win it," and he said that Sir John Pope Hennessy's victory was entirely due to the influence of the priests. Mr. Parnell contradicted, point blank, Mr. Justin McCarthy's statement that Kilkenny was the very best division in the country for the patriotic fight, and he went on to say that "if priestly influence is used, Ireland is lost."

Both sides are using every endeavour to be able to number Mr. William O'Brien among their party. He is now in Paris with Mr. William Gill, stopping with Mr. Raffalovitch, his brother-in-law, but since he landed he has been continually pestered by the representatives of both parties. On one side Messrs. Justin McCarthy and Sexton, armed with a pile of *Suppressed United Ireland*, and on the other side Mr. Byrne, of the *Freeman's Journal*. A crowd of press men have been dogging his footsteps, but no one has been able to get any direct expression of opinion, and he is generally supposed to be waiting for an interview with Mr. Parnell, who is now on his way to Paris.

Professor Huxley still continues to thunder away in the *Times* against General Booth's scheme. The General has issued a circular, in which he says that he is now quite confident of getting the required £100,000; but even if the whole amount be not forthcoming, he hopes to receive sufficient for him to carry out his experiment in a really efficient manner. In the meantime he has received a check in the retirement of Commissioner Frank Smith, the head of the Social Reform Wing of the Salvation Army. It is Commissioner Smith who has collected the majority of the materials with which the General (or rather Mr. W. T. Stead) wrote his book, so that his retirement is particularly unfortunate. It is due to a difference of opinion with General Booth on a point of principle. This quarrelling does not augur well for the future of the scheme.

The facts of Commissioner Smith's resignation seem to be these: In 1887, at the time of Bloody Sunday, Smith was the only member among the officers of the Salvation Army who saw the need that there was to do something for the suffering lower classes. At this time he was very friendly with Mr. Stead (then editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*), who told me that at the time Smith had incurred the censure of a large portion of the Army for his socialistic tendencies. He tried to impress on General Booth the necessity of using the Salvation Army as an instrument for raising what the General now calls "The Submerged Tenth." But the General, less advanced in his ideas, could not see his way clear to do as Smith suggested. Smith then went to America, and in the meantime the General developed the Rescue Homes, the Slum Brigade, and the Food Depots, which were of such advantage during the great dock strike. On Smith's return the General entrusted him with the leadership of the Social Wing. Then it was that the General decided to write his "Darkest England," and started writing a rough draft when his wife fell ill. Not wishing to delay the publication, he went to Mr. Stead and asked him to find a literary hack to write the book, Mr. Stead himself volunteered,

and, in his own words, "acted as a scribe temporarily under the General's orders." Of course the General owes a little to Mr. Stead's suggestions, but Mr. Stead tells me that it is very little. When the book had been published some four weeks (the sum collected having reached about fifty thousand pounds), Mr. Smith began pressing the General for the fulfilment of his promise that the Social Wing should be entirely distinct from the religious side of the Army, and that the Social Wing should be carried on on an entirely independent basis. The General now said that this was impossible, and Frank Smith, finding the friction, consequent on the present mode of working, between himself and the other departments—he was always more or less distrusted since 1887—that he resigned, giving up a place where, as Mr. Stead says, he had a power of doing good second to none.

Nothing that is new is stirring just now in the dramatic world, although, of course, we are promised a number of more or less important new plays at the end of January. Besides Mr. Jones' "Dancing Girl," of which I spoke last week, the really important coming plays are "The Idler"—Mr. Haddon Chambers' new melodramatic play, which has been a great success in New York—at the St. James, under Mr. George Alexander; a revival of "Much Ado About Nothing" at the Lyceum, with Mr. Henry Irving as Benedict, Miss Ellen Terry as Beatrice, Miss Annie Irish as Hero, and Mr. Mackintosh as Dogberry. A revival of Henrik Ibsen's "Doll's House" is also contemplated, with Miss Marie Fraser as Nora.

The cold weather has abated somewhat, but the streets are still covered with a thick coat of half frozen black slush. It has been calculated that the cost of a snowstorm such as we have just had, covering the ground with about two inches of snow, to Central London is very little short of sixty thousand pounds. Of course, this includes the payment of carts, etc., for conveying the snow away. One of the processes has been to cart the snow down on to the Embankment and then to throw it into the river. Another way has been to flush the streets with water until they are quite clean. This last, however, is a trifle expensive, as the vestries have to pay the water companies ten shillings an hour for the use of each hose. In the country the cold, for England, has been intense. The driver of the mail cart between Canterbury and Dover was found frozen to death on his seat a few days ago. The horse had stopped at each resting place from habit, and the driver's silence was put down to ill humour, so that his death was not discovered till the end of the journey.

The plagiarism rage, which has been so rife in England of late, has, it appears, spread to France. The other week all Paris was talking of Alphonse Daudet's new play, which was shortly to be produced. Now that it is produced, it is found to be identical, in character and plot, to a novel written by Xavier de Montephen, which appeared as a *feuilleton* in one of the leading Paris papers. This author considers himself particularly aggrieved, for he had made arrangements for the production of a play founded on his play at another theatre, though now, of course, M. Daudet's play makes that impossible. He does not, however, accuse his brother author of plagiarism; all he does is to state the facts plainly and fairly, and leaving M. Daudet to clear the matter up, as, no doubt, he will to his own and every one else's satisfaction.

Among the list of new books for the ensuing season, Messrs. Macmillan & Co. announce a new work of Prof. Goldwin Smith on "Canada and the Canadian Question."

Henrik Ibsen's new play is said by those who have read it to be the finest he has yet written, both from the dramatic and from the psychological point of view. Two London publishers, and two well known Ibsenites are quarrelling over the possession of the English copyright. The title is "Hedda Gebler," and although the author advances no new theories and propounds no new questions, it may well be called a study in pessimism. Hedda Gebler, the heroine, is a miserable creature, who is able only to suffer not to enjoy, and the whole play turns upon her near-sighted and selfish pessimism. The plot is exciting enough for an Adelphi melodrama, but the delicate by-play is all distinctively Ibsenite. The whole action takes place in thirty-six hours and in a single room.

GRANT RICHARDS.