

THE DOMESTIC DIFFICULTY.

Whilst the bonny Scotch lasses of "Bonnie Dundee" are holding meetings and discussing their grievances on the other side of the Atlantic, the matrons of Montreal are assembling in large numbers under the protecting wing of the Protestant clergy, to hold what one of the reverend speakers called an "experience meeting."

The proceedings at the first meeting were opened with a long exhortatory prayer and a series of ten-minute sermons, or homilies, duly divided into "subjects for consideration," and followed up by discussions limited to five minutes—for each speaker. The first lecturer on "Family Training, with a view to meet the exigencies of the case," was philosophical, scientific and suggestive. The speaker urged the necessity in a new and rapidly developing country of the fusion of class distinctions, and the bringing up of the families of the present generation to a sense of self-reliance and self-help,—and in reference to the employment of domestic servants they should be rather looked upon "as helps" of the family than as persons in an inferior position. He proposed that culinary science be taught as an art to all young ladies, and that the accommodation, situation and furniture of the kitchen should be remodelled so that it should be an apartment equally comfortable and cheerful as the less essential "parlour." The discussion which arose on this question was not confined to the subject, but meandered mildly all round it. One gentleman had a touching regret for the "domestic institution" of the Southern States; a lady recommended longer terms of service, and a ladies' combination to "fix the rates of wages," and to define a domestic servant's duties! A venerable clergyman considered that extravagantly high wages "had a tendency to lower the morale." (Did he ever experience a "moral declension" from this cause?) One clergyman had very nearly converted his servant-man by compounding a felony; another had some fragrant reminiscences of his Indian luxury of a "body servant" or "valet de chambre;" whilst the most popular of all the speakers was the excellent young divine, who was disposed to offer a premium for any servant girl in Montreal who had quietly suffered herself to be ill-treated, whom he proposed to exhibit in a glass case to the curious public, "Barnum" fashion, we presume "for charitable purposes only. A light broke unexpectedly upon the meeting, just as it was beginning to be very "dusky." A "School-master abroad" from "London Town,"—or very near it, proposed that the ladies should establish a "Servants' Home and Registry Office" in Montreal and communicate with the matron of his "Home" in London. He would undertake to send them out third and fourth rate servants, keeping all the first and second-class for the London market, as they required the best articles. If, however, the quality would suit he would guarantee the quantity. An earnest Teetotaler advised the ladies to become total abstainers by way of example,—at which the ladies smiled, and one of them declared with the most touching earnestness, that she for one was not willing to "despise the good creatures of God,"—at which the ladies laughed. The question of "How to raise the morale of domestic servants," was discussed mainly from a religious point of view. And the practical result of the meeting was to form a Ladies' Committee to deliberate over the various suggestions made, and devise some plan of action.

An adjourned meeting of the ladies was accordingly held at the Natural History Society's rooms, which were again crowded. The meeting again opened with religious exercises and but little progress appeared to have been made. It was, however, considered desirable to establish a "Home for Domestic Servants," and a "Registry Office," probably in connection with the Protestant House of Refuge. Meantime we learn the servants are about to follow the example of the "maids of Dundee," and will hold a meeting to discuss their view of the "situation."

It is quite possible that the result of this movement will be to enable the two or three hundred ladies who thus associate themselves together (chiefly English and Scotch members of our leading Protestant congregations) to improve their own facilities for obtaining what may be called "the pick of the servant market," with the obvious result of raising the wages of superior servants, whose abilities and character receive the additional guarantee of these ladies' approval. But will the community, as a whole, be benefited by this movement? Peter, who is poor, will be robbed of a good steady servant to pay Paul, who is rich; but as a question of Political Economy or of Social Science what good has been, or is, likely to be accomplished? Is domestic service the only kind of labour which "groaneth and travaileth" until the "kingdoms are moved"? Certainly not. No thoughtful man can take a bird's-eye view of the social upheavals which are now going on in every community upon the face of the earth—without regarding the "servant question" as a "storm in a tea-cup"—as a mere bagatelle, as a tiny outside vortex which is a part of great whirlpool rapids which, hurrying along with Niagara vehemence, will land this generation and the next—where? That man would be a bold one who would venture to predict what changes will occur as the result of Chinese immigration into America and Indian travel and education in Europe.

The boundaries of the seas of ignorance and superstition are broken up by the tide of overflowing population, which will sweep away before it much that appears stereotyped and

settled in the minds of the homely Anglo-Saxon race. What is to be the issue of the conflict between capital and labour, between employer and employé, between design and execution, between brain work and handicraft? It has to be fought out in Great Britain, where the yeast of discontent is fermenting in every industrial occupation, paralyzing for the time being the manufacturing interests of that great country. The solution is to be found, so far as our past experience teaches us, in the reduction of manual labour by novel appliances of machinery—and wherever labour can be saved even in household work, a true economy of time, temper, and money will be realized.

The labour question will not be solved by immigration—competition is scarcely possible in so large and elastic a country as this great Dominion—but habits may alter and adapt themselves to the exigencies of a new order of society, which may be after all a condition not less happy or enjoyable than those of our forefathers—and this is what the situation indicates. People who emigrate to Canada, wish, very naturally, to retain as much as possible the habits and customs and family arrangements which they have been brought up to consider "comfortable." And as soon as they begin "to get along" and make "comfortable incomes," they make their homes more and more "Scottish," or "Irish," or "English," respectively. And those who are "well-to-do" set the fashion here, as in other countries, to those immediately below them in the social scale.

Much has been done (though not enough) in Montreal to meet the requirements of the English and Scotch "middle class" community. Tenement houses, where the kitchen is laid out for the convenience and comfort of the mistress of the house and the family, are a great social advance upon the Parisian and Scotch systems of "flats" or "chambres en suite," and the American system of boarding-houses and hotels.

The question now to be solved is, not how can we increase the supply of this unsatisfactory class of labour, which destroys all the comfort of home-life, by the clanking of unwilling chains and the demand for an unearned wage—but how can we supersede it? On this we shall be prepared to offer a few suggestions in our next issue. "E."

MR. SPROUTS, HIS OPINIONS.

(Continued.)

Bearing in mind my promise to visit Mr. Sprouts, I accordingly found myself, a few days after my last interview with him, ascending the hill of Beaver Hall. As I entered the sacred precincts of this exclusive and highly refined neighbourhood, where the very side-walks seem to be saturated with gentility—suggesting also in their seedy and dilapidated condition a not uncommon kind of shabby gentility—a mysterious thrill vibrated through my whole frame. Instinctively I began to twiddle my mustache, to assume a military bearing, and to twirl my walking-stick in a *déjà* and nonchalant manner; while my uncertain accents flowed softly from my lips with that hesitating and musical *le-sé-à-à-à*, peculiar to the demizens of this favoured region. Arrived at the highly genteel and, consequently, excessively inconvenient mansion of my friend, I gave a vigorous pull at the bell. The door was opened by his manservant, who, in common with most Montreal flunkies, seemed as much at home in his livery as a City Councillor at a Governor-General's reception. I had previously seen this unhappy being on the box of Mr. Sprouts' carriage, evidently overwhelmed by a sense of his top-boots, which were fearfully and wonderfully constructed, and gazing round him with a wistful expression that seemed to appeal to some kind Christian to come and rescue him from his unfortunate position. His boots were evidently undermining his constitution. The leather had entered into his soul. By this melancholy mental I was ushered into the Sprouts' drawing-room which, it is needless to remark was, like most of our fashionable reception-rooms, furnished in the most severe and artistic manner, and did not in the least suggest a *bric-à-brac* shop in Wardour Street, or the Lowther Arcade Bazaar. Here "Betsy" attired in a broad-silk of gorgeous hue and a head-dress which struck terror to my soul, rose to receive me. Her *tout ensemble* suggested the startling combination of an Eastern sunset, an Aurora Borealis, and a bed of prize tulips.

She tendered me the tips of her fingers and sinking back on the sofa, exhausted with the effort, said in languid accents, "How de do, Mr. DeBoots, how werry hinclement the weather is."

I may here be permitted to remark that my name is "De-Boots," and that our family came over with William the Conqueror, in whose service my ancestor occupied the proud position of "Buskin Burnisher,"—a post of high consideration and not synonymous, as our detractors have enviously asserted, with that of the shoe-black of modern times. Our family chronicles also state that my ancestor was frequently the recipient of the most flattering personal attention from the Conqueror, and often enjoyed the distinguished honour of being kicked by Majesty when the royal corns were more than usually troublesome. Hence it will be seen both by birth and descent I am fully entitled to mix with the most select of our society, and I confidently expect that the result of this public announcement will be the reception of numerous invitations from our upper hundred and fifty; in anticipation of which I have ordered a new dress-coat, and have taken several lessons in deportment from a distinguished professor.

I responded most courteously to Mrs. Sprouts' greeting, and after a few trivial remarks enquired with genuine interest how she liked our Montreal society. "Well, reely, Mr. DeBoots," she replied, "we have a werry nice circle, but since the military left it's hextremely limited, and society now-a-days is getting so werry miscellaneous that one has to be most pertickler about one's visiting list, or else we gets mixed hup with hall sorts of people."

I felt that this was very true and suggested, with an eye to the DeBoots' pedigree, that all candidates for admission to the sacred circle should be compelled to furnish satisfactory evidence of unblemished descent for, say, three generations. But Betsy did not seem to think that this

would answer, and indeed on mature consideration, I felt compelled to admit that this rule, if rigidly carried out, would probably tend still more to contract the already limited circle. We therefore, after a full discussion of this most interesting topic, came to the conclusion that candidates must continue to be judged by the two great tests of wealth and good breeding, all due allowances being made for the possessors of the first qualification, because, as Mrs. Sprouts pertinently remarked, it wouldn't do to be as pertickler with wealthy people as with them as didn't keep no carriage.

I then inquired after Mr. Sprouts. "Oh! Mr. DeBoots," Betsy exclaimed, "Josef is a killin' of me. His vulgarity is a breakin' my hart. You wouldn't hardly believe it, but it was honly yesterday as Mrs. Councillor Buggins, as belongs to one of our tip-top families, was a wisit-in' me, when Josef he comes into the drawin'-room in his shirt sleeves, with a 'orrid pot of beer in 'is 'and, and wanted me and Mrs. Buggins to 'ave some. I thought I should have fainted."

I condoled with Mrs. Sprouts as well as I could, and then mildly suggested in the interest of Mr. Sprouts that, after all, many people, high up in the social scale, imbibed malt liquor—of course always by the advice of the family physician—but Betsy was too much for me.

"Yes, Mr. DeBoots, but then they does it on the quiet and never lets nobody know, and then there's no harm in it. Of course if Josef had brought it in when there wasn't nobody here it would have been a different thing. And I do 'ope," she continued tartly, "that you ain't a going to hincourage Josef in his vulgarity, becas if you are you won't get no hinvitations to my 'ouse."

This was not encouraging to the result of my embassy, and I felt considerably relieved when Mr. Sprouts made his appearance and proposed an adjournment to what he called "his snuggery."

Mr. Sprouts' "snuggery" was fitted up in strict accordance with the owner's peculiar ideas of comfort. The floor was sanded, in imitation of the parlour of an old-fashioned English public house, and numerous triangular shaped spittoons filled with sawdust were dispersed about the room. In one corner was a kilderkin of Molson's porter, symmetrically balanced on the opposite side by a similar vessel of Dow's ale, offering every facility for the composition of Josef's favourite beverage, "arf and arf," and evincing a laudable desire on the part of the proprietor to encourage home manufactures. The walls were covered with sporting prints in gay colours, while in the place of honour over the fire-place hung an oil painting of Mr. Sprouts' famous donkey, the immortal "Noddy."

I looked with much interest on the portrait of this intelligent quadruped about whom I had heard so much. Mr. Sprouts noticed this and said with a sigh:

"Ah! that was a hanimal. Do you think, old feller, that there's a futer state for donkeys?"

I professed myself unable to give any decided opinion upon this abstruse polemical point, and Mr. Sprouts continued—

"Dooring the six years as we lived 'armoniously together that hanimal never once shirked his dooty. Like that feller in the play as I used to see at the Surrey theayter—he died with his 'arness on his back. I wish he was alive and here now. He wouldn't 'ave gone and caught no eperzantes like all the hesses has. Why, I never knowed that critter have a day's illness except the time when the bull terrier chewed the end of his tail off, and then I cauterized it with a hot flat iron and stuck Betsy's chignon on to the end of it, and he was as right as a trivet next day, and looked as 'andsome as paint. But, lor! what a row the old lady kicked up about her blessed old chignon! Ah! how that woman's altered since we come into the fortun'. I really believe if that dear hanimal was here now she'd be too proud to ride behind him."

"This sickness is a sad thing for the poor horses, is it not?" I said.

"Yes," replied Mr. Sprouts, "and if you was in the hemploy of the City Passenger Railway I rather fancies you'd think it was a sad thing for the poor men too. You see the hesses they has a holiday and gits their wittles all the same, but they tell me that the Company's been a docking the men's wages, so I expects they don't find it much of a holiday. I'm designated with the Company. Why don't they set all hands to work to scrub out the cars with plenty of soap and water and repair the track in St. James Street? They wants it had enough."

I thought this was a remarkably good idea on the part of Mr. Sprouts; but as he seemed to be getting a little excited I changed the subject and enquired if he had attended the ceremony of the presentation to the city of the Queen's statue.

"Yes," he answered, "I was there of course, and a werry nobby speech Lord Dufferin made too. He's a brick is our Governor. There ain't no humbug about him, and I means to call on him when he comes to live in Montreal; but I wish that somebody would give some of our public men a 'ut to dress a little nobbler when they goes to a ceremony of this kind—best if some of 'em doesn't seem to think that when they gets their boots shined and puts on an old stovepipe hat as they're in full dress. I felt raly ashamed of some of 'em."

"But what do you think of the statue, Mr. Sprouts?" I enquired. "Don't you think it's very fine?"

Mr. Sprouts hesitated a little and then said: "Why, you see I ain't much of a judge about them things. If it was a donkey now or anything in the vegetable or shell fish line, I'd back my opinion agin anybody's. Of course as that statue was made by a celebrated London artist and cost a heap of money, heverybody feels bound to admire it werry much. But between you and me, old feller, if it had been designed by a local hartist and cost about half as much, there'd have been plenty of faults found about it."

"By-the-by, Mr. Sprouts," I said, "you take some interest in educational matters, do you not?"

"Yes," he replied, "I'm on the Committee of that there Mercantile Libery, and Betsy she's attendin' a course of lectures by Goldwin Smith. But, lor! there don't seem to be no gratitude in the world. You see the Libery has been a going down 'ill ever so long, and the young men seems to want something amooseing, so I hofferred to put up a skittle alley at my own expence, and best if some of 'em didn't hobject and said as they didn't think as skittles was elewatin' to the mind. Not elewatin' at all I know is that when I've been playin' a few games of skittles and 'avin' a pot or two of beer, I always feels werry considerably elewated. Besides, as I said at the meetin', if you turns the cathedral into a concert room I don't see why you shouldn't 'ave skittles in the Libery."