

Northern Messenger

Wm Bronscombe 2.0.06

VOLUME XLII. No. 2

MONTREAL, JANUARY 12, 1906.

40 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid



HIS FELLOW WORKMEN GAVE HIM RATHER A HARD TIME.

Fred Stevens's Dinner Party, and Other Sketches.

When Fred Stevens became converted his fellow-workmen gave him rather a hard time. Merry and full of life he had been, and was still, for the matter of that, but now they delighted to hush up every joke and pull a long face if he were nigh, pretending he thought it wicked to laugh.

But that which hurt him most was the charge of bad fellowship. 'He couldn't take a glass with them now, he was too good for that,' or the implied meanness that 'refused to stand treat as once he did.'

Fred was not mean. He was a frank-hearted, generous fellow, and the men knew it, only they wanted to get him back to the old ways. But Fred stood his ground, sometimes quietly went on with his work, and sometimes laughingly turned the tables against them. But he feared God. It was a real change in him, and he knew that whoever laughed he had the best of it, and was by far the happier.

At last, one day when the fun was keenest, and the taunting jokes were flying about, continually provoking laughter from the men, Fred turned round, saying, with one of his bright smiles, 'Look here, mates, it's quite true I have transferred my custom from the beerhouse to the butcher's, and I like it better. Now, I've often been with you and tried your fare will you come with me and try mine?'

The men stopped working, and turned to him, with an inquiring smile on their faces.

'Yes, I mean it,' he continued. 'To-morrow's Saturday, and if you'll come to my house in the evening instead of to the Black Bull I'll stand treat. But, mind, it'll be meat, not beer.'

The men were profuse in disclaiming their taunt of meanness. It was only to tease him they had spoken. Yet Fred stood to his invitation, and finally they agreed to come to 'Fred's dinner party,' as they dubbed it among themselves.

There were five of them besides Fred, and kind-hearted fellows as you can find. They were surprised to find what a comfortable home Fred had got, and how pleasantly his wife received them.

The dinner was good, too. Roast pork, apple sauce, and potatoes, and a substantial pudding to finish up with. They had good appetites, and enjoyed it, although there was no beer, and a pleasant, merry party it proved.

As soon as they had finished Jim Clifford got up. He was always the leader, bright, and full of life, and, holding a tumbler of water prominently before him, he said that he had an old duty to discharge in a new way. He was not much used to Adam's ale himself, but after the excellent fare they had, he must say it was refreshing, and he used it out of respect to his host, who had treated them so well. But it was the hostess he was

going to talk about, who had served such a splendid meal, so well cooked, and who was looking so well as to remind them of the pretty girl they knew before she was married. 'I am going to ask you to drink her health in water, because I know she'll like that best.'

'Aye, I do!' was her emphatic response.

'Well, here's to her, lads,' he continued, 'and may she long live to give Fred as good dinners as she's given to us.' And they all, gladly and perhaps a little noisily, drank her health.

'Well, mates,' said Fred, standing up, 'I am right glad you have drunk Polly's health, for she deserves it. She's been a right down good wife to me, and if I am a Christian man to-day I owe it to her. And when I told her about this dinner she took to it like a Briton. "We'll do it," she said, and so she did, and did it well, too,' which sentiment the men heartily applauded.

'But, mates, what I want to say is this, that many a Saturday night I've spent more money at the Black Bull than this feed has cost me to-night, and so have you. Now I don't go to the Black Bull, and I give the money to Polly instead, and she lays it out better than I used to do. The only difference there is, she's given us Sunday's dinner on Saturday night. She always gives me a good feed on Sunday, God bless her!

'But, mates, it was a hard battle for me, and you didn't always make it easier. Time