

PROGRESS, SATURDAY, MAY 19, 1894.

DESERVE GOOD WORDS.

STEPMOTHERS AS A CLASS HAVE BEEN UNFAIRLY USED.

Traditions as to their wickedness are not in accordance with the facts in most instances. Where stepmothers have had trials to endure sometimes.

If there is one person in this world that I sympathize with above all other oppressed and down trodden creatures, it is a stepmother; and the fact that the misguided woman has brought her troubles upon herself, so far from weighing in the balance against her, and giving the Job's comforters of her acquaintance a chance to say, "It is her own fault, and she deserves to suffer for her folly," should rather entitle her to the Victoria Cross with its grandly simple legend "For Valor."

The soldier who dashes alone up the slope commanded by a hostile battery, and rescues a wounded comrade in the very face of the enemy's guns is a brave man, and has won his "three pennorth of bronze" fairly; but then he does it in the heat of battle, when his blood is at fever heat, when the sense of danger is lost, and even the instinct of self-preservation lies dormant in the mad lust of battle which dominates every other feeling in the heart of the true soldier while he is in action. But the woman who is her own mistress and in her right mind, and yet deliberately marries a widower with a large family of small olive branches, and faces the ample task of bringing up another woman's children; or worse still, walks into the lion's den of a grown up family, some of them nearly as old as herself, displays the courage of the martyrs of old who walked singing up to the stake! Both approach their fate in cold blood, with only this difference—that the martyr had some slight idea of what he had to endure, while she has none. But then her sufferings were comparatively soon over, while her's often end only with her life.

Of course I know very well I am preaching the very rankest kind of heresy towards some of the most cherished traditions the world has ever hugged to its foolish old breast, and trying to shatter an idol as dear to humanity at large, as a belief in the elixir of life, was to the alchemists of the middle ages, or the existence of Captain Kidd's treasure seekers of the nineteenth century.

From almost the earliest times of which we have any record, the wicked stepmother has been almost as important a feature in song and fiction, as Fenimore Cooper's lonely horseman, or the villain in a melodrama. In medieval times she starved and beat her luckless children, when she did not murder them outright, but as a rule—especially in poetry—she took the shorter method, and simply strangled them first, and then threw them either down a well, or into one of the vaults with which every medieval castle of any standing was provided. In more modern days the wicked stepmother contented herself with oppressing the gentle beings confided to her untender mercies, by every means in her power. She turned their father's heart against them, managed to fasten suspicion of some kind upon the noble boy who had borne everything patiently for the sake of his lovely fragile sister, and finally succeeded in driving him forth from his father's house, and his own rightful heritage. She next managed to part the gentle girl from her lover, and give the grief which this last act of cruelty caused her, every chance to foster a natural tendency to consumption, and so remove the last obstacle in the way of her own son's succession to the family acres. In the present day, the popular ideal of a stepmother is a bold strong-minded woman who bullies the unfortunate youngsters under her care out of all reason, feeds them on bread and molasses while her own children get jam and cake, cuts down her own worn out dresses for them and is only generous of spankings to them.

And yet, in spite of all this accumulated mass of evidence, it is a source of perpetual wonder to me that a widower ever succeeds in finding any woman possessed of sufficient strength of mind, heart and character, to assume the thankless position of being a second mother, because the stepmother of reality is generally such a vastly different person from her prototype in fiction.

She is often a young girl full of romance, and generous impulses, and very much in love with the man who is so much older than herself, and yet who has selected her in spite of her youth and inexperience to take the place of the wife he has lost. I don't know why she should be, I am sure but still it is very often the case. The poor young thing is full of love and pity for the motherless children of the man she loves and brimming over with enthusiasm and unselfish plans for their happiness. She probably takes them at their father's valuation, and being young and inexperienced she is prepared to find a family of the sweetest cherubs that ever graced a household, all yearning for a mother's love, and prepared to meet her with open arms

and bestow upon her all the accumulated store of affection which has been pent up in their hearts since their own dear mother's death, and is only waiting for an object to expend itself upon.

And what does she often find to be the real state of affairs? She discovers too late that she has entered a household every member of which except the head, is an enemy, and who have all banded themselves together bound by a common bond, the determination to make her life as unpleasant as possible. Four or five sturdy children ranging in age from the precocious girl ten or eleven who has been primed with every wild tale of a stepmother's cruelty that can be imagined, ever since the fact of her father's engagement became known and who has been pitied and mourned over, and sympathized with over the bitter fate in store for her, by every nurse, governess, and misguided friend of the family who had nothing better to occupy their time, till her heart is harder than the nether millstone against the unfortunate stepmother—down to the delicate boy of three or four years old who has never known a mother's guiding hand, and who is so utterly spoiled now, that even his own mother could scarcely have patience with him.

Into this hostile camp the luckless bride is ushered and it is needless to say that it does not take long for her enthusiasm to abate, and her loving plans to evaporate into thin air. Perhaps there is no being in this world so hard to get on with, or to manage as a child; indeed I often wonder how their own mothers can put up with them and many honest mothers have confessed to me that nothing on earth but the divine mother love enabled them to have the patience necessary in bringing up children. And yet the stepmother is blamed if she falls short in the most trifling degree, or fails one iota in love or duty towards the children who are not only not her own, but who only give her dislike and suspicion in return for all her care.

She tries bravely to win their love, and if she fails, at least to do her duty, and keep the real state of affairs from her husband, partly lest it should worry him, and partly from a nervous dread lest he should think it her fault.

By and by children of her own are born to her, and though they do much to heal the heartache, they make her task harder in one way, because then she knows what the real love between mother and child is; and the constant struggle to avoid making any difference between the child who loves her and is her own, and the one who hates her and has none of her blood in its veins, becomes almost too great for human nature to endure. And yet there seems to be no sympathy for her anywhere, and all her troubles must be crushed down, and borne alone, so that she may show a smiling face to the world, which too often condemns her unheard.

But thank Heaven there are some exceptions to this dismal picture, and I have known two or three instances where the stepmother was valued as she deserved, and loved in only a lesser degree than the real mother could have been.

Several men, and two or three women whom I have known, have told me that their own mother could not have been dearer to them than the woman who had taken her place. One friend of my own, a lady past middle life, lost her mother whom she adored, and in speaking to me of her loss she said, "I have lost my best friend, and I scarcely know how to take up my life again and go on without her. I never knew any other mother, and I am sure my own could not have been more to me." I never knew till then that the mother she loved so dearly was only a stepmother.

I do not doubt for a moment that there are some bad stepmothers; in the nature of things there must be a few—but I believe, judging from my own experience, that the good ones predominate largely, and that their path is by no means strewn with roses, owing to the foolish custom so many people indulge in, of trying to prejudice their stepchildren against them; and also to the determined hostilities of the children themselves.

ASTRA.

Told of Lord Beaconsfield.

Freedom of speech has its penalties. Lord Beaconsfield was living at Hughenden Manor. He was one day walking on the terrace, in a easy coat and old slouch hat, when two women of strong Gladstonian opinions entered the gate. Supposing him to be a keeper or gardener, they inquired if he would show them over the place, which he at once undertook to do. While they were walking about they overwhelmed him with questions as to the habits of the master of the manor, and one of them finally said: "Do you think you could manage to get us a sight of the old beast himself?" "Madam," was the polite rejoinder, "the old beast has the honor to wait upon you now."

As Near as She Remembered.

The woman who married her dead husband's brother had a neat way of putting things. The portrait of her first husband hung in the parlor, and when asked whose portrait it was, she would reply:—"Lor' sakes! that 'ere is a likeness of my poor dead 'brother-in-law,' and as near as I can recollect, it is a pretty tolerable picture of him."

NOT ALL METHODISTS.

TURNING OF THE TABLES AS TO THE OFFICES IN HALIFAX.

Denominationalism in the Matter of the City Officials—Catholics are to the Front and in a Number of Instances are in the Line of Promotion in the Future.

HALIFAX, May 17.—Some time ago a leading Boston paper contained an article congratulating Irishmen and Roman Catholics on the fact that two of the most exalted positions in Nova Scotia at the present time are held by descendants of sons of Erin, and that the senior member for this county in the Dominion commons, as well as the junior member in the Senate, are proud of their Irish Catholic lineage. Governor Daly, Mayor Keefe, Thomas E. Kenny, M. P., and Senator Power, next to being Canadians, boast of their love for Ireland. These men with all their possible faults, are a credit to the old and the new country both.

But the fact that those prominent positions were held by Catholics did not altogether make up for what some people here considered an undue representation in the civic employ, in the offices of the various departments at the city hall. Mysterious paragraphs appeared from time to time in the papers rather complaining that there were too many "methodists" in receipt of salaries from the city, and that that denomination had too large a share of the fat offices. Possibly some such disproportionate state of affairs existed two years ago but there is a decided change now, or there soon will be.

The Catholics did not set out to capture the heads of departments all at once, and that they are in a fair way to partial success in that direction now may be pure accident, but it looks as if before long it might be the Methodists and other protestants who will be complaining that to a certain extent they are out in the cold. Lately, whenever a junior clerkship was to be filled, generally a Catholic has been selected for the place. It will thus only be a question of time when, in the course of promotion, those juniors will be the heads.

This conclusion has been suggested by the appointment last week of James J. Hopewell, as assistant clerk of works. The late clerk, W. B. McNutt, was a pillar in the Methodist church. Since his death, Mr. Reilly, a Catholic, is promoted and another Catholic made assistant clerk. Whatever may be said of Mr. Reilly's qualifications for his position, Mr. Hopewell at least will make an admirable officer, and the chances are that ere long he will be clerk of works. After all, citizens should not look at a man's creed in discussing his qualification for an office, and that is not the intention of this letter, but there are people who do, and sometimes it makes an interesting pastime for them. Mr. Hopewell is the right man in the right place. He was long in the office of the North Atlantic steamship company, and recently, when that concern was bought out by the Plant line, he found himself out of a situation. That is how he came to be a candidate.

Another instance of such a denominational change is furnished in the city clerk's office. Mr. Rhind, a staunch Episcopalian, was superannuated more than a year ago on account of ill-health, and Henry Trenaman, the old assistant, and also a protestant, was made his successor. L. F. Monaghan, an influential young Catholic, was appointed assistant. The appointment was a good one. Mr. Monaghan makes an efficient officer, and in course of time, Mr. Trenaman, being twenty-five years his senior, Mr. Monaghan will be city clerk. That makes, practically, a denominational change in two of the important offices.

In the city engineers office the assistant, Mr. Johnston, is a Catholic, and if Mr. Doane were to resign, or be removed for any cause, Johnston would take a step up, and there is no doubt would be found a perfectly capable official, as he is now in the assistants position.

In the poor's asylum Superintendent Daw is a decided protestant. If anything were to happen him his successor will likely be Mr. Mulcahey, the secretary of the institution under the charities committee. Whether or not Mr. Mulcahey could satisfactorily perform the duties would remain to be seen. He is a Catholic.

Ewen Morrison is the efficient foreman of the water works department, an official whom the Moncton people were after some time ago. The Presbyterian church finds in Mr. Morrison an enthusiastic adherent. Should we go elsewhere, and for any other reason should it become necessary to appoint a successor to Mr. Morrison, the man who stands the best chance to get the place is John E. Burns, the present water inspector, a leading member of St. Mary's society and a devout Catholic.

When John O'Sullivan was appointed chief of police, Garrett Cottar, the former head of the force, was continued as city marshal. This made two Catholic heads of departments instead of one as before. Had all the churches in the land been

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LED BY OTHER RODENTS.

A Blind Rat Guided to and From Its Food and Hiding Place.

The manner in which rats steal eggs has always been regarded as a wonderful example of animal intelligence. It is well known how one rat will hold the egg firmly between its four legs, then turn over upon its back and, remaining in this position, allow itself to be pulled along by other rats until the nest is reached. Remarkable as this may seem, a writer for the Pittsburg Dispatch recently heard of a still more astonishing example of the intelligence of a rat. Patrick Hurley lives in a rural portion of the twenty-third ward. Some distance from his home is a large barn, where, besides horses and cows, he keeps quite a number of chickens. About 100 yards from the barn a brook winds its way through a ravine. Naturally the presence of corn and grain about the barn had drawn many rats. They frequently come out in the barnyard for food or to play. Among the rats the Hurleys had observed one that was a rare specimen of its tribe. Its coat was of a pure white. Strangely, too, the white rat, whenever it appeared, had a companion that was apparently leading it. This peculiarity caused the people to watch the rodents. They discovered that the white rat always had a straw in its mouth by which the other rat led it. They concluded the rat was blind. Sometimes, when a particular good lot of corn was found, the white rat would drop the straw and proceed to satisfy its hunger. But by an impatient movement he was always able to bring to him one of his friends, who would pick up the straw, give it to him and lead the unfortunate back to the nest under the barn. One of the most remarkable things noted was the fact that every day the blind rat was led out by another down to the brook to get a drink. This was not an occasional but a regular performance. After the blind animal had satisfied its thirst the straw would be put into its mouth by its companion or attendant, and the rat led carefully back. But one day some boys, who were not acquainted with the story of the blind white rat, saw the two animals coming from the creek, and at once made a charge on them. The leader of the blind rat endeavored to hurry up its charge, but was finally forced to let go of the straw and scamper off to save its own life. The white rat, left helpless, ran blindly around until the boys caught and killed it.

PURELY DENOMINATIONAL.

One of the Stories Told by Jay Cooke of a Man From the Rural Districts.

Jay Cooke, in 1866, told the following: "One day, when I was putting government bonds upon the market, I was greatly annoyed by the clerks telling me there was an old man in the office who would do no business with them and must see me. To get rid of him I went out. Said he: "Mr. Cooke, I have got \$3,000 in gold in this bag. I can't do anything with it in town where I live; they are circulating grocer's checks and everything else but money, and I am frightened because I think I will be cheated if I dispose of it. Will you tell me on your word of honor if these bonds are sound and right?" "I replied: 'If they are not right, nothing is right. I am putting all I have in the world into them.' "After further conversation the man concluded to take them. "What denomination will you have them in?" I asked. "This was too much for the man. He had never heard that word used in connection with business. He scratched his head and said: "You can give me \$500 in Old School Presbyterian, to please the old woman, but I will take the hell of it in Baptist."

Comparison in Years.

How strange our ideas of growing old change as we get on in life. To the girl in her teens, the ripper maiden of twenty-five seems quite aged. Twenty-two thinks thirty-five an "old thing." Thirty-five dreads forty, but congratulates herself that there may still remain some ground to be possessed in the fifteen years before the half century shall be attained. But fifty does not by any means give up the battle of life. It feels middle-aged and vigorous, and thinks old age a long way in the future. Sixty remembers those who have done great things at threescore; and one doubts if Parr, when he was married at one hundred, had at all begun to feel himself an old man.

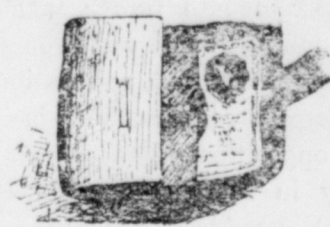
The American, not the Moncton "Thad."

The late Judge Jere Black once said of Thad Stevens: "He's one of the brightest men ever born and can say the smartest things, but in respect of being under any sense of obligation to his Creator his mind is a howling wilderness.—Ex.

How to Clean Brass.

A good material for cleaning brass is oxalic acid. As this is a poison, of course the article, after cleaning, should be thoroughly washed, to remove the excess of acid and the salts formed by it with the copper and zinc of the brass, but it is safe if used intelligently. Much of our brass now in use is covered with a coating of shellac varnish, which protects it from tarnishing, and requires no cleaning as long as the varnish remains intact. If, however, the coating be broken, and we want to remove it and clean the brass underneath it, it should be remembered the shellac is soluble in alcohol, and it may be rubbed off with a cloth wet with this substance, the brass cleaned, and a new coating of shellac applied.

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