

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN GIRLS IN PARIS.

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JOHN BULL has often won fair possessions by his sword, and then allowed them to slip from his hands through the wiles of diplomatists. About the middle of last century a remarkable instance of this strange tendency occurred. The long contest for supremacy on the continent of America between Great Britain and France had been brought to a brilliant close by the capture of Quebec by Wolfe. Canada was completely and finally subjugated, and France thenceforth abandoned all hope of ascendancy in the Western world. The mighty fortress of Louisburg had

already fallen, and the whole country lay at the feet of England, at a great cost of blood and treasure. Canada was a conquered country. It was for the victors to decide on its future laws and government.

And now, having sheathed the sword, John Bull took up the pen, and, according to his custom, allowed himself to be allured by the French diplomatists into one of the most egregious mistakes recorded in his history.

There was no room whatever for the offices of diplomacy. The land was the rightful possession of the conquerors. It was not incumbent on them to bind themselves by any stipulations with the conquered as to their treatment of the territory. Yet they did so; and to this hour the baneful effects of the "Treaty of Cession" are felt in Canada. The French had nothing to cede. Wolfe had settled that on the Plains of Abraham. Yet England accepted under a treaty what was already hers by conquest, and in the treaty the English representatives allowed the astute French diplomatists to insert covenants and stipulations which secured to the French inhabitants of Lower Canada, now the Province of Quebec, French laws, language, and religion in perpetuity. Enormous tracts of land, then of little importance, but now of immense value—such, for instance, as that on which the great city of Montreal is built—were guaranteed to the ecclesiastical authorities, and are now held in mortmain, and form a dead weight on the progress of the country. The result has been that while all the rest of the Dominion is in a ferment of activity and enterprise, the Province of Quebec, thus heavily handicapped, and artificially separated from the

English-speaking provinces, not only lags far behind them in the race at present, but is daily increasing the distance between them. But the knot which diplomacy tied must eventually be unravelled by the same agency which tied it.

But what, I may be asked, has all this to do with English girls in Paris? Much every way. It illustrates the mode in which some of the sufferings endured by Englishwomen in France have originated, and it points to the remedy.

One fruitful source of misery has been the state of French law on the subject of marriage with foreigners. It appears to be a monstrous thing that a marriage valid in one civilised country should be invalid in another, and that a neighbouring and friendly state. But, unhappily, it is as true as it is monstrous that in the case of girls married in England to Frenchmen according to the rules of English law, the marriage may be legally repudiated by the husband on his return to France whenever it suits his convenience to do so. Nor is this a mere imaginary evil; authentic cases of cruel desertion by Frenchmen of their English wives, in many instances after they had possessed themselves of the whole of their victims' property, are, unhappily, of too frequent occurrence to admit of any doubt on the subject. The Civil Code of France, which is in truth the Code Napoléon with the great Emperor's name obliterated from political motives, renders a desertion under these circumstances not only possible, but perfectly legal. In the eye of the French law the man was never married at all. In effect, the provisions of the Civil Code offer a distinct premium to the committal of one of the most heartless and cruel offences of which a man can be guilty.

What is the remedy? Let us look back to the beginning of this century, and see if we cannot get some light on the point.

As in the days of Wolfe's victory in the previous century it was for England, had she exercised her indisputable rights, to dictate terms to the vanquished, so in the still more glorious days of Wellington, when France lay prostrate at the feet of Europe, it was in the power of England to have insisted upon an international code, or understanding, with France, from which every possibility of injustice to her own subjects was eliminated. But amid the excitement of the great events of that memorable period, the putting down and setting up of kingdoms, and the glamour of regal festivities, such comparatively small matters as the laws of marriage and the relative position of the subjects of the various countries affected were wholly lost sight of. And now, just as in the parallel case of the conquest of Canada, the present generation is suffering the penalty of the remissness and mistakes of former days.

When Miss Leigh, whose noble work in Paris on

behalf of English and American girls is now beginning to attract the attention which it deserves, gave her evidence before the French Government on this subject, and detailed many cruel instances of desertion which were well known to herself, she was told by a member of the French Cabinet that the British Government had the remedy in their own hands. This reply could bear but one interpretation: it meant that if England was dissatisfied with the state of the French law, she might retaliate, and place French citizens under the same disabilities of which English subjects now complain. I do not know that Miss Leigh drew the same inference from the French Minister's remark; I am merely giving the impression which it leaves on my own mind. But, if I am correct, this would surely be a miserable remedy, if it is a remedy at all: it would simply double the possibilities of cruel desertions by giving evilly-disposed Englishmen an opportunity to commit crimes now enjoyed by Frenchmen only. I cannot, however, entertain a doubt that the Government of France would listen to any overtures made by the British Government on this subject, and would gladly introduce into the Civil Code such changes as would set this important question for ever at rest. This way lies the path which leads to a real and lasting remedy; and though it would be only obtaining as a matter of grace and favour terms which England might at one time have dictated, yet even at this late hour it would be an object which all would rejoice in achieving, by whatever means secured.

There is, however, another aspect of English life in Paris which neither Governments nor Legislatures can affect. Great numbers of English and American girls are every year attracted to the French capital, in hopes of acquiring either the language "as spoken in Paris," or the taste and skill necessary to qualify them to earn a living as modistes for the upper classes in their own country. It is quite clear that their welfare must depend largely on themselves, with such assistance as they may receive from the disinterested philanthropists who have come to their aid.

The greater number of these are not housemaids, nor the children of peasants, but the daughters of half-pay officers, medical men, clergymen, and other professional men who have died, leaving their families without any provision for their support. Hundreds of these girls, without any knowledge of the world or of the exceptionally great dangers of the Parisian world, drift from the English and American shores in an almost ceaseless stream to that great vortex. Notwithstanding their numbers, however, one might walk the streets of Paris for weeks, and seldom or never meet with one of this class unmistakably English or American in appearance.

But all Paris is not to be seen in the streets. Beneath the pavement over which thousands of busy feet are hurrying from morn till night there is another world of busy toilers. Innumerable workshops exist in these cellars, in which the light of day never appears, and where hundreds of English and American girls are sorrowing in bitterness of soul that they ever left their homes. And what remuneration do many of these un-

happy toilers receive? According to the testimony of Miss Leigh—and we can wish for no higher—it is just two meals a day, without lodging or any money payment whatever. But, you may say, they cannot possibly live on those wages. Of course not. Just ask them, as Miss Leigh has often done, how they do manage to exist.

If anything can be done to help those among them who are willing to be helped to a higher level, I am sure all would rejoice to see the effort prosper; and it appears to me that this is precisely the work which Miss Leigh is so nobly doing. I have no acquaintance with that lady or with her work, beyond having once had the pleasure of hearing her give an address on the subject at a drawing-room meeting. She is a very pleasing speaker; but it was not simply on that account that I was interested, but from the intrinsic merits of the cause she advocated: indeed, none could listen to her touching appeal without some emotions of sympathy being aroused. It is seldom that any philanthropic undertaking obtains such remarkable testimony to its value as this effort has received—testimony so peculiar that I cannot conclude without adverting to it.

After witnessing the progress of the work for several years, and satisfying himself of its reality and importance, the well-known M. Galignani, before his death, presented his orphanage at Neuilly, which had cost him fifteen or sixteen thousand pounds, to Miss Leigh, and by his will has directed the sum of three hundred pounds per annum to be paid for ten years successively towards helping on the work in which she is engaged.

More recently, the Baroness Alphonse de Rothschild contributed fifteen hundred pounds to erect an additional building, rendered necessary by the expansion of the work. When we bear in mind that these munificent gifts to an institution conducted on Protestant principles came, one from a Roman Catholic and the other from a Jewess, and neither of them English, and that in both cases they were the spontaneous offerings of the donors, arising solely from their conviction of the value of the results already attained, we need no higher testimony to the real importance of the effort.

It is not my object, nor are these columns the place, simply to advocate the claims of one out of the innumerable charities that appeal to the community for aid. But I have no doubt that any of my readers who would like to learn more on this interesting subject can readily ascertain the address of the committee in London, who will, doubtless, gladly supply information to any applicant.

Since the above was written I have seen in the morning papers that Lord Granville's secretary, replying to a memorial from Liverpool, in reference to the French marriage laws, and the hardships arising from their uncertainty inflicted upon Englishwomen marrying Frenchmen, writes:—"That matter is engaging the attention of Her Majesty's Government, and an arrangement is nearly concluded with the French Government which will practically obviate the evils complained of." This is most satisfactory