

A TALE OF ANCIENT WRONG.

About this time of the year, as regularly as the seasons roll, the newspapers begin to discuss the subject of "country board," and to receive letters about it from that large class of dwellers in cities to whom the expensive joys of Newport and Saratoga and Sharon are forbidden, but who, nevertheless, want to get to the country with their families during the hot weather, and, partly for the sake of the seclusion and plain clothes, and partly for the sake of economy, resort to the farm-houses.

The number of farm-houses which now receive city families in July and August is practically unlimited. The boarders, however, generally come back to town feeling swindled, attenuated, badly bitten, and somewhat run down in digestion, and possibly with the seeds of disease implanted in the children by poor fare, vomiting, if not swearing, that they have had the last of "country board."

The memory of last year's woes has grown faint, and the grass and foliage become tempting, and the streets look hot, and dusty, and lonely, and the children look pale, and another trial is made; and so on from year to year, till some people are lashed into fury by the mere sight of a farmer, and think of a farm-house as a den in which strangers are starved and cheated, under the pretense of being fattened and strengthened; and their indignation is favored by the press, which, in May and June, renews savagely with the agricultural population upon its beds, the beef, its butter and milk, and, indeed, its whole manner of life.

We are not so vain as to suppose that anything we can say can bring the parties in this controversy to an understanding. There are some woes which nothing but the consolations of religion can assuage, as the lady said apropos of the expensive clothes of her next door neighbor's daughters, and we are far from flattering ourselves that we can pluck from anybody's brain the bitter memories of saleratus bread, and boiled pork, rancid butter, skimmed milk, or other country delicacies.

But we think we can give some reasons why a city family of moderate means and average fortune should accept the existing condition of country living with at least as much resignation as it accepts the narrowness of fortune, or the dust of the cars, or the dulness of trade, or the weight of taxation. In other words, we think there is more to be said for the farmer and his wife than this pair of badly fed extortioners are likely to say for themselves, partly, no doubt, owing to their callousness, but somewhat to their defective literary training.

In the first place, we think the ideas of farm-house life, as held by city people are greatly colored either by boyish recollections of the enjoyment of things only enjoyable when one is very young, very poor, and very inexperienced, or by the literary view of country life derived from magazines and novels. According to the novelists and magazine-writers, the farm is a real Arcadia, flooded, however, with the light of modern thought. The air is ever heavy with the scent of the flowers and the blossoms of the new-mown hay; the orchards are laden with golden fruit; the barn-yard swarms with tender chickens, and the shelves of the dairy are groined with cream-pans and the cheese, and of these things good to market till the family have had their fill. The farmer himself is a jolly and open-handed man, full of wise saws and modern instances, and his wife, an industrious, bustling, efficient person, with her head full of receipts for dainty dishes, which it is her special delight to prepare, and which she revels in seeing other people eat. The picture of the daughters, too, is well calculated to fire the dullest imagination. They make their own clothes, of plain, sensible materials, but, it is cut on patterns furnished by *Harper's Bazar*, so that, as far as externals go, they are not distinguishable from really good city girls. They do nearly all the work of the house, and delight in it—in fact, consider it "fun"—without even soiling their dresses, and almost without soiling their fingers, and hate the sight of Irish "helps." They take a "Robinson-Crusoe-like pleasure" in the chores. Every morning "they give the coffee pot a ration of fragrant beaten paste—the brown kernels mixed with an egg; into one frying-pan "they set the milk for the brewis, into which, when it boils up white and frothy, they go the sweet fresh butter and the salt, and then the bread-crumbs; and the result is a light, delicate, savory bread-porridge, to eat daintily with a fork, and be thankful for."

very small, and not only does she not care to add to it, but she wishes in her heart there was no such thing as food known, and would herself, were it not for the cravings of her men folk, gladly live on ten and bread or coffee and pie all the year round. The girls, instead of looking forward eagerly to your coming, and being ready to discuss Shakespeare and the musical glasses with you, have probably gone off to teach or work in a factory, as the readiest way of supporting themselves and lightening their father's burdens. Even if you should find them at home, however, so far from wanting to make coffee and brewis and bake bread for you, they have been so long and so faithfully learning the great democratic lesson of equality, that the last thing in the world they wish is to wait on you. They think you are quite competent to wait on yourselves, and that if you did more of it it would be better for you; so they set themselves resolutely to keep you in mind of the utility and baseness of the little airs of refinement and social superiority which you bring down with you from the city.

It must be borne in mind, too, which it seems not to be by many persons, that farmers who offer country board are not induced to do so by a feeling of compassion for the poor people, or from a desire to bring the roses back to their cheeks. They are induced to do it by the hope of making a little money with the least possible outlay on their part, and the least possible disturbance of their daily life. People who complain of the coarseness of their fare and the badness of their beds talk as if they deliberately went to work to set up a poor boarding-house, and that the poverty of their table was the result simply of a desire to cheat. It is nothing of the kind. The way that the farmer asks you to live is rather better than the way he and his family live all the rest of the year. The saleratus bread is the bread always consumed in the family, and if he sends his fat chickens and his lambs and his best vegetables to the market, it is because he has always done so; if he were to let you eat them, he would probably make little or nothing by keeping you. What you ask him to do when you call for good bread and fresh meat every day, and good vegetables and milk of the first quality, is to rearrange his whole life and business for two months in the year. If he were to give you such a table as you ask for, he would have to get from New York such a cook as you pay sixteen or eighteen dollars a month; to, instead of the wild "help" whom you see rugging to and fro furtively between the kitchen and the wood-pile like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons, probably picked up in the nearest settlement at five or six dollars a month, he would have to get a waiter or two from the city at double that sum. In short, for the number of boarders his house will contain, the thing would never pay. He does not want to go into a new business; he simply invites you, if you want country air, to share the fare and conveniences of his own household.

The remedy is to be found—if remedy there be—in the multiplication of boarding-houses, managed by people who understand keeping them, and make a business of it. Boarding city people cannot be tasked on to farming, as American farm life now is, and as American women now practice cookery. What we want is a greater number of country innkeepers, who know what city people need to make them comfortable, and are not above trying to supply it, instead of making, as so many "hotel-keepers" do, a steady effort to reform city manners, and show guests that their desires are unreasonable. Let us suggest, too, that, now that women are looking about so eagerly for new fields of employment, and are so fretted by the public disinclination to let them be lawyers and brokers, that there is here an excellent opening for farmers' daughters. A company of young women, in any healthy and picturesque locality, who could furnish amongst them really good cooks, chambermaids, and waiters, and were not above being polite—not servile, but polite—might, we are sure, reap a golden harvest every summer. There would be little difficulty in their finding houses or capital if they gave any evidence of ability to make use of them; and they might rob summer of the terrors it now has for so many thousands of families.

But of the improvement of board in farm-houses we cannot conscientiously hold out any hope. It cannot come without a total reorganization of American agricultural life, and the breaking up of many very deeply rooted habits, and these we are not likely to see in our time. People who cannot stand farm-house board, and cannot afford the great hotels or country houses, would therefore do well to stay at home. If they have to do so, too, we see no objection to their persuading themselves, as so many do, that the air of Murray Hill is as pure as any on the continent, and that, for real coolness and repose, there is no place on a summer evening like the stoop of a New York house. But there is little use in abusing the farmers and just as little in dreaming golden dreams of the summer that is to be. All board is vanity and vexation of spirit, whether it be in town or country. There is probably no image which so many active and subtle brains have delighted in conjuring up as the ideal boarding-house-keeper. Many is the pillow on which she has spread succulent beefsteaks and potatoes done to a turn, and light, wholesome, and well-baked bread, with a winning and respectful smile. But the vision fades with the morning light, and we fear it will long before poor humanity sees it embodied in flesh and blood.

A NEW THEORY OF IMMORTALITY. The immortality of the soul is so conclusively established in the teachings of Christianity that an attempt to prove it on grounds apart from revelation must naturally seem to most minds a mere labor of supererogation, even if it be not one of irrelevance; but, as evidence of the curious theories the human mind can invent, we would call the attention of our readers to a most remarkable theory propounded by the late Dr. Ivan Slavovski, a very distinguished Russian mathematician, in which he attempts to give "Mathematical and Physical Proof of the Immortality of Man." But it is not immortality, as we ordinarily understand it, that the learned mathematician believed himself to have established, for his "mathematical and physical proof consigns us for vast and indefinite periods of years to utter oblivion, but recalls us upon the stage of life at regular recurring eras, to re-enact our little drama of existence—to be born again, to enjoy, to suffer, to die, exactly as we are now born, and as we now enjoy, suffer, and die. We would endeavor to make Dr. Slavovski's extraordinary theory clear to the reader in a few words as possible. Dr. Slavovski asserts the atomic theory of the universe. The world is composed of a limited and definite number of indivisible atoms. Atoms are defined as the smallest existing portion of matter. The indivisibility of matter has been asserted by

some philosophers, but Dr. Slavovski asserts pertinently whether or not there is the smallest existent portion of matter. To say there is not, is to say there is a portion of matter smaller than itself, which is an evident absurdity. The universe being composed of a definite number of atoms, these are ceaselessly undergoing change of place, constantly combining in new forms, and with variable results. But, the question arises, into how many possible forms may these atoms be arranged, and, when every variation of form is expressed, must not former combinations recur? The letters a and b, for instance, can only be formed into ab and ba; the letters a, b, c, give six variations, or permutations, which are abc, acb, bac, bca, cab, cba. Two things may be arranged by pairs in four ways, as a and b can be placed as ab, ba, ba, and ab. These letters may be varied by pairs nine ways, and, as evidence "of the number of combinations of a few things taken by twos, by threes, by fours, and so on, it is only necessary to state that in this way the letters of the alphabet would give 1,391,724,288,887,252,999,425,128,493,402,200 changes, and not one more. This result is definitely fixed by the law of their arrangement." And, just as there is a law of limitation in the combination of three, six, or twenty-six letters, so there is also the law of limitation in the combination of any number of items or atoms. There must come a time, then, according to this rule, when all possible place-changes of the atoms composing the universe will have been exhausted, and nature must return to forms or combinations that have previously existed. This theory, the reader will understand, asserts that the time must come "when the earth will be in the same condition it is at this moment, and that it has already been a vast number of times. The geological eras which have made it what it is will again work out their necessary results, and man will appear again, each individual being precisely the same individual he is now, born of the same parents, be reared under the same circumstances, and live the same life." This surprising theory assumes, it will be noted, that each person is no more than a "fortuitous congregation of atoms," and entirely eliminates all conception of soul or spirit. The vast interregnum between each of our eras of existence is described as in no way affecting us, because we should be unconscious of the duration of it. Of what that duration may be, we can form some sort of breathless guess when we recall what we have already said of the number of combinations of the English alphabet is capable of. If any one would like to estimate how many years must elapse before the world returns to its old course, and things that have been shall once more be, let him assume the largest possible number his imagination can grasp as a possible enumeration of the number of atoms in the universe, and then let him apply the rule of permutations, which is as follows:—To find, say, the permutations of two letters, multiply one by two; of three letters, multiply one by two, and the result by three; of four letters, multiply one by two, the result by three, and the last result by four. Seven letters will give five thousand and forty possible changes—and with this start we hope some of our industrious readers will ascertain the time when our earthly turn ought to come around again. But how strange and startling is this proposition! If it assumes that, at each recurring era, we should be unconscious of preceding ones, then this sort of immortality is nothing to us; immortality, if it concerns us at all, must mean the perpetuation of our individuality—and if it does mean this, then Dr. Slavovski's theory is a purgatory ever dreamed of. Think of men and women being compelled in ever-recurring eras to endure over and over again all their trials, struggles, disappointments, and sorrows, and all their pains and ills, all their delusions and sharp disciplines. Think of calamity, and war, and famine, of crime and disease, of persecutions and cruelties, of sloth and debauchery, of oppression and wrong, being also immortal, forever and forever returning to renew their terrible history! Why, this conception of immortality renders life absolutely appalling, and may well make us hope that Dr. Slavovski's "Mathematical and Physical Proof" be found to have omitted some important factor, by which the dire result predicted may never come about.—*Appleton's Journal.*

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