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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

AN URGENT QUESTION.

Is the question—What shall we do with our girls? solved in a very satisfactory way by the employment given in the Government offices at Washington to women? That very smart and round-the-world-in-no-time institution, the female reporter, still peculiarly American, has given us some particulars as to the fair employees alluded to, and, indeed, in some instances, their lot seems by no means one on which no improvement could be made. They are 5000 in number, we are told, "the brightest women in the United States," and that of course bespeaks a degree of brilliancy quite unimaginable. We are afraid, however, that the female reporter, herself an individual of considerable brightness, is not prejudiced in favour of the sterner sex. She is so very smart and so very much engaged in getting quickly and brilliantly over the ground that, perhaps, she has not time to perceive, much less to ponder on, their good points. But here is what she tells us about the girls who earn their salaries as clerks. "For most positions they make better clerks than men. They waste less time chewing tobacco, (Do they, indeed, waste any?) and they do not spend an hour or so over the morning paper. They are fine copyists and they can count money faster than a man can think." It is to be wondered, in passing, in what manner a man has communicated his thoughts to the female reporter. She evidently thinks him dreadfully slow, or else does not appreciate well weighed ruminations. But these deft girl-clerks are not only prodigiously fast, outstripping with their fingers the thoughts of man; they can also do two things at once, coming nearer to the powers of Sir Boyle Roache's bird than anyone else we know of, bi-location and twofold action being in some degree akin. While they count it seems they also think, wishing the dollars they handle were their own. "I (the female reporter) asked one of them yesterday if she did not covet the money she counted. She replied that she did, and that her feelings while she worked were much like those of the ragged boy who presses his nose against the candy window and gloats upon the sweets within and thinks what he would do if he had them. Coveting and counting, then, go on together. But at least let us recognise the advantage gained by the man-creature in his slowness of thought. He is not so fast about breaking one of the commandments. These counting clerks, however, suffer from a danger in handling bank notes, not only of incurring infectious diseases, but of blood poisoning from the arsenic used in colouring. "The position," says the reporter, "is by no means a sinecure, and it is my experience that these Government clerks have to work mighty hard for every cent they get." Of another department in the Government service we are told that the girls work as hard as any of the factory girls in England. We do not know, meantime, that we should vote for the solution of the difficulty as to disposing of our girls by copying the American example. If it were only to spare our men the humiliation of being proved slow in thought—less nimble in their minds than a girl in her fingers,—not to speak of her tongue, that organ of the sex nimble *par excellence*, and outstripping as it would often appear not only the thoughts of the man but even those of the woman herself, there would be something to make us hesitate. Nevertheless, the question among ourselves is far from being solved and it seems to become more and more urgent.

MR LABOUCHERE perseveres in his resolution to do AN ANOMALOUS away with the House of Lords. Notwithstanding INSTITUTION. his expulsion from the House of Commons he was able to return in time to bring forward his standing motion for the abolition of the hereditary Chamber. Matters, however, are not as yet ripe for the momentous change involved, and, as a necessary consequence the motion has once more been rejected. We are, nevertheless not very rash in assuming that things are ripening every day for the end alluded to, and that if the days of the obnoxious Chamber are

not actually numbered they are at least coaching the point at which such will be the case.—Indeed, a democratic spirit extends among the English people, and a traditional influence of rank and wealth grows weaker, they of necessity, revolt against the anomalies that hereditary legislation involves. As Mr. Labouchere argued, for example, it is monstrous that men who have been expelled from the Jockey Club, and warned off race-courses, should still have a right to take a part in determining grave and serious issues, with which the interests of the Nation are bound up. There are members of the House of Lords in whose hands the humblest and most careless even of the lowest class of the community would hesitate to place anything that was of importance to them. There is, for example, the Marquis of Ailesbury, an associate of blacklegs of a more degraded class, and himself their fitting comrade. There is also the Duke of Manchester, who within the last month or two has succeeded his father, and who as Lord Mandeville had for some years owed his support to a disreputable woman, earning a living as a music-hall singer—while he was separated from his wife, an American lady who seems to have made a bad bargain in her marriage. In comparison with either of these noblemen another notoriety of the peerage, the present Duke of Marlborough, may perhaps seem to shine, though he also has figured in a manner that would disqualify any man for obtaining a seat in the House of Commons. The constituency, at least, that would elect him must be chiefly composed of the aristocratic element. Yet it is to a Chamber in which such men have a hereditary right to sit, and to this Chamber alone, that the Prime Minister, now in office, acknowledges his accountability. It was to it that Lord Salisbury explained, or attempted to explain the conduct with which he was charged the other day by Mr. Labouchere, haughtily intimating that he was exalted beyond the rebuke of the House of Commons. His Lordship, in short would plead before the Duke of Marlborough, the Duke of Manchester and the Marquis of Ailesbury, but he would not condescend to offer an explanation to Mr. Gladstone and his honourable colleagues. Is not such a state of things anomalous in the extreme, and such as can endure only so long as the influence of old associations and traditions of the past is unduly felt among the people? But, under the new condition of things, this must sooner or later die out. An Upper Chamber will probably still remain, but it will not be hereditary.

The much-dreaded labour demonstrations have, A REASONABLE after all, with very few exceptions, passed quietly DEMAND. by. In some parts of Spain and France riots have occurred, and from Vienna some slight scuffling with the authorities is reported, but on the whole the working-men have proved themselves to be orderly, law-abiding, and legitimately attending to the promotion of their interests. In London an immense assemblage gathered in Hyde Park, their usual place of meeting, and everything was conducted by them in a peaceable and respectable manner. The authorities seem to have perceived that nothing was to be gained by interfering with the people, and consequently none of those disgraceful displays on the part of the police took place which on former occasions had resulted in rioting. The Government were probably influenced by the recollection that whatever they might do, a dissolution of Parliament must at length take place—was, in fact, inevitably approaching nearer every day, and that the London populace would remember their behaviour towards them at the General Election. The hint of the way in which popular feeling inclines, lately given by the election for North St. Pancras, may also have something to do with the matter. The chief point insisted upon at the meeting in Hyde Park, and made prominent elsewhere, was the eight hours' system. On obtaining this the working men seem determined, and the sympathy of all right-feeling people the world over must be with them in their effort. There may be places, indeed, where legislation for the purpose in question is not required—new countries, for example, where everything shows something of a change from that which has existed in the older world—where the divisions of the classes are less marked, and the employer is more immediately and surely accountable to the community at large for his conduct towards his employees. The change to be brought about in other lands, however, is one more