

THE EVENING NEWS.

Tuesday, December 21 1872.

DIGBY'S REFORM CLUB.

A Sketch for Whom it may Concern.

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

There was a quartette of free and dignified spirits in Boston, and John Digby was the acknowledged leader thereof. Peter Slade, and Tom Lowden, and Sam Pepper were his associates. They were four young men, free-hearted and generous, with great capacity for enjoyment. On a certain Monday evening they were assembled in the small parlour of a house in the city, for the purpose of having a good time, as they were wont to do. The season was winter, and the beverage of rum, sugar, milk, and egg, familiarly known among the initiated as "Tom and Jerry." At an early stage of the evening, before the wine had been consumed, Peter Slade suggested that he had a complaint to make against one of the dignitaries of the town, and thereupon he opened his tale of denunciation against Sam Pepper, the old clergyman of the place.

"As near as I can find out," he said, "the person just about the same as called us by name, and held us up as a set of graceless scoundrels."

"Not quite so bad as that," said John Digby. "He did certainly allude to us very plainly; but the words he brought against us were that we were prostituting noble powers and opportunities to base and sinful purposes. Rather flattering, I thought, especially the noble powers."

"Flattering with a vengeance," growled Tom Lowden. "What business is it of his?"

"As he said," replied Sam Pepper, "what business is it of his? And then look at the hullabaloo they're making over this foreign mission. It was in connection with that that Sam Pepper attacked us. They'd better look at home. I think we're suffering enough under our very noses that had better be looked out for first."

"That's so," cried Slade. "I say, 'charity begins at home.' What do you say, John?"

John Digby had listened attentively, and during the conversation he had turned his glass bottom upward upon the table.

"There may be truth in what you say," he slowly and thoughtfully replied; "but people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. We may object to furnishing our money for these foreign missions upon the plea that charity begins at home, and all that; but the question may come back—'What have we done for this charity at home?' What have we done toward alleviating the distresses of the poor of our own town? And if we haven't done anything in that direction—if we don't open our hands in charity at all—what right have we to say in what direction others shall aim their good works?"

Blank were the looks that greeted this speech. The trio of listeners were taken aback. They hadn't expected this from their leader.

"Now look here, boys," continued John Digby, pushing his inverted glass away to the centre of the table, and leaving it there, "I don't like this overhauling that Sam Pepper gave us any better than you do, and I propose to shut him up."

"Hi-yah!" shouted Sam Pepper. "That's the talk. I'm with you."

"Are you sure you've got the courage, Sam?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"Count me in," added Peter. "Let's shut the old fellow up. What's the programme, Jack?"

"Well," answered Digby, soberly, "I have planned that we will take the wind out of Sam Pepper's sails by establishing a Reform Club of our own, and starting a Missionary Society on the same basis."

"Look ye, boys," people besides the parson are talking pretty hard about us, and we'll shut them all up in a lump. I'd like to astorish 'em. I'd like to hit back in the most effective way. I'd like to make 'em take the back track here in Burville in their own business. His hearers were interested, and listened eagerly.

"What is it?—Tell us how it's to be done?" they asked.

"Have you got the courage to do it?"

"We'll follow you," said Peter Slade. "Honor bright?"

"Then listen," said Sam Pepper. "Let's fill up before you commence."

"Not with old Lushington's Tom and Jerry," returned Jack. "We shall want the cost of it for another purpose. Turn your glasses bottom up for the present. There—that's a go. Now listen. We are to have three evenings in the week; and our expenses for liquor and cigars are at least two dollars an evening, aren't they?"

This was admitted by a nod.

"And in addition to this I spend at least a dollar more each week for beer and tobacco on my own hook. How is it with you?"

The others acknowledged that a dollar a week was little enough.

"I have ten dollars a week as the result of our combined and individual expenditure for rum and tobacco. I, for one, think I could manage to live through the rest of the winter without any more of it; and for the sake of the experiment I would be willing to put my share of that ten dollars into a charitable use. Here it is in the beginning of December, and the winter has opened hard. There are poor families not far away which we can bless with our sympathy and our help. We can organize a benevolent society, or a missionary society, upon our own hook. Do you begin to understand?"

They understood him perfectly, and since he would lead, they were ready to follow. In fact, they rather liked the idea. There was a charm of poverty and originality about it that caught them. It would be fun to purchase flour, and meat, and tea, and sugar, and fuel, and gasoline and assist the poor and themselves. They were generous, full of life and good feeling, and had caroused only because of the fun of the thing. Here was promise of the fun in another direction, and they would go for it.

The matter was discussed, and finally settled. They would make a square week of it at the beginning.

To be continued.

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