

CHAPTER XI.

AN ADVENTURE IN MONTREAL.

SHORTLY after my visit to Three Rivers, and my return to Montreal, a stirring episode, growing out of the American war, occurred in that city, which for the moment absorbed the attention of the public, and excited a feeling the reverse of friendly to the Federal Government. Happily it ended well for all parties except the guilty, and happily the Federal Government disavowed all connection with it as soon as the facts became known.

Two Southern gentlemen, Mr. George N. Sanders, of Kentucky, and Mr. Beverley Tucker, of Virginia—forlorn and stranded remnants of the once great Southern Confederacy—were then residents of Montreal, where they were quietly living under the protection of the British flag. President Johnson, ill-advised by Mr. Secretary Stanton—and, perhaps, in a moment of alarm and irritation at the dastardly murder of President Lincoln, accused these gentlemen of complicity in the crime.

and put a price of 25,000 dollars upon each of their heads.

No one believed that either of them had the slightest foreknowledge of, or sympathy with, the murder; and no one, whether lawyer or layman, reading the voluminous evidence of the perjured and suborned scoundrels with many aliases, who testified before the military tribunal at Washington, could discover a scintilla of proof that, collectively or individually, they knew more of the plot to assassinate Mr. Lincoln than President Johnson. Messrs. Tucker and Sanders no sooner heard of the charge against them than they offered to return to the United States, and meet it, provided the Government would guarantee their personal safety pending the investigation, and secure them an impartial trial before a judge and jury.

The offer was not accepted, and the exiles remained on British territory, content to know that on that soil they were as safe as Louis Napoleon Buonaparte had been in Switzerland, or in London, or as any European fugitive from political vengeance would be in New York or Philadelphia, or that, if demanded by the Federal Government under the Extradition Treaty, the demand would have to be supported by such evidence of their complicity in assassination as would satisfy the legal authorities of Canada that there was a fair presumption of their guilt. Of

this there was no prospect. The danger was that, as long as the proclamation against them remained uncanceled, the rowdyism of the States might produce ruffians in sufficient numbers to attempt their forcible abduction for sake of the reward.

Nor was the danger illusory. A party of desperadoes, two of them a father and son of the name of Blossom, from Auburn, in Maine; two brothers named Adams, from the Canadian frontier; and four or five from New York and Washington, arrived in Montreal, and distributed themselves among the minor hotels and boarding-houses of the city, carefully avoiding the St. Lawrence Hall, where, from the general publicity of the place, they were more likely to attract notice and suspicion. They matured their plans, which were, first, for the abduction of Mr. Sanders, and, secondly, of Mr. Tucker, very quietly and, as they imagined, very skilfully.

Their leader, Blossom, who passed under the alias of Hogan, appeared to be bountifully supplied with money, and freely distributed it among the conspirators. Casting about for that Canadian aid without which they feared their scheme might fail, they fell in with one O'Leary, formerly a detective in the Montreal police, but who, for some venial error, had forfeited his position, and was without the means of livelihood.

To him they cautiously communicated

plans, and, finding him well disposed, offered him the sum of 10,000 dollars, to be paid by the Federal Government as soon as Mr. Sanders was safely lodged in the gaol of Washington. They furthermore informed him that the Federal Government was determined to secure that person; that he was intriguing from Montreal with the leading opponents of Mr. Johnson's Administration in the States; that, next to Mr. Jefferson Davis, he was considered the most important capture that could be made; and that the Government had raised the price put upon his head to 50,000 dollars, which large sum was to be further supplemented by 25,000 dollars, the personal contribution of a New York millionaire, who had made a large fortune by contracts with the Government during the war. They also promised O'Leary any position in the police service of the Government at Washington which he might desire.

O'Leary, apparently dazzled by these magnificent terms, accepted—but not so gladly as to excite suspicion—and the bargain was solemnly sealed, *more Americano*, by a drink at the nearest bar. O'Leary, however, had a game of his own to play. He knew himself to be an able detective, and preferred honourable reinstatement in his old position in the Montreal police, and the good opinion of his fellow-subjects and old companions, to the 10,000 dollars in greenbacks, or any other

blood-money, to be won at the expense of innocent men.

He accordingly communicated the whole scheme to Mr. Penton, chief of police, and a little counter-plot was arranged between them, by which, if Mr. Sanders could be induced to play a part, they hoped to capture the whole gang. The scheme was unfolded to Mr. Sanders by O'Leary, and, though attended with extreme risk to that gentleman's life, had it failed in the smallest particular, was approved by him, on consultation with Mr. Tucker, two of the magistrates of the city, and other personal friends.

It was proposed by Blossom and his confederates that O'Leary should call upon Mr. Sanders in a carriage, with a pretended message from the Recorder, and persuade him to enter. This done, the rest would be easy, and the prize would be won. A fast horse was to be purchased for the purpose, and one of the gang, in the guise of an ordinary cabman, was to act as driver. After proceeding a short distance, the vehicle was to be stopped by three other conspirators posted by the wayside to await its coming, who were to jump in, throw O'Leary out, gag and manacle Mr. Sanders to prevent outcry and resistance, and then rattle away as fast as horseflesh could carry them to Lachine, where a boat was to be in readiness, under charge of a crew of Indians,

handsomely paid for their services, to ferry them across the St. Lawrence to Caughnawaga, where another batch of conspirators was to be in attendance, with horses and vehicles, to drive into Federal territory, near Rouses's Point.

The weak part in the case was the honesty of O'Leary. If, instead of betraying, he were true to the conspirators, and took any other road than the one indicated to the police, Mr. Sanders was a doomed man. Mr. Penton, however, answered for O'Leary's fidelity, and Mr. Sanders resolved to trust himself in their hands. At 8 o'clock one Monday evening, O'Leary called, as agreed, at the house of Mr. Sanders. Mr. Sanders entered the carriage without hesitation, and with all the air of innocent unsuspection, and in less than a minute afterwards the three conspirators stopped the vehicle, threw O'Leary out, and clapped a pair of manacles on Mr. Sanders's wrist.

"That d——d scoundrel O'Leary has betrayed me!" said Sanders.

Blossom immediately drew forth a gag and attempted to force it into the month of the prisoner.

"There is no necessity to gag me," said Sanders; "I am betrayed and helpless, and will make no resistance."

The conspirators had humanity enough to forego the gagging, and the carriage drove on towards

Lachine, at what Sanders, in recounting the story to me, called a "John Gilpin" rate. On arriving at the toll-bar the gate was shut. The driver lashed the horse to break through the obstruction, and the animal stumbled and fell. In an instant Mr. Penton and his assistant, Mr. Tetu, with a strong body of police, aided by Mr. Beverley Tucker and his son, who had been sworn in as special constables for the occasion, sprang upon the conspirators.

Seeing that the biters were bit, and that, to use the expression of their leader Blossom, they were "infernally sold," they leapt from the vehicle, driver and all, and took refuge in an adjoining oat-field, in which the crop was four feet high. From this ambush they fired at least half-a-dozen shots upon the police, which the latter returned. No blood, however, was shed on either side, and, in less than a quarter of an hour after Mr. Sanders had entered the carriage, the whole party of conspirators, except those stationed at Lachine and the driver, were captured, and Mr. Sanders released. Three others were afterwards captured at Lachine by a detachment of the force specially detailed for the purpose by Mr. Penton.

On searching the persons of the kidnapers, photographic portraits of Sanders and Tucker were found on the persons of each, considerable sums of money, and letters, tending to prove th

Federal authorities at Washington had cognizance of the scheme. Blossom wore upon his breast, concealed by his overcoat, the silver badge of a Deputy Provost-Marshal of the United States, which badge, together with the correspondence, the greenbacks, the gag, and the manacles, remained as trophies of the bloodless but spirited encounter.

The utmost satisfaction was expressed at the result in Montreal, and great praise was bestowed upon O'Leary, Mr. Penton, and the police, for the adroitness with which the affair was managed. Nor was due credit withheld from Mr. Sanders for the coolness he displayed in the transaction; for, had the conspirators suspected even at the last moment that he had acted as a decoy, it is highly probable that one at least of the ruffians might have aimed a revolver at his heart, instead of firing at random upon the police.

The attempt to kidnap was, it appears, only a misdemeanour, punishable with fine and imprisonment for two years, whereas the firing upon the police in the execution of their duty was a more serious matter, which, at the option of the Judge, might be punished with imprisonment for life. The criminals in this case escaped with the minor degree of punishment.

A VISIT TO PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

A FEW months before the cruel murder of President Lincoln, I attended one of his *levées* in Washington. Once, and once only in my life, I was presented to my sovereign and had the honour of kissing the royal hand. Nobody has a higher respect for the personal character of the Queen of Great Britain than I have ; but I have no respect for the barbarous and cumbrous formalities of state and ceremony with which the sovereigns of my country have, during many centuries, thought fit to surround themselves—perhaps I ought to say with which they have been surrounded by the old-fogeyism of heralds and Heralds' Colleges, and gold and silver sticks-in-waiting, and ushers of this rod and the other rod, and lords chamberlain and mistresses of the robes, and other trumperies of the like kind.

When I attended the royal *levée*, and was presented, upwards of thirty years ago, I had to dress myself in the garb of a flunkey, or something very like it. I was not privileged to wear military or naval costume, or even the costume of a deputy-lieutenant. I was not entitled to wear horsehair

my head in the shape of a forensic wig, or the robes of a judge or an advocate, or of an alderman or lord mayor ; so, as I said, I dressed like a lackey, with knee-breeches, silk stockings, buckles on my shoes, a waistcoat like that of a harlequin—if harlequins wear waistcoats—and a claret-coloured coat cut in the style of the last century. In addition, I wore a sword, which got provokingly between my legs—the result of my unfamiliarity with the instrument—and had to pay for the hire of the disguise the sum of seven guineas.

I fancied, as I toiled my weary way through the over-crowded room, elbowed by judges, barristers, admirals, generals, dukes, marquises, lords, baronets, knights, members of the Commons, city magnates, country gentlemen—not any of them more polite or courteous in the pressure of the crowd than as multitudinous a mob of costermongers might have been, had it been my ill-fortune to be squeezed among them—I felt that I had never been more uncomfortable or more humiliated.

How different was my presentation to Mr. Lincoln!—a plain, homely, tall, gaunt, jocose, but very sad-looking man, who received me without ceremony in my ordinary walking-costume, and gave me a shake of the hand which I thought would have wrenched it from my wrist, and which I felt in my arm for a long time afterwards. On

calling for Mr. Lincoln at the White House, the man who answered my ring at the door looked at my card, and said the President was at home and engaged with Mr. Seward, but that I could walk up. I walked up, or rather he showed me up.

"Glad to see you," said the President.

"Glad to see you, Sir," said Mr. Seward; "and more than glad. The President and I are in somewhat of a fix; perhaps you can help us out of it."

What the "fix" was he did not stop to explain at the time, though he explained it afterwards. Mr. Seward was very argumentative, very loquacious, very much addicted to awkward sallies of wit or humour, or something that seemed to him to be either or both. Mr. Lincoln won my heart by his honest simplicity, his unaffected good-nature, his broad, frank, sturdy common-sense, and the merry twinkle that sometimes lit up his usually sad eyes and grave countenance.

I am not going to detail private conversations; but I could gather from all that Mr. Lincoln said, whether it were in jest or in earnest, that he had a painful sense of the heavy responsibility that destiny and the votes of his fellow-countrymen had cast upon his shoulders, and that he by no means shared the almost boyish hopes of Mr. Seward as to the speedy restoration of the Union by subjugation of the South. I may add tha

“fix” Mr. Seward spoke of was a military difficulty which had presented itself to his mind with regard to the army of the Potomac, that I was utterly incompetent to discuss or even to understand it, and that I was amazed that such a matter should have been mentioned to a stranger, or to anyone not a member of the Cabinet. But, as Solomon says, “Great men are not always wise.”

Mr. Seward informed me that the President would hold a *levée*, or public reception, at twelve o'clock that day, and that, if I would be present, either as the friend of the President and stand at his side, or as one of the crowd, whichever I preferred, I might see and study to advantage the free-and-easy manner in which the sovereign of a free people received his fellow-citizens, as compared with the absurd state and formality with which hereditary sovereigns, ruling the people by virtue of their dead fathers and grandfathers, received their subjects.

“We have no subjects here,” added Mr. Seward; “or, rather, we are *all* subjects—subjects of the law, and of the law alone.”

“For the matter of that,” I replied, “it is the same in Great Britain. Our Queen, who talks of her ‘subjects’ in proclamations and other formal documents, is herself a subject—subject, as you say, to the law, which she may not break without taking the very disagreeable consequences. But

we will not discuss that point. I like *your* system, and shall be delighted to attend the President's *levée* and stand at his side; not that I would not be just as well pleased to mix with the multitude and take my chance among them, except for the fact that I should not in that case see so much of what I want to see. So, Mr. President," I added, turning to Mr. Lincoln, "if you will permit me to be one of your suite, I shall be grateful for the privilege."

"One of my *what*?" asked Mr. Lincoln, suddenly.

"One of your *suite*—or, if your Excellency likes the word better, one of your circle."

"Oh! I see now," he replied; "but excuse me for not understanding *Latin*. I never had much schooling, and I am too old now to learn anything but the mother tongue; and I rather flatter myself that I can make myself understood in it, and can say what I mean as plainly as any man living. But you English beat us hollow in languages. We Americans are content to talk the language of the Bible, and of old John Bunyan, and of Benjamin Franklin, one of the plainest speakers of all. But time's up. We must be moving. Come along! I must not keep the public waiting."

"Punctuality is the politeness of princes and of presidents," said I, with an alliteration which was wholly unpremeditated.

Mr. Seward smiled, and said in his most gracious manner: "You are quite a courtier, and would shine in *dye-plomacy*."

I pledge the reader my word of honour that he pronounced the word as I have written it. I have subsequently heard many Americans do the same. But let that pass. I am an observer of small things as well as of great, and recognize the fact that the noble English language is in danger of deterioration in America. I have heard Americans call Italy *Eye-taly*, and engine and machine, *engyne* and *ma-chyne*. Not that this corruption signifies much, if people understand and adopt it. All I have to say is, that I do not like it.

I followed Mr. Lincoln to the reception-room. Mr. Seward accompanied us. We found Mrs. Lincoln ready to join in our little procession, she on her part being accompanied by the private secretary of the President. A minute after Mr. Lincoln had taken the place appointed for him, and we had all ranged ourselves about him—like planets around a central sun—the doors were opened and the crowd rushed in. There were no gold sticks, no silver sticks, no sticks of any kind to introduce the sovereign to his makers; nothing but the President face to face with the people. But such a crowd! I love my fellow-creatures as well as most men when I have occasion to think of them in the concrete; but to meet them in the

concrete, or the aggregate, or in the shape of a rushing, roaring, selfish multitude, when each man or woman thinks or acts upon the thought, "Each for himself, and the devil take the hindmost!" I do not think I love them. I do not even think I like them.

I thought, as I saw the vast amount of handshaking that was inflicted upon Mr. Lincoln—and the equally vast amount that he inflicted upon others—that it was hard work to be a popular President of the United States. The Queen of England can choose her company, but the President cannot. Anybody or everybody is free to present himself, in any costume he pleases, to the chief magistrate and to shake hands with him, without an introduction, or so much as the announcement of his name. I was told that the President's customary receptions on the first day of the New Year were far more remarkable as a study of national manners than an ordinary *levée* such as the one at which I assisted; but the scene before me was quite peculiar enough to justify me in considering it remarkable.

This plain, simple man represented one of the most powerful nations of the earth—a man who, without any particular ability or virtue or claim to pre-eminence, had been selected out of the multitude to fill the highest place; who, before the votes were recorded in his favour, was

nobody, and who would become a nobody once again as soon as his term of office expired. And to this man came all those other men—equally eligible as himself to fill such high station—to pay their respects in their working-dresses, and many of them with the grime of their trades on their hands and habiliments.

With some of them the President merely shook hands, making the weaker ones wince in the vice-like grasp that he gave them. I fancied two or three times that he had a pleasure in thus punishing a few people for whom he had more or less dislike—punishing them in the guise of extreme cordiality, which they could no more resent than a dog could, if you hit him on the head with a meaty bone which you afterwards kindly presented to him.

Among the company who paid their respects to the chief magistrate on this occasion were the lively little Irish boy who had blacked my boots in the morning; a German head-waiter at Willard's; the clerk at the hotel; and a whole host of roughs and "rowdies." Among these were intermixed civil and military functionaries, clerks in the public offices, contractors *in esse* and *in posse*, members of Congress, and whole squads of people, who, if they had been Britons and in London, would no more have thought of presenting themselves before the sovereign than of committing murder. But this, I

thought, was in the true spirit of democracy. This was liberty—this was equality—this was fraternity. And when at last the crowd had passed out and the last hand had been shaken, Mr. Lincoln turned to me and said: "I'm glad this is over. Come to my private room and take a drink." I went with him and took a drink; and he told me a funny story about General Butler, which I do not feel myself at liberty to repeat. Altogether, I was very favourably impressed with Mr. Lincoln—not with his manners, but with his heart and intellect.

A MEETING OF CONGRESS.

I AFTERWARDS attended a sitting of the House of Representatives with a member, and proposed on the next day to attend a meeting of the Senate, accompanied by the same guide and monitor. The English House of Commons is more or less of a democratic assembly, but the first appearance of the House of Representatives was to my mind decidedly aristocratic. An air of order, quiet, and respectability pervaded the whole place. The members did not sit with their hats on, as is the custom in Westminster; neither was there any unseemly pushing or scrambling to secure places. Each member had his own seat, with a convenient writing-desk before him, in which to keep his papers, documents, and writing materials.

I noticed also that there was a goodly sprinkle of lads from eleven or twelve to fourteen years of age, dressed in a neat uniform, stationed at various parts of the hall, who acted as pages or messengers, and were at the call of any member who chose to summon them to deliver his missives either inside or outside of the House. I could not at first understand the utility or necessity of this arrangement, but saw it at once when I was informed that many of the members transacted

legal, literary, and other business in the House, instead of listening to the speeches, and used the paper of Congress for writing editorial articles, letters, or despatches to the newspapers of the various cities of the Union, or the places which they represented.

The bulk of the members, especially since the temporary disruption of the Union by the Civil War, and the consequent disappearance from Congress of the wealthy cotton-planters and slave-owners of the South, were poor men, mostly lawyers on the look-out for business, to whom the pay of a Member of Congress was all-essential as a means of subsistence, and who were very glad, in addition to this, to earn a few extra dollars by literary or political writing, and other newspaper work.

I was introduced to the Speaker, who seemed to me to be very much like an auctioneer, as he wielded his little hammer and struck it at intervals on his desk, just as an auctioneer does when he knocks down an article to the highest bidder. This little hammer was continually in motion, either to command silence or to add emphasis to some formality or other that had been or was about to be accomplished, though I could not exactly, if at all, understand the reasons of its apparently preternatural activity. I observed that he wore no portentous wig and robes like our stately functionary at home, and that there was no

or other "bauble," as Cromwell called it, before him on the table.

I was also admitted to the "privilege of the floor"—in other words, to free entrance in and out of the House, just as if I had been a member without a vote. In this respect the Americans are always courteous to strangers, and do not fence round the deliberations of the Legislature with obstructive fictions such as that which in England allows a member to call the attention of the Speaker to the fact that there are strangers present, and to clear the said strangers out, whether they be ladies, diplomatists, peers, or reporters. Strangers are always present in Congress, and large and commodious galleries are especially set apart for their reception; and the time, it is to be hoped, will come when the British Parliament will imitate the example, and not only admit, but accommodate the public, reserving to itself the right, by a vote of the whole House on special occasions, to close its doors when public expediency or necessity justifies the proceeding.

As nothing particular was going on, and as the Member of Congress who acted as my guide was becoming thirsty, and invited me to the customary drink—which, though I did not want, I knew too much of the customs of the country to refuse to partake with him—we adjourned for a while to the refreshment-room or bar of the House, where

the "captain"—such the bar-tender or man behind the counter seems always to be called—compounded for us a couple of mint juleps.

"One thing," said I, in sipping the cooling mixture, "strikes me as singular, and that is, why the House should call its chairman or president the 'Speaker.' Do you know the reason?"

"It is because you have a Speaker in England," he replied.

"That answer does not meet the case. We have a Queen, and may have a King in England, and you won't imitate our example in that, I suppose?"

"I calculate not," said the member; "though the time may come when we may have to appoint a military dictator. But what's your objection to the word Speaker?"

"My objection to the word is that it represents a state of things which never existed in your country. Our 'Speaker' was so called, in the early period of our parliamentary history, because he, and he only, had the right to *speak* to the sovereign on behalf of the Commons. The name is a relic of the days when, as a people, we were just beginning to feel that we were not politically free, but were determined to become so, and the Parliament, beginning to feel its power, nominated its president to *speak* to the King, and speak plainly, to the effect that, if he did not

redress grievances, Parliament would not vote him any money."

"I thank you for the information, which I must confess is new to me. We can't call our Speaker the President, because we have another officer who monopolises the title. We might, perhaps, call him the chairman. But, after all, we're used to calling him the 'Speaker,' and I must confess I am conservative enough to wish to retain the title."

"There is no harm," I said, "in the title, though I rather wonder that you should have adopted it. But there is one thing—nay, two things—which I admire in your congressional modes of proceeding. If I am rightly informed, you do not allow a bore to inflict his weariness upon you; you limit the duration of his speech by the hour-glass; and, if a bore is overmuch of a bore, you can get rid of him without the expedient of counting out the House, and thus losing a day that may be urgently required for practical legislation."

"You are rightly informed," said my guide; "if the gentleman from Buncombe (you would call him the honourable member for Buncombe) wants to inflict his long-winded and vapid eloquence upon the House, the House can escape the nuisance by simply telling him that his speech, which he holds in his hand, will be accepted as read or spoken, and that he may send the manuscript forthwith to the *Congressional Globe*, the official reporter of the

proceedings of the Legislature of the United States. Thus both parties are satisfied. Business proceeds, and the unspoken speech is printed, and reaches the people of Buncombe, and anybody else who chooses to waste his time by reading it."

"We also ought to have an official record of our debates, though I dread to think how much money it would cost if the full flood of the eloquence of our garrulous mediocrities were let loose upon the land—unless it were at the expense of the offending orator, which might help to mitigate, if it could not remove, the evil. We have members of our Parliament who could spout twelve closely-printed columns of the *Times*, and think nothing of the feat, if anybody would listen to or report them."

"And we have members of Congress who could double the quantity, aye, and treble it, if we had not wisely clipped the wings of their verbosity by the scissors of Time—or, if you don't like the metaphor—if we had not limited them, and pressed them down by the inexorable sand of the hour-glass."

"Very good, and a rule to be much commended. Have you such an officer as a 'whip'?" I inquired.

"A whip!" said my guide; "what's a whip? America whips all creation, as everybody knows; but I suppose that is not what *you* mean."

"A whip," I replied, "is a useful, in fact an indispensable public functionary with us."

"*Unde derivatur* the name?"

"His name is derived from the hunting-field. He whips the dogs, the whelps, the curs, and hounds of party together, so that they may all yell and bark or vote together in the service of the minister, and that the party in power may not be unexpectedly outnumbered by the Opposition. Both the ins and the outs have their whip. The whip must know the temper and the habits, the weak points and the strong points, the vices and the virtues, of every dog in the pack. He must know when and where they pipe or bark, when and where they dance, where they eat, where they drink, where they sleep, and how he may summon them by his whistle or his whip, at a moment's notice, to come to the aid, or it may be to the rescue, of his party."

"We need no such 'cuss' in our politics. When one party's in, it is in for four years certain. Our President is his own prime minister, and can't be turned out before the expiry of his term by any vote of Congress, unless by impeachment or revolution—two tools that are apt to cut the fingers or throats of those who use them. So we don't want the thing you call a 'whip'; he would be of no use to us—and, what's more, our Congress-men, dogs or no dogs, would not submit to have such a

varlet continually at their heels to pry either into their time or their occupations, or to be at his beck and call irrespective of their own convenience."

"But I am a student, you know, and have come to America to learn. Is it not a flaw in your constitution, a defect in the working, that a minority, changing itself by degrees into a majority, has, when a majority, no ready means to rid itself of an obnoxious President, in case of his departure from the straight line of his duty? Our Palmerston is a popular minister—he is virtually President; Gladstone is a power in the State, because he can make the worse appear the better reason; but our House of Commons could get rid of either of them in a week, if they rendered themselves unpalatable to the majority, and that, too, with the greatest ease, and without the slightest wrench of the political machinery."

"We all know that, and shall amend in time—if revolution and a military autocracy do not supersede the present order of things, and make a clean sweep of our present corruptions and anomalies by the introduction of new and possibly worse corruptions and anomalies than those which now beset us. There's Mr. Seward, now, a worse wind-bag than even your Mr. Gladstone, who is as unpopular and, I think, as inefficient a minister as ever existed; yet the country must endure him

for the remainder of Mr. Lincoln's term—if Mr. Lincoln has made up his mind to put up with him for so long a period. Upon the whole, I prefer your system to ours, only we want a king at the top of it and can't have him."

"And wouldn't have him if you could?"

"There's nothing to make him of; *ex nihilo nihil fit*. I am not such an optimist as I once was, and think I am mellowing, and ripening, and developing into a pessimist, especially when I recognize and deplore the fact, as I oftentimes do, that all systems of government, despotic or free, are bad and imperfect, just because human nature is bad and imperfect. You can't make a good machine with bad iron; you can't set up a good government if bad men are to work it."

"My friend," said I, "the ancients held that it was a crime to despair of the republic."

"The ancients were 'poor shotes,'" replied he, "and their republics were not republics, but aristocracies playing antics under the guise of democracies. But come; let us visit the Senate and the Supreme Court, both of which are now sitting, and take a further peep into the workings of our system before we discuss it any further, either to condemn or to extol it."

IN THE SENATE.

THE Senate of the United States is not a numerous body, but it is a very high and important one. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, when every State in the Union, great or small, sent its two delegates or senators, elected for six years, but not simultaneously, the number of members was under seventy. In 1864, when eleven of the Southern States were unrepresented, the number was diminished by twenty-two. I found that my guide—a Jeffersonian, or “straight-out” democrat, and a sturdy opponent of the party in power (the Republican, or Black Republican party, as he called it, on account of the use it made of the negro, his rights and his wrongs, in freedom and in slavery)—was a strong supporter of a project for the reform of the Senate, which had been broached in the democratic journals, and found great favour with all the opponents of the war.

The six New England States—the very focus and fountain of the abolition movement—the States that were most furious and persistent in the cry for the subjugation by fire and sword of the rebellious South—as hot-headed, every one of

them, as George III. and his administration were for the subjugation of the Thirteen States under the illustrious Washington — illustrious because successful — provided the Senate with twelve members; and these twelve, acting together, could and did control the deliberations of that body. Seeing that these six States, if united into one, would not form a State so large as New York or Pennsylvania, the project was to unite them, under the name of New England, and so deprive them of ten votes in the Senate.

“But,” said I, after my friend had explained the matter to me as we proceeded towards the Senate-chamber, “would not this be a revolutionary act, and contrary to that principle of State rights on which the Union is based?”

“No doubt,” he replied; “but there are no longer any State rights. The Republican party, by making war upon the South, has made war upon and denied the right of the several States to judge and act for themselves. Besides, if Congress can make two States out of one, as it has done by the creation of the new State of Western Virginia from a portion of the illustrious State of old Virginia, Congress can, by a similar exercise of power, transform six little States into one large one. Do you admit that?”

“Oh, yes; I admit it in theory; but I don't think that, whatever may be the issues of this war,

you will succeed in a scheme so revolutionary; and against which you would unite a clear majority of the present Senate, and, if the Union were re-established, of any succeeding Senate that it would be possible to elect."

"We shall try, though," rejoined he. "The New England States are the bane of our politics; they are more troublesome to us than Ireland is to you; and I wish with all my heart they had carried out their threats of a dozen or twenty years ago, and annexed themselves to Canada."

On arrival at the Senate, we went up first to the gallery reserved for the public, but were speedily summoned down by a senator to whom our cards had been transmitted by a messenger, and accorded, as we had been in the House of Representatives, the honours of "the floor." A fine, tall, handsome, powerful-looking man was speaking in a loud, clear voice, and seemed to command the close attention of his audience, not merely by his oratory—which was of a high order—but by his personal character and position.

"That," said my guide to me, "is the virtual dictator of the Senate—one of the most remarkable men in our country, Sir; a man of the highest talent, Sir, which he has devoted to the most detestable purposes—a very fire-brand of hatred and bigotry, and the most blatant war-preacher who ever hounded on one section of a people to

murder the other. That, Sir, is Senator Sumner, of Massachusetts—one of three or four zealots whose memory will go down to posterity as the real authors of secession, and all the horrors of this horrible war.”

I looked on the face and form of Mr. Charles Sumner with the greatest interest. I was somewhat surprised to find that he was a man of very robust proportions and magnificent *physique*, remembering as I did the ferocious assault made upon him, some years previously, in the Senate, by a Southern politician of the name of Brooks, who was represented at the time as a small and slender person. I learned from my friend that the outrage took Mr. Sumner unawares—that, as he was writing at his desk, he was struck from behind a violent blow with a cane upon the head, and rendered insensible before he could grapple with his assailant, for whom he would have been much more than a match if they had met face to face.

“I forget what, if any, provocation Mr. Sumner gave to his cowardly assailant,” I whispered.

“He slandered the Southern ladies ‘wholesale and retail’; and the ladies found a champion in Mr. Brooks. But Brooks was a coward. I give him up, and have nothing further to say of him, except that, if I had undertaken, as he did, to champion the virtue of ladies unjustly maligned, I would not have done as he did, but would have

challenged the slanderer to mortal combat—in fair duel—and would have shot him through the heart, unless he first shot *me*.”

Mr. Sumner filled the high office in the Senate of Chairman of Committee on Foreign Relations, and was in all foreign and many domestic respects a greater power in the State than Mr. Lincoln, or either of his secretaries. The speech he was making at the time I entered struck me as particularly unreasonable, and accused both the people and Government of Great Britain of the vague crime of want of sympathy with the North, in what the orator called its “holy and sublime” contest with the South.

He predicted, in passionate phraseology, the coming day of retribution, when Great Britain would find herself overwhelmed with peril and calamity, and in danger of conquest by the Powers of Europe, in which day, if she looked for either aid or sympathy to the United States, she would look in vain, and if she perished, would perish unregretted.

This struck me as particularly unfair and unjust, inasmuch as the British Government at this very time allowed the North, without let or hindrance, to supply herself in British ports with arms and munitions of war—with everything, in fact, that the United States required, besides providing the Northern armies with Irish immigrants in countless

numbers to do the main part of the fighting required for the prosecution of the war. All these privileges were denied to the South, which could not procure arms or munitions, or even an ounce of quinine for its hospitals, unless by means of blockade-runners, who took all the adverse chances of their illegal trade, or by means of "Alabamas" and "Shenandoahs," and other craft, that set international law at defiance, and whom it was free to the United States to capture and destroy, with all on board, whether British subjects or not, if they could do so, without opposition or even remonstrance from Great Britain, or any other Power in the world.

On the whole, although I greatly admired Mr. Sumner as an orator, I came to the conclusion that he was a very poor logician, and allowed his prejudices to get the better of his reason in the most absurd manner. Before I heard him speak I was of opinion, judging from his high character and reputation, his great accomplishments, his varied learning and long study of politics, in his own country and abroad, that the United States would have possessed in him, had the votes of the people so ordained, one of the most illustrious of their Presidents. After his speech, before I left the Senate-chamber, I came to the conclusion that plain, blunt, warm-hearted, homely, uneducated Abraham Lincoln, without a tithe of his

abilities, or a hundredth part of his pretensions, was a far better man for the position.

Musing on this, I said to my friend: "Do you think, as a rule, that very able and intellectual men are of the stuff of which good politicians are made?"

"Decidedly not," he replied. "It is your very clever men who wreck the ship of the State if they attempt to steer it. If there are rocks ahead, your over-clever men despise the rocks, as things that in theory have no right to be there, and drive over them; your cautious, dull man does not despise the rocks, acknowledges the disagreeable fact of their existence, and keeps out of their way. It is my opinion that, if the world only contained clever men and women and no fools, and none but heavy, solid—or, as one may say, stolid—people to keep the peace between them, the human race would arrive at a catastrophe such as that which befell the Kilkenny cats."

"Then you acknowledge that it may be a good thing, after all, that your Presidents are men who come to the surface unexpectedly, as Mr. Lincoln has done; that they are good, plain, humble people, of no particular talent beyond that of sitting quietly in the high seat of honour to which circumstances have drifted them, and who possess the one great quality of letting well alone."

"I admit it thoroughly," replied my guide

“though it rather riles me at times to think that mediocrity is better than superiority in the government of a great and free country.”

A VISIT TO CHIEF JUSTICE CHASE.

My friend the Member of Congress, and I, went to the Chief Justice's reception, in that full evening costume which assimilates waiters, clergymen, and gentlemen, in one dull uniformity of bad taste, and makes it difficult, except by personal acquaintance and information, to distinguish one from the other. We found his modest house—modest, though one of the best in Washington—crowded with a very distinguished company, of whom fully one-half were ladies. The honours of the evening were well and graciously done by the Chief Justice's daughter.

I was, before many minutes had passed, introduced to a very great number of senators, Members of Congress, generals, colonels, judges, governors, and foreign ambassadors; but my attention was so engrossed with the Chief Justice himself, that I thought but little of the crowd by whom he was

surrounded. Mr. Salmond Portland Chase—such was his name—was a man who had just passed, or was closely approaching, the grand climacteric. Tall, solid—I may say heavy—of dark, almost sallow complexion, and a clear, full, searching eye. He reminded me of what somebody said of Lord Thurlow, that he must be more or less of an impostor, inasmuch as it was morally impossible for any man to be so wise as he looked. I knew—as all the world did—something of his early history and struggles, and thought of him as one who had rightly merited the aid of Heaven, by the brave heart with which he had aided himself, and walked through life unsullied, achieving the highest objects of a legitimate ambition without performing a mean, unworthy, or questionable act. Early adversity either makes or mars a man, and it had made, not marred, the Chief Justice.

Who ne'er his bread in sorrow ate,
 Who ne'er through silent midnight hours
 Weeping upon his bed hath sate ;
 He knows you not, ye heavenly powers !

Mr. Chase had evidently known the “heavenly powers,” and profited by their teaching.

Mr. Chase, as Finance Minister, had occupied so distinguished a place in the councils of his country and the estimation of the world, as manager of that vast system of paper money

which enabled the Northern States to purchase and pay soldiers to subdue the South, that I wondered why he should have accepted what I thought was the inferior position of Chief Justice. But this was sheer ignorance on my part, for the Supreme Court is, in reality, as supreme as its name implies, can over-ride even the decrees of Congress, if these be unconstitutional. The chief of the court is a far more important personage than the President himself, and, once appointed, holds his place for life, far above the storms of party, irremovable, and almost unassailable.

Appointed by their party for party purposes, the judges of the Supreme Court have invariably distinguished themselves by the great ability and the dignified impartiality with which they have performed their duties. This much must be said in justice to the judicial system of the United States, as a set-off to the charges, unfortunately too serious and too well-founded, that have been and are continually brought against the popularly-elected judges of the inferior Courts.

My conversation with Mr. Chase on this and on subsequent occasions, when he honoured me by friendly, social intercourse, at his own table or at mine, took a financial rather than a legal direction. The vast system of paper money which he had organized and worked with consummate success, the "five-twenty" and the "seven-thirty" bonds, as

they were called, and the inundation of the country with the notes popularly known as "greenbacks," was a subject of extreme interest to me; and my discussing it with Mr. Chase but confirmed me in a previous impression: that no truly great or colossal work, either of peace or war, could be carried to completion on a strictly gold basis. That gold was a mere commodity, just as bread, or beef, or cotton were commodities, was abundantly proved from the very outbreak of the American war; that, as a commodity, its value rose and fell, just as the value of bread, beef, cotton, &c., rose and fell, according to scarcity or demand; and that the endeavour to reconcile the two characters of gold—the one as a commodity, and the other as money or circulating medium—persisted in by Great Britain, was a constant source of financial difficulty, too often followed by panic.

I could understand, too, that if the United States, under the auspices of Mr. Chase, had not issued upon its credit all the paper currency that it needed for the purchase of recruits, of horses and mules, of powder and shot, of arms and munitions, and the daily food of half a million or three quarters of a million of combatants, and had obstinately stuck to the British principle of issuing no paper money not immediately convertible into gold, and the Southern States had adopted the contrary practice, the North would have been over-

run and conquered in six months, and the Union divided into at least four hostile fragments. Great Britain fought France, and subsidised all Europe, in the gigantic wars of the first French Revolution, not with gold, but with paper—paper that could buy gold, just as it could buy everything else, men and ships, and the wherewithal, both in food and powder, to keep men and ships in fighting order.

And moreover, as I said to Mr. Chase, suppose there were not an ounce of gold left in the world, would the world be any the poorer, if the sun shone, the rains fell, the earth yielded its fruits, and men put forth their energies as they do now to make bountiful Mother Earth their provider? It is, in fact, a species of idolatry, very profitable to the priests—that is to say, to bankers, usurers, and bill-discounters—to worship gold, and exalt it to the sovereignty of the world. Without iron, the world would certainly be poorer; but as regards gold, all other conditions of life and nature being exactly what they now are, its utter annihilation would not make any real difference to a single human creature.

This was my idea at the time; this is my idea now. The Government of Great Britain owes, or is supposed to owe, the Bank of England the sum of sixteen millions sterling, and is empowered to issue paper money, in notes not under the value of five pounds each, for that amount, unrepresented

by gold, silver, copper, bread, beef, beer, wine, cloth, tea, or anything whatsoever, except the credit of the British nation. For every five pound note above that amount the Bank is bound to pay gold. This was the state of affairs thirty years ago, forty years ago, perhaps seventy years ago, and fitted—though not too well, or very indifferently and unsatisfactorily well—the necessities of British commerce and enterprise, when British trade and commerce had not attained a tithe of their present amount.

But is the credit and are the resources of Great Britain no greater now than at the earliest of these comparatively recent periods? The computation is that the resources of the country are ten, or twenty, or it may be a hundred-fold greater now than they were three quarters of a century ago. If so, why should our inconvertible paper money not stretch and increase with our wealth and population? If paper unrepresented by gold, for sixteen millions sterling, was sufficient to lubricate the wheels of commerce, to make the machine roll smoothly, and form the medium of a continually-extending barter seventy years ago, surely the same amount of paper unrepresented by gold is not sufficient for the constantly-expanding wants of the present day?

I put the case before Mr. Chase, as the great financier of the United States.

“Wait till you are at war,” said he, “with a combination of all the leading Powers of the world against you, as you may have some day; and if you don’t find out the value of paper money unre-presented by gold or by anything else but your credit, you are in a bad way. I take you for.”
