

LETTER LVI.

THE MACDOUGALLS AND THE MACLEODS.

ON the 28th of November, accompanied by our Mexican friends, as our fellow-passengers, and by others who desired to see us embark, we went on board the Cunard Line steam-ship, *America*, commanded by the well-known, and no less respected Captain Judkins. We had a good run to Halifax, where we arrived at about ten on the night of the 30th.

Here the packet merely stops for mails and passengers, but the mail agent, Lieut. Biddock, R.N., acceded to my desire of going on shore with him, accompanied by Don Joaquin Sayago, who was also anxious to have a peep at Halifax. The cold was intense. We drove in a small mail carriage to the Post-office, and there leaving Mr. Biddock and the bags, Mr. S— and I proceeded, in the

mail cart, to make a moonlight inspection of the streets and public buildings of Halifax.

Although well wrapped up—Mr. Sayago in a splendid Leopard-striped *poncho*, and I in my great coat—we felt the cold much, and Mr. Sayago looked out wistfully for some place where a glass of hot brandy and water and a segar might be procured. Every house of entertainment, however, was shut up; but at last, the driver seeing our difficulty, said there was a meeting of some kind that night at one of the public halls, and there we drove. We found the building lit up, and great doings going forward within. The front door was opened to us, and in the hall we found ourselves in the midst of butlers, servants, bottles, and bustle. “You cannot be admitted here, sir,” said some one to me; “it is a subscribers’ public dinner.” “And what is the occasion?” said I. “Saint Andrew’s day—the 30th of November.”

We had no time to lose. My informant and I soon understood each other, and accompanied by M. Sayago, I went into the banquet-room, which contained a company of about 120 persons. The “*croupier*,” or vice-chairman, being near to the

door at which we entered, I quietly sat myself down, a little behind, but close to him. He looked at me somewhat suspiciously: but I told him that I was a Scotchman; had just landed from the packet with my friend; that we had found our way there; that I had attended many a St. Andrew's day's dinner; and that I was sure he would allow us the pleasure of drinking a glass of wine at a board so congenial with my feelings.

The Vice-Chairman's face glowed with Scottish hospitality. "What will you take? Claret? Champagne? What will you have—Port? Come, Sir! I am most happy to pledge you and your friend in a bumper!" So, M. Sayago, who stood with his *serape* thrown gracefully over his shoulder, admiring the scene before him, and himself attracting no small degree of attention, responded with me in a glass of good old port.

In this state of affairs the Chairman, who was also, I think, Mayor of Halifax, called for a bumper. "Gentlemen," he said, "we have unexpectedly been honoured by a visit from two gentlemen just landed from the packet from New York. One a distinguished Mexican, the other a countryman of our own." Then, after some happy

remarks on the occasion of our visit, and personal compliments, the Chairman concluded by requesting a bumper to the health of M. Sayago and myself.

Great and unfeigned was the surprise of my friend, in finding himself thus prominently and suddenly brought forward in an assemblage of all the notables of Halifax, whom he had so little dreamt of seeing or knowing that night; and still more was he surprised, when he heard the loud applause with which his name was received. He gave me a look, however, as much as to say, "You must carry out what you have begun." So I stood up and returned thanks for M. Sayago and myself. I told the Chairman that I had, on more than one occasion, presided over a Saint Andrew's day's dinner in foreign and distant lands; and that, as I entered that splendid hall, I knew well the hearty welcome with which my friend and I would be greeted. But I added, that although I could dilate with pleasure on the gratifying sight before me, our time was short; and as I wished to volunteer a Scotch song, I could not indulge in a lengthy speech. What I said was

well received; and then I sang, "Get up an' bar the door."

Under the peculiar circumstances, my song produced no small excitement. The applause had scarcely subsided, when a gentleman laid hold of my arm, and in our own vernacular (of which on such occasions we make free and unreserved use), he said: "Come awa', Mr. Robeson, ye've been lang enough wi' the Vice-Chairman—the Chairman wants to shake hands wi' you."

M. Sayago and I, accordingly were transplanted to the upper seats, and amid many demonstrations of cordial feeling, we were seated on either side of the chairman. All was hilarity and good fellowship, in the midst of which we became oblivious of our steamer, our passage, our Admiralty Agent—and well it was that the latter did not forget *us*. The post-office mail-cart had gone back for him; and when I was preparing for a second song, in rushed Mr. B., whose energetic remonstrances with the chairman were drowned in vociferous plaudits. Down he was placed among us, *nolens volens*, and once more all went well.

"Duncan Gray" came off in grand style: one

or two short but pithy speeches followed, and excitement was the order of the night.

Meantime, Captain Judkins, uneasy at the unwonted length of absence of the Admiralty Agent (not knowing the extent of a Saint Andrew's day's coercion in Halifax), left his vessel in search of us, and at half-past eleven he entered the banquetting hall, just as I was about to sing "Ae day a braw wooer cam doon the lang glen." The excitement rose with the new occasion (for Captain J. was an immense favourite in Halifax); so if we were received with a bumper, and the Admiralty Agent with applause, Captain Judkins was welcomed with hurras and clapping of hands. In a moment he was seized by four athletic Scotchmen, carried in triumph to the head of the table, and placed between the chairman and myself. All remonstrance for the moment was in vain. The song was sung—the bumpers were emptied—a more jovial sight never was seen.

But it was highly necessary to bring our visit to a close. Her Majesty's mail-bags, which generally wait for no man, had been detained nearly an hour extra, for midnight was approaching—and detained, I must say, *vi et armis*, in so

far as the gentlemen having them in charge were concerned. The leave-taking was something tremendous. I had such Scotch and Halifax grips from every man in the room, that my fingers were pretty well reduced to a jelly; but invitations to *return* to my Halifax friends were heartily tendered on every side, with a more especial one from the chairman.

When at last I came to my first-made friend, the vice-chairman, he seized me by both hands. We had all thrown away the Corinthian English for the Doric Scotch. "Noo, Mr. Robeson," said the warm-hearted croupier, "when ye get back to Halifax, ye'll find plenty o' freens, but nane sae glad to see ye as the Macdougalls and Macleods. Mind—ask for them. The chairman's a Macdougall—I'm a Macleod. Ask, I tell ye, for *them*! Dinna ye forget the Macdougalls or the Macleods." And I certainly never shall.

Our passage home was a most agreeable one, for among our fellow-passengers from New York we found some truly pleasant companions. A more gentlemanlike, a more attentive, or more friendly commander than Captain Judkins is

nowhere to be found; and his officers were of the same stamp as himself. We left exactly at midnight of the 30th; and, although a derangement of one of our engines not only stopped us for three hours on the 6th, but became unavailable during the rest of the passage, we arrived in the Mersey about daybreak on the 12th of December, after a run of thirteen days and some hours from New York, and of eleven days and six hours from Halifax.

FINIS.