

LETTER XCV.

NOTING THE CONTINUED ANGUISH OF THE CONSERVATIVE KENTUCKY CHAP, AND THE DEATH OF NEMO; AND DESCRIBING AN IMMENSE POPULAR DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE OUTRAGES OF FEDERAL OPPRESSION.

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 24th, 1864.

THE beautiful Spring, my boy, is out in the sunshine once more,—bowing her pretty face over her lap, as though to breathe the odor of the fresh violets lying scattered upon her coquettish green apron, but really to hide the blush mantling the cheeks on which the hot breath of enamored young Summer is tempting the roses to premature birth. What a fine old world this is, after all, if we have plenty of money in our pockets, plenty of health in our systems, and no poor relations! As you stand on the Arlington side of the Potomac, on any one of these fair May days, and look around you in any direction, there is a beauty even about the tracks of war which enables you to comprehend why so many of our brass-buttoned generals are fond of staying in one spot so long. Behind you rise Arlington Heights, which are disliked by our excellent National Democratic Organization, only because they wear a covering of Lincoln green in summer; before you, and across the Potomac is the Capitol of our distracted country, looking like an ambitious marble-yard on its way out of town; and close beside you is one of our national

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troops extracting certain wonders of the insect kingdom from a Government biscuit. On Tuesday, I was standing with the Conservative Kentucky chap near Long Bridge, surveying this scene, and says I, —

“Behold, my Nestor, how the scars left upon Nature’s face by the chariot wheels of War are turning into dimples, and all the twinkling curves of a placid smile.”

“Yes,” says he, hastily picking up the Jack of Diamonds which he had accidentally drawn from his pocket with his handkerchief, — “the scene is somewhat pleasant; but not equal to Kentucky, where there is more rye.”

Here the Kentucky chap became so deeply affected that he was compelled to smell a cork which he took from his vest pocket, and says he, —

“Kentucky raised a great deal of rye before the breaking out of this here fatal war with the Southern Confederacy, with whom Kentucky is connected by marriage; she raised it by the bottle; in which form it becomes, as it were, the crowning glory of agriculture. Ah!” says the Conservative Kentucky chap, stirring an invisible beverage with an imaginary spoon, “how softly on my senses steals Kentucky’s national anthem, —

“‘If a body meet a body,
Comin’ through the rye.’

And the Old Rye of Kentucky is famous for its body.” The Kentucky chap hiccupped at the bare recollection of the thing, and says he: “But we can no longer say that the bloom is on the rye; for this unnatural war has killed the agriculture of Kentucky and broken many of her bottles. O Kentucky! Kentucky! how thirsty I am!”

After this speech, I could no longer profane the glory

of God's beautiful picture by talking about it to a chap who could see nothing in a landscape but rye fields. And yet it is but natural for any Conservative chap to talk thus, after all; for I have found it to be a peculiarity of nearly all our fellow-beings, that Old Rye is forever running in their heads.

On Wednesday, while I was on my usual weekly visit to the Mackerel camp near Duck Lake, I was called to look upon the body of a poor soldier who had been shot during the night by a prowling Confederacy. He was a very young chap, my boy, with light, wavy hair, and might have been taken for a mere lad, had there not been more years in the deep lines on his brow than on his beardless chin. There he lay upon his gun, with one hand clenched in the sand, and the other upon the damp red spot on his breast. He looked like a child who had fallen asleep after unkind words from his mother. The Chaplain and a private Mackerel in rags were bending over him, and says I, —

“Who was he?”

“He went by the name of Nemo,” says the Chaplain, sadly; “but no one knows what his real name was. He enlisted only two days ago, and kept himself apart from the other men. I think he was a gentleman.”

Here the private Mackerel in rags broke in, and says he: “Yes, he *was* a gentleman. I an't no gentleman, but I know *he* was, and I can lick any man that says he wasn't! I spoke to him last night when he was relieving guard, and asked him what fire-company he belonged to; and he said, none. I see he looked sick, and wasn't fit to do duty, and I offered to go out on picket in his place.

It wasn't much to offer; but he squeezed my hand very hard, and said that my life was worth more than his; and that he would go. I asked him what he wanted to come to the war and get killed for; and he said he'd tried to do his best in the world, but everybody was against him, and he'd been disgraced for trying to do an honorable thing, and couldn't stay and face people any more, because all turned away from him. I told him I would lick the man who hurt his feelings, and he only said: ‘They all do that,’ and went away.” Here the poor Mackerel in rags shed tears, and says he: “I know he *was* a gentleman.”

“I see how it is,” says the Chaplain, shaking his head; “he was one of those unfortunates whose sensitive natures are a legacy of unhappiness, or madness, to be cancelled only by death. And yet his kindness of heart with this rude soldier proved how much goodness there was in him that the world had not turned to bitterness.”

Alas! my boy, what a pity it is that these finer natures are forever coming under the heels of everybody, and getting themselves crushed! They are like fine Sèvres vases among stout earthen pipkins, equally ready to split with the cold, or be pulverized by a tilt from their next door neighbors. It is a misfortune for such fragile natures as these to be in this common-place world at all, my boy, and they cannot do the more useful portion of humanity a greater service than by getting themselves out of it as soon as possible. I have known human porcelain vases of this kind so fragile, that they were half-cracked before anything touched them.

On Thursday, my boy, the report that a friend of the well-known Southern Confederacy had been arrested and

court-martialled, in Ohio, for simply advising the intelligent masses to set fire to a few Union hospitals and go hunting after American eagles by the light thereof, — this report, I say, excited amongst the loyal but seditious patriots of storied Accomac an indignation that was anything but speechless. Shades of our Revolutionary sires! was it possible that a citizen of the Republic could no longer speak pieces without being arrested for speaking peace! Ashes of the great! could it be, indeed, true that, even where there were no police, a man's personal liberty was no longer safe! The people of Accomac, my boy, were alarmed for their own liberties, and at once held a public meeting, at which I happened to be present.

As all the citizens who were worth \$300 each sent notes to say that they had imperative engagements to prepare for the approaching Conscription, and could not come, the meeting was composed entirely of the other citizens, many of whom engaged in single combat on their way thither, for the purpose of making the distance seem shorter. Punctually at seven o'clock, P. M., a gentleman of much muscle touched off a small field-piece with such admirable precision as to break all the windows for two blocks around, and then dexterously discharged a two-pound sky-rocket into the third-story bedroom of a venerable maiden lady living across the road. The demonstration was received with joyous acclamations by the populace, nearly twelve of whom had already arrived; and a victim of Federal oppression, with a very large stomach, mounted the platform erected for the speakers, and said that he would commence proceedings on this occasion, by reading a short portion of Washington's Fare-

well Address from the volume of Bancroft which he held in his hand. (Great applause.) The honorable gentleman then proceeded to read something; but was interrupted by a reporter, who remarked that the speaker must be mistaken about that being Washington's Address, as he had certainly read it in the Bible. The honorable gentleman then turned his book over so that he could read the title, and said that he had, indeed, made a slight mistake about the volume. He would defer reading the Address for the present, and begged leave to introduce Mr. John Smith, the Hon. Ferdinand De Percy having failed to be present.

Mr. Smith said that it was the proudest moment of his life, and he felt it an honor to be there. They had met together to denounce and spit upon an astounding Administration, under whose tyrannical sway no man was allowed to say one word against it. A fellow-citizen had been arrested in Ohio upon the miserable charge of advocating peace, when he was really disturbing the peace all he could. How long were such outrages to be endured? He advised his hearers to strictly honor the laws; but he would also have them go home, organize into regiments, purchase artillery, procure iron-clads, and destroy every man who dared to speak in favor of an Administration under which the boldest man dared not express his sentiments. He would have them do all this peaceably; but he would have them do it. (Great enthusiasm, and cries of "Keep off my corns, durn ye!")

As Chesterfield Mortimer, the celebrated Accomac patriot, was not able to be present on this occasion,

Mr. Jones was introduced, and made a few sensible remarks. He said that he had always been a law-abiding man, and would always advocate the strictest observance of the laws. The peaceful people, he trusted, would all procure reliable muskets and

At this moment, my boy, the speaker suddenly stopped short; stared at a white object which had just appeared fluttering down the street; and then, dashing wildly from the platform, tore furiously in the direction of said object, which appeared to be moving, followed spontaneously and with frantic speed by his fellow-speakers and the entire meeting. I was astounded; I was overwhelmed; for such a sudden breaking-up and precipitate flight of a great indignation meeting was never witnessed before. Quickly mounting the vacant rostrum, I drew my field-glass from my pocket, and proceeded to scan the wonderful white object which had produced such an electrical effect. It was moving on, as I fixed my glass upon it, and I found it to be a new banner, born by a fat young man in a white apron, and bearing the inscription:

BROOKSES
NEW BAR-ROOM,
JUST OPEN.
FREE LUNCH NOW READY.

This it was, my boy, which had broken up one of the most significant meetings of the age, by artfully working upon the idea of its supposed inn-significance.

Upon reaching Washington, on my return, I heard

that a serious-minded chap, of Republican officiousness, had just waited upon the Honest Abe to ask if he did not intend to cause the arrest of Smith and Jones for their treason.

Our Uncle Abe smiled feebly, and scratched his head, and says he:

“What Smith and Jones, neighbor?”

“Why,” says the serious-minded chap, earnestly, “the Smith and Jones of Accomac.”

“Well, really,” says the Honest Abe, pleasantly, “it’s curious, now; but I never heard of them before.”

Drawing an inference from this little circumstance of Executive conversation, my boy, it strikes me that it would add considerably to the importance of some of our large-sized local revolutionists, if they could overturn the present ignorant Administration, and establish in its place a—Directory.

Yours, double-entendrely,

ORPHEUS C. KERR.

LETTER XCVI.

DEVOTED PRINCIPALLY TO SOCIAL MATTERS, AND THE BENIGNANT BEARING OF V. GAMMON AT A DIPLOMATIC SOIREE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., July 3d, 1863.

SOCIAL life at our National Capital, my boy, as far as the native element is concerned, has not been refined by the war; and even at the White House it is scarcely possible to collect an assemblage of persons sufficiently genteel by education to speak familiarly of European noblemen of their acquaintance. At the last dinner given by the Secretary of State, there were actually three Western persons of much cheek-bones, who dissented from the very proper idea that Earl Russel's Carlton-house sherry is superior to anything we have in this country; and my disgust intensified to hopeless scorn, when an Eastern chap in a nankeen vest was brazen enough to confess that he could not tell how many pieces the Emperor of the French had in the wash on the last week of Lent. At other social gatherings in Washington I have noticed the same evidences of growing vulgarity; and I greatly fear, my boy, — I greatly fear that a knowledge of Europe will yet be more prevalent amongst Europeans than Americans. O my country, my native land! has it indeed come to this at last? In thy loftiest social circles shall we no more behold that beautiful flesh-colored being in lavender gloves and dress-coat whose etherealized individ-

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uality broke rapturously forth in the thrilling words, "When I was in Paris last summer"? Are we no more to palpitate with ecstasy at the tones of that voice which was wont to trill forth in liquid music from a curl-crested fountain of white shoulders, saying: "Don't you remember, Mr. Thompson, how the Guke of Leeds larfed that day, at the Reception, when I told him that we American ladies thought it was vulgar to say 'garters' out loud?" Alas! my boy, our aristocracy is fading away like an abused exotic, and it is not oftener than once in a season that the frequenter of our Republican Court witnesses one incident to make him recognize the polished people he once knew. About two months ago, at an evening party given by Mrs. Senator —, I did witness a social incident, showing that there is still hope for the Republic. An interesting young mother, of not more than sixty-two summers, attired in a babywaist and graduated flounces, was standing near one of the doors of the music-room conversing with me upon the moral character of her dearest female friend, when her gushing daughter, a nymph not more than six pianos old, came pressing to her side, and whispered behind her fan, —

"Mamma *cheri*, may I donse with young Waddle?"

The maternal girl smiled grimly at the fragile suppliant, and asked:

"How much is his celery, *ma petite*?"

"Nine hundred, mamma, in the Third Auditor's."

"Then tell him, *mon ange*, that you are engaged for the next set, and wait until the thousand-dollar clerks come in. You know, *ma petite*, what the Count Pistachio said to you at Avignon about giving encouragement to anything less than four figures."

I could not avoid overhearing this conversation, my boy, for it was not held in whispers, and I thought to myself, as I eyed the fashionable pair, "The Republic still lives."

It is, however, with the foreign embassies at Washington, that the genuine aristocratic spirit still holds its normal own; and when I lately received an invitation from a certain convivial diplomatist of the Set to be one of a select party of distinguished gentlemen at his residence on a certain evening, I felt that there was still an available balm in Gilead. Arriving in the rooms shortly before ten o'clock, I found seven middle-aged gentlemen in cambric ruffles and scratch-wigs assembled around the wine-table, all pledging the health of the Venerable Gammon, who had come up from Mugville expressly to be present. There was the French Marquis Non Puebla, on a visit to this country to search for traces of one of the lost gravies of Apicius; Milord Gurgle, who had been deputed to convey to New York a pair of Southdown sheep, presented by the Zoölogical Gardens to Central Park; the Honorable Peter Pidger, who had once been to Europe to negotiate the sale of some railroad stock; the Ambassador in person; and three other respectable persons with no names, whose sole duty it was to indorse the Ambassador whenever he said anything about "dat signeeficant commencement of dees war at Bool Run." But the greatest of them all, my boy, was the Venerable Gammon, who smiled fatly as they drank his health, and emptied his own crystal with a soft benignity which seemed to consecrate that brand of liquor forever.

"My friends," says the Venerable Gammon, waving an

unctuous hand around the board in a manner to confer blessings on the very nutcrackers, — "my friends, I accept the honor for my country, and not for myself. Your countries bask in the sunshine of a powerful peace, while mine grows weak in despotic war. But do not spit upon us, my friends; do not crush us. We will do whatever you want us to do. War," says the Venerable Gammon, beaming thoughtfully at the nearest wine-cooler, — "war may be called the temporary weakness of a young country like ours; and if we learn not to value peace more than war as we grow older, it will only be because we do not learn to value war less than peace as we advance to riper years."

Then all the respectable middle-aged gentlemen nudged each other to notice *that*; and the Honorable Peter Pidger observed, in an undertone, to Milord Gurgle, that if the Government was only guided by such wisdom as that, the country might yet hope for favor from Europe.

"Ah!" says the Ambassador, reflectively, "I cannot help to recollect dat signeeficant commencement of dees war at Bool Run."

Whereupon the three middle-aged gentlemen with no names nodded meaningly to each other, and murmured, in pitying chorus:

"Ah, yes indeed."

As I rode home to my hotel that night, my boy, and reflected upon the polished observations I had listened to, it seemed to me that Europe must indeed be superior to a weak young country like ours, and that Secretary Seward was but showing a proper respect for the dignity of monarchies in yielding gracefully to them whatever they

asked, and establishing in American history its first creation of knighthood, under the title of Sir Render. The Sword of '76 would have refused the accolade; but that of '63 is of a milder temper.

On Wednesday, as I strolled lazily along the shore of Awlkyet River, listlessly tossing pebbles into the placid stream, and paying no attention to any visible object save the severed branches of trees and broken fragments of artillery-wheels which occasionally barred my progress, a Mackerel picket suddenly touched me on the shoulder, and says he, in a whisper, —

“You mustn't be chucking stones into that air water, or you'll wake up the Captain which is asleep.”

I glanced askance at him from under my vizor, and says I, “What Captain, my trooper?”

“Why,” says he, “the Captain of the Blockade, over yonder.”

I looked in the direction indicated by his finger, my boy, and beheld the sloop-of-war Morpheus at anchor near a small inlet leading to the river from the up-country.

“Why, my Union champion,” says I, wonderingly, “I should like to know at what time the Captain makes it a practice to retire?”

“Ah!” says the Mackerel picket, leaning upon his musket, and looking dreamily over the water, “he's all the time retiring—he's been put upon the ‘Retired’ list.”

Here was a man, my boy, an American, like you or me, brought up in a country where education is free to all, and yet he had no clearer idea of the functions of our

Naval Retiring Board than such as happened to be suggested to his instinct by what he could see of the national blockade service!

Yours, amazedly,

ORPHEUS C. KERR.