

LETTER XCVIII.

RECOUNTING A CHASTE "RECONSTRUCTION" ANECDOTE OF THE SIXTH WARD, AND DIVULGING CAPTAIN VILLIAM BROWN'S INGENUOUS ALPHABETICAL EXPERIMENT WITH COMPANY THREE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., Sept. 25th, 1863.

It is a high-moral idea of poets, congressmen, and the writers for our improving weekly journals of exciting romance, my boy, that it is a noble and majestic thing to feel warmly for one's country; but when the thermometer stands at 90 in the shade, and we join with our fellow-beings in shedding tears from the tops of our foreheads, I find my disinterested patriotism fully equal to the self-abnegation of the remark, that I had rather be cool than be President. Our brethren are already in the field; why stand we here idle? Is ice so dear, or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty Dollars! I know not what other gentlemen would have; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me a fan. Thus, my boy, after the manner of the departed Patrick Henry, did I expose myself to the conservative Kentucky chap, as we stood panting together in the vestibule of the Treasury Buildings the other day; and says he:

"The loyal State of Kentucky, of which I am a part, has no objections to warm weather in the summer-time; provided it is not indorsed by the fanatical Black Repub-

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licans. Warm weather," says the conservative Kentucky chap, thoughtfully, "is of much service to the old rye crop of Kentucky; but Kentucky would forego even her old rye, rather than see retarded the movements of that army whose constitutional duty it is to restore the Union — not reconstruct it."

The regular list of dead idiots for this year being not quite full yet, my boy, there are still persons living who can perceive no very immense difference between Restoring the Union and Reconstructing the Union; which reminds me of a chaste little incident that once occurred in the Sixth Ward.

A highly-respectable liquor-selling chap, of enlarged stomach and overwhelming shirt-collar, having just been elected Alderman, through the influence of his excellent moral character, and about two thousand dollars judiciously invested in Irishmen, gave a fashionable party to celebrate this triumph of the purity of elections, and invited about two-thirds of the Fire Department to bring their wives and sweethearts. Promptly at nine o'clock, two Hose Companies, of unblemished reputations for noise, four Engine Associations noted for saving one pine table from the devouring element to every two Brussels carpets they ruined with water, three Hook-and-Ladder Societies greatly distinguished for climbing into the third-story windows of the building two doors from the burning domicile, and an equivalent number of the cotton-hearted women of America, were on hand in the aldermanic drawing-rooms. The new public dignitary received them all with that exquisite blandness of demeanor which is so becoming to

great men who have just made a rush from obscurity: and says he, —

“Make yourselves at home now, boys, only don’t spit on the carpet. If there’s a fire while the swarry is goin’ on, I’ll let the old woman listen for the district and announce it from the airy. We’ll keep the winders up, and when the hall-bell rings, you fellers as has to leave, can just slip down onto the front stoop without breaking up the entire swarry.”

Here the large-hearted aldermanic chap was called hastily downstairs to attend the bar, several army officers having just arrived in the ward, and the “swarry” commenced as merrily as a fire in a carpenter’s shop. It set in for a heavy dance at about eleven o’clock, and then were seen as many elaborate verses in the poetry of motion, as any pair of eyes could wish to enjoy. “Fifty’s” foreman, who danced with a very pretty dotted muslin, produced a very striking and picturesque effect by rolling his inexpressibles up over his boots, and giving a life-like imitation of the working of an engine with his heels and toes; whereupon the assistant foreman of “Thirty’s Truck” suddenly threw off his dress-coat and appeared in full red shirt, simultaneously striking into a fine, artistic shuffle, intended to imitate the hauling-in and reeling-up of the wet hose after a conflagration. These and other graceful novelties were greatly admired by the ladies, each of whom said so many spicy and spiteful things about the other’s bare arms and forward manners, that a stranger might have taken them all for the very cream of Fifth Avenue or any other Best Society.

It was about midnight when “Fifty’s” foreman, grow-

ing reckless with the passionate splendors of excitement, scuffled away with his flushed dotted muslin to a luxurious chintz sofa near one of the windows, and intemperately whispered in her ear, “Miss Perkins, it were madness for me longer to conceal my insanity, and to remain silent would but render me speechless. Here let me lay my heart and trumpet at your feet, and” —

She had fainted! Ay, sir, swooned!

Instantly the whole brilliant saloon was in confusion; the dancing ceased, the dust commenced to settle, and the assistant foreman of “Thirty’s Truck” was seen to put on his coat.

“Bring your hose here, quick, and play on her face!” shouted “Fifty’s” foreman, half-crazed by what he had done. But the dotted muslin’s mother now clutched her in her arms, and says she, “Let’s get her into the dressing-chamber, and somebody bring a little sally wolatile.”

Here another dowager seized an arm of the fainting girl, and the two bore her tenderly into the retiring-room, followed by some two or three sympathizing young ladies. And now, my boy, it becomes my delicate duty to hastily sketch a scene which the masculine pen cannot too carefully touch upon. It being one of the principles of woman’s nature that some relaxations must be admitted in her toilet before she can revive from syncope, the second dowager commenced to relieve the fainting fair one of such articles of fashionable addenda as might retard her recovery. She took off her side-curls and back-hair and laid them upon a table; with great care she removed her upper teeth and placed them upon a chair; softly wetting a corner of her handkerchief in her mouth she effect-

ually wiped away the eyebrows and a part of the cheek of the young sufferer; and she was proceeding to make other dissections which I shall dismiss with the remark that they are merely matters of form, when the patient gave a gentle sigh as she rested in her mother's arms, and says the mother to the dowager:—

"There, Mrs. Jobbins, I guess you needn't do any more." Mrs. Jobbins gave a sagacious look at the patient, and says she:

"Very true, mem; she is getting better. It wont take us many minutes to reconstruct her."

"I beg your parding, Mrs. Jobbins," says the maternal, shaking her cap,— "I beg your parding Mrs. Jobbins; but your language is ineddicated, highly; you should say 'restore' her."

Mrs. Jobbins straightened herself up, with a glare, and says she: "Perhaps, mem, you can teach *me* eddication, and my own daughter a teacher these two years in the public schools! The ideor! I repeat it—to reconstruct her—put her together again."

"Restore," says the maternal, savagely.

"Reconstruct!" screamed Mrs. Jobbins.

"You're a artful, ignorant old copperhead!" howled the maternal, dropping her daughter's head upon the floor.

"And you're a spiteful, stuck-up, toothless old—ab'litionist!!" yelled the dowager, stamping until her snuff-box hopped out of her pocket.

Drawn to the room by the noise, a hard old nut, a retired foreman of old "Sixty," stuck his head in at the

door, and says he: "What are you old fools scrimmaging about? You're keeping the swarry back."

Both the old ladies made at him at once to know which, in his opinion, was the right word,— 'Reconstruct,' or 'Restore?'

The old nut took a thoughtful bite of tobacco, and says he: Let the girl herself tell you when she *revives*."

Revive was the word, my boy; and while the old women were quarrelling over the two terms aforesaid, poor nature got tired of waiting, and realized the right one in action for herself. The girl revived without being either restored, or reconstructed.

And thus, my boy, I sometimes think, that, whilst noisy old political grannies are quarrelling as to whether the Union shall be Restored, or Reconstructed, the fainting young Union will suddenly revive of itself. At any rate, it bids fair to have plenty of time to do so.

*In a recent letter I noted the return of the main body of the invincible and time-honored Mackerel Brigade to what may be termed the place of its military birth; but I did not, nor can I, describe justly the many touching incidents of the retrogression. Once more, my boy, does this standard national martial organization find itself on the right side of Awlkuyet River, and many a sensitive Mackerel, as he gazes through his tear-dimmed spectacles upon the surrounding scenery of his youth, fancies himself a boy again, and newly experiences in all his muscles that tingling sensation which, in the full-blooded lad, equally follows a public compliment and a private flogging. As the gory and venerable Brigade wound slowly back

into the well-known fields rendered historically famous for making Washington safe, one very ancient Mackerel grounded his musket by the roadside, took off his spectacles, looked with deep emotion upon the scenes of his early years, and says he to another Mackerel: —

“Thank Heaven! we have at last reached the end of the war.”

The other Mackerel paused in his work of cracking an army biscuit between two rocks, and says he: “Which end do you mean, Sammy?”

“Why,” says Sammy, “the end we commenced at.”

Could it be possible, my boy, that there was a serious and profound truth in that unconsidered Mackerel remark? If so, we are indeed approaching the beginning of the war, and there is rather less of Mars than of Grand-Ma’s in the management of the Virginia campaign.

But why should my pen linger upon this monotonous theme, when the grim Fort Piano on Duck Lake, and the ancient city of Paris on the nether shore thereof, are being besieged on all sides by the Mackerel iron-plated patent squadron under the hoary Rear Admiral Head, and the Mackerel contingent and Orange County Howitzers under Captains Samyule Sa-mith and Villiam Brown. Several times, my boy, has Fort Piano been entirely destroyed and taken by all our excellent and reliable morning journals, the columns of American newspapers being led on to victory — or leaded on to victory — with rather more ease than a dozen times as many columns of any troops in the world; but, inasmuch as the unseemly but well-known Southern Confederacy still keeps store there, it has been deemed proper to make

another iron-clad experiment in that salubrious vicinity. This time, however, the army takes part in the effort, as well as the navy, and Captain Samyule Sa-mith, with the Orange County Howitzers, bombards the atmosphere from the banks of the Lake, whilst the aged Rear Admiral Head, with his iron-plated squadron, performs fiery antics upon the briny element.

The sailing of the squadron inside the bar was a beautiful sight, and was witnessed by a couple of English and French consuls who had come down to the banks of Duck Lake to see if they could recognize the Confederacy at that distance. First advanced Rear Admiral Head’s flagship monitor, the “Shockingbadhat;” followed in close order by the “Aitch,” the “Yew,” the “Em,” the “Bee,” the “You” and the “Gee.”

And now, my boy, you may probably imagine that I am about to relate, with Homeric fervor and the graphic eloquence of Tacitus, how the Mackerel Squadron poured whole foundries of shot and shell into Fort Piano; and how the Orange County Howitzers rained Greek Fire (Irish whiskey) into all the basement windows of Paris; but I have various reasons for doing nothing of the kind, inasmuch as the War Department does not desire that the enemy should be prematurely informed of the capture of the Fort and City. Suffice it to say, that everything is progressing favorably, though recent heavy rains have greatly incommoded such of the land forces as are not supplied with umbrellas.

I think, however, my boy, that I may venture to describe Captain Villiam Brown’s alphabetical experiment with Company 3, Regiment 5, which constitutes the pres-

ent Mackerel reserve on the edge of the Lake. Villiam having heard of Jeff. Davis's experiment with his regiment in Mexico, when he formed it into a V shape to receive a cavalry charge, resolved to give his regiment that shape for the purpose of a roundabout sally upon Fort Piano from the rear, or land side.

"Comrades," says Villiam, impressively, "V stands for Victory, Vengeance and Vashington, and I desire yot to take its shape."

The Mackerels formed themselves into a V, my boy; but when Villiam gallantly retired behind a tree to be out of the way, and gave the order "Forward—double-quick,—march!" Sergeant O'Pake modestly stood out of the ranks, and says he:

"Of course *you* will go ahead of us, Captain?"

"Ha!" says Villiam, haughtily, "why?"

"Oh!" says the sergeant, "V., you know, always follows U."

Villiam was lost in thought for a moment, my boy, and then says he: "That's true, Sergeant; and as U never comes until after T, we'll defer that ere charge for the present."

Incidents of this kind are but common in this war between brethren, which is so abhorrent to Democrats and the high-moral members of the church.

Hoping, my boy, that, by relating the success of Rear Admiral Head and Captain Samyule Sa-mith in my next, I may add two more illustrious names to the list of candidates for the Presidency in 1865, I remain,

Yours, electorally,

ORPHEUS C. KERR.

LETTER XCIX.

IN WHICH OUR CORRESPONDENT IS BETRAYED INTO ARGUMENT; BUT RECOVERS IN TIME TO GIVE US THE USUAL CHRISTMAS SONG AND STORY OF THE RENOWNED BRIGADE.

WASHINGTON, D. C., Dec. 27th, 1863.

ANOTHER Christmas finds our great stragetic country in the toils of war, my boy, and the chiming of the bells is lost in the roar of ingenious artillery. Where blazes the yule log that misses not at least one manly form from its genial ring of quivering Christmas light; and where hangs the mistletoe bough beneath which at least one gentle, womanly heart beats not the quicker with fond thoughts of the lad whose first kiss upon her half-reluctant lips was destined to burn in future there as her keepsake from a hero? Dear old Christmas! rich to memory in all the simple joys and fond, familiar sanctities of home, thou comest sadly upon me in my exile with the iron men of war, the waxen men of politics; and though I hail thee merry for thy cheery evergreens, God knows it is thy snow that presses nearest to my heart. But a truce to sentiment, my boy, when the most sentimental object I have seen for a week is the Conservative Kentucky Chap, whose imbibing method of celebrating the approach of Christmas invariably leads him into disquisitions upon the wrongs of the heroic White Man. On Tuesday, as we took Richmond together,