

## LETTER C.

GIVING DIVERS INSTANCES OF STRANGELY-MISTAKEN IDENTITY; AND  
REVEALING A WISE METHOD OF SAVING THE COUNTRY FROM  
BANKRUPTCY.

WASHINGTON, D. C., March 5th, 1864.

THIS gray-headed pen of mine, my boy,— which is mightier than the sword, inasmuch as it can, itself, “ draw ” the sword when it chooses, quite as accurately as any pencil-vanian, — has run the blockade recently imposed upon it, and once more gambols nervously down the lines of contemporaneous military history. When first I heard that aphorism of the elegant and ghostly Bulwer, by which the sober sceptre of the scribe is magnified above the fancy-dress weapon of the hero, I took it to be like any other high-sounding sentiment of the stage, whereby the poor but virtuous editor was nobly and improvingly encouraged to believe himself rather more powerful in this universe than all its great captains put together. Being a child of the pen myself, I felt benignantly inflated by the venerable “ Richelieu’s ” excellent remark, and looked with much generous pity upon a crushed young army officer in the box next to mine ; but, at the same time, I remember that it reminded me of the exceedingly moral popular delusion making starving virtue a much pleasanter and more admirable thing to possess than a king’s crown ; and I also remember how it thereupon dawned upon me, that

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the pen was possibly mightier than the sword only in the far-removed sense of Might being Write. Since I have lived in Washington, however, I have learned, my boy, that the sentiment in question is capable of demonstration as a very plain fact ; seeing, as I do, that off-hand strokes of the pen can in a very few minutes promote into Major Generals and Brigadiers certain pleasing brass-buttoned chaps whose actual swords could never have done as much for them in all their lives. And yet, my boy, if all those powerful, unsordid creatures, our country editors, had their youths to live over again, I verily believe that two-thirds of them would sooner be put to the sword than put to the pen. Such is man !

Nevertheless, mighty as the pen may be, it must fail equally with the well-known Southern Confederacy to do justice to this Capital of our distracted country in its present social peculiarities. The cackling of geese once saved the Capitol of the Roman Empire, my boy ; but it will take more geese than those who have come hither with the expectation of being respected for their virtues, to save Washington from permanent investment by all the speculative chaps on earth who have no other capital to invest. The present social circle around the family hearth of this Capitalian and Congressional town, my boy, is somewhat more remarkable than it was, even in the palmiest and most mutually abusive days of our eloquent National Legislature, and fully equals the frequent domestic symposium of Albany when the State Legislature meet *there*. Look into a Washington home, and you shall find the venerable grandfather, who sits nearest the fire, talking and chuckling to himself over his success that day in depreciating



"Well, this here other one who just went by is the French Minister, I believe?"

"Really!" says the detective, with a slight cough, "Really; you're wrong again, for that's 'Policy Loo,' the notorious Mexican murderer and thief."

The rural chap bit his right thumb-nail irritatedly, and says he:

"At any rate, I know who yonder tall, gentlemanly person in the black gloves is. It's a famous leader of fashions from Fifth Avenue."

The detective opened his eyes widely at this, and says he:

"Why, there you miss it again. I think I ought to know 'Slippery Jim,' who got that fat contract to supply the army with caps, and made half of them of shoddy."

The chap from the rural districts seemed very much ashamed of himself, my boy, for doing such a wrong to our admirable and refined Best Society; but he was bound to try it once more, and so says he, shortly:

"Perhaps you'll tell me that fleshy individual in a black silk vest, coming this way, an't the British Minister?"

"Wrong again, by thunder!" says the detective; "for all the world knows that respectable cove to be 'Neutral John,' the celebrated rebel-spy and blockade-runner."

Indeed, appearances go so entirely by contraries here, that I really fear, my boy, — I really fear, that many of our veritable great politicians, diplomatists, and Missouri Delegates, are frequently taken for unmitigated rogues by blundering amateurs in physiognomy.

It was on Wednesday that the Venerable Gammon

being seized with a fresh and powerful inspiration to confer a new benefaction on his favorite infant, his country, came post-haste from his native Mugsville, and was quickly blessing the idolatrous populace in front of the Treasury Buildings with some knowledge of his benevolent scheme for paying the cost of the War.

"War?" says the Venerable Gammon, fatly, — pronouncing the word as though he had just invented it for the everlasting benefit of some poor but virtuous language, — "War costs money, and money costs gold. What we want is gold, to pay for the money that pays for the war. And where shall we get that gold?" says the Venerable Gammon, with a smile of knowing beneficence.

"By reference to a California journal, I find that California and Nevada contain about twenty columns of gold mines, and that each mine is worth so many millions that its directors are obliged to levy daily assessments of Five, Ten, and Twenty-five cents per share, or 'loot,' in order that the shareholders, in their immense wealth, may not forget that their distracted country has a decimal currency to be countenanced and supported. Now I propose," says the Venerable Gammon, magisterially pulling out his ruffles with his fat thumb and forefinger, "I propose that the War debt and the board of our Major Generals be paid by an especial tax on these mines, thus" —

"Killing the goose which lays the golden egg," broke in an aged Treasury Clerk standing near, whose countenance possessed all the oppressive respectability that large spectacles and a pimple on the nose can possibly bestow.

The Venerable Gammon was hereupon seized with such

a violent fit of coughing that farther argument was impracticable; and it is not decided to this day whether it would be in keeping with the eternal fitness of things to tax the miners to pay the majors.

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LETTER CI.

EXPLAINING THE WELL-MEANT DUPLICITY OF THE JOURNALS OF THE OPPOSITION; AFFORDING ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF THE IRREPRESSIBLE CONSERVATIVE SENTIMENT; AND SHOWING HOW THANKSGIVING DAY WAS KEPT BY THE MACKERELS.

WASHINGTON, D. C., Dec. 10th, 1864.

THANKSGIVING Day, my boy, is an able-bodied national festival which has dwelt unctuously in all my less spiritual annual reminiscences, since that poetical and beautiful time of life when the touching innocence of childhood tempted me to surreptitiously pick a chicken-leg while my good grandfather was asking a blessing; and to receive therefor that wholesome box of the ears, which not unfrequently imparts a temporary and excessive warmth to the brain of virtuous boyhood. 'Tis sweet to remember that old-fashioned Thanksgiving Eve, my boy, when the venerable and widowed Mrs. McShane, our cook, would renew her annual custom of inveigling us children into the kitchen on pretence of admiring our new shoes; and then proceed, by divers artful and melancholy phrases, to darken our little souls with a heart-sickening conviction of her utter failure to procure, in her recent trip to market, that long-anticipated Turkey! 'Tis pleasant to recollect how entirely we were cast down thereat, and how rigidly we refrained from so much as a single glance toward the old "Dresser," whereon stood the well-known market-basket