

LETTER CIII.

BEING ANOTHER AND FINAL CHRISTMAS REPORT; INCLUDING A SMALL STORY FROM OUR UNCLE ABE; A CIRCULAR FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE; A SUPERNATURAL CAROL FROM SERGEANT O'PAKE; AND A TREMENDOUS GHOST STORY FROM AN UNAPPRECIATED GENIUS.

WASHINGTON, D. C., Dec. 27th, 1864.

UPON these holy anniversary-days of "Peace on Earth, good-will toward men," the American human mind is naturally prone to regret that the well-known Southern Confederacy still survives, in a degree, all its inexpressible spankings, and still compels the noblest of us to pour out our substitutes like water. You, my boy, have poured out your substitute; other great and good men have poured out *their* substitutes, and your devoted pockets bleed at every pour.

O war! thirsty and strategical war! how dost thou pierce the souls of all our excellent Democratic journals, against whom the increased war-tax on whiskey is an outrage not to be mentioned without swearing.

On Christmas-day, my boy, there came to this city a profound Democratic chap of much stomach, who wore a seal-ring about as large as a breakfast-plate, and existed in a chronic condition of having the bosom of his shirt unbuttoned to such a degree as to display picturesquely the red flannel underneath. He ran for Sheriff of Squankum last month, my boy; and having been defeated with great slaughter, concluded that all was gall and bitterness,

(222)

and that he couldn't do better than come to Washington and improve the President's mind.

At the time of the interview, our Honest Abe was sitting before the fire, peeling an apple with a jack-knife; and the fact that part of his coat-collar was turned inside, did not lessen in him that certain generous dignity which hale good-nature ever wears, as morning wears the sun.

"Mr. President," says the profound Democratic chap, spitting with dazzling accuracy into a coal-hod on the opposite side of the room; "I call upon you to-day, sir, not as a politician, but as a friend. And as a friend, sir" — here the Democratic chap wore a high-moral look, and his shirt-bosom yawned as though eager to take all the world into the red-hot depths of his affectionate flannel heart, — "as a friend, sir, I feel bound to tell you, that your whole administrative policy is wrong; and as for your Emancipation Proclamation, it has had no effect at all, as I can see."

Here the profound Democratic chap stuck a cheap bone eyeglass into his right eye, and seemed to think that he rather had him there.

The Honest Abe peeled his apple, and says he:

"Neighbor, the sane men of all parties think differently from you in that matter."

"That proves, I suppose," says the Democratic chap, wrathfully, "that I'm a lunatic."

The Honest Abe ate a piece of apple, and says he:

"Not at all, neighbor; not all; nothing so serious as that. But talking about what a difference of opinion 'proves,'" says the Honest Abe, balancing one boot upon the toe of the other, and smiling peacefully at his jack-

knife; "talking about what it 'proves,' reminds me of a small tale:

"When I was a law-student out in Illinois, and wore spectacles to appear middle-aged and respectable, we had in our district-court the case of a venerable Sucker, who was prosecuting another man for spreading a report that he was insane, and greatly damaging his business thereby. The defendant made reply, that he had honestly supposed the plaintiff to be insane on one point, at least, and that was the motion of the world around the sun. This motion was denied *in toto* by the plaintiff, who had frequently, of late, greatly astonished everybody and shocked the schoolmaster, by persisting in the assertion that the world did not spin round at all, inasmuch as *he* had never seen it spin round.

"Various witnesses were called for both sides," says the Honest Abe, pleasantly scratching his chin; "various ones were called, to testify as to whether such difference of opinion from all the rest of mankind would seem to prove the insanity of the venerable Sucker; but nothing decisive was arrived at until old Doctor Dobbles was examined. Old Dobbles," says the Honest Abe, winking softly to himself, "was not quite such a teetotaler as may be told about in the 'Lives of the Saints,' and when he took the stand we expected something.

"Says the Court to old Dobbles:

"In your opinion, doctor, does a man's denial that the world turns round, inasmuch as he has never seen it go round, prove his insanity?"

"No," says Dobbles.

"Ah!" says the Court, "what then?"

"Why," says old Dobbles, deliberately, "if a man denies that the world goes round, and has never *seen* it go round, it simply proves that he — *never was drunk.*"

"As it happened," says the Honest Abe, balancing his jackknife on the tips of all his fingers; "as it happened that the Court himself had frequently seen the world go round, the justice of the idea flashed upon him at once, and the defendant was found guilty of six dollars' damages, and ordered to treat the Court.

"Now," says the Honest Abe, with a winning smile, "I am far from inferring, neighbor, that you have never been intoxicated; but it seems to me, that when you say the Proclamation has had no effect at all, it proves you can't be speaking soberly."

The profound Democratic chap came away, my boy, with a singing in his head, and has been so tremendously confused ever since, that he asked me this morning at Willard's, if I thought, that what we of war see is anything like what Thaddeus of Warsaw.

On Monday, while I was on my way to the Mackerel camp, before Paris, to be present at the usual Christmas song-singing and story-telling in the tent of Captain William Brown, I met an affable young chap, driving a wagon, in which were some thousands of what appeared to be newly-printed circulars. I knew that the young chap came from a large printing-office in the lower part of the city, and says I:

"Tell me, my young Phaeton, what have we here?"

The affable young chap closed one eye waggishly at a handy young woman who was cleaning the upper windows of a house near by, and says he:

"These here, are five thousand copies of a blank form, just printed down at our place for the State Department. And I should think," says the affable young chap, taking a dash at a small boy who had just "cut behind" his cart—"I should think that pile ought to last a month, at least, though the last one didn't."

I made bold to examine a copy of the blank form in question, my boy, and found it to read as follows:

"CITY OF WASHINGTON, U. S. A., }
DEPARTMENT OF STATE. }

"Dear Sir:

"Permit me to beg you will inform the Government of—, so admirably represented by you, that the Government of the United States entirely disapproves the action of the Commander of the —, in the matter of —, and will make whatever reparation may be deemed adequate therefor by the Government of—.

"With the profoundest respect, I am your Excellency's most obedient humble servant, — —.

"HIS EXCELLENCY — —.

MINISTER FROM —."

As I read this document, I thought to myself: Verily my distracted country's Secretary of State wishes to save as much writing as possible; and who knows but that he is like one of our frontier riflemen, who kneels only that he may take the more deliberate aim at the heart of the wolf?

And now, as I push on again for my destination, let

me say to you, my boy, that few who read my wonderfully lifelike picture of Mackerel strategy and carnage, have any idea of the awful perils constantly assailing a reliable war-correspondent of the present day.

Thus: during a great battle which I attended in Accomac, a piece of shell tore off my head,—that is to say, the head of my cane.

At the second battle of Paris, while I was in the act of taking notes of the prevailing strategy, a cannon-ball took my legs off,—that is to say, the legs of my camp-stool.

In the summer of '62, as I was sitting in the doorway of my tent, on the shores of Duck Lake, a case-shot, of immense size, entered my chest,—that is to say, the chest in which I carry my linen.

Cherish me, my boy, make much of me; for there is no telling how soon some gory discharge of artillery may send me to join the angel-choir.

But here we are in the tent of Captain William Brown; and the manner in which the Mackerel officers are clustered about the round table in the centre, reminds me of flies around a lump of sugar—supposing a lump of sugar to be shaped exactly like a portly black bottle.

Sergeant O'Pake rises with a manuscript in his hand, and says he:

"Comrades,—let me read to you a weird legend, of which I am the sole author and proprietor, and to which I would draw your most political attention."

And the sergeant forthwith delivered this remarkable poetical report of

“THE IRISHMAN’S CHRISTMAS.

“Hic!” — TERENCE.

“Ould Mother Earth makes Irishmen her universal pride,
You’ll find them all about the world, and ev’rywhere beside;
And good Saint Peter up above is often feeling tired,
Because of sainted Irishmen applying to be hired.

“Thus, being good and plentiful, ’tis proper we should find
A spacious house stuck full of them where’er we have a mind,
And unto such an edifice our present tale will reach,
With sixty nice, convaynient rooms — a family in each.

“No matter where it stands at all; but this we’ll let you know,
It constitutes itself alone a fashionable row;
And when a bill of “Rooms to let” salutes you passing by,
You see recorded under it, “No Naygurs need apply.”

“Now, Mr. Mike O’Mulligan and servant boarded here, —
At least, his wife at service spent a portion of the year, —
And when, attired in pipe and hod, he left his parlor-door,
You felt the country had a vote it didn’t have before.

“Not much was M. O’Mulligan to festive ways inclined;
For chiefly on affairs of State he bent his giant mind;
But just for relaxation’s sake he’d venture now and then,
To lead a jig, or break a head, like other Irishmen.

“Says Mrs. Mike O’Mulligan, when Christmas came, said she:
‘Suppose we give a little ball this evening after tea;
The entry-way is broad enough to dance a dozen pairs,
And thim that doesn’t wish to dance can sit upon the stairs.’

“‘And sure,” said M. O’Mulligan, “I don’t object to that;
But mind ye ask the girls entire, and ev’ry mother’s Pat;
I’d wish them all, both girls and boys, to look at me and see,
That, though I’m School Commissioner, I’m noways proud,”
says he.

“The matter being settled thus, the guests were notified,
And none to the O’Mulligans their presences denied;
But all throughout the spacious house the colleens went to fix,
And left the men to elane themselves and twirl their bits of sticks.

“’Twas great to see O’Mulligan, when came the proper hour,
Stand smiling in the entry-way, as blooming as a flower,
And hear him to each lady say, “Well now, upon me sowl!
Ye look more like an angel than like any other fowl.”

“And first came Teddy Finnigan, in collar tall and wide,
With Norah B. O’Flannigan demurely by his side;
And Alderman O’Grocery, and Councilman Maginn,
And both the Miss Mulrooneys, and the widowed Mrs. Flynn.

“The Rileys, and the Shaunesseys, and Murphys all were there,
Both male and female creatures of the manly and the fair;
And crowded was the entry-way to such a great degree
They had to take their collars off to get their breathing free.

“O’Grady with his fiddle was the orchestra engaged,
He tuned it on the banisters, and then the music raged;
‘Now face your partners ev’ry man, and keep your eyes on me,
And don’t be turning in your toes indacently,’ says he.

“And when the dance began to warm, the house began to shake,
The windows, too, like loosen’d teeth, began to snap and break;
The stove-pipes took the ague fit, and clattered to the floors,
And all the knobs and keys and locks were shaken from the doors.

"The very shingles on the roof commenced to rattle out :
The chimney-stacks, like drunken men, insanely reeled about ;
A Thomas cat upon the eaves was shaken from his feet,
And right and left the shutters fell into the startled street.

"It chanced as M. O'Mulligan was fixing something hot,
The spoon was shaken from his hand, as likewise was the pot ;
The plaster from the ceiling, too, came raining on his head,
And like a railway-carriage danced the table, chairs, and bed.

"He tore into the entry-way, and 'Stop the jig!' says he :
'Its shakin' down the house ye are, as any one can see ;'
But not a soul in all the swarm to dance at all forbore,
And thumping down their brogans came, like hammers on the
floor.

"And then the house commenced to sway and strain and groan and
crack,
And all the stairs about the place fell crashing, front and back ;
The very air was full of dust, and in the walls the rats
Forgot, in newer perils found, all terror of the cats.

"Then swifter flew O'Grady's bow, and 'Mike, me lad,' he roared,
'They'll dance until they haven't left your floor a single board ;
It's sperits that they are,' says he, 'and I'm a sperit, too ;
And sperit, Mike O'Mulligan, is what we'll make of you !'

"'And sure,' said M. O'Mulligan, though turning rather pale,
'Its quite a handsome ghost ye are, and fit for any jail :
But tell me what I've done to you offinsive in the laste ;
And if I don't atone for it, I'm nothing but a baste.'

"'Its faithless to Saint Tammany ye are,' O'Grady cried, —
And wilder, madder, grew the jig as he the fiddle plied, —
'Its faithless to Saint Tammany, who bids the Irishman
Attain the highest office in this country that he can.'

"'Och hone !' says poor O'Mulligan, 'it's pretty well I've done,
To be a School-Commissioner before I'm thirty-one ;
'Tis barely just a year to-day since I set out from Cork,
And now, be jabers ! don't I hold an office in New York ?'

"'Why, true for you, O'Mulligan,' O'Grady roared again ;
'But what's a School-Commissioner to what ye should have been ?
It's County Clerk, the very laste, an Irishman should be,
And, since you're not, receive the curse of Good Saint Tam-
many !'

"Then wilder danced the spirit crew, the fiddler gave a scowl ;
And scarce could fated Michael raise a good old Irish howl,
When all the timbers in the house went tumbling with a crash,
Reducing M. O'Mulligan to bits as small as hash !

"Take warning now, all Irishmen, of what may be your fate,
If you come home on Christmas-night an hour or so too late ;
For sleeping on the garret stairs, and rolling down, may be
To you, as unto Mike, a dream of good Saint Tammany !"

The deep, terror-stricken silence following this ghastly legend was suddenly broken, my boy, by a frenzied shriek from my frescoed dog, Bologna, who had followed me down from a Washington, and whose stirring tail had been accidentally trodden upon by the absorbed Mackerel Chaplain. The picturesque animal, with a faint whine not unlike the squeaking of a distant saw, walked toward Captain Bob Shorty and gazed inquisitively for an instant into his face ; then took earnest nasal cognizance of the boots of Captain Samyule Sa-mith ; then sat for an instant on his haunches, with his tongue on special exhibition ; and, finally, went out of the tent.

"Ah !" exclaimed Captain Villiam Brown, who sat

nearest the bottle, and had, for the past hour, been unaccountably shedding tears, — “how much is that dorg like human life, feller-siz’ns! Like him, we make a yell at our firz ’pearance. Like him, we make our firz advances to some brother-puppy. Like him, we smell the boots of our su-su-superiors. Like him, we put out our tongues to see warz marrer with us; and, at last, like him, we — (hic) — we go out.”

At the culmination of this sublime burst, Villiam again melted into tears, smiled around at us like a summer-sunset through a shower, and gracefully sank below the horizon of the table, like an over-ripe planet.

“By all that’s Federal!” said Captain Bob Shorty, “that was dying young, for Villiam; but who can tell whose turn it may be next? To guard against possibilities, my blue-and-gold Napoleons, I will at once proceed to read you a Christmas-story, written expressly for the Mackerel Brigade by my gifted friend, Chickens, who should be in every American library, and would like to be there himself. The genius of my friend, Chickens,” says Captain Bob Shorty, enthusiastically, “cannot be bought for gold; but, in a spirit of patriotic self-sacrifice, he would take ‘greenbacks,’ if the sordid persons having control of the press should conclude to give him that encouragement which, I am indignant to say, they have hitherto, with singular unanimity of sentiment, entirely denied him. Indeed, my friend Chickens has, at times, been placed in charge of the police by certain editors with whom he has warmly argued the value of his talents, and I trust that the four shillings we have appropriated for our Christmas-

story may be given him for the following tale.” And Captain Bob Shorty proceeded to read: —

“THE GHOST’S ULTIMATUM.

“England, merry England! Land of our forefathers! Having seen several attractive stereoscopic pictures of thee, — not to mention various engravings, — I love thee! Yes, I am of passionate temperament; I am thy fond American child; and I love thee. Ay, me lud, we all love thee; and the best of us cannot pay the shortest visit to thy shores without bringing back such a wholesome contempt for everything at home, as none but affectionate American hearts can feel. Having inherited the money realized by our deceased paternal from his celebrated patent Fish-scales we put our aged mother comfortably into the Old Ladies’ Home, and fly to thee, dear, dear motherland, by the most expensive steamer to be had. Then we associate with the footmen of thy nobility, and go to see thy dukes’ houses while the dukes are absent, and ask the dukes’ housekeeper how much such a house costs, and come away stupefied with the atmosphere of greatness. We return to America with mutton-chop whiskers and our hands in our pockets, while our wife wears a charity-boys’ cap on her head, and carries a saddle-whip forever in her left hand. We haven’t seen the fashion-plates in the London shop-windows for nothing. We find New York rather small. There’s no Tower, ye know, nor Abbey, nor Pell Mell, my dear boy. What’s Pell Mell? Oh, I suppose *you’d* call it Pall Mall; ha, ha, ha! quite provincial, to be sure. Really, this new Fifth-avenue house of