

And now, my boy, as the New Year rolls in, let me tender you the compliments of the season, and sign myself,

Yours for festivity

ORPHEUS C. KERR.

#### LETTER CIV.

EXPLAINING, IN A LUCID AND PERFECTLY SATISFACTORY MANNER, THE POWERFUL INACTIVITY OF THAT PORTION OF THE VENERATED MACKEREL BRIGADE RESIDING BEFORE THE ANCIENT CITY OF PARIS, AND PRESENTING CERTAIN GENIAL DETAILS OF A RECENT FESTIVE CONGLOMERATION.

WASHINGTON, D. C., March 6th, 1865.

METHINKS, my boy, that I see you sagely assuming a pair of massive ears, a pair of silver spectacles, and a blue cotton umbrella, for the purpose of accurately personating the celebrated Public Sentiment, and, in that gifted character, peremptorily requiring me to explain the present use of the venerable Mackerel Brigade!

Mastering for a moment the noble rage of the unimpaired patriot at a request so vulgarly practical, I sternly refer you to the latest able articles in all our exciting and learned morning journals; wherein you will be taught that such portion of the aged Mackerel organization as has of late years invested Paris is in reality the gorgeous Pivot around which revolve all the other brass buttons of ultimate national triumph. And is not each editor of these excellent and sanguine morning journals well qualified by his military genius to represent a General Ism, oh?

But perhaps, my boy, you fail to find ocular demonstration in that illumination. It is barely possible that you refuse to acknowledge optical conviction in a lucidity of

that description. It may be that your cornea lacks ability to transmit a specific image in that polarization of prisms. It strikes me as not improbable that you — can't see it in that light.

Then come with me to the Mackerel camp before Paris, and mark where the antique Brigade is sitting-up with the expiring Confederacy. Observe how each morning's sun is reflected from the gleaming spectacles of the venerable military organization; while occasional rains make those same innumerable glasses resemble fairy lakes with dead fish in them. Note with what a respectable air of a reliable family physician each patriarchal warrior exhumes, from somewhere down his leg, the massive gold watch which he has been induced to buy for \$10 of one of those national benefactors in jewelry who advertise affectionately in our more parental weekly journals of romance — and remarks, oracularly:

“It being exactly three o'clock by this here nineteen-carat repeater, that air Confederacy has got just one hour less to live.”

The fact, my boy, that this timely observation would apply with about equal accuracy to the whole human family, need not deter your insidious self from answering in the affirmative, when I ask you, calmly, if it does not seem that a military organization of such intellect, *must* be engaged in some unspeakably profound scheme of victory, even though to the uneducated eye it may present somewhat the aspect of a muddy old gentleman with his head against a stone-wall?

And this business of showing the possible identity of apparent dead-pause with actual velocity, reminds me of

a chap I once knew in the Sixth Ward. He was a cast-iron chap, my boy, whose most powerful conception of enterprise in trade was vividly associated with the duty of being forever in his shirt-sleeves; and he kept a hardware shop at which the economical women of America could get such bargains in flat-irons and door-plates, as were a temptation to marry none but the most impoverished young men.

Many customers had this very practical hardware chap, and one of them was an aged file in a broad-brimmed hat, blue spectacles, and a silk umbrella, who had about him that air of Philadelphia which at once suggests an equal admixture of chronic slumber and profundity. Being a widower and a happy man, it was the daily custom of this aged file to spend several hours of intellectual refreshment in the hardware shop, smiling benignantly upon the ancient maidens who came thither to buy curling-tongs, and enlivening the soul of the cast-iron chap with fine, laborious treatises on the general idiocy of popular perception.

“I tell you, my child,” this aged file would remark, polishing his spectacles with a red silk handkerchief, — “I tell you, the popular perception wants nicety; wants delicacy; wants capacity to distinguish between the noisy, bustling style of operation by which it loves to be deceived, — *Populus vult decipi*, — and the silent, almost imperceptible agencies through which all really great results are accomplished.”

Having heard this chaste sentiment repeated daily for about three years, my boy, the very practical hardware chap began to find his nature growing embittered, and re-

solved to do something desperate. So, one morning, after listening quietly to the essay of the aged file, and refusing to tell a small boot-blackening child of six years old the lowest price for one of Jones's Patent steam-ploughs, this cast-iron chap suddenly removed his hands from around an object on the counter, which he had, apparently, been attempting to conceal, and revealed to view a boy's lignum-vitæ peg-top, which stood seemingly exactly balanced on its steel tip.

"Who would think now," said he, reflectively, "that it could be turning all the time?"

The aged file advanced his blue spectacles to the very verge of the top, and says he:

"Well, now, it's wonderful, an't it? Any one would think, to look at that simple toy, that it stood perfectly still; and yet its velocity of movement must be prodigious. Go into yonder street," exclaimed the aged file, dropping his umbrella in the excitement of the moment, — "go into yonder street and bring in any man you please, and that man could swear that this top is not spinning at all. And why? Simply because the velocity of this top, being several millions of revolutions per minute, is greater than his ignorant eye can comprehend. Upon my soul!" ejaculated the aged file, bending once more to the top, with great enthusiasm, "upon my soul! it's wonderful."

Over the counter came the hardware chap, with one bound, and says he:

"Why, you durned old fool, *the top an't moving at all!*"

And sure enough, the very practical cast-iron chap had just stuck the top up with his hand, in order to bring the popular perception theory of the aged file to grief.

Ordinary persons, my boy, observing the Mackerel Brigade any time these three years, might think it was not moving at all; but we know its General to be the Top of the heap, and we know that he is making revolutions — in the whole art of war.

Let, then, the venerable and strategical Mackerel Brigade strike off impressions of itself in the mud before Paris; while the conic section, under Colonel Wobert Wobinson, walks calmly through the depths of storied Accomac; while Captain Samyule Sa-mith and the Anatomical Cavalry prosecute Confederate railroad researches, and Rear Admiral Head's iron-plated squadron keeps watch and fishes for bass near the captured Fort Piano, on Duck Lake. For the present, be mine the pleasanter duty of imperfectly reporting that stately Ball at the Patent Office, which clinched the re-inauguration of our Honest Abe, and was attended by none of the old aristocracy of the capital, save those who had received invitations.

The old aristocracy of the capital, my boy, having been accustomed only to association with the ministers from combined Europe, and the chivalry who had, now and then, a nice wife or daughter to sell, could not be expected to countenance a plebeian carnival for which they had not received invitations. They could not be expected so soon to forget those elegant family entertainments of the olden time, when the hospitable board, with its green covering, groaned under the weight of gold and silver; when, instead of salads and pates in crockery platters, the plates were of delicately enamelled pasteboard, containing from one to ten diamonds each, or, perhaps, a king or queen served up cold with mint sauce.

The Old Aristocracy! lineal descendants of the British cavaliers! I should weep, my boy, over their possible extinction forever, were it not that the assiduity of the London Prisoners' Aid Society, in sending ticket-of-leave men to New York, promises to keep the species going.

Behold me, at the proper hour, suspended between the shoulders of three or four fat citizens of America in the entrance-hall, and being thus borne into the festive scene like a being too delicate to walk. This, too, at the expense of only the linen "duster" which I had donned to preserve my broadcloth from the dust in the dancing room, and which I had the satisfaction of seeing distributed in ribbons around the necks and bodies of a score of my neighbors, like so many charms to keep off enchantments. The crowd, the management, and the number of guests with umbrellas and top-boots, were all the subjects of ill-disguised sneers among the old aristocracy of the capital who had not received invitations.

And now I emerge into fountains of satin and mechlin cascades, with numerous citizens of America up to their waists in the surf, and looking about as comfortable as though bathing at Newport in full dress. Yonder stands our Honest Abe, in sombre costume, like a funeral procession standing on end to let something pass under it.

Leaning thoughtfully against the wall, my boy, I was gazing meditatively upon this scene, and thinking how many of these fair beings would be destroyed by railroad accidents on the way to their homes in other cities—I was thinking of this, my boy, when I heard a voice saying:

"How powerful is human instink! let a fire-bell ring,

and at least half of these manly beings would make a bust for the street to join their native fire departmink. Let the hall-bell ring, and nearly all these fair petticoats would involuntarily rush to 'tend the door. Such is human instink."

Like one in a dream, I turned me where I stood and beheld the form of Captain Villiam Brown, his left hand upon his hip and his right caressing the neck of a small case-bottle in his bosom. I eyed him pleasantly a moment, and, said I:

"Well met, my Union Blucher!"

"Ah!" says Villiam, pensively, "how powerful is Human Instink!"

"Explain, my Blue and Gold."

"Human Instink," says Villiam, softly, "is an involuntary tendency to our normal condition."

"Ahem," said I, sagely, "that sounds like Seward."

"Come with me," says Villiam, gravely, "and I will show you the power of Human Instink."

He led me quietly, my boy, to a corner of the great room, where the guests were nearly all males, and suddenly roared out this extraordinary question:

"Say, Johnny-y-y, how's yer do-o-org?"

The magical sound caught them unprepared, my boy, and before there was time to remember where they were, they unanimously responded with:

"Bully!"

"Ah!" says Villiam, "that's Instink. They all were fellow-firemen last year, and remember the language of the Departmink."

Deeply impressed with a sense of that subtle sympathy

with early usages which never leaves a man in life, I again let the hero of a hundred battles lead the way to another corner, where fifty fair ones stood apart in a cluster, waiting for their escorts. Then it was that Captain Villiam Brown suddenly assumed an air of unspeakable abstraction, and commenced humming the tune of the song :

"Bridget, tend the airy bell,  
Don't you hear it tinkle?  
Butcher's brought the bacon home, —  
Cook it in a twinkle."

Without at all thinking or knowing why they were doing so, my boy, two-thirds of those fair ones took up the tune at the first note and hummed it through!

"The fair sect," says Villiam, cautiously, "once heard its mother sing that song, as she had learned it in her native palace; and has the Instink to remember it."

Thus, taking new and beautiful lessons in the ever-fresh volume of animate nature, we sauntered into the ball-room, where our Honest Abe and his lady were viewing the performances from a pair of handsome elevated chairs. Ay, sir: handsome (!) chairs; and that, too, when many an honest poor man in the land has not a single chair with a gilt back to rest upon. Thus are we drifting toward (start not!) — yes sir and madam, toward — Royalty!! Thus, too, are we incurring the highest scorn of the old aristocracy of the capital who had not received invitations.

There was dancing of the ordinary sort in plenty; many solid men of Boston of the oldest age going to the verge of apoplexy in their efforts at double-shuffle; but how can description do justice to the Honorable Gentleman from

the Sixth Ward, who performed the celebrated Conflagration Hornpipe!

First, the Honorable Gentleman threw his whole weight upon his left leg, elevated one ear as though intently listening, and tapped distinctly upon the floor with his right heel the number of the district. Then came a confused scuffling, first upon one foot and then upon the other, to represent the hurry and excitement of getting the machine out of the house and whirling her to the scene of the conflagration. The next figure, performed alternately upon the toe, heel, and side of the shoe, was an imitation of the noble machine in motion; the whole winding up with the Honorable Gentleman's seizing his partner around the waist and plunging into a polka, symbolizing the gallant fireman's rescue of a consuming female from a sixth-story window.

This beautiful dance, my boy, was considered an unanswerable argument in favor of a Volunteer Fire Department; but its finishing effect was somewhat marred by a piercing note from the famous night-key bugle of the Mackerel Brass Band: who, in an enfeebled state of mind, was found wandering about the palace a trifle intoxicated, and received prompt direction to the apartments of Detective Baker.

After witnessing, also, the noted walk-around known as the Revenue Stamp, we joined the march for supper, and I sweetly expressed to Captain Villiam Brown my fear of being crowded from the eatables.

"Oh!" says Villiam, catching his case-bottle just in time to save it from sliding through his ruffles to the floor; "I shall work upon human Instink."

Here, this ornament of our National Mackerel organization inserted an elbow under the right ear of a fair being in blue just before us, and says she :

"I don't admire to see you men treating ladies in that manner. The ideor!"

"Ah, Mrs. Nubbins," says Villiam, pleasantly, "when your father, the milkman, used to serve our house, I" —

"Here — you can pass, sir," said the fair being in blue; and Captain Villiam Brown walked forward deliberately upon the trailing skirts of a beauteous object in pink."

"You're tearing my things — creature!"

"Ah!" says Villiam, abstractedly, to me, "you don't remember stand Number Twelve, Fulton Market, where Miss Poodlem's grandmother used to" —

"There's plenty of room here, sir," observed the beauteous object in pink, and Captain Villiam Brown accidentally brushed against a beatitude in white.

"Plebeian!"

"My fren," says Villiam, as though he and I were entirely alone together on a desert island, "when old Binks gave up the soap-boiling business last fall, and came to" —

"Did you wish to pass, sir?" said the beatitude in white; and we soon found ourselves beside the banquet board, where all went merry as a fire-bell.

Then did we gorge ourselves, my boy, like the very First Families under similar circumstances; revelling in such salads as were known to the ancients just before the breaking out of the Asiatic cholera, and paying general attention to a bill of fare which was heartily despised by the old aristocracy of the capital who had received no invitations.

It was past midnight when we retreated to a double-bedded room at Willard's, and as Captain Villiam Brown took his goblet of final soda, he gracefully tipped my glass, and says he :

"I propose a sentimink."

Villiam raised the Falernian nectar aloft, gazed solemnly at me, and says he :

"Human Instink!"

Let us believe, my boy, that the instincts of those who come to the higher social surface in this, our trying time of war, are, by their own purity from anything actually malignant, sure indications that the nation's heart is good to the very bottom. Let us believe that the pride of Ascent, vain-glorious as it may seem, is nobler in raising the public laugh than is the tyrannical pride of Descent, which too often forces the public tear. Let us believe that, in the course of time, when the soft white hand of Peace shall have thrown a wreath of flowers across the muzzles of our guns, these unaccustomed tradesmen-courtiers who now throng the halls of our upright First Citizen and Friend will prove the sound ancestral stock of a race of brave gentlemen and women fair, to defend and adorn our Republican Court.

Yours, blithely,

ORPHEUS C. KERR.