

San Francisco Examiner
April 15, 1900

The Passing Show

A Record of Personal Opinion and Dissent

Mr. Webster Davis, the not unreturning brave, has uttered to a large Washington audience the sentiments of the funny heart of him anent the South African war. He saw it, if you please, and related through tears of sensibility and indignation the customary tales of brutality and heroism which civilians pick up in every camp of every war, which partisan orators need in their business, and which audiences joy to believe. He saw farmers, imbued with love of liberty, attack six times their number of entrenched soldiers and scatter them like a flock of pigeons. He saw thousands of lyddite shells and shells stuffed with bullets explode among heroes, doing no damage, the laws of nature being suspended for the purpose. He saw small boys (small girls would have been more fetching) treacherously slain by men helplessly wounded to whom they were giving water, and a dying old man with opportune gray hair stuck full of the victors' lances. He saw 7,000 men surround 15,000 and hold them tight for many weeks, while beating back 40,000 who tried to uncork the bottle. Altogether this extraordinary civilian in this unearthly war saw a good deal and got much for his money. Naturally, he got a good tail hold on public sympathy and slewed the animal round till its head pointed the way that it should go. Mr. Davis is withal an admirable man to tell a good story, but, if it please him, I prefer Ananias.

Popular sympathies in foreign wars are more commonly misplaced than placed aright, for popular ignorance of the causes of quarrel, the characters of the belligerents and the consequences to follow upon triumph of the one or the other is deep, dark and without hope of illumination. Popular sympathies take account of non-essentials only—of racial and religious and political characteristics and so forth—even of matters purely artistic and literary. The people of this country sympathized with the Greeks in their recent Quixotic and reasonless assault upon Turkey, partly because the Turks are Mahometans, partly because two thousand years ago Greece was inhabited by a people who wrote great books, thought out great philosophies, erected great buildings and carved great statues—and to whom the modern Greeks are not related. We sympathized with the Armenians because they call themselves “Christians” (for which blasphemy may Heaven forgive them!) and because the good missionaries and the good editors described every defeat of Armenian aggression incited by hereditary cantankerousness as a “massacre.” In the Crimean war, which grew out of a dispute about putting a roof on a church in Jerusalem, our sympathies were given to Russia because one of her antagonists was Great Britain, with whom we had ourselves been twice in quarrel. In our civil war nearly all nations of the world favoured the Confederacy because from the South on every breeze that blew they had heard the term “southern gentlemen” and from nowhere the term “northern gentlemen.” Thus in time of peace our southern neighbors had prepared for war; and they seem ever since to have been making alliances in the same way.

It is affirmed with great solemnity and much iteration that Admiral Dewey's political ambition (if without irreverence one may call it so) is of his own creation—that it is due in no way to the circumstance that he is married. That is a gratifying declaration. It shows not only that women are sometimes able to forego high social distinction but that in affairs of state our American prophets, unlike those of the ancient Hebrews, are a negligible factor. In "The Examiner" of November 19, last year, a writer for whom in ordinary matters I entertain the profoundest self-respect makes the following political prediction. Observe how erroneous it turn out to be:

Senator Proctor of Vermont says there is absolutely no possibility of Admiral Dewey becoming a candidate for the Presidency. President McKinley is not at all uneasy about it and expects to be his own successor. Admiral Dewey is of the same conviction, and goes about uttering it. From the fact that Mrs. Dewey smiles very sweetly and says nothing about it, except that the duties of "the First Lady of the Land" must be very fatiguing, it has been inferred that her view of the matter is the same as that of the three high authorities named and that her wishes are four-square with those of her illustrious but modest husband. Ah, yes, precisely—just so. For President, George Dewey, of Vermont.

All day on Tuesday last, by the way, "at camel speed the rumor ran" that the Admiral had called himself together in secret session and withdrawn his name; but one Wednesday it was seen by the dawn's early light that his flag was still there. Wherefore General Coxey is exceeding sad, for it is clear that he is not to have a walk-over.

RICHMOND, Va. April 10—As a sequel to the double lynching at Emporia on March 24 a military company is to be organized in that little town.—N. Y. Tribune.

There was a military company in that little town just before the lynching—sent there to prevent it. "To avert the effusion of blood" the civil authorities sent it away; so that the lynching might take place peacefully. What greater blessing can the new company secure? Is anything better than peace?

This "citizen soldiery" business is a ghastly failure. The entire national guard is not worth the price of its uniforms. It is intended to be a Greater Constabulary: Its purpose is to suppress disorders with which the civil authorities are too feeble to cope. How often does it do so? Nine times in ten it fraternizes with, or is cowed or beaten by the savage mobs which it is called upon to kill, and which it ought to kill. In a country with a competent militia and competent men to use it there would be crime enough and some to spare, but no rioting. Rioting in a republic is without a shadow of excuse. If we have bad laws, or if our good laws are not enforced; if corporations and capital are "tyrannous and strong"; if white men murder and black men outrage white women, all this is our own fault—the fault of those, among others, who seek redress or revenge by rioting and lynching. The people have always as good government, as good industrial conditions, as effective protection of person, property and liberty, as they deserve. They can have whatever they have the honesty to desire and the sense to set about getting in the right way. If as citizens of a republic we lack the virtue and intelligence rightly to use the supreme power of the ballot, which—

Executes a freeman's will
As lightning does the will of God

We are unfit to be citizens of a republic, undeserving of peace, prosperity and liberty and have no right to rise against conditions due to our own moral and intellectual

delinquency. There is a simple way, Messrs. Mobemen, to correct all public evils: put wise and good men into power. If you cannot do that for you are not yourselves wise, or will not for you are not yourselves good, you deserve to be oppressed when you submit and shot when you rise.

To shoot a rioter or lyncher is a high kind of mercy. Suppose that twenty years ago (the longer ago the better) two or three criminal mobs in succession had been exterminated in that way, "as the law provides." Suppose that several scores of lives had so been taken, including even those of "innocent spectators"—though that kind of angel does not abound in the vicinity of mobs. Suppose that no demagogue judges had permitted officers in command of the "firing lines" to be persecuted in the courts. Suppose that these events had writ themselves large and red in the public memory. How many lives would this have saved? Just as many as have since been taken and lost by rioters, plus those that for a long time to come will be, and minus those that were at that time. Make your own computation from your own data; I insist only that a shot rioter in time saves nine.

You know—you, the People—that all this is true. You know that in a republic lawlessness is villainy entailing greater evils that it cures—that it cures none. You know that even the "money power" is powerful only through your own dishonesty and cowardice. You know that nobody can bribe or intimidate a voter who will not take a bribe or suffer himself to be intimidated—that there can be no "money power" in a nation of honourable and courageous men. You know that "bosses" and "machines" cannot control you if you will not suffer them to divide you into "parties" by playing upon your credulity and senseless passions. You know all this, and know it all the time. Yet not a man has the courage to stand forth and say to your faces what you think in your hearts. Well, Messrs. the Masses, I don't consider you dangerous—not very. I have not observed that you want to tear anybody to pieces for confessing your sins, even if at the same time he confesses his own. From a considerable experience in that sort of thing I judge that you rather like it, and that he whom, secretly, you most despise is he who echoes back to you what he is pleased to think you think and flatters you for gain. Anyhow, for some reason, I never hear you speak well of newspaper men and politicians, though in the shadow of your disesteem they get an occasional gleam of consolation by speaking fairly well of one another.

Taking a new pen and placing it between the fifth and sixth toes of his left foot, according to the fashion of his time, the Future Historian wrote as follows:

During what were known as the "nineteenth" and "twentieth" centuries (for what reason is not now even conjectured) the middle part of our continent was inhabited by a people calling themselves Amorigans. They appear to have consisted of four great tribes: In the East the Smugwumps, in the North the Pewks, in the South the Coons, and in the West the Galoots. The seat of government (Throne) was at Laundryton, which is believed to have been situated at the confluence of the Jojuk and Gwap Rivers—then known as the Potstomach and Mishashippy. Here their national parliament met and for more than fifty years discussed nothing but the making of a canal through the Republic of Niggerawgua, which lay to the southward. Many parties of surveyors, engineers and statesmen were sent at enormous expense to select a route, survey it and estimate the cost of the canal. Several treaties were made with other nations that lived on the other side of the world and having no rights in the matter would make any treaty desired if it cost them nothing and gave them some share in the ownership. Dumbleshaw, an historian of the period quoted in one of the sacred books of the prophet Mark Twain, says that a new treaty was negotiated every full moon and amended every foggy morning. At one time the disputes about the canal caused a

great civil war in which the Coons were beaten by the Smugwumps and the Pewks, and which resulted incidentally in emancipation of all the mules in the country. Finally, during the early part of the "Twentieth" Century, while in both houses of the Potstomach parliament the dispute was at its hottest and no fewer than four commissions were in Niggerawgua re-examining the route, the French, who had long been working at a better place nearby, completed their own canal, which was promptly seized by the British, who never permitted a competing one to be made nor an Amorigan to pass through that one. The site of it is not now known.

George Dewey, dear I did not think that you—
So lately married and so happy, too—
Would go philandering with another girl
And give your gray mustache a fetching curl
And set your cap—I should say your cocked hat—
At Miss Columbia the like o' that.
Pray what can you expect to get by throwing
Sheeps' eyes at one so very, very knowing?

See how she served McKinley! All his life
He wooed her for his morganatic wife,
Swore that he loved her better than his soul
(I'm half inclined to think, upon the whole,
She better did deserve his love) and vowed
He'd marry her alive, or even aloud!
What did she? Ere his breath he would recover
She heartlessly accepted the poor lover!

There's William Bryan of the silver tongue,
Old in ambition, in distinction young—
He courts her with the song, the dance, the lute
But knows how suitors feel who do not suit.
And Teddy Roosevelt, plucking from its sheath
The weapon that he wears behind his teeth,
Endeavors in his simple, soldier fashion,
But all in vain, to touch her heart by slashin'.

Beware, my web-foot friend, beware her wiles:
Fly from her sighs and disregard her smiles.
She's no fool mermaid with a comb and glass,
But Satan's daughter with a breast of brass,
Put out your prow to sea again—but hold!
If Bryan and McKinley, all too bold,
Show up along the beach, with little Teddy—
Well, Dewey, you may fire when you are ready.

The following dispatch from our Special Commissioner at St. Petersburg relates to a recent incident in the life of the Czar and Czarina, who had driven out without the knowledge of the courtiers:

Their Majesties and their Lady-in-waiting were discovered by gentlemen of the court in a solitary place. Their carriage had stopped and the Czarina and her companion were

laughing at the Czar, who for their amusement was shopping about in the snow and crowing like a cock.

In diplomatic circles in Washington the Czar's levity is thought to suggest that certain engineering difficulties in construction of the Trans-Siberian military railway have been overcome, or that everything is now ready for the movement into Afghanistan with a view to invasion of India. A high official of the State Department who refuses the use of his name is of the opinion, however, that the imperial performance has reference to French and Russian concert of action in maintaining the present activity of the allied fleets in Chinese waters. If so it is one of the most ominous incidents that have occurred this week, for inactivity is a condition favourable to preparation. That the Czar's hilarity found expression in cock-crowing is especially significant, for it is not to be overlooked that this took place in St. Petersburg—the city of St. Peter, who before the cock crew had denied his Master thrice. The utterance of his Imperial Majesty, who is an Oriental and therefore a religious mystic, should be considered in connection with the recent telegram from Rome (exclusively published in this journal) to the effect that the Pope had refused to receive an emissary from the head of the Greek Church in Moscow, as he is thought to have done twice before. Is Europe on the verge of a great religious war?

Members of Congress, the administration and other authorities on international law are confronted with a new "question," namely, "Does the Isle of Pines belong to Cuba, or was it ceded by Spain to the United States?" The Isle of Pines, with a salubrious climate and a fertile soil producing several kinds of valuable woods, lies off the southern coast of Cuba and has an excellent harbour which can be made into a naval station to offset that of Great Britain in Jamaica and guard the Nicaragua Canal and the Yucatan Pass to the Gulf of Mexico. Therefore the Isle of Pines does not belong to Cuba, but was ceded by Spain to the United States.

If Admiral Dewey is wise he will resign from the navy forthwith. He is still on the active list, subject to sea duty, and it is darkly hinted that the wicked president is about to order him away on a three years' cruise in foreign parts. I call that mean, don't you?