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***The Passing Show***

***A Record of Personal Opinion and Dissent***

Senator Mason of Illinois is without a skin: his nerves are all out-of-doors, exposed to the rude touch of whomsoever curiosity may lure or malevolence incite. He winces when observed, and when a thumb is bitten at him he shudders. On Monday last he “rose to a question of privilege” to hurl back an allegation made by Aliegator Van Sittart, the British consul at New Orleans. The part of the allegation which Senator Mason took the trouble to hurl back at a considerable expenditure of energy that was given him by Providence in trust for mankind consisted of the following words as reported in a newspaper:

“But what are the people of my country to think when such men as Senator Mason adopt the role of mountebank in the Senate chamber of the United States and hurl invectives at England, the friend, and encourage the half-civilized people who are fighting her? I have been in this country five years and understand fully what it all means. I know nothing can come of it except votes from the constituency for whose benefit it was done. It was never intended that such speeches should change the friendly relations between England and the United States; consequently it was all for show and for votes.”

This, Senator Mason described as “hardly worth attention except that it is the expression of one of the accredited representatives of England to the United States”—a gentleman who in his next sentence he called “an English diplomat.” It is to be regretted that the customary and time-tried distinction between diplomatic and consular officers does not commend itself to Mr. Mason’s intelligence, but that is a matter which can perhaps be adjusted when necessary by a conference committee representing both parties to the disagreement. Meantime a good deal of needless friction might be avoided by a stern and heroic resolve of our Senators and Representatives to give more time to the discharge of their Constitutional duties and less to the affairs of Great Britain and the South African republics. If in pursuance of this *modus vivendi* any honourable member of either House should fail to hold his tongue with one hand, there could be no objection to his employment of both.

After all, Mr. Van Sittart denies that he said anything of the kind. It is to be hoped he did not, for Senator Mason is not a mountebank and it makes no difference to him what the voting population of Illinois thinks of him; he is elected by the state legislature, and he knows it. Let us be always just, even to the lowly; when a United States senator “rises in his place” and makes “the halls of legislation” ring with denunciation of Great Britain for what is none of our business, it is not because he needs votes, but because he needs manners.

If, Sheldon, you show us  
How Christ, scorning pelf,

Would edit a newspaper,  
That will be strange;  
But show us how Satan would  
Carry himself  
If pulpited—nobody'll notice the change.

From the “queen’s speech” in opening Parliament I make (with indignation) this extract: “I regret that, owing to insufficient rainfall in autumn over a great part of western and central India, the harvests and pasturage have failed to such an extent as to make a famine.”

That will not do, madam. As “Empress” of two hundred and fifty million hapless wretches who groan beneath your iron heel, your manifest duty was to assure them a sufficient rainfall. In this country, the most enlightened on the face of the earth, many millions of freemen (sons of revolutionary sires and mostly in sympathy with the embattled farmers of South Africa) have their considering eyes upon you as you sit in fancied security in the parlor of the Tower of London, eating bread and honey and fondling your gold crown while the victims of your misrule in India devour their cotton headgear without salt.

War—even a little war like ours—is a horrible business; not so much because of the privation, suffering and death afield as because of its effect upon the minds of the non-combatants. A nation fighting is like a dog fighting; or, for that matter, a man. It has no powers of reason—nothing but a blind, passionate fury that is neither vincible to suasion nor pregnable to sense. Those who are not incapable of justice to the enemy are as bigoted in his defence as the others in his vilification. If these disagreeable phenomena are less conspicuous in our national life today than they were during the Civil War it is only because the present affair touches our interests and therefore our feelings, less nearly; we are no better than we were then. “The fury of the non-combatant awaits the great occasion,” that is all. On the real war, which God willing, we shall have if we get our deserts we shall doubtless calumniate the enemy and one another with the same lack of common sense that served to distinguish us from our asyllumed idiots in the crazy days of the great rebellion. I don’t know why human beings should not acknowledge the lonely virtues of Aguinaldo, nor why Senator Pettigrew should not acknowledge ours. These unripe reflections are the fruit of a debate in the Senate on Wednesday last, when the Senator from Calumpit sought to have a “resolution” read, consisting mainly of Aguinaldo’s version of a conference between himself and Admiral Dewey. The Senator had already tried in vain to have that statement printed at the expense of the government, and the impudence of this second attempt was very properly resented, but not resented very properly. Mr. Hawley of Connecticut, for example, objected to the reading as “treason”—which is very like calling a throbbing boil an active volcano. Mr. Pettigrew as a traitor would at least engage the interest of the curious; as a bore he is without distinction.

Mr. Lodge was hardly more reasonable than Mr. Hawley. He denounced Aguinaldo’s statement as false and said he wanted all the facts—which he proceeded to supply by reading a letter of denial from Admiral Dewey. That was opportunity to Mr. Gallinger of New Hampshire, who solemnly said that to him the question was simple; whether we should believe “a man in open rebellion, or the hero of Manila Bay.” With all due respect for this logician, the question is not quite so simple as that. Men of sense, even in war time, do not believe what they will, but what they must; they believe according to what seems to them the preponderance of evidence. To such the fact of a man being “in open rebellion” as was Cromwell, Washington (he of the

hatchet) and Lee, is not proof of his inaccuracy; nor does the fact that another man is the “hero” of something—that is to say, the victor in a battle, establish beyond question his credibility as a witness. But Mr. Gallinger was not content to set up his monumental criterion and have it shining in the admiration of mankind. He went on to say that doubtless the loyalty of the American people would come to the rescue of Admiral Dewey, whose words would be believed in preference to the words of a man “engaged in shooting the soldiers of this republic”—and doubtless these interesting phenomena really will ensure, for Mr. Gallinger’s countrymen are no wiser than Mr. Gallinger. They have all manner of solemn convictions, but Sentiment is the bellwether of the whole flock.

I know no more about the relative credibility of General Aguinaldo and Admiral Dewey than a babe unborn—no more than Senator Gallinger himself. A fairly good working presumption would be that at a pinch both can “say the thing which is not” if they diligently try to; most of us can. I have never found that illustrious personages, even men of high rank, are more truthful than the humble folk who stand with hats half-masked to see them go glittering by to the Temple of Fame. Yet I dare be sworn that Senor Gallinger of the Filipino Congress has many a time mounted his hind legs and “nailed” an Americano lie with the simple word of Emilio Aguinaldo, Field Marshal and Dictator.

Count Boni, so the Masters say  
In Heraldry (they’re furious)  
Wears fifteen pairs of “pants” a day  
And honors that are spurious.  
His title if he must forego  
(And quite a pretty war it is)  
Yet snatch not at his trousers, O  
Sartorial authorities.

Possibly Congress can afford to ignore the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, but a combination of Costa Rica, Nicaragua and the overland railways is another kind of snap-dog. If the railway gentlemen can subsidize the governments of these countries with a larger sum than ours would give them for a right of way through their worthless dominions they will indubitably accept it. Considerations of morality and international comity do not count for much with the rogue republics of Central America. Under these circumstances it may be expedient to discover great commercial possibilities in Costa Rica and Nicaragua and find that the logic of events has thrust upon us responsibilities that we cannot evade. It may, indeed, become necessary to discern in all Central America a wicked indisposition to accord the elective franchise to Yankee Uitlanders.

A coal-and-wine merchant in Paris having sub-let a part of his shop to a cobbler had trouble with his landlord about it; but he showed the court that his license permitted him to “sell coal, wine, et cetera.” He held that et cetera covered cobbling and won his case. This recalls the London shoedealer, who, when his pedantic competitor across the way ostentatiously displayed the motto, “Mens Conscia Recti” outdid him by flinging to the breeze the glittering legend “Mens, Womens and Childrens Conscia Recti.” And that, in its turn, reminds me of some of the Latin which one has the happiness to hear in the halls of legislation on Capitol Hill.

Why didn’t Buller, applying right

The rules of his art, advance to white  
And out of trouble get him?  
O, well, for one thing (more are in sight  
To military children of light)—  
Old Joubert wouldn't let him.

The amenities of debate in the House of Representatives are not devoid of interest. On Wednesday last Mr. Linney of North Carolina addressed the House on—but that is “another story,” “a detail,” what you please; the importance of the subject is sometimes dependent on that of the speaker. Mr. Williams of Mississippi afterward accused Mr. Linney of having called some other member an ass.

“The gentleman is mistaken,” interrupted Mr. Linney, “I did not brand anyone in the way he says.”

“O, I heard it,” retorted Mr. Williams. “When some gentleman wanted to interrupt the gentleman from North Carolina, he said: ‘O, I do not refer to you. I referred to another ass.’ That is what he said. It is the ‘record’ and will be found there tomorrow unless he revises it out.” There was no further denial, but I dare say the remark will not be found in the “Congressional Record.” Honorable gentlemen have a trick of revising out a good deal that they say and revising in a good deal that they do not say. The momentous question remains, whom did Mr. Linney call an ass, or whom did he call asses—for by obvious inference he had in mind at least two—the gentleman to whom he referred and the gentleman to whom he did not. I suppose they will be heard from later, particularly if the taunt is true, for it is observable that the man who has the strongest objection to being called an ass has no objection at all to being one. Anyhow, it is sad to think that the House of Representatives should be so rich in asses and the Senate have none at all.

“The great need of Washington at the present time,” says Mr. Warner of the Board of Trade, “is a municipal building.” I beg his pardon; this is a matter to which I have given the deepest study. The great need of Washington is a good French restaurant.

“Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley,” says Dr. Leyds, “are simply prisons, with the sole difference that the prisoners consume their own provisions.” O, no—there is another difference; they require four or five times their own number of keepers, who also are not air-eaters. Dr. Leyds is deep, but not unfathomable. In a dry season you can wade him.

The Senate has adopted a resolution looking to the enlargement of the Capitol, in order that senators may have more elbow room. There would be room enough if senators would keep their hands in their own pockets. The resolution was introduced naturally, by Senator Hoar, whose innocent enjoyment of his own magnitude is abated by his sense of the pressure of his cosmic environment: He is hemmed in on all sides by the points of the compass. Of him it cannot be said that he knows no north, no south, no east, no west. He knows all too well and they affect him with an acute discomfort. When he walks they chafe him.

The bullet that pierced Goebel's chest  
Cannot be found in all the West;  
Good reason: It is speeding here  
To stretch McKinley on the Bier.

