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***The Passing Show***

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

Nimble observers who think they see in the intelligence of the rank and file of the Boer army an element of strength disclose in themselves a notable natural qualification for suspension of judgement. The "embattled farmers" are not very intelligent; if they were they would not fight so well, for they would be devoid of hope. These patriotic but misguided men have no conception of the magnitude of the task which they have undertaken in antagonizing the British Empire. In the ignorance of their isolation they have always regarded the British as a small South African people like themselves. Their notions of what lies beyond the sea are crude and nebulous. The Boer common soldier became such in the belief that he had to deal with the men of Cape Colony and Natal only; and even now it is impossible for the English "Outlander" or prisoner to convince him of the power and resources of his enemy. Nothing can alter his belief that the two petty inland "republics" are among the most powerful nations of the world, having the added advantage of an offensive and defensive alliance with God.

Among our American Indians we observe the same ignorant underestimate of our military power, the same infatuate conviction of the superiority of their own. For hundreds of years tribe after tribe has fought us in the belief that nothing was behind the few troops garrisoning a frontier post or two and the small contiguous settlements. Vainly in time of peace has the government sought to impart a sense of the wealth and numbers of the American people by inviting the chiefs to visit the "Great Father" and showing them our populous cities and all the wonders of our civilization. The tribesmen have received with invincible incredulity the marvellous reports of the returned chiefs, whom they have invariably declared bewitched, and in many instances have put to death. The average burgher of the Transvaal or Free State knows about as much of the outlying universe as does the worthy Mr. Hole-through-the Moon of the Skuntatunks, or the no less admirable Mr. Seven-year-itch-in-the-snout, of the Squatawottomy persuasion.

As the mother of hope, confidence and fortitude, this ignorance is an element of military strength. In the end it will prove disastrous by prolonging the contest until there is no reserve of resisting power with which to back up a demand for easy terms of surrender. "Dutch" dominance in any part of South Africa is a thing of the past, but the Angel of Death has a perching place on every hill between Bloemfontein and Pretoria, and if old Paul Kruger's sons of thunder are handled with any sense many a good tall fellow in the opposing force is doomed to miss himself at roll-call before there is an end of the quarrel. In a military sense defeat of the Boers is a foregone conclusion; without intervention they have no chance of success. But the rank and file do not know that. All the military knowledge they have is how to fight in a trench when attacked, or lay an ambush.

But President Kruger knows it, and if he were both patriotic and wise he would renew his overtures for peace, making concessions as liberal at least as might fitly be offered by a super-structural rhinoceros to a fundamental toad.

So many of our foremost orators in both houses of Congress have failed to soar in their customary intellectual altitude in discussing questions relating to our new possessions as to suggest the inadequacy of the Insular Dependency as an oratorical footing. It is apparently unsteadfast; there is too much “give” to it. Let these aspiring gentlemen take advantage of the continental stability of some such large question as that of macadamizing the public lands of the United States and they may do as well as the father of their statements when (John Milton reporting) he “sprang upward like a pyramid of fire.” Tableau—music: “I don’t care if you never come back.”

Since the Commissioners who govern this city wisely and well, because the residents haven’t a word to say about it, passed an order compelling all dog-worshipers to muzzle their dangerous brutes, Washington has been a very decent place to live in. Now, however, it is beginning to be made hideous by the snapping and snarling and howling of the caniolaters themselves. These anthropoid laggards in the progress of evolution are afflicted by heredity with a young and joyous enthusiasm for the once useful companion of their shaggy forefathers, and the feeling is not vincible to sense nor accessible to entreaty. Not knowing how they came by it, they regard it as a spiritual grace credentialing them to heaven. And, doubtless, every professor of the horrible cult secretly believes, with Pope’s poor Indian, that,

Admitted to that equal sky,  
His faithful dog will bear him company.

I think myself it is easier for a camel to go through the knee of an idol than for a man to travel the straight and narrow way attending a snapdog of any known breed, from a Sicilian Lunk-head to an indigenous Benchleg.

For one month, four years ago, I kept count of the instances of dogs attacking and injuring human beings in the immediate vicinity of New York City, as recorded in a single daily newspaper. It is not likely that all were recorded, but the total was eighty-one. In more than three-fourths of these instances the victims were women and children, many of whom, especially the children, were not merely bitten, but terribly mangled. Not all the dogs were supposed to have rabies; many merely followed the suggestion of their natural antipathy to everybody but those whom they respected as “good providers.” No words of mine could add anything to the force and significance of this appalling record, but I should like to add that the count was made from the New Jersey edition of the paper. Doubtless the casualties in that state were accorded a special attention, for metropolitan journals, like provincial ones, “strive to please,” and are not above “pandering to local pride.” Certainly the number of these pleasing phenomena credited to the Trust State was disproportionately large. It is hardly likely that that Commonwealth has exceptionally enterprising varieties of “man’s best friend,” and it is well known that Jersey women and children are not very good eating.

Really, I did not mean to go into all this, but only to note that a meeting of cynophiles has been held in Washington to denounce the commissioners for muzzling the dogs and Congress for not muzzling the commissioners. At this gathering an erectile quadrumane mounted his hind legs to remark, concerning the taxation of dogs, that our

Revolutionary forefathers “threw tea overboard in Boston for less than that.” Well, that form of redress is still open to all; let him go to Boston and throw overboard a few dogs. He will then be a revolutionary forefather, and if that does not elicit our respect to mitigate the horrors of his own he may as well give up the struggle and confess that he has lived in vain.

Eloquent passage from a congressional eulogy on a dead member:

Wherefore, Mr. Speaker, the halls of legislation are today a gulf of dark despair, upon whose keystone stands the Angel of Sorrow uttering an appropriate sentiment. So it is that today Columbia wears upon her sleeve in the sight of heaven and earth the customary badge of mourning. So it is that throughout the great length and greater breadth of this land of the free we hear the wail of a stricken people—the note of a considerable public affliction. We hear it in every murmur of the pines of Maine, in every whisper of the bluegrass of Kentucky, in every thunderous reverberation from the cataracts to the Gulf Stream! And yet, Mr. Speaker, to the unaided eye all is as it was before the hand of death stepped in. Industry places his various implements, Commerce advances her banners on every sea and the great lakes, and Agriculture flies with a free wing. The poet “builds the lofty rhymes” and the architect is similarly diligent in his high calling. The physician sings at his toil. But, sir, away out there “on fame’s eternal camping ground” is spread the “silent tent” of the distinguished remains whose voice so recently rang in our midst, making tyranny tremble and casting down the mighty from their seats! In the glowing words of the gifted bard, whom I am proud to number among my constituents—

“He tasted of life’s bitter cup  
And (notwithstanding) drank it up:  
Then turned his eyes to where the light is,  
Deceasing of appendicitis,”

or appendiceetis. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time for a few remarks in advocacy of the proposed ship canal from Topeka northwest.

I believe that emotion and sentiment have their proper place and influence in human affairs, but one of the affairs into which they may not advantageously enter is international politics. In that domain they are more mischievous than beneficial, for they more frequently darken counsel than serve as a lamp to the feet of reason. It is not likely, therefore, that in resigning the Assistant Secretaryship of the Interior to advocate the cause of the South African “Republics” Mr. Webster Davis will do the world a service. Mr. Davis is an avowed sentimentalist. He does not profess to have achieved his convictions regarding the right and wrong of the South African war by study of the causes underlying it, but by observation of the war itself and personal communion with those who suffer most keenly from such evils as are common to war in general; more particularly with the women and children. That their tears and entreaties have profoundly stirred his emotions is creditable to his heart, but that he permits them to direct the current of his political convictions is anything but creditable to his head. Mr. Davis’ head would probably be a trifle more useful to himself and his fellow-men if it and his heart had not a speaking acquaintance.

Mr. Davis may properly be reminded that his claim to a special knowledge of anything needful to an understanding of the causes of the Anglo-Boer war through having made a flying visit to South Africa narrowly escapes effrontery. The materials for an adequate study of that matter are accessible in every great library of the world, and some of us had been making good use of them for years before this clash occurred. It is easy to sneer

at all that as book-knowledge, but of what sort, pray, will be the knowledge that he is to impart?—not lecture knowledge? Are we to disregard what many men have written and give our faith to what one man speaks? If so, I, for my part, am concerned about that man's intellectual fitness to instruct. I want his knowledge to smell less strongly of the varnish of brand-newness, and his speech to be less thick with sobs of sensibility. Mr. Davis appears to have an impediment in his modesty.

The meteoric rise of Senator Beveridge has been followed by a fall that was less resplendent. The Senate chamber is not a playhouse in which a young, new actor is encouraged in holding the center of the stage in a flood of limelight. I was not present when he sought to confirm the fame of his great speech on the Philippines by another on Puerto Rico, but I'm told that most of the kindly old gentlemen who listened with interest and applause to the former tranquilly ambled out into the cloakroom, ignoring the latter, and those who remained took advantage of the auspicious occasion to write letters to their wives—theirs mostly. Senator Beveridge is now nursing the broken pinions of his chin and trying to figure out how long it will take him to climb beetlewise to the sunbright summit under whose slippery pinnacle he had the indiscretion to alight on his way down to earth from Indiana.

McKinley—Sir John.

Hay—What is Your Majesty pleased to want?

McK.—Sir John, it is beastly low of you to assume that when I speak to you I want something.

H.—Yes, Your Majesty, what is it that you already have?

McK.—That tired feeling. The newspapers insist in saying that the Imperial Government has apologized for opening Macrum's letters. Where do you suppose they got that absurd notion?

H.—From me, Sire,

McK.—From you? How is that, you bloomin' incapable?

H.—They misunderstood. I told them that Lord Salisbury had expressed regret, and promised that nothing of the kind should occur again.

McK.—And is that a fact?

H.—That is the grain of truth in their bushel of falsehood.

McK.—And that is not an apology.

H.—A very different thing.

McK.—Oh, Sir John, you make me so happy.

H.—I humbly beg your pardon.

McK.—But we must reform the vocabulary—"Hay's Unabridged Dictionary," or something. Sir John, are you not literary?

H.—No, if it please you—literature is not genteel.

McK.—Didn't you write a poem called "Little Beeches"?

H.—There is such a poem, Your Majesty, but (putting on a fur glove and laying his hand upon his heart) upon my honor it is a typographical error.

A superficial contemporary says that the Hay-Pauncefote treaty resembles the work of an idiot. It does not; it resembles the work of a number of idiots in consultation.