

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

THE LOUNGER AT OTTAWA.

NO. V.

SCENES.

"No, sir. I'll never stand that. I can stand a good deal. I stood a good many dollars during the elections. I stood rotten eggs on nomination day and had a taste of an axe-handle on polling day. Since I have had to stand many epithets of a promiscuous character, and even my very friends take it upon them to call me leatherhead. I can stand that too. But when it has gone so far as to be called a 'convicted felon,' and in a dock too, I can't stand it any longer. I am ready to hang, draw and quarter, burn, expatriate——" This was poor old Mouldes, who came in on Thursday forenoon in a terrible state of excitement. Whilst ejaculating the foregoing he rampaged up and down the room in a state of terrible excitement, waving his arms and shaking his fists, more like a madman than a responsible legislator, and had Boulter not luckily come in and brought him to reason with his universal Catholicism, a glass of 'dark,' I don't know what might have come of it. "Never mind," said Boulter in the most hilarious manner; "never mind. The thing is all arranged. Come on. It may come on at any moment. Come on." This was enough for poor old Mouldes, who rushed off without his hat; rushed back again and made off with mine; and I had the mortification of walking towards the Parliament House with my hat stuffed full of *Globes* in order to keep it from getting over my eyes. I got into the gallery at length, and the first words that fell on my ears were, 'convicted felons in a dock.' The benches were crowded, and the member for Pictou was screeching with a preternatural vehemence, and almost every sentence was cheered to the echo. It appeared afterwards that the cheers emanated from the felons themselves, but they did not look like felons at all. On the contrary, they looked wondrously frisky, and more like school-boys baiting a hedgehog than anything else. But there was great excitement all over the House. Members were to be seen rushing frantically out, and rushing as frantically in again, some with fyles of *Globes*, some with *Leaders*, and some with *Chronicles*. These were the laymen. The lawyers, on the other hand, eschewing current literature, had their desks piled up with Hansards, Mirrors of Parliament, and kindred volumes. On inquiring as to the cause of all this display and excitement I was informed that the member for Gloucester in a correspondence with his paper had called the famous '107' a pack of convicted felons, and they in their wrath were going to expel him. The excitement at first was terrific. The man from Pictou, to whom I have already referred, waxed eloquent, and went for the offending scribe with the greatest vigour. The gentlemanly member from Napierville replied, and made out that the *modus operandi* of conducting the case was out of all rule. But what had felons to do with rules. Tupper got up and made a fearful speech. He pictured out the high character the felons had hitherto borne, and demanded indignantly whether it was consonant with any experience or any species of philosophy that '107' respectable men could become felons all at once and *en masse*, and when he reached his peroration and exclaimed, "Sur-r-r, let us hand down to our children's children the fact that we, by our vote to-day, maintained the honour, the dignity, the purity of the Parliament of this great Dominion, which extends from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth," the effect was prodigious, and I noticed poor old Mouldes surreptitiously wiping away a tear which had trickled down his nose; affected no doubt at the vision of his grandchildren, reading with prideful feeling the journals of 1873, and seeing their grandfather's name enrolled among the felons, just as we used to revel over the pluck of those fellows who cornered King John at Runnymede. Then Huntington shook himself up for an effort, and I wish he would do so a little more frequently, and the effort was a noble one. At first he playfully brandished the whip over his head; but when at length he brought it down smack on the head of the Minister of Customs, why it made every man in the House wince. As a speech it was perfect; as a piece of keen effective satire, though refined and polished to a degree, it was almost too painful to listen to; and by a long way surpassed any oratorical effort of this Parliament. Then the battle waxed fast and furious. Some cried one thing and some another, but for the most part it seemed the bulk of the orators did not know very well what they were talking about. "Freedom of the Press," shouted one; "the dignity of the House," cried another; "Convicted felons," roared Boulter; "we are all involved in the grave accusation, Sir John and all," creaked Mouldes. Holton suggested that the purpose had been served by what had occurred; but the '107' with one voice bawled forth "no, no." Cunningham in his bluff way made a joke of the whole thing, and begged the House not to make themselves the laughing stock of the Dominion; but he was soon disposed of, Boulter even going so far as to threaten him with a little corporal chastisement if he didn't sit down.

About 1 o'clock Sir John rose. It was anticipated by some that he would throw a little oil on the waters, but that was a delusion. He pictured out the noble '107' as the pure, unadulterated patriotism of the Dominion. He denounced the men who dared even to hint the probability of their having their heads shaved and eating oatmeal mush out of a rusty panikin as convicted felons. As he proceeded the excitement increased, and when at length the question was put, "Men of the 107 are you condemned felons or no?" the shout of indignant denial that supervened was deafening. Boulter waved his hat, and poor old Mouldes was so overcome that he tottered down to Sir John, shook him by the hand, and looked as if he were saying, "O, Sir John, I am willing not only to become a convict, but am ready to go to the scaffold for your sake." Poor old fellow. His devotion is so unadulterated, and it is all the purer since there are no more roads to make. As I went home I caught myself repeating my childhood's stanza:

"But what good came of it at last, quoth little Peterkin,
Why that I cannot tell, said he, but 'twas a famous victory."

In the course of the debate on Thursday an episode occurred worth preserving. Toward the close of the debate an honourable member rose in his place and moved an amendment to the amendment. This was lost, being supported by only 12 votes against the whole House. The amendment was then put, but when the vote was taken the attention of the

Speaker was called to the fact that the honourable member already referred to had not voted. The member rose in his place and stated that he had not voted, it was true, but he had a very good reason for so acting, inasmuch as he had not the slightest idea as to what the amendment was. "Some people round him voted blind," said he, "but he was not in the habit of doing so. Would Mr. Speaker be good enough to read the amendment again?" Though out of all rule, the Speaker good-naturedly re-read the amendment. The honourable member bent his ear, catching every sound with his hand, which he had attached to his aural organ, and when the reading was finished he pronounced in favour of the amendment. But this was not all. The main motion having been put and voted on, again the Speaker's attention was called to the delinquency of the honourable member who had not voted before. "I don't know what the main motion is. Would the Speaker kindly read it over again?" The House roared, but the Speaker felt nettled and said, rather pettishly, to the clerk, "hand me the motion and I will try and read it loud enough for the honourable member to hear it." The motion was read, the ear, with the usual hand attached, was again eagerly bent, and the honourable member pronounced in favour of the motion. One side shouted triumphantly; the other looked disappointed, but all laughed nevertheless. It was a good ending to the farce.

But, perhaps the most ludicrous performance of the session was that of M. Cauchon, the member for Quebec, on Friday night. It was a Government day, but an hour, from 7:30 to 8:30 was given to Private Bills. On the occasion the first bill brought up was a Grand Trunk bill—one of great importance I was led to understand—especially to the promoters. On the motion for the second reading, Mr. Cauchon took the floor and kept it. He had great difficulty in making a start, but at length he got hold of a pamphlet and got on much better after that. Being very short-sighted the honourable member not only has recourse to spectacles, but uses, in addition, a large hand-glass about three inches in diameter, the use of which necessitates the honourable member standing at an angle a little over 90°, with his nose very close to the page. On this occasion he spoke very indistinctly, and from the gallery all we could make out was seeing Mr. Cauchon reading away most assiduously, but hearing nothing save a low, mumbling sound, like the booming of a wheel. Occasionally he looked up from the pamphlet and interjected a few sentences, utterly incomprehensible from the rapidity of the utterance and the lowness of the voice. Half an hour passed and the House began to get uneasy. Something like a cat call was occasionally heard. The lids of desks were called into operation and banged with fearful violence. Noise of every available kind were plied, but it was all of no avail. Now and again, when the noise was exceptionally outrageous, the honourable member would turn round and scan the gallery, as if he were endeavouring to detect the culprit. Failing in this he would begin anew, and so would the noises. At length a new method was hit upon. "Louder," "louder," "louder," resounded from all sides; and at every call he gave a roar or rather a bark, but he soon got to the crooning level again, and the uproar increased. It would seem that in his remarks he was reviewing the whole career of the Grand Trunk, and the member for Lambton offered him the original prospectus of that institution to read from! "The very thing," said the imperturbable member for Quebec. "The very thing, I may as well read from that as from anything else. I have an hour to speak, any way." The house roared in spite of itself. Bringing the hand-glass into operation, he waded through the prospectus, and at length having lighted on something to his mind, he commenced again, and the shouting and laughing and banging of desks was renewed louder than ever. But it was at about ten minutes from the expiry of the hour, that the thing came to a crisis. For laying aside the pamphlet and the prospectus, he stepped out to the front of his desk—he sits on the front row—and lifted a great volume of the *Globe*, which he managed with considerable effort to bear to his desk. "Now, I'll let you have it," said he triumphantly, as he turned round and nodded defiantly to the noisy ones. But the mark had fallen out, and amidst the convulsive laughter of the whole house, he turned leaf after leaf, but could not find the place. Whether he found the place or no, I cannot tell, but in quite a dramatic voice he began with his nose very close to the paper, to read pathetically about some widows and children. Never was a House of Commons so demoralized before. Almost every member in the House was convulsed, except a few. These were those more immediately interested in the passage of the measure, and as half-past eight drew near, they looked very grave indeed. But there was no use in looking grave or gay, for the inexorable M. Cauchon continued his mumbling unmoved, with his nose closer to the page than ever. At length it was 8:30, and Mr. Holton interrupted the honourable member—who sat down according to etiquette—and suggested that with the unanimous consent of the House, he should be allowed to finish his speech in order to the passing of the bill. The Speaker, however, took a more effective method. From his place he said, "The motion is on the second reading—carried." The member for Quebec jumped to his feet and gesticulated wildly; the House was a scene of the wildest uproar. The Speaker, amid the tumult, said "The motion is on the committing of the bill forthwith—carried." But not so fast. M. Cauchon defied the Speaker to commit the bill. "I have so ruled," said the Speaker, warmly, "and you must obey." "I will not obey," said the member for Quebec, and in his energy he lashed the *Globe* before him with his eye-glass. More than a dozen members were on their feet at one time, and all speaking together. "Shame" was heard from more than one corner. What the end was to be seemed somewhat dubious, but at length the Speaker gave way, and never shall I forget the cool, cynical grin of the member for Quebec, who, as he closed his *Globe*, turned to his foes and exclaimed, "Never mind, I have the floor yet." His rage, his facts, his figures, his erring, were all part of a farce. He had all along been speaking against time.

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

TOUCHSTONE PAPERS.

NO. IV.—BELISARIUS.

Was it truth or only legend? It matters little. The old record of school time remains sadly beautiful all the same, and the lesson which it teaches is as instructive as it was a thousand years ago. He walked the streets of Syracuse, blind,

bent and footsore, or sat upon the ramparts looking seaward, lonely and disconsolate, with no one to pity the hero of a hundred victories. On his breast, a little square board was attached with these doleful words: *Dote obolon Belisario to stratagem.*

I love to recall the histories of Marius and Belisarius. I am no cynic, but I doat upon misfortune. I have the idea that a man's greatness is never evolved except from the chasm of some relatively gigantic reverse. And there is a solace, a grim satisfaction in being perforce brought down to the level of the common sufferer. The influence of solitary sorrow is chastening. It begets spiritual peace and a species of voiceless joy. *Est quedam flere voluptas.*

There is a class of beggary which is respectable. When one has worked hard through life, while health and strength were allowed him, he need not blush to ask for succour in the dark day of need. The one thing which neither he nor anybody else can fight is Providence, and when that beats him down, it is no disgrace to bow the head and ask for pity from weak fellow mortals. The soldier who comes out of a war, with limbs broken by grape, or lungs hopelessly diseased by marsh fever, may go boldly forth into the streets to beg his bread, if his country gives him no asylum. Shame on the wretch who would insult, by word or look, the destitution of that mother who wanders at sunset in quest of a morsel for the babes abandoned by a cruel or drunken father.

We are all liable to become beggars. The smart Yankee believes he has invented a code of ingenuity whereby he can ward off the great felling strokes of God, but when he is stricken—as so many of them are and deserve to be—none are so pitifully helpless. There is such a thing as a continuous run of ill luck. Talent, industry, prudence are of no avail. Every thing is attempted and nothing thrives. Stay in the same place or the same occupation and it is a monotonous round, like a tread-mill. Change to something else, and it is to plunge deeper into trouble. Verily, there are some men made to be poor. In the order of Providence, beggars are meant to be a type and a class.

I fear that cant goes for much in the distribution of alms. It was Archbishop Whately who made it a boast that he had never given a beggar a penny in his life. We all remember the story of the poor woman who stood at the door of a great London public hall, with hand stretched out to the hundreds trooping in to attend a charitable meeting. She was rudely jerked by the majority of them, and after several hours' patient waiting collected less than half a crown. I have seen gentlemen slam the door into the face of mendicant women. I have seen sweet-faced, delicate ladies push cripples down their marble steps. Some people train their dogs to chase beggars from their neighbourhood. Children are taught to treat the poor like lepers.

Yet these same people will give hundreds of dollars for asylums, hospitals, refuges, homes and reformatories. They glory in the brick and mortar. They take pride in the stately charities which adorn the city. They go through the wards with pompous, patronizing mien, or with vulgar curiosity as at a show of wild beasts. Far be it from me to criticize the alms given even in this way. It will receive its reward from Him who knows how to compassionate our silly pride. But I contend that the true eleemosynary spirit is not solely shown in the creation of monumental asylums. It is no proof of the superior civilization of a country that it has no street beggars. Take Montreal, for instance. No city in the world, considering its size, is so liberally endowed with institutions of charity. Yet it has its door-to-door mendicants. And I contend that it deserves no special reproach for this. Nay more, he were a bold man who would take upon himself to brand these mendicants as worthless vagabonds, unworthy of a mite.

The Parisians love the old blind man who has been sitting on the abutment of the Pont d'Austerlitz ever since it was built. He is a living, eloquent statue. He is the Lazarus of that giddy modern society. He excites pity, which might otherwise never be evoked. He is a perpetual reminder of the duty of alms-giving, who knows the goal which may be produced by a solitary soul dropped into that wallet? Let us remember who Mordecai was, sitting at the gate.

Of course, I have no plea for vagrants or tramps. Let them be swept from the street, like the offal of the lanes, or the straws of the crossing. More particularly, let the child vagabonds be carried out of sight of sin, out of reach of temptation into the sanctuaries of homes and refuges. It is impossible for a girl above ten years of age to walk the street for a fortnight without ruin. With these, it is not a question of mendacity, but a question of crime, to be at once dealt with by the two rules of prevention or repression.

But as to the grown-up man, broken down by the storms of fate, let him walk in the sunshine, let him see the gay, outer world, let him look at others enjoying life, if he does not. If he asks you a copper, do not refuse it. If he strikes at your door, for a piece of bread, do not give him a stone. Be sure of one thing. All your scorn and meanness cannot drive him out of his place in the world. There must be beggars.

Vareek, or sea-wrack, which is a sea-weed used in France for stuffing mattresses, since it presents the great advantage of not harbouring insects, and which is burned for the sake of the soda and iodine which it contains, is found on the Brittany and other coasts in considerable quantities. Attention is now being drawn in France to the enormous quantities of weed to be found in the neighbourhood of the Gulf Stream, where it forms what looks almost like an immense prairie in the midst of the ocean. This sea of vareek, or sargasso, as the Portuguese call it, covers a space nearly equal to the whole area of France. The weed itself is the *sargassum bacilliferum* (*elma focus natans*) of botanists, a plant without roots, which floats in the direction of the waves and currents. Soundings taken in this sea in the year 1851-2, show depths varying from 2,000 to 7,000 metres. M. Leps, a captain in the French navy, who has carefully studied the subject, is of opinion that this vareek, or goémon, as it is so called, might be utilised for agricultural and industrial purposes more readily than that which is found on the coasts of Europe, and he suggests that it might either be brought home in compressed bundles, or that vessels might carry the necessary apparatus to burn it on the spot, and bring home only the soda and iodine which it contains. He argues that this would be a lucrative occupation; for iodine, which is now obtained only from the weed thrown on our coasts by the sea, is dear, and promises to be still dearer, on account of its employment in the production of a green pigment. It is said to be contained in such small quantities in sea water that thirty millions of pounds of the latter only give 1 lb. of iodine. The idea of utilising this huge sea of vareek deserves the consideration of practical men.