

(Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.)

THE LOUNGER AT OTTAWA.

No. 1.

When in a place strange to me I like to lounge around. I know it is not quite the thing. The modern idea is to see the sights, and off and away somewhere else to see more sights. Take your modern traveller to London for the first time, for example, and before even giving himself time to rest a little after his railway journey, you find him rushing through the Thames Tunnel or to the top of the monument, whence having taken a bird's eye view of the city all in, at a single wink, he scrambles down again, and anon he is found rushing through the British Museum, not noiselessly, and much to the disturbance of the sage and quiet philosophers who gather into that wonderful emporium. With equal energy he does the Zoological and Botanical, Regent's Park and Pall Mall, the Seven Dials and Westminster, Sydenham and Richmond Hill. He takes in Oxford Street at a four-mile pace; and reads the History of England, as published in the Tower, in a quarter of an hour. He masters the mysteries and wonderful biographies of Greenwich Hospital, by rushing up to the top of the hill and then down again, to catch the next boat, and is terribly wretched when he feels himself caught in the labyrinth at Hampton Court. And happy man, after having spent a few days in this manner he makes off again by express train—of course—comforting himself with the idea that he has done London. But that is not my way of doing things; as I have already said I like to lounge. Once I spent four months in the Seven Dials—it was on a Sunday—doing four windows filled with canaries, white mice, squirrels, rats, rabbits and other objects of Natural history; and I daresay, would have spent four more, had not a representative of the law, in a blue suit and buttons, politely informed me that my conduct was rather suspicious and was beginning to give some anxiety to a gentleman of the Detective force, who was lounging on the opposite side of the lane, apparently much intent on the physiology of a musty fox who glared very savagely through the window at him with its amber eyes; of course I took the hint and sauntered into Dr. Bellows's church, and saw him marry a couple of the name of Smith. There is a great advantage in this quiet way of doing things, and impressions remain with you a long time; for though it is long ago, I remember distinctly that the female Smith had only one eye, and that Smith himself wore an invisible green coat with a pansey in the button-hole thereof; and were I to meet that Smith family today, I am sure I would know them. That's the advantage you see. A man who lounges burns; while the man who rushes through life at a constant high pressure, rarely burns but little, the object only of a series of ephemeral sensations.

Now, having little else to do—nothing in fact—this spring, I have settled down in Ottawa, and mean to lounge round a month or two, just to see how things are here. How they are I haven't the slightest idea myself. In fact they don't seem to be any way at all. Boulter, a strong Government man, and a friend of mine, is peculiarly exuberant. It is all plain sailing with him; while Mouldes, also a strong Government man, mopes considerably, and with the sea's eye foreboding many storms a-brewing, ominously shakes his head occasionally, and expresses many a fervent hope that the steersman may be up to his work when the time comes. But being nothing of a politician myself, and quite ignorant of the science of navigation, I don't take much interest in the matter further than to enjoy myself, observing those who do.

It was on the sixth, I think—yes, the sixth—I was lounging on the Rideau Bridge, and was regarding some navvies at work on an excavation, which was in process of being made, to put a house in, or something, and was beginning to concentrate my observations on one of the navvies who appeared to me the very personification of laziness. Every time he reared his pickaxe he evidently did so under an earnest inward protest; and when he brought down his pickaxe it was clear the protest was renewed. Then he would look round with a scowl at us poor innocent people on the bridge, as much as to say, "Ay, it's all very fine for you to be loitering on the bridge that way. Come and handle this pickaxe for an hour, and see how you would like it," just as if we had anything at all to do either with him or his pickaxe. My curiosity was roused so much that I was about to step over and ask his name, but on getting up from my elbows—quite unwittingly I knocked up against a gentleman, and thereby disturbed the onward progress of a lady, whom he accompanied. I begged his pardon most abjectly, but he only scowled on me, so I lighted my cheroot, gave a little boy—who I verily believe was playing truant—two pence, just because he had been lounging like myself, and laughed so heartily at the angry gentleman; and then I sauntered up towards the Parliament buildings.

Before passing over a frail wooden structure, three feet wide and utterly innocent of any ornamentation, which leads into the grounds of the buildings, and which I have heard facetiously called a bridge, I had to run the gauntlet of a cab stand. The sleighs were very fine, the prettiest I have seen anywhere, and I was so much struck with the beauty of one in particular, that I stopped to have a look at it. As I looked the owner of the vehicle came up, and inquired, quite naturally of course, if I wanted a sleigh. Before giving any direct reply to his query, I first of all drew him into a little conversation, in the course of which I ascertained where the sleigh was manufactured,—the maker's name, its value, what his time span was worth, the original cost of the robes, his average earnings, and sundry other small crumbs of information, all valuable in its way,—I then walked off. Of course I did not want a sleigh, and consequently did not have one. True, the sleighman bawled out something after me, relative to some mean cove of his acquaintance, and was received with a shout of derision by his colleagues at the corner. But I could not help it. It was entirely his own doing.

On entering the vestibule of the Parliament House, and on taking up a good position whence I could admire its noble architecture, I observed an old gentleman in a swallowtail with a white cravat of the olden style, eyeing me narrowly. He made a feint of doing something which necessitated his coming nearer and gradually nearer, until at length he came right up to me, and addressing me in the most kindly way imaginable asked if I were one of the new members. I felt flattered for the moment, but remembering George Washington and his hatchet, I informed him I was not one of the new

members. I thought I discovered a slight modification of his previous amiability at this information; so to make things as smooth as possible, I further informed him that though not a member myself, I was a very intimate friend of Boulter and Mouldes. This had quite the desired effect. The old gentleman knew Boulter well, "a fine man," he said, "a fine man, always cheery and affable. Mr. Boulter was liked by everybody. Mr. Mouldes was a fine man too, but he was not in good health. It was a great pity, for if Mr. Mouldes was as healthy and cheerful as Mr. Boulter, he would be as fine a man every bit." It pleased me to hear that my two friends were held in such high estimation, so after a slight mercantile transaction between us, we parted and I sauntered into the lobby of the Commons.

I was not long in the lobby before I found myself comparing the conduct of the old members with that of the new. I had no difficulty in distinguishing them whatever. And it was a pleasant sight to see many of the old members, before even going to the Post Office, walk up to the door-keepers and messengers, and shake hands with them heartily and congratulate them on their healthy aspect. It shewed me there was some heart after all amongst politicians; and I felt how much more safe our country was in the hands of such men than it would be under a crowd of baughty Spanish Rodrigues. But the conduct of some of the new members was not quite so satisfactory to the onlooker. I have one of these in my mind's eye now. His hat was excessively broad in the brim—his face was not very expressive, save a very manifest dimple on his chin; his breast was the great feature of him. It was thrown out quite pigeon-like, and his surtout—blue with velvet collar—was buttoned tight round his waist. His gait, too, was magnificent, and as he brushed past me making the very air perceptibly get out of the way, I felt awed. So did the old door-keeper who sat on a chair by the door entering into one of the lobbies. For this brave gentleman, having come up to the old door-keeper, exclaimed in a tremendous voice: "Dickson! (I think it was Dickson, but I won't say so positively), 'Dickson, what has come of the key of my wardrobe? What does all this mean?' The old man looked terrified exceedingly; and though, as I fished out afterwards, he had no more to do with wardrobe keys than I had; and though to leave the post he occupied was a dereliction of duty, still the broad brim, and the dimple and the breast and the surtout and the voice were too powerful a combination of circumstances to resist, so he toddled off and soon toddled back again, with a very little key, which is presented to the gentleman. 'Don't let me have any more of this,' and he clift the air again. As he walked off I thought I discovered just the faintest glimmer of satisfaction gather round Dickson's features, and he looked just as if he were saying to himself: 'Stop, my man, till Sir John or Mackenzie tackles you and you won't crow so loud.'

Amongst the new members there was another class—old fellows who had sat in the old parliaments—saving the last. Fully old fellows they seemed to be some of them, and the proximity of the House seemed to renew them wondrously. The memories of old field days, old victories and old defeats, seemed to crowd upon them as they prepared to enter the arena once again, and whilst to some of them these old recollections seemed to lend a feeling of sadness and reflection, for the most part they were exceedingly buoyant and shook hands all round with their old comrades in excellent spirits. The appearance of some of these old strangers apparently gave great satisfaction to many of the members, and from some hints I gathered this was caused by the anticipation of the weariness of many a tedious debate being relieved by their eccentricities or their humour.

But there was still another class amongst the fresh men. These were your young men—and it is remarkable the number of comparatively young men who occupy seats in the House. Young men evidently from the country, who were quite unacquainted with the geography and the habits and customs of the House. One of these attracted my notice especially. He was a thick-set man, with a very intelligent eye in his head; but he looked excessively bashful, and was clad in a kind of pepper-and-salt suit, made very easy. He walked into the lobby in a deprecating sort of way, and when the gentleman with the dimple swaggered past him he looked abashed. He made very commendable efforts to look uninterested, and occasionally looked eagerly towards the entrance as if he were anxiously looking for some one he was expecting. But it was a failure, and things were apparently becoming so uncomfortable for him as to make it unendurable, so he made up his mind for an effort, and walked timidly up to old Dickson, and said something to him as deprecatingly as Sterne's Monk. The old man took in the situation at once. He led him to the Post Office where some arrangements were made; he next took him into a lobby with a green carpet, and when they emanated thence I observed the pepper-and-salt man had a little key in his hand like the one the man with the dimple had made such a fuss about. For fully five minutes Dickson trotted him round, and at the end of that time he looked a new man altogether. He did not cleave the air perceptibly to be sure, but somehow Dickson's deference and the wonders he had unfolded to him seemed to have instantaneously conveyed the impression to his mind that a member of the House of Commons was somebody that could dare to look the world in the face, without a blush. The next time I saw my pepper-and-salt friend he was in close confab with a cabinet minister, who, I afterwards learned, was the Postmaster-General, and as I passed them I heard—mind you I never listen at key-holes or ought of that kind; but when I pass two gentlemen talking, I know of no law, human or divine, that compels me or even asks me to close my ears to what they are saying—I say I heard the P.-G. say to our pepper-and-salt acquaintance: "That's all settled. He gets it. Salary ten dollars a year." He looked grateful, for no doubt he had made a big stroke of business for some needy constituent. This world is a stage, thought I to myself, as I walked towards the apple-stall in the vestibule.

LOUNGER.

PARLIAMENTARY NOTES.

Monday, March 17.—Little business of importance was transacted in the House of Commons. After routine Mr. Dodge called the attention of the House to the attack made upon him in the *Globe* of the 14th inst., denying that there was any truth in the charges made against him. A somewhat lengthy discussion followed, in which several members took part.

On Tuesday petitions were presented against the return of

no less than thirty-five members. His Excellency's reply to the address was received and read, and the House then went into Committee on the resolution for the amendment of the Act respecting Banks and Banking; passed the resolution, and read, for the first time, a bill founded thereon. The effect of the bill is to amend the present declaration, which merely stated that the assets of the bank invested each month in Dominion notes amounted to one-third its cash reserves, by adding an affirmation that the bank never at any time held less than one-third of its cash reserves in Dominion notes. Mr. J. H. Cameron then brought up the report of the Committee on Privileges and Elections in the West-Portborough case, declaring that as there is appearance of Mr. Clouston being disqualified from sitting the next case should be disposed of under the Controverted Election Act, provided a petition be presented against his election. Mr. Huntington made a long speech against the decision of the Committee and concluded by moving in effect that the report be not concurred in, but, in order to the protection of the interests of the electors generally, that it be amended in accordance with the precedent established by the House on the Muskoka case. A lengthy debate followed, finally the House divided on the motion which was lost by a vote of 63 to 93.

On Wednesday Mr. Cartwright moved for a Select Committee to report upon the quickest route for mails and passengers between Canada and Europe. He contended that a rapid route by combined railway and ferry, via Newfoundland, was feasible, and spoke at some length in support of his motion, which was granted. Mr. Oliver then moved for a return of the tariff of tolls charged by the Grand Trunk and Great Western Railways, arguing that in consequence of the large amount of assistance granted these lines from the public treasury, the country was entitled to greater accommodation than they at present received. The motion was carried.

The session of Thursday was but a brief one. At an early stage of the proceedings the Speaker read a communication from Mr. Blake electing to sit for South Bruce and resigning his seat for West Durham; whereupon it was resolved, upon motion of Mr. Mackenzie, that the Speaker do issue his writ for the election of a member for West Durham. The business of the day was throughout unimportant, and the House adjourned at half-past five.

The earlier part of Friday's sitting was taken up by a discussion on the propriety of receiving a petition against the return of Mr. Wilkes, (Toronto Centre), Mr. Edgar arguing that the time allowed by law—fourteen days—had expired. The debate was finally adjourned, the Speaker reserving his decision. A number of bills were introduced and read a third time, and the Premier then introduced his bill to amend the Election Law. In this bill he consents to allow all the elections to be held in one day, and, while making no provision for the ballot, if the House should deem it prudent to insert a clause that the vote should be taken by ballot, he will not oppose it. He adheres to retain for the Government of the Dominion the power to appoint its own returning officers, in order that the local governments might have no power to influence the elections improperly. The bill was read a first time.

CURIOUS CRITICISMS.

When we read the critical sentences of the last century we are amazed at the inconceivable blindness which they seem to imply. Goldsmith, to take a case at random, was undoubtedly a man of fine taste; he tells us, apropos of Weller's ode on the death of Cromwell, that our poetry was not then "quite harmonized"; so that this, which would now be looked upon as a slovenly sort of versification, was in the times in which it was written almost a prodigy of harmony. In the same place, after praising the harmony of the "Rape of the Lock," he observes that the irregular measure of the opening of the *Allagro* and *Pen-crosc* "hurts our English ear." We can only wonder at the singular change of taste which induced our grandfathers to fancy that "harmony" of all things, was their strong point, and that Pope's mechanical monotony was to the exquisite versification of Spenser and Milton as Greek sculpture to the work of some self-taught medieval carver. The same incapacity for perceiving what to us appear almost self-evident truths is as obvious in a wider kind of criticism. When Voltaire called Shakespeare "a drunken savage," it was a mere outbreak of spleen; but Voltaire in his sober moods, and he is followed in this by Horace Walpole, speaks still more contemptuously of one of the two or three men who can be put beside Shakespeare. He marvels at the dulness of people who can admire anything so "stupidly extravagant and barbarous" as the *Diana Comedia*. These monstrous misunderstandings are to be explained by the natural incapacity of the subjects of one literary dynasty for judging of those of another. But the judgments of contemporaries on each other are not much more trustworthy. The long-continued contempt for Bunyan and Defoe was merely an expression of the ordinary feeling of the cultivated classes toward anything which was identified with Grub Street; but it is curious to observe the incapacity of such a man as Johnson to understand Gray or Sterne, and the contempt which Walpole expressed for Johnson and Goldsmith, while he sincerely believed that the poems of Mason were destined to immortality. Nor, again, can we flatter ourselves that this narrow vision was characteristic only of a school which has now decayed. We may find blunders at least equally palpable in the opinions expressed by the great poets at the beginning of this century. Such, for example, is the apparently sincere conviction of Byron that Rogers and Moore were the truest poets among his contemporaries; that Pope was the first of all English, if not of all existing, poets; and that Wordsworth was nothing but a namby-pamby driver. The school of Wordsworth and Southey uttered judgments at least equally hasty in the opposite direction. Many odd instances of the degree in which prejudice can blind a man of genuine taste are to be found in the writings of their disciple, De Quincey. To mention no other, he speaks of "Mr. Goethe," as an immoral and second-rate author, who owes his reputation chiefly to the fact of his long life and his position at the Court of Weimar. With which we may compare Charles Lamb's decided preference of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* to Goethe's immortal *Faust*.—*Saturday Review*.

The peace strength of the Imperial German Army is at present fixed at 401,639, being 978 per cent. on the estimated number of 11,000,000 of souls. Constitutionally this percentage could at any time be raised to 1 per cent., or 110,000 men. Prussia, when alone, kept up a peace army at the rate of 1.065 per cent. of the then population. In France the estimate is for 1.157 per cent.