

THE GRUMBLER

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THE GRUMBLER.

"If there's a hole in a' your coats,
I ree'd you tont it;
A chiel's amang ye taking notes,
And, faith, he'll prout it!"

SATURDAY, JUNE 4, 1864.

THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS.

It is not many hundred years ago since the old House of Commons, forced to it by the unswerving energy and the powerful eloquence of one of its Members, of the good name of Burke, increased the number of the grand estates, and, creating a fourth, bestowed it upon the Press. An honest, plodding, industrious printer, called Turner, (to whom, indeed, a great deal of the *vim* now present in newspaper enterprise, usefulness and success must be owing,) brought about the establishment of the Fourth Estate. Turner desired to have the privilege to print an account of the proceedings in Parliament, and was refused it. Burke and others took up the cudgel for the printer, and after a siege of some days the side of the Press triumphed, unlimited access was given to Turner to print and publish all he liked about the Commons; and to sign and seal, as it were, the transaction, the Press was honoured with an estate, the strength, gloriousness and favour of which have gone on increasing year by year, century after century. But, alas, the grand march of power is no longer to be—so say, at least, the miserable pigmies down in Quebec, whom misguided constituencies have transmogrified into Parliamentarians. It was left for the Metterniches of the Canadian Parliament to insult on the 31st of May, 1864, the estate which their superiors and progenitors had so honourably created into permanent existence, centuries previous. What a long time, truly, has this slow watch of destruction to the dignity of the Press, been tracherously burning and making its way on till it burst forth in a flame in the Reading Room of the Legislative Assembly, where, perhaps, the large quantity of inflammable material was an inducement. And so the puny members of our Canadian Parliament, in 1864, think that the Representatives of the Press in Quebec and attending Parliament, should be excluded from the News Room until after 12 o'clock each day. If the question be one of contamination, we think the Press men would be well rid of mutual contact with many of the economizing

Grits, who could not be very sweetly perfumed after crawling down from some of the suburbs or up from St. Roch's, where they cohabit three abreast, six in a room 7 x 9, sky-light in window, and one wash-stand and towel for the entire parliamentary squad, hailing from the great Canada West; where, it is said, things are so liberal, so free, so just and so clean. And it is this kind of people who have taken the Press into their custody. But as well might they call upon the sea to cease rolling, the wind no more to sigh, or bid the electric flash halt upon its narrow path along the mystic wires, as attempt any proceeding that would tend to cripple one tiny chord of the great ever-beating pulse which regulates every public matter wherever civilization exists. The Press first goes forward, it is admitted, and then in its royal train comes the long procession of science, art and learning, so inseparable from the presence of the Fourth Estate, wherever that may be—no matter what clime—no matter what flag. We ask, could this insult have been perpetrated upon the Press in the good times past and gone, when the only real ornaments of the House were the men who, with their ever-toiling pens, have guarded our liberties and written us into the enjoyment of Responsible Government? Could Mr. Sandfield McDonald; Mr. McDougall; Mr. Dorion or Mr. Ford Jones have risen then, in the House of our Canadian Parliament, to excuse if not to license the barrier placed upon Press-men last Tuesday, in Quebec? No, not they. No estate, no power, no instrumentality, has had such beautiful tribute paid to it, from time to time, as the Press. And, in fact, what power could stir up to its loftiest flow pure eloquence, or tune with half so much melody the muse, as the Press? Sheridan has said, "Let the House of Commons be venal, let the Courts be corrupt, but give me a free Press, and I defy a hair's breadth encroachment to be made upon the liberties of England." Fancy McDougall and Sandfield taking issue with Sheridan! Then, it will be remembered, that Napoleon, although breathing a shackled atmosphere, once remarked, that "one newspaper was more powerful than a thousand bayonets." Imagine classic, veterinary Joseph Rymal, differing from Napoleon. And it is not a year since good Lord Palmerston, in making a public speech, paid high honour to the Fourth Estate, and said that "he knew of no invention of modern time so great as that of the Press." Need we quote further? Need we make more comparisons? Are additional arguments necessary to prove the absurd character of the position in which our Canadian Legislators have placed themselves? We think not. How many of the men now in Parliament could ever have sat under the brilliancy of Mr. Speaker's mammoth chandelier, had it not been for the Press? Echo again inquires, how many? If there be one thing more than another which we, as a Colony, must be active in protecting, it is the newspaper enterprise. A newspaper is the index, the advertisement of a County or Colony, and once commence to question the right of Press men to unlimited privileges in the furtherance of their undertaking, and then, at once, our national concern will begin to loosen,

the machinery of all our civil affairs will get out of joint, and we shall proceed on our way unguided, unadvised and uninformed, upon nearly the same principle omnipotent as a Donnybrook Fair. We make not the comparison invidiously, but we feel alarmed when we see so high a body as our Legislators halting between two opinions as to the rights of the Press, and we venture to say that the disastrous character of the result cannot be estimated nor anticipated. The question of liberty to the Press should not for one moment have been permitted in the House; without thought or word, with one voice the order should have been proclaimed, "Throw open every door, offer every facility, extend and create every possible courtesy." But, no; with shame it has to be said that for days and nights this mongrel collection of Legislators has remained in doubt, continued unconvinced, as to which course to pursue, as to whether the representatives of the most powerful, most useful, most industrious, most painstaking and most respectable community in the Province should have entrance to the Reading Room. We speak in right earnest when we say it is a very lamentable thing that this insult to the Press was ever conceived, let alone offered. And it is a matter of chagrin to the Press, too, to have to feel that the outrage has been offered by some men who, themselves, cannot peruse the papers in the same Reading Room without spelling the words almost audibly and to the inconvenience of others present. This all is our humble protest, and we trust every paper in the Province will follow suit.

THE WAR DRAMA.

SCENE.—White House. Enter LINCOLN, SEWARD and STANTON.

Lincoln.—What said Ulysses Grant as touching Richmond?

Stanton.—That he would be there in thirty days.

Lincoln.—The Gods best know—and what said Butler then?

Stanton.—He smiled and said, the better for our purpose.

Report hath it that he sought Richmond in the throat Of death, but found it not.

Enter a Herald, (War Correspondent.)

Lincoln.—Good news or bad; that thou com'st in so bluntly?

Herald.—Good news, my President; Lee has fled to Richmond.

Lincoln.—I cry you mercy. There is my purse to pay thee for the news.

Seward.—I will make proclamation, my liege, that by sudden blows our foes have been dispersed and scattered, and that within the revolutions of three moons, (30 days,) our bruised arms will be hung up for monuments.

Lincoln.—Seward, do so. I have learned that fearful commentary.

Is laden servitor to dull delay;
Delay leads impotent and snail paced beggary.
I think there be six roads to Richmond,
Five of which hath already cost us dear,
The sixth may make or mar all.

—Richard III., Act 5, Scene 6.

* Manassas, Peninsula, Pope's, Fredericksburgh and Chancellorsville Routes.