

INCIDENTS OF AMERICAN POLITICS DURING THE GREAT STRUGGLE.

BENTON AND FOOTE.

I HAPPENED to be in the Senate on April 17th, just before the memorable *fracas* between Foote, of Mississippi, and Col. Benton. They had had an unfriendly encounter not long before, and it was well understood that Benton had made up his mind that Foote should not henceforth name him or allude to him in debate. Foote had said: "I do not denounce him as a coward—such language is unfitted for this audience—but if he wishes to patch up his reputation for courage, now greatly on the wane, he will certainly have an opportunity of doing so whenever he makes known his desire in the premises." Benton replied: "Is a Senator to be blackguarded in the discharge of his duty, and the culprit go unpunished? Is language to be used here which would not be permitted to be used in the lowest pot-house, tavern or oyster cellar, and for the use of which he would be turned out of any tavern by a decent landlord?" Benton's wrath had not in the least cooled since this altercation. Foote was on the floor, and in speaking of the late "Southern Address," referred to Benton in terms which everybody understood. In an indirect way he became more and more personal as he proceeded. Col. Benton finally arose from his seat with every appearance of intense passion; and with a quick pace moved toward Foote, who was addressing the Senate from his desk near the main aisle. The Vice-President demanded "order," and several Senators tried to hold Benton back, but he broke loose from his keepers, and was moving rapidly upon his foe. When he saw Benton nearing him, Foote sprang into the main aisle and retreated toward the Vice-President, presenting a pistol as he fled, or, as he afterwards expressed it, "advanced backward." In the meantime Benton had been so obstructed by the Sergeant-at-Arms and others that Foote, if disposed to shoot, could not have done so without firing through the crowd. But Benton, with several Senators hanging to him, now proceeded round the lobby so as to meet Foote at the opposite side of the chamber. Tearing himself away from those who sought to hold him, and, throwing open his bosom, he said, "Let him shoot me; let him shoot me if he dares; I never carry arms, and he knows it; let the assassin fire." He was an embodied fury, and raged and raved, the helpless victim of his passions. I had never seen such an uproar in a legislative body, but the Sergeant-at-Arms at last restored order, when Mr. Clay suggested that both parties should voluntarily enter into bonds to keep the peace, upon which Benton instantly rose and said, "I'll rot in jail, sir, before I will do it. No, sir; I'll rot in jail first. I'll rot, sir," and he poured forth a fresh torrent of bitter words upon the man who was then so well known throughout the Northern States as "Hangman Foote." Benton was not only a man of tremendous passions, but unrivalled as a hater. Nor did his hatred spend itself entirely upon injustice and meanness. It was largely personal and unreasoning. He was pre-eminently unforgiving. He hated Calhoun with a real vengeance, styling him "John Cataline Calhoun," and branded him as a "coward cur that sneaked to his kennel when the master of the hermitage blew his bugle horn." He seemed to relent a little, however, when he saw the life of the great Carolinian rapidly ebbing away, and on one occasion declared that, "When God lays his hand on a man, I take mine off." His wit was sometimes as pungent as his invective. In his famous speech on the Compromise measures, he gave Mr. Clay a telling hit by comparing the boasted panacea of his "Omnibus Bill," or "five old Bills tacked together," to "old Dr. Jacob Townsend's sarsaparilla," and contrasting it with the alleged worthlessness of the same measures when separately proposed, which he likened to "young Dr. Samuel Townsend's extract from the same vegetable." "Sarsaparilla" was thus more widely advertised than ever before, but it aided the triumph of the "young Dr." and the defeat of Mr. Clay's pet scheme.

WEBSTER AS A SPEAKER.

I HEARD the famous "Seventh of March Speech" of Mr. Webster. To me his oratory was a perfect surprise and curiosity. He not only spoke with very unusual deliberation, but with pauses having no relation whatever to the sense. His sentences were broken into fragments, and the hearer was perplexed in the endeavour to gather his meaning. In declaring, for example, that he "would put in no Wilmot proviso for the purpose of a taunt," etc., he made a long pause at "Wilmot," perhaps a half minute, and finally, having apparently recovered his breath, added the word "proviso;" and then, after another considerable pause went on with his sentence. His speaking seemed painfully laborious. Great drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead and face, notwithstanding the slowness of his utterance, suggesting, as a possible explanation, a very recent and heavy dinner, or a greatly troubled conscience over his final act of apostacy from his early New England faith. The latter was probably the truth, since he is known to have long and seriously pondered the question of his ultimate decision; and, with his naturally great and noble traits of character, he could not have announced it without manifest tokens of uneasiness. I was greatly interested in the brief dialogue between him and Mr. Calhoun, which followed this speech. Reference was made to their famous passage-at-arms twenty years before: and Mr. Calhoun, while taking exception to some of Mr. Webster's positions, congratulated him on his strong deliverance in the interest of slavery. The great Carolinian was then wrestling with the disease which soon afterward terminated his life, and was thin, pale, and feeble of step; but his singularly intellectual face, and the peculiar light which flashed from his eye while speaking, made him the most striking, picturesque figure in the Senate. No man can compute the evils wrought by his political theories; but in private life he was thoroughly upright and pure, and no suspicion of political jobbery was ever whispered

in connection with his name. In his social relations he was most genial and kindly, while he always welcomed the society of young men who sought the aid of his friendly counsel. Politically, he has been singularly misunderstood. He was not, as has been so generally thought, a disunionist. He was the champion of State sovereignty, but he believed that this was the sure basis and bond of union. He thought the right of State nullification, if recognized, would hold the central power in check, and thus cement the union; while his devotion to African slavery as a defensible form of society, and a solution of the conflict between capital and labour, was doubtless as sincere as it was fanatical.

BULL RUN.

BUT the war spirit was fully aroused, and active preparations were on foot for an advance upon the enemy. The confidence in General Scott seemed to be unbounded, and I found everybody taking it for granted that when the fight began our forces would prove triumphantly victorious. On the day before the battle of Bull Run I obtained a pass from General Scott, intending to witness the engagement, believing I could do so, of course, with perfect safety, as our army would undoubtedly triumph. I had a very strong curiosity to see a great battle, and was now gratified with the prospect of doing so; but a lucky accident detained me. The battle was on Sunday, and about eleven o'clock at night I was roused from my slumber by Col. Forney, who resided on Capitol Hill near my lodgings, and who told me our army had been routed, and that the rebels were marching upon the Capitol and would in all probability capture it before morning. No unmiraculous event could have been more startling. I was perfectly stunned and dumbfounded by the news; but I hastened down to the Avenue as rapidly as possible, and found the space between the Capitol and the Treasury Building a moving mass of humanity. Every man seemed to be asking every man he met for the latest news, while all sorts of rumours filled the air. A feeling of mingled horror and despair seemed to possess everybody. The event was so totally unlooked for, and the disappointment so terrible, that people grew suddenly sick at heart, and felt as if life itself, with all its interests and charms, had been snatched from their grasp. The excitement, turmoil and consternation continued during the night and through the following day; but no one could adequately picture or describe it. Our soldiers came straggling into the city, covered with dirt and many of them wounded, while the panic which led to the disaster spread like a contagion through all classes.

LINCOLN.

On meeting him I found him far better looking than the campaign pictures had represented. His face, when lighted up in conversation, was not unhandsome, and the kindly and winning tones of his voice pleaded for him like the smile which played about his rugged features. He was full of anecdote and humour, and readily found his way to the hearts of those who enjoyed a welcome to his fireside. His face, however, was sometimes marked by that touching expression of sadness which became so generally noticeable in the following years. On the subject of slavery I was gratified to find him less reserved and more emphatic than I expected. The Cabinet rumour referred to was true. He felt bound by the pledges which his leading friends had made in his name pending the National Convention; and the policy on which he acted in these and many other appointments was forcibly illustrated on a subsequent occasion, when I earnestly protested against the appointment of an incompetent and unworthy man as Commissioner of Patents. "There is much force in what you say," said he, "but, in the balancing of matters, I guess I shall have to appoint him." This "balancing of matters" was a source of infinite vexation during his administration, as it has been to every one of his successors; and its most deplorable results have been witnessed in the assassination of a President. Upon the whole, however, I was much pleased with our first Republican Executive, and I returned home more fully inspired than ever with the purpose to sustain him to the utmost in facing the duties of his great office.—"Political Recollections," George W. Julian.

GEIST'S GRAVE.

MR. MATTHEW ARNOLD's delivery is very quiet and professional. To Americans, accustomed to the sensationalism of platform lecturers, it appears tame; nevertheless he drew tears from the eyes of some of his audience at Boston by reading the following poem, written by himself, on the grave of a dog:

Four years!—and did'st thou stay above
The ground which hides thee now but four;
And all that life and all that love
Were crowded, Geist, into no more.

Only four years—those winning ways,
Which make me for thy presence yearn,
Call'd us to pet thee or to praise,
Dear little friend, at every turn;

That loving heart, that patient soul,
Had they indeed no longer span,
To run their course, and reach their goal,
And read their homily to man;

That liquid, melancholy eye,
From whose pathetic, soul-fed springs
Seem'd surging the Virgilian cry,
The sense of tears in mortal things: