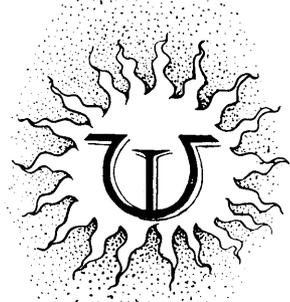




CHERRYFIELD, December 10th, 1891.

DEAR EDITOR,—



HAT a magnificent assemblage was that in the parlours of the DOMINION ILLUSTRATED Club, on the evening of —! Certainly, brilliance out sparkled itself! How the guests were arrayed, and how the dishes were served, I submit to their proper scribe,—the Society Correspondent, who will omit not the least

important detail,—including all in the comprehensive similitude, (with which such matters are fitly summed,) of “Solomon, in all his glory.” The order of events, also, I forbear to designate, confident that such needful memorabilia will not be overlooked by the local press. But I cannot forbear allusion to a few of the guests. The Hon. Bright Dollar, always approaching the mark of excellence, here surpassed it. It is but incident to his career of merit, that he always takes the prizes,—being the most desired of all prizes himself. How radiantly he beamed at the head of the table, while he promised you a banquet at his own expense when, at no distant date, he has mastery of a few extra millions! He scattered his beneficence right and left, in the shape of courtly speeches,—though a little severe upon the wantonness of Poverty,—and never was his rotund face more suggestive of cheery abundance, nor his well-fed corpulosity more impressive. Nor did I ever understand so plainly the language, nor apprehend so clearly the proportions of that great Firm, represented at your banquet by the Hon. Stillwell Slaymore, eldest son of the gentleman you so greatly honoured in a recent issue of your journal. He is a huge and swarthy person, who completely overshadowed the company, and he seems aware of his influence. He rose majestically, and though in a mellow mood, and quite at his ease, swayed his arm and pointed his finger with the instinct of a dictator. He is, at times, a wondrously merry fellow, and can tell a story and crack a joke that requires the absence of all but *gentlemen*. I did not quite like the benevolent swagger with which he toasted all the Virtues. It is entirely in keeping with his purse and his character, that he should have built a hospital, and endowed an asylum; but mention of these should have been left to the courtesy of Hon. Bright Dollar, when he was on his feet. He had some show of reason in claiming the People for his own, as well as the Muses. How aptly he quoted Anacreon and Burns! With what exquisite taste he introduced the bacchanalia of Byron! What a beautiful passage of his own it was, on the transmigration of fair Alcohol,—that spirit of wit and elquence! (transfiguration, perhaps, I should have writ,) and in it how delicate an allusion to Béranger! He did not quote Solomon, nor certain Shakespearian passages,—sufficiently ventilated by the temperance orator,—nor did he ment on Moloch, who is not a muse. I regret if Sir Richard Oldfamily, Bart., was unavoidably absent, as I consider him the chief ornament of your most select company,—though sometimes frowned upon. I am not blind to his worthiness; and he has had more of my sympathy, since Dicke Dynamite Dunderpate swore vengeance against him. Old men should have, at least, an undisturbed right to the chimney corner. The Hon. Turpin Tollgate was candid. He reversed the sentiment of the Thracian Robber, cornered by the Great Alexander, and confessed: “What I take from the poor I give to the rich; and this is just: for the desire of the rich is to become richer; and why should an honest man be thwarted of his aim, or have the long clutching arm, given by Providence, arbitrarily shortened?” Upon which the Hon. Bright Dollar brought down his fist upon the table, and called “Hear!” A few of the influential gentlemen from the Republic, lately honoured in these columns, were here, by way of national and civic comity,

and, in the interchange of courtesies, were properly heard. Since Messrs. Laurier and Chapleau have led in this cordial movement of international visitation, any failure of your amicable guests on an occasion like this would have been the more painfully felt. But, since your widely-famed Reporter was doubtless present, ready and eager for all these matters, with which I have dealt so thanklessly, why should I proceed? I will but doff my hat to the Sagamore,—who, as a notable representative of his race, was properly present,—and, signifying my regret that I could not have been with you in person, as I was in spirit,—I must hasten away to the Old School House, where I will soon disclose the means of wholesome discipline used in the old days when schools were properly governed, and before aggressively rustic savagery had learned to bundle the meek and white-livered graduate out of the window. There was order, or else violence, in this low-roofed shell, unknown to Mr. Bright Dollar, if not to the Slaymore family, and where the teacher was significantly termed “Master.” Mr. Tollgate was there, in his infancy, and, for the behoof of our shepherd, levied on each urchin, or his parents, the monstrous sum of sevenpence-half-penny per week! Mr. Tollgate has a better way of getting at it now, and teachers fare more thriftily.

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IV.

THE TEACHER'S DESK.

“A little door there is,
Whereon a board that doth congratulate
With painted letters, red as blood, I is
Thus written,

‘CHILDREN TAKEN IN TO BATE’:
And oft, indeed, the inward of that gate,
Most ventriloque,—doth utter tender squeak,
And moar’s of infants that bemoan their fate.’

—HOOD. “The Irish Schoolmaster.”

Being in the nick of a noontime opportunity, we examine the official department. The desk is left unlocked, and we are free to make an inventory. Here are a pile of copy-books, some bundles of pencils and pen-holders, a few mineral specimens, and a few volumes for special reference. But it is chiefly interesting as a complete arsenal, befitting a semi-barbaric educational period; which might, in the event of an insurrection, have furnished arms to the entire school, instead of a mere choice of instruments to our inquisitor. Let us look down deep into this receptacle,—this Romish chest of our vigilant Torquemada, and see what really is in store. Here is boot, thumb-screw, wheel, rack, maiden, and what not. Fish up the gruesome things! Here is the thin box-wood scaler, with its smooth yellow surface, and dark tracery of lines and numerals; equal to all emergencies, of peace or war,—apt to a mathematical demonstration, or an idler’s smarting palm. And note beside it, this round, robust, weighty companion, the ebony ruler! Plainly, there can be but one direful use for this dark sub-educator! It must make its mark,—but where? In the chilling phrase of the master, its peculiar vocation must be correction,—to “raise a racket” among the small bones and tender tissues of the delinquent’s hand, putting them, with the wits of the owner, into inextricable confusion. At sight of it, how surely twelve-times six, and the possessive case, and that hieroglyphical phthisic, whirled in a sort of involved nebulousity! And impartial judgment is given; the left digits are called up to suffer with the right; for the master is a steadfast advocate of what he terms “even-handed justice,” and metes it out so generously that no culprit, who from the magisterial presence goes blubbering to his seat, can righteously say he is scant of it. No wonder, schoolmates, if you look on this gloomy fellow with aversion; he has not one agreeable feature, and all our memories of him are mixed with w.e. Here is something that suggests vivisection. It is a common penknife, but sharp as the tooth of ingratitude. I have no personal grudge; but memory recoils from that tale of the master, how a less merciful pedagogue would run it in clean, butcherly fashion under the clumsy, careless hand drooped so low over its copy-book that the pen-stock which should have indicated the North Star declined toward Venus when near the horizon. And, in the event of your having forgotten him, (though this is quite inconceivable,) let me, as one painfully conversant, introduce you again to your most particular aversion,—the common hangman of the school,—a fiery, flying serpent, with a sting in each end, and venomous throughout! A glance at him is recognitive, for he has felt the quick so certainly, and

with such instant effect, that you cannot have outgrown this bitter familiarity, though your eyes were dim with years and your beards hoary. There was one unkempt unfortunate, of many bruises, and this vengeance was ever at him:

“Lo! the Pedagogue, with sudden drub,
Smites his scald head, that is already sore,—
Superfluous wound,—such is misfortune’s rub!
Who straight makes answer with redoubled roar,
And sheds salt tears twice faster than before,
That still with backward fist he strives to dry;
Washing, with brackish moisture, o’er and o’er,
His muddy cheek, that grows more foul thereby.”

Look, then, at this long leather strap,—old, tough, well-seasoned, black and horny, with just oil enough in its fibres to render it supple in its address to refractory sides and shoulders. This,—of greater efficacy than any universal panacea on the market,—was never known to fail when skilfully and faithfully applied by our judicious dominie, save on one occasion; then the crafty culprit, already adjudged and under sentence from the previous day, that he might lighten his punishment as much as possible, had lined the inside of his jacket with birch bark.

This sable constable keeps the peace (?) by means of a variety of singular evolutions. It moves mysteriously, and is competently assisted. It will suddenly lasso a shock-headed boy, who has assumed a preternatural innocence and most starch demeanour, after having provoked an outcry from his unsuspecting neighbour,—who is not too dull to know when a pin is stuck in him. Hooking him out of his secrecy, and his snug corner, into an arena of woe, it brings this culprit to a stand-still. He is first well shaken, lion-like,—perhaps to benumb his sensibilities; then, while supported by the master’s capable arm, this back-biter feels for the tenderest part, clipping here and there, evoking many a penitential yelp, till a burst of overwhelming sorrow announces the supreme discovery. Our master never pounded a rock after it was broken; nor, to use his own affirmation, did he “ever leave a jacket till it was well dusted.”

Sometimes, when we suppose it stretched placidly before the teacher on the desk, while he sits writing, or tracing in his smooth round hand the copy lines,—proverbs too sage for heedless and frolicsome youth; or, again, when even the most knowing (since the master relishes a surprise) think it coiled like a tame adder round his coat-collar, doubled together as he is wont to wear it, while two or three boys in a back seat have stooped low and bent their heads together suspiciously;—then it will suddenly, stealthily awake, uncoil, descend, knob itself into a competent projectile!—then, appearing for a moment comet-wise, let loose from the master’s hand, it will fall with a thud, and the smitten pates will separate with an air of the most expressive awe and sobriety;—upon which the master will look mysteriously about him to see whether his leather knob has disappeared, or, perhaps, will make some jocose remark about “killing two birds with one stone.” The chief mischief-maker, if distinguished, is bidden to the seat of judgment, an unwilling delegate. Hesitant, he goes on his precarious embassy,—the hateful instrument in his hand; (would he could keep it there!) and happy is he beyond the lot of an ordinary school-boy, if he return to his fellows without stripes hastily administered and vicariously borne, coupled with a warning as to his fuller wormwoody measure when he shall be caught next time. Verily, it is no smooth sailing, when once he has embarked on the rudder of the transgressor, all canvas spread and the rudder shifted to his own side; but, as the redoubtable Mr. Bagnet was wont freely to observe in the presence of his wife, “discipline must be maintained.” But sudden judgments make us wary, and we have an artfulness proportioned to our dread of this lithe, ungente visitor.

V.

“Severe by rule, and not by nature mild,
He never spoils the child and spares the rod,
But spoils the rod and never spares the child,
And soe with holy rule deems he is reconciled.

“But surely the just sky will never wink
At men who take delight in childish throe,
And stripe the nether urchin like a pink
Of tender hyacinth, inscribed with woe;
Such bloody pedagogues, when they shall know,
By useless birches that forlorn recess,
Which is no holiday in Pit below,
Will Hell not seem designed for their distress,—
A melancholly place, that is all bottom lesse?”