

PUNCH AND COUSIN JONATHAN.



THE intervention of the Comic Press in international criticism, and still more in international dispute, does not necessarily import good-humour into the discussion. The humour may possibly be good, yet it is more likely to be ill, for wit and satire are almost certain irritants, and salt rubbed into the sores of a wounded national pride stings none the less because it is labelled “Attic.”

As moderation is the virtue of the serious journal, so tact is the quality proper to the comic paper that pretends to respectability and aspires to the exercise of power and influence for good. It is only in proportion to its self-restraint that a humorous paper can

hope to make itself felt, as well as heard, in times of difficulty; and it is much to be doubted whether Douglas Jerrold—Thackeray's “savage little Robespierre” of the early days of Napoleon III.—were he alive to-day, could have been trusted with a free and independent pen in dealing with the recent American crisis.

On the other hand, we have seen in Mr. Punch's attitude within the year gone by a sense of responsibility rarely displayed in his more ardent youth. With the quiet judgment of the comedian who continues to act and laugh while the audience are crying “Fire!” he preferred for a time to relegate the main question to his “*Cartoon Junior*,” declining to invest the incident with the exaggerated importance that, in his opinion,

would be implied by Sir John Tenniel's leading page. He gently chaffs the American on his partisan view of "arbitration," and on his political motives; he good-humouredly exaggerates the Monroe Doctrine into "everything everywhere belongs to US—i.e. United States;" he helps with his pencil the cause of peace, and declares—

"Punch does not mean joining the fussy or frantic,
He sends a gay greeting across the Atlantic,
A blend of the loving and larkish."

From the outset, *Punch's* attitude towards the United States has, broadly speaking, been clear and unmistakable. Inimical, or at the least suspicious and distrustful, from the beginning right up to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the journal then performed a *volte face*—through the consciousness and memory of a great wrong done to a great and good man. And thenceforward, with but few intermissions, the remorseful *Punch* stretched out

his right hand in loving and fraternal friendship to the nation he had long misunderstood.

In the original prospectus of *Punch* it was severely declared that the Paper was to be devoted in part to what are known as Yankee yarns and tall stories—to "the naturalisation of those alien JONATHANS whose adherence to the truth has forced them to emigrate from their native land." That Americans were not popular in London in the 'Forties is manifest from the bitter attacks on American honour that were common in *Punch* and went unreprieved elsewhere. In comparison with the inhabitants of the United States, it would appear, Ananias and Autolycus were men of rigid truth and punctilious honesty; and *Punch*, as the champion of these (and of all the other) virtues, lost no opportunity of flinging his stone at the alleged miscreants.

This sentiment of angry scorn was intensified in *Punch's* third year, when, in the spring of 1844, a State debt was repudiated by Pennsylvania. An anonymous contributor to the paper, signing himself "C. G."—one of the few writers in *Punch* who have been permitted to initial their verses or articles—sent in a scathing criticism on the event, in the form of a poem of four-and-twenty stanzas, entitled "A Letter from Pennsylvania" (*Punch*, Vol. VI., p. 31), of which the following verses are perhaps the most striking:—

"Freedom!"—and do you dare
to send
In taunt, ye British slaves,
Words that ye cannot comprehend,
To us, across the waves?
* * * * *
Then bluster on! We do not heed
The wrath ye idly kindle;
Our lot were base as yours, indeed,
Were we not FREE—to swindle!
* * * * *
Our law is Freedom! Ease our aim,
Spitting our recreation,
Chewing our right;—our motto,
'Fame,
Wrong, and Repudiation!'
* * * * *
Farewell, friend Bull! our trade
is gone,
Our credit's hardly better,



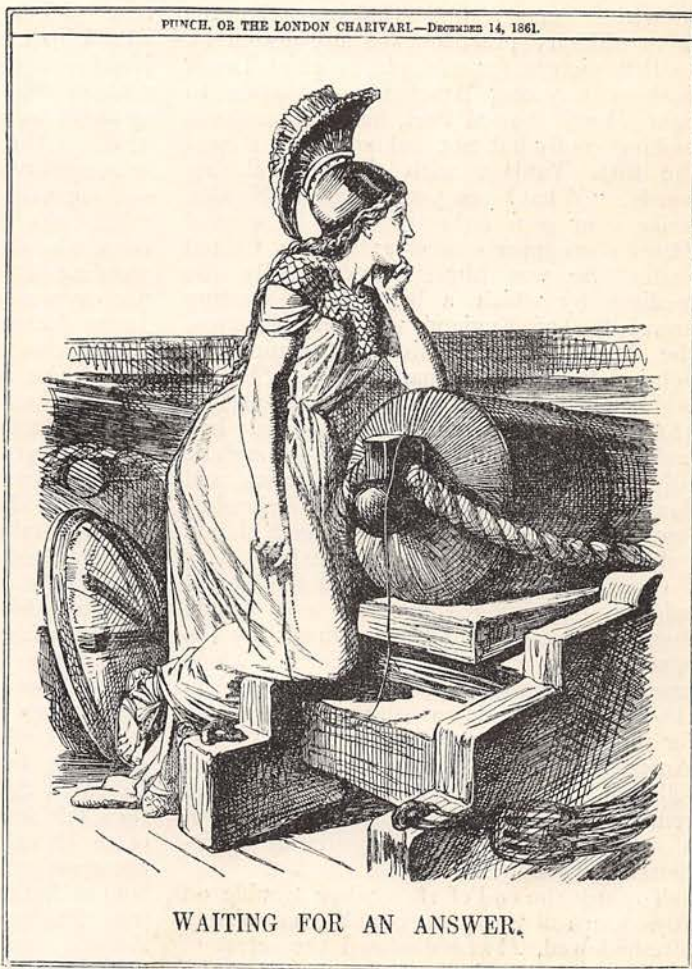
But still, I guess, the game we've
won
Whilst we remain your
Debtor!"

In the following year another incident, unimportant enough in itself, occurred to ruffle still further the embittered *Punch*. In the course of a laudatory article which appeared in the *Boston Atlas*—in which, notwithstanding its friendliness, *Punch* swore he smelt treason—it was stated that several of the Jester's staff, dissatisfied with their remuneration, were about starting a journal of their own, "leaving *Punch* to its fate."

Douglas Jerrold replied with stinging violence, savagely attacking the American press in general and the *Boston Atlas* in particular. He denounced the London correspondents of American papers indiscriminately as "biped vermin," and declared that "the *Boston Atlas* has one of these animals in its pay." The journalist at whom Jerrold aimed his darts of abuse replied with spirit in the *Great Gun*—a paper which at the time claimed to be, and in a measure doubtless was, *Punch's* principal rival; but as he could neither substantiate his original statement nor explain away the several errors of his article—and as, moreover, he was no match for Jerrold in brilliant power of vituperation, though yet not at all a mean antagonist—his efforts had little effect in converting *Punch* to the formation of a juster and more genial estimate.

Then the long-standing difficulty of American publishers and English copyright—destined to be settled, in a fashion, half a century later—was already a burning question; and Leigh Hunt's declaration that American literary piracy, as it was considered, was "all right and proper and free-born, and slaveholding and go-a-(nother man's) head," was warmly applauded in Whitefriars as a wise and witty definition. *Punch's* prejudice, in short, was deeply-rooted, and to him the word "American" was as clearly synonymous with lying and cheating as "Jewish" represented to him the equivalent of tailoring,

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WAITING FOR AN ANSWER.

sweating, money-lending, and sponging-house running. The matter was a serious one, as Ticknor himself bore witness. "I am much struck," he wrote to Sir E. Head, "with what you say about the ignorance that prevails in England concerning this country [the United States] and its institutions, and the mischief likely to spring from it. . . . From *Punch* up to some of your leading statesmen things are constantly said and done out of sheer misapprehension or ignorance, that have for some time been breeding ill-will here, and are likely to breed more." How truly might these words be applied to things said and done ever since, which have not been without effect in bringing about recent events!

Notwithstanding all this, it is probable that *Punch* was never entirely serious in his attacks; or, perhaps, he intended to level them rather against particular communities than against the nation at large. Such a view is suggested by the cartoons in which, at rare intervals, he

showed a deeper feeling of affection than his more ordinary practice gave any notion of. In that picture, for example, in which Leech dealt with young America's inclination to fight, *Punch* showed Peel, hands in pockets, looking coolly but not unkindly down upon the little Yankee, with the admonishing words: "What? you young Yankee-Noodle, strike your own father!" Yet, in spite of *Punch's* misapprehension as to the United States, he was himself undoubtedly the medium by which a better corresponding knowledge of England was carried across the Atlantic. "The gaieties of genius, the political, the social, the parietal wit of *Punch*," said Emerson in his speech at Manchester in 1847, "go duly every fortnight to every boy and girl in Boston and New York"—though he slyly added, some years later, the caustic and damnatory faint-praise that "the relentless law of averages ordained that *Punch* should publish a real joke once in two weeks."

Constituted as was *Punch's* staff of high-spirited, high-minded men, it was deeply moved, collectively and individually, by the appearance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which practically shaped *Punch's* later policy when the Civil War broke out, and was responsible for much that appeared in the paper in its American relations for several years that followed. On one occasion, too, it will be remembered, the book supplied the subject of a cartoon, in which Disraeli figured as an unflattering version of Topsy.

Towards the end of 1856, when trouble on American soil was plainly and unmistakably foreshadowed, *Punch* disclosed the secret of his American prejudice. In a cartoon he portrayed the North and South as twins—a sort of Jekyll and Hyde combination—of which the former was the very embodiment of Good, and the latter, Vice incarnate; and he pointed out the disastrous result that would assuredly ensue as a consequence of any struggle *à outrance* between the two:—

"How all the despots would rejoice
Should you break up and fail;
How would the flunkies' echoing voice
Take up their masters' tale.
'Free Institutions will not do!
Would be the cry of all the crew.'"

Not many days later the United States sent back to England the Arctic ship *Resolute*, which had by them been recovered; and *Punch's* heart—and with it England's—was deeply touched by the graceful act. In a cartoon commemorating the event, Jonathan was styled "a good boy with his heart in the right place;" Britannia wished him a Merry Christmas and many Happy New Years, and—reverting to the parental refrain—declared

that "Mother and child are doing well." *Punch*, indeed, was very well pleased with the North—as pleased as when in later times he declared that the *true* "United States" were, or ought to be, America and England.

When the Civil War broke out, *Punch*, as in sympathy bound, threw his weight at first—along with English public opinion—on the side of the North; though it is asserted by those who should know best that his understanding of the question was neither profound nor even superficially complete. Mr. Henry James declared that the cartoons before and during the war were "issued under an evil star." An American writer, Mr. Parton, is more explicit:—

"In common with John Leech and the ruling class of England generally, Mr. Tenniel was so unfortunate as to misrepresent the Civil War in America. He was almost as much mistaken as some of our own politicians, who had not his excuse of distance from the scene. His 'Divorce a Vinculo,' published in January, 1861, when the news of the secession of South Carolina reached England, was too flattering to the North, though correct as to the attitude of the South. 'Mrs. Carolina Asserts her Right to "Larrup" her Nigger' was a rough statement of South Carolina's position; but we cannot pretend that the Northern States objected from any interest they felt in the coloured boy. On the part of the North it was simply a war for self-preservation. It was as truly such as if Scotland or Ireland, or both of them, had seceded from England in 1803, when the Peace of Amiens was broken, and the English people had taken the liberty to object. Again, Mr. Tenniel showed good feeling in admonishing Lord Palmerston, when the war had begun, to keep Great Britain neutral. 'Well, Pam,' says Mr. Punch to his workman, 'of course I shall keep you on, but you must stick to *peace-work*.'

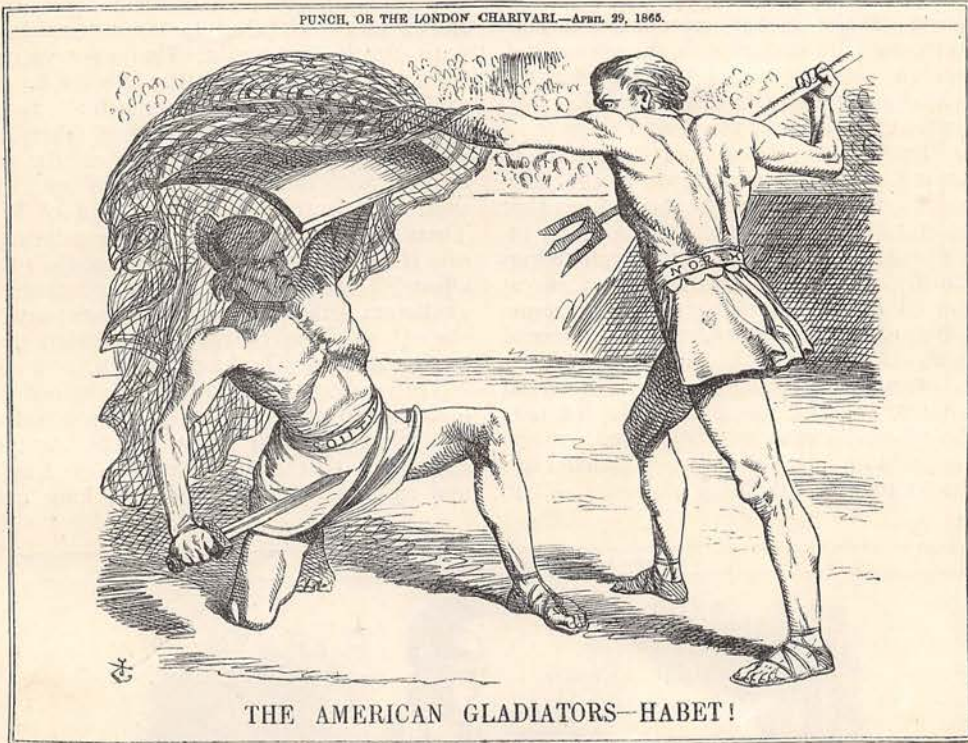
"Nor could we object to the picture in May, 1861, of Lincoln's poking the fire and filling the room with particles of soot, saying, with downcast look, 'What a nice White House this would be if it were not for the Blacks.'" [This was the first picture of President Lincoln, and represented him with a clean-cut intelligent face, which later on was shown as a compound of malice, vulgarity, and cunning.]

"But from that time to the end of the year," continues Mr. Parton, "all was misapprehension and perversity. In July, 1861, 'Naughty Jonathan,' an ill-favoured little boy carrying a toy flag, addressed the majesty of Britain thus: 'You *shan't* interfere, mother—and you ought to be on my side—and it's

a great shame—and I don't care—and you shall interfere—and I won't have it.'" [This, of course, had reference to the divided state of public opinion in the States as to the attitude England should adopt.] "During the Mason and Slidell *imbroglio** the Tenniel cartoons were not soothing to the American mind. 'Do what's right, my son,' says the burly sailor, Jack Bull, to little Admiral Jonathan, 'or I'll blow you out of the water.'

'Don't fire,' says the coon; 'I'll come down.' And accordingly Mason and Slidell were speedily released.

"In a similar spirit most of the events of the war were treated; and when the war had ended, there was still shown in *Punch*, as in the English press generally, the same curious, inexplicable, and total ignorance of the feelings of the American people. What an inconceivable perversity it was to



Again, we have a family dinner scene, John Bull at the head of the table, and Lord John Russell the boy in waiting. Enter 'Captain Jonathan, F.N.,' who says, 'Jist looked in to see if thar's any rebels he-arr.' Upon which Mr. Bull remarks, 'Oh, indeed! John, look after the plate-basket, and then fetch a policeman.'" [This was in allusion to a supposed claim on the part of Mr. Seward of a right to search ships for rebel passengers.] "Then we have Mr. Lincoln as a 'coon' in a tree, and Colonel Bull aiming his blunderbuss at him. 'Air you in earnest, colonel?' asks the coon. 'I am,' replies the mighty Bull.

* Known as "the Trent outrage," by which war between England and the Federals was rendered likely, and was only averted by the firm demand for reparation by the English Government, conceded, after an anxious three weeks, by the North.

attribute Mr. Sumner's statement of the damage done to the United States by the alliance which existed four years between the owners of England and the masters of the South to a Yankee grab for excessive damages! In all the long catalogue of national misunderstandings there is none more remarkable than this. Mr. Tenniel from the first derided the idea that any particular damage had been done by the *Alabama* and her consorts; certainly, there was no damage, he thought, upon which a certain claim could be founded. 'Claim for damages against *me*?' cries big Britannia, in one of his pictures in October, 1865. 'Nonsense, Columbia; don't be mean over money matters.'

"All this has now become merely interesting as a curiosity of misrepresentation. The American people know something of

England through her art, her literature, and press; but England has extremely imperfect means of knowing us. No American periodical, probably, circulates in Great Britain two hundred copies. We have no Dickens, no Thackeray, no George Eliot, no *Punch*, to make our best and our worst familiar in the homes of Christendom; and what little indigenous literature we have is more likely to mislead foreigners than enlighten them."

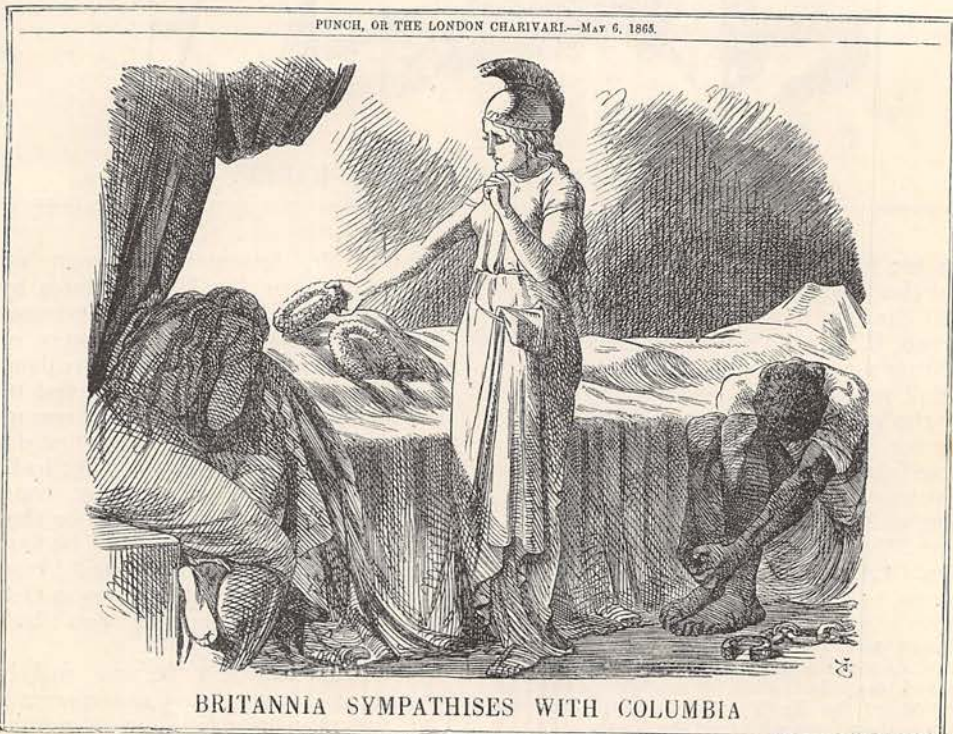
Thus wrote Mr. Parton in 1878; and except for his mistake in supposing that the initiation of the *Punch* cartoons lies with the cartoonist instead of with the whole staff in solemn conclave assembled, his view, so moderately expressed, places *Punch's* misconception fairly before the reader.

For four years *Punch* had dealt out to North and South in turn some of the most powerful cartoons and most cutting lines that have ever appeared in his pages. His invariable assumption of the tremendous superiority of England was to Americans at all moved by them galling in the extreme, and his satire as unpleasant as he could make it. Thus, when the secessionist States were in search of a name, he suggested "Slaveownia;" but when they adopted that of the "Confederates," he approved, on the ground, said he, that they were "Confederates in the crime of upholding slavery"—"the

just and holy cause of slavery." When General Beauregard declared, in his proclamation to the South, that "unborn generations would arise and call them blessed," *Punch* averred that with their proverbial inaccuracy the reporters had omitted the concluding word—"Rascals."

But the Jester tired of the war before the belligerents did; partly, perhaps, because of the grave hindrance imposed by it upon our cotton-spinners in their supplies, through the blockade—and this consideration, perhaps, inspired him with a kind of commercial sympathy for the losing side. Thereupon he called for a separation between the fighters, for now, said he "dis-Union is Strength;" and he hailed the fraternisation that had taken place of negroes bearing the flags of the rival armies, with the epigram, "When Black meets Black then comes the end of War." Then in April, 1865, came the superb cartoon of "Habet!" one of Sir John Tenniel's finest efforts, representing the combatants as gladiators before the negro Cæsar; and, on the 6th of May, the supreme design of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

This cartoon was one which helped in a measure to melt for us the hardened and justifiably resentful heart of the American nation, at that time distrustful of England and righteously indignant at a long course





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of insult and misrepresentation. It was an affecting picture of Britannia's tribute and of *Punch's amende honorable*, entitled "Abraham Lincoln: Foully Assassinated, April 14th, 1865." The long poem which accompanied this picture was not only a very complete and a very touching and generous recantation of former misunderstanding and wrong, but it had the ring of true sincerity and loving sympathy—so true that the sound of it is even yet not forgotten; indeed, a Boston writer has lately declared that *Punch* is chiefly remembered and respected in the States for these verses of Shirley Brooks, addressed to the American nation in its great bereavement. They take highest rank amongst poetry of their kind—rugged enough and incomplete, no doubt, but coming straight from the heart, and speaking to a mighty nation with humility, with emotion, and deep sincerity.

From that time forward *Punch* took seriously to heart the lesson he had taught himself, and his relations with Uncle Sam were thereafter of a very different and a far more cordial kind. He had his misunderstandings, of course, and has them still—what nation judging other nations has not? But they have consisted chiefly in the presentations of curiosities of American life, as though such illustrations were ordinary and characteristic scenes and natural phases: but

otherwise his influence has been steadily for conciliation and kindly feeling. One need but compare the cartoons of the American comic press with those in our own to see that the misrepresentation and jealousy which once disfigured *Punch's* comment on international affairs have apparently crossed the Atlantic and there struck root; and it is not for us to complain if American cartoonists have bettered the example unhappily set on this side in days for ever, it is hoped, gone by.

But *Punch* has learned his lesson, as he should; and, setting his face against the iniquity of racial hatred and mistrust, and against all such examples of effervescent folly as the world has lately witnessed, has used his good judgment, good sense, and good heart to soften the asperities of life. By preaching the necessity of cultivating a truer acquaintance with friends and neighbours, and of drawing more kindly inferences from the knowledge thus obtained, he will carry to their logical conclusion the principles that guided Mayhew, Thackeray, and Shirley Brooks, and all the best spirits in *Punch's* band, from Leech and Lemon to Tenniel and Burnand.

M. H. SPIELMANN.

* * * We are indebted to Messrs. Bradbury, Agnew and Co., the proprietors of *Punch*, for their courteous permission to reproduce the cartoons which illustrate this paper.

ED. C. M.