MEMORANDUM ON THE CIVIL WAR.

The Builders of the First Monitor.

THE story of the creation of the first *Monitor* has not as yet been fully told. The papers on the subject in THE CENTURY and in "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War," filled as they are with facts of interest and importance, are marked by a serious omission of other facts essential to a just award of credit among the builders of the *Monitor*.

Colonel Church, in his paper on John Ericsson, in this magazine for April, 1879, mentions the fact that "there were associated with him [Captain Ericsson] three men of practical experience, great energy, and wealth." Colonel Church names but one of the three, Mr. C. S. Bushnell, though the other two had much the larger share of the practical experience and wealth, and constituted in fact the financial backbone of the enterprise.

Mr. Bushnell, in his letter printed in "Battles and Leaders" (Vol. I., p. 748), names his "two wise and able associates," but omits to mention the facts that his mission at Washington in behalf of Ericsson's battery had failed, and that only after these associates of his brought their experience, energy, and wealth to its aid did that invention stand any chance for adoption by the Government.

Captain Ericsson, in his paper on "The Building of the *Monitor*," discloses his theory that it was his personal argument and explanations before the Naval Board that secured the assent of the Board to a trial of his battery. But it is a demonstrable fact that the assent of the Board had been gained, and a memorandum or preliminary contract for the construction of a floating battery on his plan had been secured by his associates, before Captain Ericsson appeared on the scene at Washington, and before his two leading associates in the construction of the *Monitor* had ever met him.

The salient facts of this transaction, set in the proper order of time, are as follows: Roused by the national emergency, Ericsson had devised his impregnable "cheese-box on a raft." But he was crippled as to means, and out of favor with the Navy Department, and he had felt so outraged by the refusal of the department to pay him for his services in the construction of the United States frigate *Princeton*, that he would not approach the department, nor so much as visit Washington. So his design for a floating battery lay unknown in his office till his friend C. S. Bushnell saw it, approved it, and took it to Washington. Mr. Bushnell secured the attention of Secretary Welles, with whom he was on terms of personal acquaintance, but found a tremendous obstacle in the Naval Board, charged by Congress with the decision of all matters relating to ironclads.

Days lengthened into weeks while Bushnell labored ineffectually to remove the prejudices and obtain the approval of the Board, till he at last desisted under distinct notice from one of the Board that it was perfectly useless for him to haunt the department further on any such errand. His own efforts having proved thus unavailing, Bushnell applied to John F. Winslow of the Albany Iron Works of Troy, N. Y., who, with John A. Griswold of the Rensselaer Iron Works of the same city, was in Washington on business connected with the iron plating of the United States ship-of-war *Galena*. Mr. Winslow was struck by the ingenuity and merits of Ericsson's design. He took it to Mr. Griswold and secured his coöperation in an effort to have it adopted by the Government.

These new factors simplified the problem. Winslow and Griswold were leading ironmasters. They had capital, of which Ericsson had none and Bushnell little. They had political as well as personal standing and influence. Backed by such men, the project took on the character of a responsible undertaking, and men who had hitherto turned a deaf ear began to listen.

For obvious reasons, Winslow and Griswold decided to take the scheme past the Naval Board, directly to the head of the nation. Bearing a letter of introduction from their friend Secretary Seward, they secured an interview with President Lincoln, laid the drawings before him, and explained the strong points of the plan. When they ceased speaking Mr. Lincoln asked, "Why do you not take this to the Board which has charge of these matters?"

"Because it has been there to no purpose," was the reply. "Nevertheless, we believe it solves a problem of vast importance to the national cause; and not as ship-builders, for we are not such, but as loyal citizens, we appeal to you to give it a trial."

Impressed by the earnestness of the men, Mr. Lincoln meditated, and then said: "Well, gentlemen, I don't know much about ships, though I once contrived a canal-boat, the model of which is over there in the Patent Office, the merit of which was that it could run where there was no water. But this plan of Ericsson's seems to me to have something in it. Meet me to-morrow morning at Commodore Smith's office in the Navy Department."

That meeting at the Navy Department has been heretofore described. Commodores Smith, Paulding, and Davis, of the Naval Board, Captain Fox, and other officers of the navy were present. Mr. Winslow was the spokesman, and laying out the drawings, he explained the plan of the battery, and urged its adoption with powerful earnestness. The meeting ended with Mr. Lincoln's blunt expression of opinion that there was "something in the thing," emphasized by his quaint remark about the girl's stocking, which has become historical.

Mr. Lincoln's obvious approval had its effect, and next morning Commodore Smith expressed to Mr. Winslow a willingness to authorize him and his associates to construct a floating battery on Ericsson's plan, provided they would assume all the risks of the experiment.

This condition, which the Board possibly supposed would end the whole matter, was accepted, and a memorandum covering the main points of the proposed contract was drawn up and agreed upon. The Naval Board having some doubts, however, in regard to the sufficiency of the strange craft as a sea-going vessel, Captain Ericsson was next called to Washington. He found no difficulty in demonstrating the stability of the proposed vessel, and the contract was perfected without delay.

The contractors of the first part were four in number, named in the instrument in the following order: John Ericsson, John F. Winslow, John A. Griswold, and C. S. Bushnell. In addition to other rigid conditions, the contract contained a provision that in case the said vessel should fail in performance of speed for sea service, or in the successful working of the turret and guns, with safety to the men in the turret, or in her buoyancy to float and carry her battery, the party of the first part should refund to the United States the amount of money advanced to them on said vessel, within thirty days after such failure should have been declared by the party of the second part, and that the vessel should be held by the United States as collateral security until the money so advanced should be refunded.

Only men of strong patriotism and strong faith would have assumed obligations involving so large an outlay, to be expended upon a novel device distrusted by experienced naval officers, and upon terms which threw upon them all the risks, even though failure might be due to insufficient skill on the part of a commander and crew in the selection of whom they had no voice.

Mr. Bushnell says that this condition was never an embarrassment to Captain Ericsson and himself. If so, may it not have been because their pecuniary risk was so much less than that of their associates? If the *Monitor* had failed in performance, Winslow and Griswold would have lost three-fourths of all the money expended in her construction, Bushnell, or his financial backer, would have lost one-fourth, and Captain Ericsson would have lost his time and labor. But Colonel Church intimates, in a way which amounts to a statement of a fact, that after his experience with the *Princeton*, Captain Ericsson would not have accepted this condition had he known it in advance. However this may be, Winslow and Griswold accepted this hard condition and signed the contract before it was taken to Captain Ericsson for his signature.

My space in these pages does not permit me to cite documents; but I have made no statement above that cannot be sustained by documentary proof or by the evidence of an unimpeachable living witness in the person of John F. Winslow. I submit that these facts show that two names which have had but the barest mention in THE CENTURY articles on the *Monitor* should be brought to the front. For the men who bear them were both at the front and the back of the enterprise. They took the lead when others had failed. They secured President Lincoln's approval. They argued the question before the Naval Board. They brought to the project the personal and financial responsibility indispensable to its acceptance by the Navy Department. They advanced all the money expended on the *Monitor* up to a comparatively late stage in her construction, and they furnished large quantities of iron and materials. Without their resources the contract could not have been executed by their associates. They made no money and cared to make none on the first *Monitor*; but without their capital the first *Monitor* probably never would have been built; and without their earnest and powerful efforts in forwarding the work of construction the *Monitor* certainly would not have been ready in time to meet the emergency in Hampton Roads, and thus save the credit of the United States as a naval power, prevent the dissolution of the blockade, and defeat the recognition of the Confederacy by England and France. These men were John F. Winslow, still living in honored retirement in his home on the Hudson, and the late Hon. John A. Griswold of Troy.

Other names also deserve mention. That of Thomas F. Rowland of Greenpoint, L. I., who as a sub-contractor built the hull of the *Monitor*, has been printed in THE CENTURY. Other sub-contractors were the Delamater Iron Works of New York, who made the engine, machinery, and propeller, and Abbott of Baltimore, who supplied the turret plates.

One fact more. The man who is popularly credited with the invention of the revolving turret was not the original inventor of that distinguishing feature of the *Monitor*. Of this he was well aware. In Captain Ericsson's paper on "The Building of the *Monitor*" he refers to a revolving tower invented by Theodore R. Timby, describing it as a device for warfare on land. This is an insufficient description. The records of the United States Patent Office show that Timby's device was a revolving tower or turret, for use on land *or water*. It was protected by a caveat, issued in 1843, eleven years before Captain Ericsson submitted to Napoleon III. his plan for a floating battery with a revolving dome. A patent for it was issued to Mr. Timby in September, 1862, and Captain Ericsson and his associates in the building of the *Monitor* paid Mr. Timby, for the use of his patent, a royalty of $5,000 on each of the monitors constructed by them subsequent to the first. Is not this circumstance of interest enough to be comprised in the history of the *Monitor* as related in this magazine? John Ericsson was a great inventor. His fame is secure. Certainly I would not lessen by a jot the credit which is his due. Let others also have the credit which is theirs.

G. G. Benedict.

BURLINGTON, VERMONT.

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question seems a fair and faithful relation of facts; indeed, as I was in Lynchburg at the time he mentions, I know his account of his experience there is as he states it. Any one who experienced the necessary and often unnecessary horrors of many of the Northern "pens" where so many suffered and died can readily believe, as I do, all he says of Andersonville. But in speaking of seeing General R. E. Lee "for the first and only time in my life," he is evidently inaccurate. Dr. Mann says:

> He [Lee] sat upon his horse carelessly, with one knee resting upon the pommel of the saddle, and leisurely smoking a cigar. He appeared a middle-sized man, with iron-gray hair and full gray beard, not very closely cut; as fine-looking a specimen of a man and soldier as I ever saw. He remarked, as we filed past him, "Am sorry to see you in this fix, boys, but you must make the best of it." His tone was kind, and spoken as though he really sympathized with us, as I have no doubt he did.

It is kind in Dr. Mann to think and speak thus of our Lee, but it is plain he never saw General Robert E. Lee. All who knew him will say this picture is not true to nature. "Jeb" Stuart's favorite attitude, sometimes indeed under fire, was to sit "carelessly, with one knee resting upon the pommel of his saddle," and maybe "leisurely smoking a cigar,"—though I never saw him smoke,—but General Lee never did so undignified a thing as this in his life. If there was any trait of his character that was always conspicuous it was dignity, and while on duty he was the sternest man I ever saw. In the social circle he was most courteous and affable. That he should have addressed Federal prisoners gratuitously at all was very unlike him; but if he had, it certainly would not have been in that free-and-easy, glib style quoted. It would have been very much more like him to have used the term *men*, but to have called them "boys" is altogether inconsistent. That he "sympathized" with the prisoners no one will doubt who correctly estimated the goodness and noble-heartedness of the man. His humanity and sympathy for his suffering "people"—a term of his own that he always used in speaking of his soldiers—in my humble judgment alone prevented him from being what Stonewall Jackson was, the greatest general of either army. I was connected with General Lee's army for four years nearly, and I believe if he had been a smoker I would have known it. And I am informed by one who knew General Lee better than I could that he never smoked a cigar in his life.

Very likely Dr. Mann really saw one of the many bogus counterfeits of General Lee, as I have many a time seen them attitudinizing in the conceit that they resembled him in personal appearance, which would explain some inconsistencies of an otherwise interesting and very likely faithful war reminiscence.

Dr. Mann, in speaking of his two-days' railway trip to Danville from Lynchburg (a two-hours' ride now), mentions that it was his only experience of riding in a passenger coach, "box-cars" being used on all other occasions. If he had known how few coaches there were in the Confederacy he would not have been surprised. Our troops, and indeed the sick and wounded, were from necessity nearly always transported in box-cars; and on one occasion as early as 1862, when our resources were not nearly so exhausted, I saw Jefferson Davis get out of a box-car at Gordonsville, having ridden from Culpeper, the only other occupants of the car being Federal prisoners captured from Pope's army.

And if Dr. Mann had known how scarce "raw corn" was as late as 1864, he would not have commented on its being issued as rations to prisoners, when very likely our soldiers in the field (many of them) were suffering even for raw corn. I could give some personal experience here in point.

One more item, which I must say with all respect is beyond my understanding, how it was possible for the prisoners at Andersonville to dig wells (not tunnels),—perpendicular wells, and a number of them,—eighty and even a hundred feet deep, in the hard clay soil, with only pieces of old canteens as digging implements. I can believe that the "mass of maggots" was "from one to two feet deep," but there must be some mistake about the depth of the wells or the pieces of canteens.

E. A. Craighill, M. D.,
Late Private Co. G., 2d Va. Inf'y, 1st (Stonewall) Brigade A. N. Va., and Ass't Surgeon C. S. A.
LYNCHBURG, VA.

DR. MANN'S REJOINDER.

IT is possible, of course, that I did not see General Lee, but the picture he made sitting upon his horse in the twilight of May 5, 1864, has not yet been effaced from my mind. Dr. Craighill will agree with me that the men of either army, who stood up for four years and took the brunt of battle, were not in the habit of seeing apparitions.

The Confederate army did suffer much from lack of rations, and no doubt at times from lack even of raw corn, but the cause was lack of transportation rather than of such supplies within the Confederacy. There was corn enough rotting in the fields ungathered, and in the bins, within twenty miles of Andersonville to feed properly every prisoner in that stockade.

Why could not a well one hundred feet deep be dug with a split canteen for a shovel and an old case-knife for a pick as easily as could a tunnel? No doubt it puzzled a Virginia planter in ante-bellum days to imagine how a New England Yankee could obtain a living from the bleak and rocky hills he inhabited; yet he did it by digging away, in sunshine and rain, every day in the year except Sundays, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Fast Day, and "'Lection."

T. H. Mann, M. D.,
MILFORD, MASS. *Late of Co. I., 18th Regt. Mass. Vols.*

"The Builders of the First Monitor."

AS one of the executors of the late Captain John Ericsson, I feel called upon to correct some of the statements made by Mr. G. G. Benedict in his article in THE CENTURY for March, 1890. From documents in my possession, and facts of which I have personal knowledge, it is clear that Mr. Benedict is seriously at fault in many of his statements.

It is not true, for example, that Mr. C. S. Bushnell had less "practical experience and wealth" than his associates. His practical experience in vessels dated from his boyhood, when at sixteen years of age he was master of a large vessel, and a large owner and extensive builder in sailing and steam ships up to the time when he became contractor for the ironclad *Galena*,

of which Messrs. Winslow and Griswold were subcontractors under him for the iron plating.

Captain Ericsson's most intimate friend, Mr. C. H. Delamater, is entitled to the credit of bringing the plan of the *Monitor* to the attention of Mr. Bushnell, who no sooner saw and appreciated it than he carried it to Hartford, Connecticut, where the Secretary of the Navy, Hon. Gideon Welles, on a certain Friday early in September, 1861, urged him to take the plan immediately to Washington and lay it before the Government. This Mr. Bushnell did, not stopping at his home in New Haven, but arriving at the capital on Sunday morning. After breakfast he invited Mr. Winslow and Mr. Griswold to take a ride with him, that he might, undisturbed, explain to them the magnitude of his discovery. To their credit it may be said that this was an easy task, and it was agreed that all three should call upon Mr. Seward and Mr. Lincoln the following (Monday) morning. Mr. Seward gave them a letter of introduction to Mr. Lincoln, and the latter was so much pleased with the plan that he promised to meet them the next day (Tuesday) at the Navy Department, and use his influence with the Naval Board for its adoption. Promptly at eleven o'clock Mr. Lincoln appeared, and, after listening to the adverse criticism, expressed his opinion that "there was something in it, as the Western girl said when she put her foot into her stocking!" After the President had withdrawn, Messrs. Bushnell and Winslow secured from Admiral Smith and Commodore Paulding a promise to sign a favorable report, provided Captain Davis — the remaining member of the committee — would join them. This he declined to do, and the enterprise seemed hopelessly blocked. Mr. Bushnell, after consulting with Secretary Welles, then started for New York, and by persistent persuasion succeeded in inducing Captain Ericsson to go on to Washington, where he had no difficulty in satisfying Captain Davis of the stability of the *Monitor*, and inducing him to join his associates in recommending a contract for its construction.

Mr. Benedict's statements, that "Days lengthened into weeks while Bushnell labored ineffectually to remove the prejudices and obtain the approval of the Board," that "His own efforts having proved thus unavailing," he applied to Messrs. Winslow and Griswold, and that they "decided to take the scheme past the Naval Board, directly to the head of the nation," etc., are wholly misleading. The fact is, that the entire enterprise was managed with the greatest expedition. The plan was never presented to the Board until the Tuesday morning when President Lincoln met Mr. Bushnell and his associates at Admiral Smith's office, and was accepted three days later, after Mr. Ericsson's arrival from New York.

"Mr. Bushnell says that [the hard conditions exacted by the Government were] never an embarrassment to Captain Ericsson and himself. If so, may it not have been because their pecuniary risk was so much less than that of their associates?"

The real reason was because of the unbounded faith which Ericsson had — and which Mr. Bushnell shared — in the ability of the vessel to do all that was required of her. It may also be said that Mr. Bushnell had secured other parties to take the place of Messrs. Winslow and Griswold in case they finally refused to sign the contract. After hesitating for a week, they decided to share in the enterprise, but only on condition that Mr. Bushnell should secure Mr. Daniel Drew of New York and Hon. N. D. Sperry of New Haven as bondsmen for all parties. Mr. Bushnell was both able and willing to take all the risks involved in his share of the work, and has always felt more than satisfied with the public appreciation of his effort to aid the country in its darkest days. He has never had the slightest wish to appropriate the lion's share of the credit, and joins most heartily with Mr. Benedict in honoring all gentlemen whose names are given such well-earned distinction in Mr. Benedict's article.

George H. Robinson.

The Flag first hoisted at Mobile.

THE June CENTURY, page 309, speaks of the flag hoisted by Lieutenant De Peyster over Richmond as "the same one that had been first hoisted at Mobile on the capture of that city."

Now the *first* flag hoisted over Mobile was hoisted by men from the ironclad *Cincinnati*. On April 12, 1865, a fleet of transports took the force that had been operating on the east side of Mobile Bay against Spanish Fort, reported to be about fifteen thousand men, over to the west side of the bay. The naval force accompanied them, ready for action. On landing, a white flag, or its equivalent, was found on every house. The citizens reported Mobile evacuated. Two boats left the *Cincinnati* to hoist a flag over one of the batteries in the harbor. The gig commanded by Acting Master J. B. Williams, executive officer, reached Battery McIntosh first and hoisted the flag there. They found everything in order except that the powder had been thrown into the bay before the evacuation. After some little time spent in rummaging, the two crews started for the city. They found no opposition to their landing, and hoisted the ensign they carried on the roof of the Battle House, climbing up on each other's shoulders to get to the flagstaff on the roof. Twenty-five minutes after our ensign was hoisted a party of cavalry came tearing in, their horses all in a foam. They went up to the roof of the custom house, across the street from the Battle House, and the first thing they saw was our flag and our men across the way. They were chagrined, and set up the flag they bore against a chimney, where it could not be seen from the street. Our men went over and helped them hoist it where it could be properly seen, then we took down our ensign and returned to the ship. Our flag was hoisted while the mayor was surrendering the city.

Ambrose S. Wight,
Late Clerk to the Commander of the "Cincinnati."
LINDEN, MICHIGAN.

A Letter from Lincoln when in Congress.

THE following copy of an autograph letter of Congressman Abraham Lincoln to the Hon. Josephus Hewett of Natchez, Mississippi, evinces a spirit of fairness and kindly feeling towards the South, and may be found of interest to readers of THE CENTURY. The original is in possession of Mrs. M. E. Gilkey of this place.

DUNCANSBY, MISS. *L. L. Gilkey.*

WASHINGTON, February 13, 1848.

DEAR HEWETT: Your Whig representative from Mississippi, P. W. Tompkins, has just shown me a

"The Builders of the First Monitor" Again.

HAVING no interest or desire except to have the truth fairly told about the first *Monitor*, I should thank Mr. George H. Robinson for his courteous "corrections," in THE CENTURY for last November, of certain statements of mine, made in a previous number, if I were able to reconcile the corrections with established dates and facts.

Mr. Robinson says that on "a certain Friday early in September, 1861," Mr. C. S. Bushnell left Hartford for Washington with the plan of the *Monitor;* that it was shown to President Lincoln on "the following Monday"; that it was presented to the Naval Board for the first time "the next day, Tuesday"; and that it was accepted "three days later." According to this the whole transaction at Washington occupied less than a week.

Now the Friday "early in September" could not have been later than the first Friday in the month, which was the 6th. The following Tuesday was the 10th; and "three days later" would, according to Mr. Robinson, fix the 13th as the final date of the acceptance of the plan. But the record shows that on the 16th of September the Naval Board made a report in which they say that Ericsson's floating battery is "novel" in plan; that they are "apprehensive that her properties for sea are not such as a sea-going vessel should possess"; but as she might be used in still water they recommend that "an experiment be made with one battery of this description with a guarantee and forfeiture in case of failure in any of the properties and points of the vessel as proposed."

It was in pursuance of this report, as I understand the matter, that the preliminary memorandum or agreement for the construction of the *Monitor* was made with Winslow, Griswold, and Bushnell.

It is to be noted that on the 16th of September the Naval Board was in doubt in regard to the seaworthiness of the proposed floating battery. It was to resolve this doubt that Ericsson was induced to go to Washington. He went thither, as his biographer, Colonel Church, says, on the 21st of September. His demonstration of the sea-going qualities of his novel craft was clear and convincing, and the contract for the first *Monitor* was thereupon made with him and his associates. The contract bears date of October 4, 1861.

The difficulty in fitting Mr. Robinson's statement to these dates is apparent.

G. G. Benedict.

BRIC-À-BRAC.

"Literary Clog-Dancing."

I WROTE not long ago to an unknown young correspondent, who had a longing for seeing himself in verse, but was not hopelessly infatuated with the idea that he was born a "poet." "When you write in prose," I said, "you say what you *mean*. When you write in verse you say what you *must*." I was thinking more especially of *rhymed* verse. Rhythm alone is a tether, and not a very long one. But rhymes are iron fetters; it is dragging a chain and ball to march under their incumbrance; it is a clog-dance you are figuring in when you execute your metrical *pas seul*. . . . You want to say something about the heavenly bodies, and you have a beautiful line ending with the word stars. . . . You cannot make any use of cars, I will suppose; you have no occasion to talk about scars; "the red planet Mars" has been used already; Dibdin has said enough about the gallant tars; what is there left for you but bars? So you give up your trains of thought, capitulate to necessity, and manage to lug in some kind of allusion, in place or out of place, which will allow you to make use of bars. Can there be imagined a more certain process for breaking up all continuity of thought, for taking out all the vigor, all the virility, which belongs to natural prose as the vehicle of strong, graceful, spontaneous thought, than this miserable subjugation of intellect to the clink of well or ill matched syllables?

Dr. O. W. Holmes, in "The Atlantic."

O GENIAL Doctor, long the friend
Of poet and of poetling,
Try, try not thus to make an end
Of all young birds that sing,
Or, at the very least, be fair —
Stop not at cars, scars, tars, and bars
While bidding headstrong youth beware
Of rhyming of the stars.

Methinks there is suggestiveness
In the omitted rhyme of spars;
I know not much, but I might "guess"
About the hero Lars.
For serious rhyming, 't would not do
To utilize the local "pars,"
But surely something neat and new
Might be evolved from Mars.

Wars only famous bards may take
When they are rhyming of the stars,
But haply something one might make
Of fervid heat that chars;
And, being skillful, one might twist
A line that finishes with jars —
For never, even in a mist,
"Collide" the wandering stars.

And what of each discarded rhyme?
Were there not ancient days, when cars
Had nought to do with steam and time,
And sometimes "hitched" to stars?
And what of all the heroes who
To Odin showed their wounds and scars?
And why may not a chosen few
Say something more of tars?