

Besides—a boon few bridegrooms can command—

He is a widower—so—you understand.

Now all this happiness, beyond a doubt,  
By this silk hat I hold was brought about,  
Or by its brother. Poor old English tile!  
Many have sneered at thy ungainly style;  
Many, with ridicule and gibe—why not?—  
Have dubbed thee “stove-pipe,” called thee  
“chimney-pot.”

They, as aesthetes, are not far wrong, maybe;  
But I, for all that thou hast done for me,  
Raise thee, in spite of nonsense sung or said,  
With deep respect, and place thee on my head.

#### A DAY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

IT is not our purpose in this paper to treat of any event which has taken place in the “New Palace” at Westminster, erected in 1840, but to what transpired in the old building on a certain day a little more than a century ago. The day to which we refer was Wednesday, the 30th of May, 1781, and the debate of which we are to speak had reference to American affairs.

The war of the Revolution had been “dragging its slow length” along for more than six years. In spite of the numerous reverses which the British arms had experienced, the government saw, or thought it saw, signs of hope that the summer campaigns of 1781 would put an end to the struggle. The most vigorous efforts had been made to add to the efficiency of the army, and both the naval and the land forces were in a better condition than ever to do the work assigned to them. Favorable news, moreover, was coming from the seat of war to the effect that even at that early period of the year success was following the military movements of Lord Cornwallis. It was announced through the London papers that he had had a decisive engagement with General Greene, in which the entire American army had been taken and destroyed. “This last and fortunate stroke of Lord Cornwallis,” said the editor of the *London Chronicle*, “will probably put a final period to the rebellion.”

It was when these hopes of final success, and the confident expectation of soon bringing to a close the long war of which people were becoming so weary, were bracing up the government, that the House of Commons met on the day to which we have referred, May 30, 1781. Some of the

most eminent men that ever sat on that floor were present. Those least familiar with English history will readily recognize the names of Lords North and Germaine, and those of Fox, Pitt, and Burke. These were among the most distinguished speakers in the House. The last three, as is well known, stood prominent among the leaders of the opposition, who for years had been fighting the government and pleading the cause of America. It seemed just now to be a forlorn hope in which the friends of liberty were indulging, that the United States would ever be able to achieve their independence, and make good their determination forever to dissolve their connection with England. Never to the eye of sense did the prospect of success seem darker. The plans of George III. and his ministry had prospered to the measure of their most sanguine expectations. The “rebels” must soon come to terms, and the States once more return to their colonial relations to the mother country. Keeping all these circumstances in mind, let us enter the House of Commons, and recall by such aids as are at our command what is about to take place on this May day of which we are speaking.

On the government side of the House we can not help noticing the feeling of encouragement which shows itself in the faces of the members. Their recognized majority over the members who sit in the opposition is large and influential. We may keep within the bounds of probability if we suppose that before being called to order they are freely talking over the latest news from America. In yesterday's *London Chronicle* they had read that in a recent bloody battle Lord Cornwallis had been left in complete possession of the field, that General Lafayette had been killed, and that Arnold (Benedict, the traitor) had completed a junction with Lord Cornwallis. No doubt Lord North met his associate, Lord Germaine, with a happy, cheerful countenance on this auspicious day. The government felt itself more than usually strong, and prepared, with a bold front, to meet the attacks of the opposition. Some preliminary business is attended to immediately after the opening of the session, and then discussion on American affairs is the order of the day. There is a movement on the opposition side of the House, and Colonel Hartley, the earnest

advocate for the independence of the United States, presents a motion for leave to bring in a bill empowering the King to treat with persons who may be authorized to agree on terms of peace with America. After adducing a number of reasons for his motion, he takes his seat, and the motion is seconded by Sir Philip Jennings Clarke. Without further discussion it is about to follow the fate of other and similar motions previously made, *i. e.*, be negatived by a division of the House, when its passage is stopped for the present by what proves to be a hot and most exciting discussion.

Sir George Saville rises and severely rebukes the ministry for attempting to choke off debate on a subject of such importance. Every idea of pacification with America which does not recognize the independence of the United States he declares to be utterly futile. He maintains that the crown has no authority by itself to enter upon negotiations looking toward peace. It receives the power to act by a formal vote of the House of Commons. If the motion of Colonel Hartley is negatived, he asserts his belief that in the future, though government may flatter itself that all things are moving on prosperously, there is nothing but disaster and ruin.

When Sir George has resumed his seat, Lord North, as in duty bound, comes to the rescue of the government. We are inclined to think that Americans generally have the impression that Lord North was an imperious, haughty, uncivil sort of a person, a second Lord Jeffreys, full of hate and malice and all wicked passions. But candor forces us to take a different view of him, and to recognize in him a man of amiable instincts and of marked courtesy, as a member of Parliament, in his treatment of his opponents. In his reply to Sir George he deprecates the idea that it is the wish of the side of the House which he represents to cut off debate. He declares it to be his understanding that when a question has been repeatedly debated, as this has been in the House before, there is no necessity of entering again into a discussion of its merits, or any want of candor in giving it a silent negative. He says that he is obliged to differ with the gentleman in his view of the rightful prerogative of the crown, believing as he does that the King is already invested with authority to nego-

tiate terms of peace with America without the passage of any such motion as had been presented by the opposition.

Immediately on Lord North's taking his seat, Charles James Fox is on his feet, and, as we are told, makes a long and animated speech in reply to the Prime Minister. Nearly all the positions taken by his lordship he denies. He vehemently insists that under no condition can the King of his own prerogative, and without the consent of Parliament, make peace with America. The war, he maintains, was founded on acts of Parliament, and therefore can not be a war of prerogative. He proceeds to point out the great difference between the war with America and that which had been carried on against France, Spain, and Holland. The latter, he admits, originated solely from the prerogative of the crown, and a royal command can at any time end it. Not so the American war; that was undertaken by Parliament, as was claimed, for the express purpose of chastising rebellion. It was by an act of Parliament that all trade and commercial relations between the countries have been suspended. Until that act is revoked by Parliament the crown can not restore trade without transcending its authority. Parliament has declared all trade with America contraband; and will any man have the presumption, asked the speaker, to say that it is in the royal prerogative to render licit a trade declared by an act of Parliament contraband?

Having by a variety of most cogent arguments enforced his assertion that the crown has no authority to negotiate a peace with America, Mr. Fox takes up another line of argument. "If," says he, "it be admitted that the King on his sole authority has the *power* to make peace, it is very clear that the ministers have not the *will*." He maintains that they must go forward in this nefarious business, or resign their places, and lose the political influence which for so many years they have held in the country. He takes occasion, moreover, to pour out the vials of his wrath upon the Tory refugees who had fled from America to England, and were now busy in stirring up strife and keeping alive the excitement with which the country had so long been cursed. The whole speech of the great Commoner is marked with those characteristics which have made for him the

reputation of having been one of the most remarkable speakers of his day on the floor of the House of Commons.

On the government side Mr. Fox is followed first by Sir Harry Houghton, who repudiates all idea of peace with America if a condition of that peace be a recognition of her independence. Lord Germaine then follows, and the record of the discussion tells us he "answered Mr. Fox with infinite ability." He re-affirms in the most unqualified terms the position so warmly maintained by his colleague in office, Lord North, that the power does inhere in the crown to make peace, and in support of his position quotes one of the Parliament's own acts, to wit, "That his Majesty might, by his royal authority, declare any province, town, or district returning to its allegiance to be within his peace and protection, and that from henceforth all restrictions, prohibitions, and penalties imposed thereon should cease." He declares it to be as certain as anything can be that England will never consent to peace which recognizes the independence of the United States. "And yet," says the noble lord, "Congress has already solemnly declared that nothing short of independence will satisfy them. If," continued he, "Parliament is resolved not to acknowledge this independence, will it not be useless to hold out terms short of this independence? Will it not be throwing the dignity of Parliament at the feet of the Congress, and sporting with its consequence, without any chance of peace?" After continuing for some time in this strain, the speaker takes occasion to allude to the attack which the gentleman in the opposition made on the refugees. He recites particularly the case of Mr. Galloway, who, he maintains, was a fair representative of many others who had fled from over the water to England. "The fact is," said Lord Germaine, "Mr. Galloway withstood taxation by a British Parliament because he thought it unconstitutional; but the moment that it was proposed in Congress to break all connection with the mother country, his regard for the constitution made him oppose the measure; and when he knew that his zeal for England had endangered his life, he then resorted to the British standard." Such was the "head and front" of the offense of Mr. Galloway and his refugee friends. The noble speaker closed with these words,

so memorable and worthy of note in view of what transpired a few months later: "Ardently desirous as I am of peace with America, yet if it can not be obtained without an admission of her independence, I, for one, will forego the blessings of peace rather than give my vote for so degrading a concession."

Lord Germaine takes his seat. He has spoken earnestly, decidedly, and, no doubt, in view of what was believed at that moment to be taking place in America, with an air of triumph, which, if it wore somewhat the appearance of arrogance, might reasonably have been pardoned. Burke rises, and in one of his remarkable speeches, abounding in wit and sarcasm, some of which is not of the most refined and delicate character, he supports the motion of Colonel Hartley. After remarks from some other members, two gentlemen, Lord North and Hon. Mr. Courtney, rise together, and upon the question being about to be debated which of them is entitled to the floor, both waive their right to speak, and a division of the House is called for, with this result: ayes, 72; noes, 106. The ministry has a majority of 34.

Much of the strength of the government, as has already been intimated, was unquestionably due to the encouraging news which every few days was reaching England of the undoubted success of Lord Cornwallis in the southern campaign. With reference to what happened not quite five months from the day when the great debate of which we have spoken took place in the House of Commons, the London *Chronicle* of Tuesday, November 27, 1781, makes the following announcement, which, all things considered, must have been startling and overwhelming intelligence to the government and to the people of England:

"According to the most authentic accounts, on the 19th of October his lordship [Cornwallis] made a desperate and vigorous sally on the nearest part of the American army, where he carried all before him; but unfortunately a powerful re-enforcement arriving to the assistance of the Americans, the British troops were repulsed, and driven back to their lines with great loss. In this action the left wing of the British army suffered most considerably. Next day his lordship, encompassed with innumerable difficulties, and the enemy being in possession of every advantage, found himself under the unavoidable necessity of surrendering his whole army."