

anchor in a position of great strength, protected by heavy batteries on shore, and guarded from attack by a formidable boom, "composed of large spars bound by chains, and moored along its whole double line with heavy anchors, forming the most stupendous structure of the kind on record." It was most important that this fleet should be disabled, because at any moment when unwatched it might have slipped out to sea, and been down upon the West India Islands or elsewhere. The English admiral, Lord Gambier, would not take the responsibility of attacking such a position, and the senior captains were equally averse to so perilous an enterprise as that which Lord Cochrane proposed.

On the night of the 11th of April, 1809, the wind blowing hard, and the sea being high, Lord Cochrane was at last permitted to make the attack. The service being a desperate one, as the manning and conduct of fireships ever must be, it was left to volunteers; but a sufficiency of officers and men came forward for the purpose. The "Impérieuse" stood in to the edge of a shoal, where she anchored, with one of the two explosion-vessels prepared by Lord Cochrane, made fast to her stern; it being his intention, after having fired the first, to return for the other, to be used as circumstances might suggest. Three frigates were anchored at a short distance from the "Impérieuse," to receive the crews of the fireships on their return. Lord Cochrane had also contemplated that their position there would enable them to support the boats of the fleet, which should have been ready to assist the fireships. "But," says he, with significant brevity, "the boats of the fleet were not, for some reason or other, made use of at all."

Accompanied by one lieutenant (Bissel) and four seamen, Lord Cochrane went on board the largest of the explosion-vessels, containing fifteen hundred barrels of powder, several hundred shells, and nearly three thousand hand-grenades. The fireships were to follow. Drifting through the darkness, the gallant six soon neared the estimated position of the French ships, and Lord Cochrane having kindled with his own hand the port fires, they hurried into the boat, and pulled away for their lives, with a strong wind and sea against them, which materially retarded their progress.

"To our consternation, the fuses, which had been constructed to burn fifteen minutes, lasted little more than half that time, when the vessel blew up, filling the air with shells, grenades, and rockets; whilst the downward and lateral force of the explosion raised a solitary mountain of water, from the breaking of which in all directions our little boat narrowly escaped being swamped. In one respect it was, perhaps, fortunate for us that the fuses did not burn the time calculated, as, from the little way we had made against the strong wind and tide, the rockets and shells from the exploded vessel went over us. Had we been in the line of their descent at the moment of explosion, our destruction from the shower of shells and other missiles would have been inevitable.

"The explosion-vessel did her work well, the effect constituting one of the grandest artificial spectacles imaginable. For a moment the sky was red with the lurid glare arising from the simultaneous ignition of 1500 barrels of powder. On this gigantic flash subsiding, the air seemed alive with shells, grenades, rockets, and masses of timber, the wreck of the shattered vessel; whilst the water was strewn with spars shaken out of the

enormous boom, on which, according to the subsequent testimony of Captain Proteau, whose frigate lay just within the boom, the vessel had brought up before she exploded. The sea was convulsed as by an earthquake, rising, as has been said, in a huge wave, on whose crest our boat was lifted like a cork, and as suddenly dropped into a vast trough, out of which, as it closed upon us with the rush of a whirlpool, none expected to emerge. The skill of the boat's crew, however, overcame the threatened danger, which passed away as suddenly as it had arisen, and in a few minutes nothing but a heavy rolling sea had to be encountered, all having again become silence and darkness."

By the *monstre* explosion the boom was shattered, and a clear way made for the fire-ships. Out of twenty-five only five approached the enemy, and even these did no damage. The alarm caused by them, however, was so great that the French ships cut their cables and drifted ashore. Daylight revealed the helpless condition of Villeneuve's fleet, and Cochrane anxiously signalled for the advance of the British ships—"All the enemy's ships, except two, are on shore"—"The enemy's ships can be destroyed"—"Half the fleet can destroy the enemy"—"The frigates alone can destroy the enemy"—"The enemy is preparing to heave off." No reply was vouchsafed, save the acknowledgment that the signals had been observed!

The conduct of Lord Gambier at this juncture forms a disgraceful episode in the naval history of England. It would be painful to dwell on the subject, but it is only right to state that it was not Lord Cochrane's fault that an attack of unparalleled daring was not followed by complete success.

AN HOUR WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

WEARIED with the tediousness of the debates in Congress, which (unlike those of our cherished British Parliament, that resemble the discourse of the ancient philosopher, "on all things and some others besides"—*de rebus omnibus et quibusdam aliis*)—are usually confined to a very limited and domestic range, we at length seized an hour for paying our respects to President Pierce. We had been duly provided with an introductory letter some time before, from New York, by a politician of the most "rowdy" order; but, having some doubts whether our friend was now in estimation at "the White House," in consequence of his having declined to put the wheels in motion, or "pull the wires" for a re-nomination, had hitherto refrained from presenting it.

In this emergency we were recommended to have recourse to the advice of Sergeant —, a noted Hibernian official, once, we believe, an officer (non-commissioned) in the British army, but who now presides over the door department of the chief magisterial residence of the United States with an ability and potentiality truly astonishing. The Sergeant, we were informed (we regret his name has escaped our recollection, and that we cannot thus in these pages hand him down to that immortality of which he is worthy), was the most powerful man in the whole length and breadth of the Republic. "He wakes up the President," said a gentleman to

us, "in the morning, takes care of him all day long, and at night puts him to bed." It was accordingly not without some species of awe that we approached this specimen of the Western Cerberus; but truth compels us to add, he was a far more agreeable representative of his order than any we had ever found in the eastern hemisphere. Whether it was or not that he retained the hereditary disposition of his countrymen for "blarney," we are ignorant; but certain it is, he received us with eminent suavity, *the sincerity* of which we should have doubted, had he not in the sequel proved to be wholly disinterested. Had the Sergeant merely contented himself with assuring us that we were "welcome as flowers in May," we should have deemed it but a compliment due to any stranger; but, to our astonishment, he greeted us with the information that we should be more cordially received than either Prince Albert or the Prince of Wales, "until they had taken out their first papers," that is, expressed their intention of renouncing allegiance to Queen Victoria, and becoming free and independent American citizens.

Eminently flattered by the address, we bowed, and were bowed by the Sergeant in return into the waiting-room, the brace looking, we doubt not, more like the ancient *preux chevaliers* than those well-known Roman soothsayers whom Cicero, or some other worthy of old, used to admire for their gravity and command of countenance, in meeting in the highway without laughing in each others' faces. We should first, however, premise that it is a considerable step from the halls of the legislature to the presidential mansion. On arriving at the opposite extremity of Pennsylvania Avenue, you find the White House on a slight elevation to the right, rising but little above a small pestiferous burn named the "Tiber," in front. The present Italian river is a translucent and respectable stream in comparison to this transatlantic namesake, and the position of "the People's House," as the mansion is sometimes also termed, is consequently highly unhealthy.

On entering, we were immediately convinced that in all senses of the word it was worthy of this name, for the sovereign people there assembled, and others whom we afterwards saw, seemed to consider it entirely their own, and were accustomed to enter it at pleasure. Our friend the model door-keeper who received us—as we believe he receives all strangers—with such courtesy, follows a very different course with the natives, or adopted citizens of the model Republic. He would evidently dispense with the visits of the great majority if he could, but he does not venture to say so, inasmuch as the popular sovereign would at once despotically turn him out of office, should he dare to evince the slightest appearance of disrespect to his liege lord. All that poor Pat—who evidently is a man of innate amenity—can do is to let them pass in with resignation. He is all-powerful with the President; but any attempt to control the people, even in the shape of door-mats and spittoons, he has long since seemingly given up in despair. Two popular sovereigns accordingly entered along with us—one a huge Kentucky farmer, the other a Chicago office-hunter.

On passing the portal, you are conducted, or make your way, to a large elegant levée room, about ninety feet in length and thirty in breadth, to the left. Thence you enter, at pleasure, a still more handsomely furnished drawing-room—oval—on the right. Here the President receives his company when he holds a levée, and they pass out by a red-coloured but similarly decorated chamber, to the right. It is rare, however, that he holds such ceremonies; though, at his usual evening receptions, the rooms are crowded, and a most miscellaneous assemblage is then to be found. If you desire to see the chief magistrate of the country by day, you walk up to a diminutive and exceedingly plain room on the second floor, where his private apartments are. Only a few maps, and a small print of Washington, adorn this most unpretending of all official apartments. A table stands in the middle of the room, surmounted by a few newspapers; and you are, perhaps, engaged in perusing one of them, when an unassuming-looking gentleman, the President of the mighty Republic, suddenly enters, and, taking you by the hand, says he is "glad to see you." If welcome, or of note, you will be conducted by him into a room half the dimensions, and plainer still. It is his private closet, or sitting-room, and its aspect is positively bald. Scarcely a letter or vestige of paper is to be seen on the table, and some large books of reports alone adorn the walls. The President, too, is just as unpretending as he looks, and, though eminently self-possessed, as unassuming as his apartment. It is difficult to conceive the ruler of a great country so plain—and so plain without the slightest loss of dignity. He addresses all as if they were on a perfect level with himself; and, truth to say, they are so, equally now and on his descent from power. He is rarely, however, treated without respect; and it frequently becomes necessary for him, on the other hand, to show that he is a thorough wide-awake man of the world. The customers he meets with are sometimes rough, the applications he receives are often strange; and it consequently becomes necessary for him to become emphatic. Having no place to ask for, of course we were made unusually welcome, and honoured with an interview so long that we should have felt ourselves guilty of intrusion, had we not heard the crowd of hungry applicants stamping by the adjoining door. We saw that he wished us to remain; but it would be improper for us to repeat, in a public journal, the conversation which ensued in private. Suffice it to say that the President's remarks strictly corresponded with his policy. He expressed sympathy with the popular cause in Europe, and hoped to see it triumphant; but would neither interfere officially, nor permit American citizens to interfere, unless they first denationalized themselves. On the other hand, while such was his attitude towards European powers, he was equally resolved to resist their intervention in American affairs.

It was difficult to conceive how a man such as this should have become so unpopular; but, as already explained, it arose from the unhappy disposition and despotic conduct of his principal

secretary of state. The other members of the cabinet were polite and gentlemanly men—JEFFERSON DAVIS, a high-spirited Southron, though he upheld slavery as a natural right, and CALEB CUSHING, a Northern man, who was ready to prove by the Bible that it was a divine institution. The former of these gentlemen was Secretary of War; the other, from Massachusetts, filled the post of Attorney-General. Both possessed more than average abilities; but the remaining members of the cabinet were mere nonentities; and the Postmaster-General, we think, was the laziest official we ever saw in our life, as he sat all day with his legs upon a table, whittling at the arm of his chair, and believing the American post-office (the worst) the best of all human institutions.

We were afterwards present at an evening presidential reception, and a more heterogeneous assemblage was perhaps never witnessed: ladies from Boston, pluming themselves upon their intellect; fine, though tawdry folk from New York, who loudly, in so far as vulgar display was concerned, vaunted their wealth; and pretty Quakeresses from Philadelphia, with the smartest bonnets we ever saw, piquing themselves on their birth. Huge Western farmers, too, were there; with no lack of shrewd Yankee speculators in wooden hams and artificial nutmegs. The evening's entertainment wound up by the entrance of some Cherokee or Iroquois Indians, who seemed somewhat to oppress their "big father," as they termed the President, by the depth of their devotion, and appeared to have been participating largely in the excitement of "fire-water." We quitted at eleven, when several hundreds of the company still lingered, and we could not help commiserating the President, who during several hours had been forced to stand and shake hands with at least as many thousands.

PAST *versus* PRESENT.

I AM tired of hearing about the "good old times," which some folk, who ought to know better, are so fond of casting in our teeth. When were they? Where are we to look for them? I fear, only in the imagination of these well-meaning but silly and misguided people. The old times were comparatively bad times; this much-abused nineteenth century is a great and increasing improvement on them; and "there's a good time coming" better still.

Can any one in his senses, after reading Lord Macaulay's History, or any other (if such there be) which condescends to forget the "dignity of history," and introduce us to the everyday life of our forefathers, honestly wish that the state of things, at any given period of the past, could be reproduced at the present day? Would he wish to return to the ignorance and lawlessness of the middle ages? Would the poor be better off, or the rich more comfortable? Such a wish can only be the offspring of ignorance; and the most inveterate *laudator temporis acti*, if he be a candid man, would be cured by a judicious course of historical reading. If not, argument would be wasted on

him: nor need any worse punishment be wished for him, than that he could be transported for a year into the midst of his own ancestors, of whatever date he liked. When the first feelings of natural surprise and curiosity had passed off, and when he had indulged in a little antiquarian research, he would speedily arrive at a perception that he was deprived of most of the conveniences, refinements, and comforts of civilized life, and would be shocked and disgusted at every turn. Long before the expiration of the year, he would eagerly desire to be restored to his despised 1860, no matter what century he might have selected for his experiment. So true is it that men too often do not value advantages till they are deprived of them, and are ungratefully disposed to think the condition of other men better than their own, instead of making the best of matters, and living content with such things as they have.

"The good of other times let others state;
I think it happy I was born so late."

I utterly scout the idea of the progressive and continual degeneracy of mankind, physical, intellectual, or moral. Don't believe it. There have not been wanting sciolists and pessimists in every age to uphold this theory, which is entirely confuted by the deductions of more accurate thinkers. And though our great-grandchildren, we hope, will excel us as much as we have surpassed our great-grandmothers, we may take it for granted that some of them will be found foolish enough to extol us as paragons of everything good and wise. On the same principle, people when they grow old are apt to imagine that nothing now is worthy to be compared with what they remember in their youth. Summers *were* summers then, and the world was altogether more beautiful. People were more handsome, orators more eloquent, and fashions more becoming in those days, they think. This is simply because, at that time, their perceptions and feelings were keener and more lively, and they were more able to admire and enjoy. They attribute the alteration to outward things, when in reality it has taken place in themselves. The change, in fact, is not objective, but subjective.

Depend upon it, the law of progress and improvement is visible all around us—in England, at all events; and it is a mistake to go about in a discontented spirit, looking wistfully on the past, and saying, "There were giants on the earth in those days." The matter has been settled long ago by the wisest of men, or rather by divine inspiration (Eccles. vii. 10): "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this."

In happy keeping with this divine text is the experience of the well-known American author, Albert Barnes, in his recent treatise, entitled, "Life at Threescore."

"Permit me to say that I am, at this period of my life, *hopeful* in regard to the world: to truth, to religion, to liberty, to the advancement of the race. The world is growing better, not worse. It is better now than it was sixty years ago; it is be-