

Chapter XVI

Martin Disembarks From That Noble And Fast-Sailing Line-Of-Packet Ship, 'The Screw', At The Port Of New York, In The United States Of America. He Makes Some Acquaintances, And Dines At A Boarding-House. The Particulars Of Those Transactions

Some trifling excitement prevailed upon the very brink and margin of the land of liberty; for an alderman had been elected the day before; and Party Feeling naturally running rather high on such an exciting occasion, the friends of the disappointed candidate had found it necessary to assert the great principles of Purity of Election and Freedom of opinion by breaking a few legs and arms, and furthermore pursuing one obnoxious gentleman through the streets with the design of hitting his nose. These good-humoured little outbursts of the popular fancy were not in themselves sufficiently remarkable to create any great stir, after the lapse of a whole night; but they found fresh life and notoriety in the breath of the newsboys, who not only proclaimed them with shrill yells in all the highways and byways of the town, upon the wharves and among the shipping, but on the deck and down in the cabins of the steamboat; which, before she touched the shore, was boarded and overrun by a legion of those young citizens.

'Here's this morning's New York Sewer!' cried one. 'Here's this morning's New York Stabber! Here's the New York Family Spy! Here's the New York Private Listener! Here's the New York Peeper! Here's the New York Plunderer! Here's the New York Keyhole Reporter! Here's the New York Rowdy Journal! Here's all the New York papers! Here's full particulars of the patriotic locofoco movement yesterday, in which the whigs was so chawed up; and the last Alabama gouging case; and the interesting Arkansas dool with Bowie knives; and all the Political, Commercial, and Fashionable News. Here they are! Here they are! Here's the papers, here's the papers!'

'Here's the Sewer!' cried another. 'Here's the New York Sewer! Here's some of the twelfth thousand of to-day's Sewer, with the best accounts of the markets, and all the shipping news, and four whole columns of country correspondence, and a full account of the Ball at Mrs White's last night, where all the beauty and fashion of New York was assembled; with the Sewer's own particulars of the private lives of all the ladies that was there! Here's the Sewer! Here's some of the twelfth thousand of the New York Sewer! Here's the Sewer's exposure of the Wall Street Gang, and the Sewer's exposure of the Washington Gang, and the Sewer's exclusive account of a flagrant act of dishonesty committed by the Secretary of State when he was eight years old; now communicated, at a great expense, by his own nurse. Here's the Sewer! Here's the New York Sewer, in its twelfth thousand, with a

whole column of New Yorkers to be shown up, and all their names printed! Here's the Sewer's article upon the Judge that tried him, day afore yesterday, for libel, and the Sewer's tribute to the independent Jury that didn't convict him, and the Sewer's account of what they might have expected if they had! Here's the Sewer, here's the Sewer! Here's the wide-awake Sewer; always on the lookout; the leading Journal of the United States, now in its twelfth thousand, and still a-printing off: - Here's the New York Sewer!

'It is in such enlightened means,' said a voice almost in Martin's ear, 'that the bubbling passions of my country find a vent.'

Martin turned involuntarily, and saw, standing close at his side, a sallow gentleman, with sunken cheeks, black hair, small twinkling eyes, and a singular expression hovering about that region of his face, which was not a frown, nor a leer, and yet might have been mistaken at the first glance for either. Indeed it would have been difficult, on a much closer acquaintance, to describe it in any more satisfactory terms than as a mixed expression of vulgar cunning and conceit. This gentleman wore a rather broad-brimmed hat for the greater wisdom of his appearance; and had his arms folded for the greater impressiveness of his attitude. He was somewhat shabbily dressed in a blue surtout reaching nearly to his ankles, short loose trousers of the same colour, and a faded buff waistcoat, through which a discoloured shirt-frill struggled to force itself into notice, as asserting an equality of civil rights with the other portions of his dress, and maintaining a declaration of Independence on its own account. His feet, which were of unusually large proportions, were leisurely crossed before him as he half leaned against, half sat upon, the steamboat's bulwark; and his thick cane, shod with a mighty ferule at one end and armed with a great metal knob at the other, depended from a line-and-tassel on his wrist. Thus attired, and thus composed into an aspect of great profundity, the gentleman twitched up the right-hand corner of his mouth and his right eye simultaneously, and said, once more:

'It is in such enlightened means that the bubbling passions of my country find a vent.'

As he looked at Martin, and nobody else was by, Martin inclined his head, and said:

'You allude to - ?'

'To the Palladium of rational Liberty at home, sir, and the dread of Foreign oppression abroad,' returned the gentleman, as he pointed with his cane to an uncommonly dirty newsboy with one eye. 'To the Envy of the world, sir, and the leaders of Human Civilization. Let me

ask you sir,' he added, bringing the ferule of his stick heavily upon the deck with the air of a man who must not be equivocated with, 'how do you like my Country?'

'I am hardly prepared to answer that question yet,' said Martin 'seeing that I have not been ashore.'

'Well, I should expect you were not prepared, sir,' said the gentleman, 'to behold such signs of National Prosperity as those?'

He pointed to the vessels lying at the wharves; and then gave a vague flourish with his stick, as if he would include the air and water, generally, in this remark.

'Really,' said Martin, 'I don't know. Yes. I think I was.'

The gentleman glanced at him with a knowing look, and said he liked his policy. It was natural, he said, and it pleased him as a philosopher to observe the prejudices of human nature.

'You have brought, I see, sir,' he said, turning round towards Martin, and resting his chin on the top of his stick, 'the usual amount of misery and poverty and ignorance and crime, to be located in the bosom of the great Republic. Well, sir! let 'em come on in shiploads from the old country. When vessels are about to founder, the rats are said to leave 'em. There is considerable of truth, I find, in that remark.'

'The old ship will keep afloat a year or two longer yet, perhaps,' said Martin with a smile, partly occasioned by what the gentleman said, and partly by his manner of saying it, which was odd enough for he emphasised all the small words and syllables in his discourse, and left the others to take care of themselves; as if he thought the larger parts of speech could be trusted alone, but the little ones required to be constantly looked after.

'Hope is said by the poet, sir,' observed the gentleman, 'to be the nurse of young Desire.'

Martin signified that he had heard of the cardinal virtue in question serving occasionally in that domestic capacity.

'She will not rear her infant in the present instance, sir, you'll find,' observed the gentleman.

'Time will show,' said Martin.

The gentleman nodded his head gravely; and said, 'What is your name, sir?'

Martin told him.

'How old are you, sir?'

Martin told him.

'What is your profession, sir?'

Martin told him that also.

'What is your destination, sir?' inquired the gentleman.

'Really,' said Martin laughing, 'I can't satisfy you in that particular, for I don't know it myself.'

'Yes?' said the gentleman.

'No,' said Martin.

The gentleman adjusted his cane under his left arm, and took a more deliberate and complete survey of Martin than he had yet had leisure to make. When he had completed his inspection, he put out his right hand, shook Martin's hand, and said:

'My name is Colonel Diver, sir. I am the Editor of the New York Rowdy Journal.'

Martin received the communication with that degree of respect which an announcement so distinguished appeared to demand. 'The New York Rowdy Journal, sir,' resumed the colonel, 'is, as I expect you know, the organ of our aristocracy in this city.'

'Oh! there IS an aristocracy here, then?' said Martin. 'Of what is it composed?'

'Of intelligence, sir,' replied the colonel; 'of intelligence and virtue. And of their necessary consequence in this republic - dollars, sir.'

Martin was very glad to hear this, feeling well assured that if intelligence and virtue led, as a matter of course, to the acquisition of dollars, he would speedily become a great capitalist. He was about to express the gratification such news afforded him, when he was interrupted by the captain of the ship, who came up at the moment to shake hands with the colonel; and who, seeing a well-dressed stranger on the deck (for Martin had thrown aside his cloak), shook hands with

him also. This was an unspeakable relief to Martin, who, in spite of the acknowledged supremacy of Intelligence and virtue in that happy country, would have been deeply mortified to appear before Colonel Diver in the poor character of a steerage passenger.

'Well cap'en!' said the colonel.

'Well colonel,' cried the captain. 'You're looking most uncommon bright, sir. I can hardly realise its being you, and that's a fact.'

'A good passage, cap'en?' inquired the colonel, taking him aside,

'Well now! It was a pretty spanking run, sir,' said, or rather sung, the captain, who was a genuine New Englander; 'considerin' the weather.'

'Yes?' said the colonel.

'Well! It was, sir,' said the captain. 'I've just now sent a boy up to your office with the passenger-list, colonel.'

'You haven't got another boy to spare, p'raps, cap'en?' said the colonel, in a tone almost amounting to severity.

'I guess there air a dozen if you want 'em, colonel,' said the captain.

'One moderate big 'un could convey a dozen champagne, perhaps,' observed the colonel, musing, 'to my office. You said a spanking run, I think?'

'Well, so I did,' was the reply.

'It's very nigh, you know,' observed the colonel. 'I'm glad it was a spanking run, cap'en. Don't mind about quarts if you're short of 'em. The boy can as well bring four-and-twenty pints, and travel twice as once. - A first-rate spanker, cap'en, was it? Yes?'

'A most e - ternal spanker,' said the skipper.

'I admire at your good fortun, cap'en. You might loan me a corkscrew at the same time, and half-a-dozen glasses if you liked. However bad the elements combine against my country's noble packet-ship, the Screw, sir,' said the colonel, turning to Martin, and drawing a flourish on the surface of the deck with his cane, 'her passage either way is almost certain to eventuate a spanker!'

The captain, who had the Sewer below at that moment, lunching expensively in one cabin, while the amiable Stabber was drinking himself into a state of blind madness in another, took a cordial leave

of his friend the colonel, and hurried away to dispatch the champagne; well knowing (as it afterwards appeared) that if he failed to conciliate the editor of the Rowdy Journal, that potentate would denounce him and his ship in large capitals before he was a day older; and would probably assault the memory of his mother also, who had not been dead more than twenty years. The colonel being again left alone with Martin, checked him as he was moving away, and offered in consideration of his being an Englishman, to show him the town and to introduce him, if such were his desire, to a genteel boarding-house. But before they entered on these proceedings (he said), he would beseech the honour of his company at the office of the Rowdy Journal, to partake of a bottle of champagne of his own importation.

All this was so extremely kind and hospitable, that Martin, though it was quite early in the morning, readily acquiesced. So, instructing Mark, who was deeply engaged with his friend and her three children, that when he had done assisting them, and had cleared the baggage, he was to wait for further orders at the Rowdy Journal Office, Martin accompanied his new friend on shore.

They made their way as they best could through the melancholy crowd of emigrants upon the wharf, who, grouped about their beds and boxes, with the bare ground below them and the bare sky above, might have fallen from another planet, for anything they knew of the country; and walked for some short distance along a busy street, bounded on one side by the quays and shipping; and on the other by a long row of staring red-brick storehouses and offices, ornamented with more black boards and white letters, and more white boards and black letters, than Martin had ever seen before, in fifty times the space. Presently they turned up a narrow street, and presently into other narrow streets, until at last they stopped before a house whereon was painted in great characters, 'ROWDY JOURNAL.'

The colonel, who had walked the whole way with one hand in his breast, his head occasionally wagging from side to side, and his hat thrown back upon his ears, like a man who was oppressed to inconvenience by a sense of his own greatness, led the way up a dark and dirty flight of stairs into a room of similar character, all littered and bestrewn with odds and ends of newspapers and other crumpled fragments, both in proof and manuscript. Behind a mangy old writing-table in this apartment sat a figure with a stump of a pen in its mouth and a great pair of scissors in its right hand, clipping and slicing at a file of Rowdy Journals; and it was such a laughable figure that Martin had some difficulty in preserving his gravity, though conscious of the close observation of Colonel Diver.

The individual who sat clipping and slicing as aforesaid at the Rowdy Journals, was a small young gentleman of very juvenile appearance,

and unwholesomely pale in the face; partly, perhaps, from intense thought, but partly, there is no doubt, from the excessive use of tobacco, which he was at that moment chewing vigorously. He wore his shirt-collar turned down over a black ribbon; and his lank hair, a fragile crop, was not only smoothed and parted back from his brow, that none of the Poetry of his aspect might be lost, but had, here and there, been grubbed up by the roots; which accounted for his loftiest developments being somewhat pimply. He had that order of nose on which the envy of mankind has bestowed the appellation 'snub,' and it was very much turned up at the end, as with a lofty scorn. Upon the upper lip of this young gentleman were tokens of a sandy down; so very, very smooth and scant, that, though encouraged to the utmost, it looked more like a recent trace of gingerbread than the fair promise of a moustache; and this conjecture, his apparently tender age went far to strengthen. He was intent upon his work. Every time he snapped the great pair of scissors, he made a corresponding motion with his jaws, which gave him a very terrible appearance.

Martin was not long in determining within himself that this must be Colonel Diver's son; the hope of the family, and future mainspring of the Rowdy Journal. Indeed he had begun to say that he presumed this was the colonel's little boy, and that it was very pleasant to see him playing at Editor in all the guilelessness of childhood, when the colonel proudly interposed and said:

'My War Correspondent, sir - Mr Jefferson Brick!'

Martin could not help starting at this unexpected announcement, and the consciousness of the irretrievable mistake he had nearly made.

Mr Brick seemed pleased with the sensation he produced upon the stranger, and shook hands with him, with an air of patronage designed to reassure him, and to let him blow that there was no occasion to be frightened, for he (Brick) wouldn't hurt him.

'You have heard of Jefferson Brick, I see, sir,' quoth the colonel, with a smile. 'England has heard of Jefferson Brick. Europe has heard of Jefferson Brick. Let me see. When did you leave England, sir?'

'Five weeks ago,' said Martin.

'Five weeks ago,' repeated the colonel, thoughtfully; as he took his seat upon the table, and swung his legs. 'Now let me ask you, sir which of Mr Brick's articles had become at that time the most obnoxious to the British Parliament and the Court of Saint James's?'

'Upon my word,' said Martin, 'I - '

'I have reason to know, sir,' interrupted the colonel, 'that the aristocratic circles of your country quail before the name of Jefferson Brick. I should like to be informed, sir, from your lips, which of his sentiments has struck the deadliest blow - '

'At the hundred heads of the Hydra of Corruption now grovelling in the dust beneath the lance of Reason, and spouting up to the universal arch above us, its sanguinary gore,' said Mr Brick, putting on a little blue cloth cap with a glazed front, and quoting his last article.

'The libation of freedom, Brick' - hinted the colonel.

' - Must sometimes be quaffed in blood, colonel,' cried Brick. And when he said 'blood,' he gave the great pair of scissors a sharp snap, as if THEY said blood too, and were quite of his opinion.

This done, they both looked at Martin, pausing for a reply.

'Upon my life,' said Martin, who had by this time quite recovered his usual coolness, 'I can't give you any satisfactory information about it; for the truth is that I - '

'Stop!' cried the colonel, glancing sternly at his war correspondent and giving his head one shake after every sentence. 'That you never heard of Jefferson Brick, sir. That you never read Jefferson Brick, sir. That you never saw the Rowdy Journal, sir. That you never knew, sir, of its mighty influence upon the cabinets of Europe. Yes?'

'That's what I was about to observe, certainly,' said Martin.

'Keep cool, Jefferson,' said the colonel gravely. 'Don't bust! oh you Europeans! After that, let's have a glass of wine!' So saying, he got down from the table, and produced, from a basket outside the door, a bottle of champagne, and three glasses.

'Mr Jefferson Brick, sir,' said the colonel, filling Martin's glass and his own, and pushing the bottle to that gentleman, 'will give us a sentiment.'

'Well, sir!' cried the war correspondent, 'Since you have concluded to call upon me, I will respond. I will give you, sir, The Rowdy Journal and its brethren; the well of Truth, whose waters are black from being composed of printers' ink, but are quite clear enough for my country to behold the shadow of her Destiny reflected in.'

'Hear, hear!' cried the colonel, with great complacency. 'There are flowery components, sir, in the language of my friend?'

'Very much so, indeed,' said Martin.

'There is to-day's Rowdy, sir,' observed the colonel, handing him a paper. 'You'll find Jefferson Brick at his usual post in the van of human civilization and moral purity.'

The colonel was by this time seated on the table again. Mr Brick also took up a position on that same piece of furniture; and they fell to drinking pretty hard. They often looked at Martin as he read the paper, and then at each other. When he laid it down, which was not until they had finished a second bottle, the colonel asked him what he thought of it.

'Why, it's horribly personal,' said Martin.

The colonel seemed much flattered by this remark; and said he hoped it was.

'We are independent here, sir,' said Mr Jefferson Brick. 'We do as we like.'

'If I may judge from this specimen,' returned Martin, 'there must be a few thousands here, rather the reverse of independent, who do as they don't like.'

'Well! They yield to the popular mind of the Popular Instructor, sir,' said the colonel. 'They rile up, sometimes; but in general we have a hold upon our citizens, both in public and in private life, which is as much one of the ennobling institutions of our happy country as - '

'As nigger slavery itself,' suggested Mr Brick.

'En - tirely so,' remarked the colonel.

'Pray,' said Martin, after some hesitation, 'may I venture to ask, with reference to a case I observe in this paper of yours, whether the Popular Instructor often deals in - I am at a loss to express it without giving you offence - in forgery? In forged letters, for instance,' he pursued, for the colonel was perfectly calm and quite at his ease, 'solemnly purporting to have been written at recent periods by living men?'

'Well, sir!' replied the colonel. 'It does, now and then.'

'And the popular instructed - what do they do?' asked Martin.

'Buy 'em:' said the colonel.

Mr Jefferson Brick expectorated and laughed; the former copiously, the latter approvingly.

'Buy 'em by hundreds of thousands,' resumed the colonel. 'We are a smart people here, and can appreciate smartness.'

'Is smartness American for forgery?' asked Martin.

'Well!' said the colonel, 'I expect it's American for a good many things that you call by other names. But you can't help yourself in Europe. We can.'

'And do, sometimes,' thought Martin. 'You help yourselves with very little ceremony, too!'

'At all events, whatever name we choose to employ,' said the colonel, stooping down to roll the third empty bottle into a corner after the other two, 'I suppose the art of forgery was not invented here sir?'

'I suppose not,' replied Martin.

'Nor any other kind of smartness I reckon?'

'Invented! No, I presume not.'

'Well!' said the colonel; 'then we got it all from the old country, and the old country's to blame for it, and not the new 'un. There's an end of THAT. Now, if Mr Jefferson Brick and you will be so good as to clear, I'll come out last, and lock the door.'

Rightly interpreting this as the signal for their departure, Martin walked downstairs after the war correspondent, who preceded him with great majesty. The colonel following, they left the Rowdy Journal Office and walked forth into the streets; Martin feeling doubtful whether he ought to kick the colonel for having presumed to speak to him, or whether it came within the bounds of possibility that he and his establishment could be among the boasted usages of that regenerated land.

It was clear that Colonel Diver, in the security of his strong position, and in his perfect understanding of the public sentiment, cared very little what Martin or anybody else thought about him. His high-spiced wares were made to sell, and they sold; and his thousands of readers could as rationally charge their delight in filth upon him, as a glutton can shift upon his cook the responsibility of his beastly excess. Nothing would have delighted the colonel more than to be told that no such man as he could walk in high success the streets of any other country in the world; for that would only have been a logical

assurance to him of the correct adaptation of his labours to the prevailing taste, and of his being strictly and peculiarly a national feature of America.

They walked a mile or more along a handsome street which the colonel said was called Broadway, and which Mr Jefferson Brick said 'whipped the universe.' Turning, at length, into one of the numerous streets which branched from this main thoroughfare, they stopped before a rather mean-looking house with jalousie blinds to every window; a flight of steps before the green street-door; a shining white ornament on the rails on either side like a petrified pineapple, polished; a little oblong plate of the same material over the knocker whereon the name of 'Pawkins' was engraved; and four accidental pigs looking down the area.

The colonel knocked at this house with the air of a man who lived there; and an Irish girl popped her head out of one of the top windows to see who it was. Pending her journey downstairs, the pigs were joined by two or three friends from the next street, in company with whom they lay down sociably in the gutter.

'Is the major indoors?' inquired the colonel, as he entered.

'Is it the master, sir?' returned the girl, with a hesitation which seemed to imply that they were rather flush of majors in that establishment.

'The master!' said Colonel Diver, stopping short and looking round at his war correspondent.

'Oh! The depressing institutions of that British empire, colonel!' said Jefferson Brick. 'Master!'

'What's the matter with the word?' asked Martin.

'I should hope it was never heard in our country, sir; that's all,' said Jefferson Brick; 'except when it is used by some degraded Help, as new to the blessings of our form of government, as this Help is. There are no masters here.'

'All 'owners,' are they?' said Martin.

Mr Jefferson Brick followed in the Rowdy Journal's footsteps without returning any answer. Martin took the same course, thinking as he went, that perhaps the free and independent citizens, who in their moral elevation, owned the colonel for their master, might render better homage to the goddess, Liberty, in nightly dreams upon the oven of a Russian Serf.

The colonel led the way into a room at the back of the house upon the ground-floor, light, and of fair dimensions, but exquisitely uncomfortable; having nothing in it but the four cold white walls and ceiling, a mean carpet, a dreary waste of dining-table reaching from end to end, and a bewildering collection of cane-bottomed chairs. In the further region of this banqueting-hall was a stove, garnished on either side with a great brass spittoon, and shaped in itself like three little iron barrels set up on end in a fender, and joined together on the principle of the Siamese Twins. Before it, swinging himself in a rocking-chair, lounged a large gentleman with his hat on, who amused himself by spitting alternately into the spittoon on the right hand of the stove, and the spittoon on the left, and then working his way back again in the same order. A negro lad in a soiled white jacket was busily engaged in placing on the table two long rows of knives and forks, relieved at intervals by jugs of water; and as he travelled down one side of this festive board, he straightened with his dirty hands the dirtier cloth, which was all askew, and had not been removed since breakfast. The atmosphere of this room was rendered intensely hot and stifling by the stove; but being further flavoured by a sickly gush of soup from the kitchen, and by such remote suggestions of tobacco as lingered within the brazen receptacles already mentioned, it became, to a stranger's senses, almost insupportable.

The gentleman in the rocking-chair having his back towards them, and being much engaged in his intellectual pastime, was not aware of their approach until the colonel, walking up to the stove, contributed his mite towards the support of the left-hand spittoon, just as the major - for it was the major - bore down upon it. Major Pawkins then reserved his fire, and looking upward, said, with a peculiar air of quiet weariness, like a man who had been up all night - an air which Martin had already observed both in the colonel and Mr Jefferson Brick -

'Well, colonel!'

'Here is a gentleman from England, major,' the colonel replied, 'who has concluded to locate himself here if the amount of compensation suits him.'

'I am glad to see you, sir,' observed the major, shaking hands with Martin, and not moving a muscle of his face. 'You are pretty bright, I hope?'

'Never better,' said Martin.

'You are never likely to be,' returned the major. 'You will see the sun shine HERE.'

'I think I remember to have seen it shine at home sometimes,' said Martin, smiling.

'I think not,' replied the major. He said so with a stoical indifference certainly, but still in a tone of firmness which admitted of no further dispute on that point. When he had thus settled the question, he put his hat a little on one side for the greater convenience of scratching his head, and saluted Mr Jefferson Brick with a lazy nod.

Major Pawkins (a gentleman of Pennsylvanian origin) was distinguished by a very large skull, and a great mass of yellow forehead; in deference to which commodities it was currently held in bar-rooms and other such places of resort that the major was a man of huge sagacity. He was further to be known by a heavy eye and a dull slow manner; and for being a man of that kind who - mentally speaking - requires a deal of room to turn himself in. But, in trading on his stock of wisdom, he invariably proceeded on the principle of putting all the goods he had (and more) into his window; and that went a great way with his constituency of admirers. It went a great way, perhaps, with Mr Jefferson Brick, who took occasion to whisper in Martin's ear:

'One of the most remarkable men in our country, sir!'

It must not be supposed, however, that the perpetual exhibition in the market-place of all his stock-in-trade for sale or hire, was the major's sole claim to a very large share of sympathy and support. He was a great politician; and the one article of his creed, in reference to all public obligations involving the good faith and integrity of his country, was, 'run a moist pen slick through everything, and start fresh.' This made him a patriot. In commercial affairs he was a bold speculator. In plainer words he had a most distinguished genius for swindling, and could start a bank, or negotiate a loan, or form a land-jobbing company (entailing ruin, pestilence, and death, on hundreds of families), with any gifted creature in the Union. This made him an admirable man of business. He could hang about a bar-room, discussing the affairs of the nation, for twelve hours together; and in that time could hold forth with more intolerable dulness, chew more tobacco, smoke more tobacco, drink more rum-toddy, mint-julep, gin-sling, and cocktail, than any private gentleman of his acquaintance. This made him an orator and a man of the people. In a word, the major was a rising character, and a popular character, and was in a fair way to be sent by the popular party to the State House of New York, if not in the end to Washington itself. But as a man's private prosperity does not always keep pace with his patriotic devotion to public affairs; and as fraudulent transactions have their downs as well as ups, the major was occasionally under a cloud. Hence, just now

Mrs Pawkins kept a boarding-house, and Major Pawkins rather 'loafed' his time away than otherwise.

'You have come to visit our country, sir, at a season of great commercial depression,' said the major.

'At an alarming crisis,' said the colonel.

'At a period of unprecedented stagnation,' said Mr Jefferson Brick.

'I am sorry to hear that,' returned Martin. 'It's not likely to last, I hope?'

Martin knew nothing about America, or he would have known perfectly well that if its individual citizens, to a man, are to be believed, it always IS depressed, and always IS stagnated, and always IS at an alarming crisis, and never was otherwise; though as a body they are ready to make oath upon the Evangelists at any hour of the day or night, that it is the most thriving and prosperous of all countries on the habitable globe.

'It's not likely to last, I hope?' said Martin.

'Well!' returned the major, 'I expect we shall get along somehow, and come right in the end.'

'We are an elastic country,' said the Rowdy Journal.

'We are a young lion,' said Mr Jefferson Brick.

'We have revivifying and vigorous principles within ourselves,' observed the major. 'Shall we drink a bitter afore dinner, colonel?'

The colonel assenting to this proposal with great alacrity, Major Pawkins proposed an adjournment to a neighbouring bar-room, which, as he observed, was 'only in the next block.' He then referred Martin to Mrs Pawkins for all particulars connected with the rate of board and lodging, and informed him that he would have the pleasure of seeing that lady at dinner, which would soon be ready, as the dinner hour was two o'clock, and it only wanted a quarter now. This reminded him that if the bitter were to be taken at all, there was no time to lose; so he walked off without more ado, and left them to follow if they thought proper.

When the major rose from his rocking-chair before the stove, and so disturbed the hot air and balmy whiff of soup which fanned their brows, the odour of stale tobacco became so decidedly prevalent as to leave no doubt of its proceeding mainly from that gentleman's attire.

Indeed, as Martin walked behind him to the bar-room, he could not help thinking that the great square major, in his listlessness and langour, looked very much like a stale weed himself; such as might be hoed out of the public garden, with great advantage to the decent growth of that preserve, and tossed on some congenial dunghill.

They encountered more weeds in the bar-room, some of whom (being thirsty souls as well as dirty) were pretty stale in one sense, and pretty fresh in another. Among them was a gentleman who, as Martin gathered from the conversation that took place over the bitter, started that afternoon for the Far West on a six months' business tour, and who, as his outfit and equipment for this journey, had just such another shiny hat and just such another little pale valise as had composed the luggage of the gentleman who came from England in the Screw.

They were walking back very leisurely; Martin arm-in-arm with Mr Jefferson Brick, and the major and the colonel side-by-side before them; when, as they came within a house or two of the major's residence, they heard a bell ringing violently. The instant this sound struck upon their ears, the colonel and the major darted off, dashed up the steps and in at the street-door (which stood ajar) like lunatics; while Mr Jefferson Brick, detaching his arm from Martin's, made a precipitate dive in the same direction, and vanished also.

'Good Heaven!' thought Martin. 'The premises are on fire! It was an alarm bell!'

But there was no smoke to be seen, nor any flame, nor was there any smell of fire. As Martin faltered on the pavement, three more gentlemen, with horror and agitation depicted in their faces, came plunging wildly round the street corner; jostled each other on the steps; struggled for an instant; and rushed into the house, a confused heap of arms and legs. Unable to bear it any longer, Martin followed. Even in his rapid progress he was run down, thrust aside, and passed, by two more gentlemen, stark mad, as it appeared, with fierce excitement.

'Where is it?' cried Martin, breathlessly, to a negro whom he encountered in the passage.

'In a eatin room, sa. Kernell, sa, him kep a seat 'side himself, sa.'

'A seat!' cried Martin.

'For a dinnar, sa.'

Martin started at him for a moment, and burst into a hearty laugh; to which the negro, out of his natural good humour and desire to please, so heartily responded, that his teeth shone like a gleam of light. 'You're the pleasantest fellow I have seen yet,' said Martin clapping him on the back, 'and give me a better appetite than bitters.'

With this sentiment he walked into the dining-room and slipped into a chair next the colonel, which that gentleman (by this time nearly through his dinner) had turned down in reserve for him, with its back against the table.

It was a numerous company - eighteen or twenty perhaps. Of these some five or six were ladies, who sat wedged together in a little phalanx by themselves. All the knives and forks were working away at a rate that was quite alarming; very few words were spoken; and everybody seemed to eat his utmost in self-defence, as if a famine were expected to set in before breakfast time to-morrow morning, and it had become high time to assert the first law of nature. The poultry, which may perhaps be considered to have formed the staple of the entertainment - for there was a turkey at the top, a pair of ducks at the bottom, and two fowls in the middle - disappeared as rapidly as if every bird had had the use of its wings, and had flown in desperation down a human throat. The oysters, stewed and pickled, leaped from their capacious reservoirs, and slid by scores into the mouths of the assembly. The sharpest pickles vanished, whole cucumbers at once, like sugar-plums, and no man winked his eye. Great heaps of indigestible matter melted away as ice before the sun. It was a solemn and an awful thing to see. Dyspeptic individuals bolted their food in wedges; feeding, not themselves, but broods of nightmares, who were continually standing at livery within them. Spare men, with lank and rigid cheeks, came out unsatisfied from the destruction of heavy dishes, and glared with watchful eyes upon the pastry. What Mrs Pawkins felt each day at dinner-time is hidden from all human knowledge. But she had one comfort. It was very soon over.

When the colonel had finished his dinner, which event took place while Martin, who had sent his plate for some turkey, was waiting to begin, he asked him what he thought of the boarders, who were from all parts of the Union, and whether he would like to know any particulars concerning them.

'Pray,' said Martin, 'who is that sickly little girl opposite, with the tight round eyes? I don't see anybody here, who looks like her mother, or who seems to have charge of her.'

'Do you mean the matron in blue, sir?' asked the colonel, with emphasis. 'That is Mrs Jefferson Brick, sir.'

'No, no,' said Martin, 'I mean the little girl, like a doll; directly opposite.'

'Well, sir!' cried the colonel. 'THAT is Mrs Jefferson Brick.'

Martin glanced at the colonel's face, but he was quite serious.

'Bless my soul! I suppose there will be a young Brick then, one of these days?' said Martin.

'There are two young Bricks already, sir,' returned the colonel.

The matron looked so uncommonly like a child herself, that Martin could not help saying as much. 'Yes, sir,' returned the colonel, 'but some institutions develop human nature; others retard it.'

'Jefferson Brick,' he observed after a short silence, in commendation of his correspondent, 'is one of the most remarkable men in our country, sir!'

This had passed almost in a whisper, for the distinguished gentleman alluded to sat on Martin's other hand.

'Pray, Mr Brick,' said Martin, turning to him, and asking a question more for conversation's sake than from any feeling of interest in its subject, 'who is that;' he was going to say 'young' but thought it prudent to eschew the word - 'that very short gentleman yonder, with the red nose?'

'That is Professor Mullit, sir,' replied Jefferson.

'May I ask what he is professor of?' asked Martin.

'Of education, sir,' said Jefferson Brick.

'A sort of schoolmaster, possibly?' Martin ventured to observe.

'He is a man of fine moral elements, sir, and not commonly endowed,' said the war correspondent. 'He felt it necessary, at the last election for President, to repudiate and denounce his father, who voted on the wrong interest. He has since written some powerful pamphlets, under the signature of 'Suturb,' or Brutus reversed. He is one of the most remarkable men in our country, sir.'

'There seem to be plenty of 'em,' thought Martin, 'at any rate.'

Pursuing his inquiries Martin found that there were no fewer than four majors present, two colonels, one general, and a captain, so that

he could not help thinking how strongly officered the American militia must be; and wondering very much whether the officers commanded each other; or if they did not, where on earth the privates came from. There seemed to be no man there without a title; for those who had not attained to military honours were either doctors, professors, or reverends. Three very hard and disagreeable gentlemen were on missions from neighbouring States; one on monetary affairs, one on political, one on sectarian. Among the ladies, there were Mrs Pawkins, who was very straight, bony, and silent; and a wiry-faced old damsel, who held strong sentiments touching the rights of women, and had diffused the same in lectures; but the rest were strangely devoid of individual traits of character, insomuch that any one of them might have changed minds with the other, and nobody would have found it out. These, by the way, were the only members of the party who did not appear to be among the most remarkable people in the country.

Several of the gentlemen got up, one by one, and walked off as they swallowed their last morsel; pausing generally by the stove for a minute or so to refresh themselves at the brass spittoons. A few sedentary characters, however, remained at table full a quarter of an hour, and did not rise until the ladies rose, when all stood up.

'Where are they going?' asked Martin, in the ear of Mr Jefferson Brick.

'To their bedrooms, sir.'

'Is there no dessert, or other interval of conversation?' asked Martin, who was disposed to enjoy himself after his long voyage.

'We are a busy people here, sir, and have no time for that,' was the reply.

So the ladies passed out in single file; Mr Jefferson Brick and such other married gentlemen as were left, acknowledging the departure of their other halves by a nod; and there was an end of THEM. Martin thought this an uncomfortable custom, but he kept his opinion to himself for the present, being anxious to hear, and inform himself by, the conversation of the busy gentlemen, who now lounged about the stove as if a great weight had been taken off their minds by the withdrawal of the other sex; and who made a plentiful use of the spittoons and their toothpicks.

It was rather barren of interest, to say the truth; and the greater part of it may be summed up in one word. Dollars. All their cares, hopes, joys, affections, virtues, and associations, seemed to be melted down into dollars. Whatever the chance contributions that fell into the slow cauldron of their talk, they made the gruel thick and slab with dollars. Men were weighed by their dollars, measures gauged by their dollars;

life was auctioneered, appraised, put up, and knocked down for its dollars. The next respectable thing to dollars was any venture having their attainment for its end. The more of that worthless ballast, honour and fair-dealing, which any man cast overboard from the ship of his Good Name and Good Intent, the more ample stowage-room he had for dollars. Make commerce one huge lie and mighty theft. Deface the banner of the nation for an idle rag; pollute it star by star; and cut out stripe by stripe as from the arm of a degraded soldier. Do anything for dollars! What is a flag to THEM!

One who rides at all hazards of limb and life in the chase of a fox, will prefer to ride recklessly at most times. So it was with these gentlemen. He was the greatest patriot, in their eyes, who brawled the loudest, and who cared the least for decency. He was their champion who, in the brutal fury of his own pursuit, could cast no stigma upon them for the hot knavery of theirs. Thus, Martin learned in the five minutes' straggling talk about the stove, that to carry pistols into legislative assemblies, and swords in sticks, and other such peaceful toys; to seize opponents by the throat, as dogs or rats might do; to bluster, bully, and overbear by personal assailment; were glowing deeds. Not thrusts and stabs at Freedom, striking far deeper into her House of Life than any sultan's scimitar could reach; but rare incense on her altars, having a grateful scent in patriotic nostrils, and curling upward to the seventh heaven of Fame.

Once or twice, when there was a pause, Martin asked such questions as naturally occurred to him, being a stranger, about the national poets, the theatre, literature, and the arts. But the information which these gentlemen were in a condition to give him on such topics, did not extend beyond the effusions of such master-spirits of the time as Colonel Diver, Mr Jefferson Brick, and others; renowned, as it appeared, for excellence in the achievement of a peculiar style of broadside essay called 'a screamer.'

'We are a busy people, sir,' said one of the captains, who was from the West, 'and have no time for reading mere notions. We don't mind 'em if they come to us in newspapers along with almighty strong stuff of another sort, but darn your books.'

Here the general, who appeared to grow quite faint at the bare thought of reading anything which was neither mercantile nor political, and was not in a newspaper, inquired 'if any gentleman would drink some?' Most of the company, considering this a very choice and seasonable idea, lounged out, one by one, to the bar-room in the next block. Thence they probably went to their stores and counting-houses; thence to the bar-room again, to talk once more of dollars, and enlarge their minds with the perusal and discussion of screamers; and thence each man to snore in the bosom of his own family.

'Which would seem,' said Martin, pursuing the current of his own thoughts, 'to be the principal recreation they enjoy in common.' With that, he fell a-musing again on dollars, demagogues, and bar-rooms; debating within himself whether busy people of this class were really as busy as they claimed to be, or only had an inaptitude for social and domestic pleasure.

It was a difficult question to solve; and the mere fact of its being strongly presented to his mind by all that he had seen and heard, was not encouraging. He sat down at the deserted board, and becoming more and more despondent, as he thought of all the uncertainties and difficulties of his precarious situation, sighed heavily.

Now, there had been at the dinner-table a middle-aged man with a dark eye and a sunburnt face, who had attracted Martin's attention by having something very engaging and honest in the expression of his features; but of whom he could learn nothing from either of his neighbours, who seemed to consider him quite beneath their notice. He had taken no part in the conversation round the stove, nor had he gone forth with the rest; and now, when he heard Martin sigh for the third or fourth time, he interposed with some casual remark, as if he desired, without obtruding himself upon a stranger's notice, to engage him in cheerful conversation if he could. His motive was so obvious, and yet so delicately expressed, that Martin felt really grateful to him, and showed him so in the manner of his reply.

'I will not ask you,' said this gentleman with a smile, as he rose and moved towards him, 'how you like my country, for I can quite anticipate your feeling on that point. But, as I am an American, and consequently bound to begin with a question, I'll ask you how you like the colonel?'

'You are so very frank,' returned Martin, 'that I have no hesitation in saying I don't like him at all. Though I must add that I am beholden to him for his civility in bringing me here - and arranging for my stay, on pretty reasonable terms, by the way,' he added, remembering that the colonel had whispered him to that effect, before going out.

'Not much beholden,' said the stranger drily. 'The colonel occasionally boards packet-ships, I have heard, to glean the latest information for his journal; and he occasionally brings strangers to board here, I believe, with a view to the little percentage which attaches to those good offices; and which the hostess deducts from his weekly bill. I don't offend you, I hope?' he added, seeing that Martin reddened.

'My dear sir,' returned Martin, as they shook hands, 'how is that possible! to tell you the truth, I - am - '

'Yes?' said the gentleman, sitting down beside him.

'I am rather at a loss, since I must speak plainly,' said Martin, getting the better of his hesitation, 'to know how this colonel escapes being beaten.'

'Well! He has been beaten once or twice,' remarked the gentleman quietly. 'He is one of a class of men, in whom our own Franklin, so long ago as ten years before the close of the last century, foresaw our danger and disgrace. Perhaps you don't know that Franklin, in very severe terms, published his opinion that those who were slandered by such fellows as this colonel, having no sufficient remedy in the administration of this country's laws or in the decent and right-minded feeling of its people, were justified in retorting on such public nuisances by means of a stout cudgel?'

'I was not aware of that,' said Martin, 'but I am very glad to know it, and I think it worthy of his memory; especially' - here he hesitated again.

'Go on,' said the other, smiling as if he knew what stuck in Martin's throat.

'Especially,' pursued Martin, 'as I can already understand that it may have required great courage, even in his time, to write freely on any question which was not a party one in this very free country.'

'Some courage, no doubt,' returned his new friend. 'Do you think it would require any to do so, now?'

'Indeed I think it would; and not a little,' said Martin.

'You are right. So very right, that I believe no satirist could breathe this air. If another Juvenal or Swift could rise up among us tomorrow, he would be hunted down. If you have any knowledge of our literature, and can give me the name of any man, American born and bred, who has anatomized our follies as a people, and not as this or that party; and who has escaped the foulest and most brutal slander, the most inveterate hatred and intolerant pursuit; it will be a strange name in my ears, believe me. In some cases I could name to you, where a native writer has ventured on the most harmless and good-humoured illustrations of our vices or defects, it has been found necessary to announce, that in a second edition the passage has been expunged, or altered, or explained away, or patched into praise.'

'And how has this been brought about?' asked Martin, in dismay.

'Think of what you have seen and heard to-day, beginning with the colonel,' said his friend, 'and ask yourself. How THEY came about, is another question. Heaven forbid that they should be samples of the intelligence and virtue of America, but they come uppermost, and in great numbers, and too often represent it. Will you walk?'

There was a cordial candour in his manner, and an engaging confidence that it would not be abused; a manly bearing on his own part, and a simple reliance on the manly faith of a stranger; which Martin had never seen before. He linked his arm readily in that of the American gentleman, and they walked out together.

It was perhaps to men like this, his new companion, that a traveller of honoured name, who trod those shores now nearly forty years ago, and woke upon that soil, as many have done since, to blots and stains upon its high pretensions, which in the brightness of his distant dreams were lost to view, appealed in these words -

'Oh, but for such, Columbia's days were done; Rank without ripeness, quickened without sun, Crude at the surface, rotten at the core, Her fruits would fall before her spring were o'er!'