

THE LAST HOURS OF CONGRESS.

As a former letter was devoted to a description of woman's week in Washington, I think this one should be dedicated to the other half of creation, who, during the first half of the first week of this most fitful and fickle of all the months of the year, wrestled mightily with a great effort to gracefully bow themselves down and out of the citadels of government.

For many months the guardians of Uncle Sam's possessions, those custodians of the people's liberties, whom men endow with titles and seat in high places, had employed themselves at stated intervals inside the halls of congress with the arduous labors of the average law-giver. And, whatever may be said of the shirking proclivities of some of the honorables, whose seats are conspicuously vacant whenever the fancy seizes them to "loaf," such senators and representatives as ours of Oregon, not to mention their confreres of the other states of the Pacific northwest, are regularly and systematically overworked. Not only do they work industriously during office hours, but they also spend much time in attendance upon their constituents' private claims, of which it is the pride and boast of these law-givers that they have never yet neglected one. No matter whether these claimants were seeking "relief" on some real or imaginary pretext, whereby they hope to replenish exhausted exchequers, or, striving with the perseverance of the characteristic bore to secure places for themselves or friends in vacancies that do not exist, these patient gentlemen never tire, and, to all outward appearance, never lose their temper, even under provocations of the most trying sort. And yet, it is well known that while many of their colleagues, who occupy equally illustrious positions, are not idlers, it is equally undeniable that there are many more who look upon a seat in congress as a mere sinecure, so far as their constituency is concerned; and their chief desire seems to be to block legislation during business hours, if their party is in the minority, or "wear out their lives in the service of an ungrateful country" over midnight potations in the hours when other and honester men are sound asleep. For many days prior to the closing week of the congressional season the throes of dissolution were ominous. Pet measures of individual senators were blocked by dilatory motions or slaughtered outright for lack of time to rush them through "on the home stretch." Grave congressmen, with their beloved bills rescued, after a hard fight, from the pigeon holes of committee rooms, rushed frantically through the corridors, urging dilatory "bargainers" to be on hand at the fateful moment to decide their fledgeling's fate; or, lacking the requisite number of votes to risk the perilous experiment of final passage, were busily engaged in buttonholing doubtful members, who enjoyed their brief advantage in a lofty way, quite laughable to behold.

The house of representatives, which at no time in the history of the country has been an orderly institution, generally loses all pretense of decorum when the hour of its dissolution approaches; and Bedlam let loose on the rampage, or pandemonium on a "tear," are easily outdone on such occasions. It was a sight well worth remembering as an object lesson to behold several hundred honorables, all on their feet at once, scores of them shouting in chorus to catch the eye of Speaker Reed, and gesticulating to make their shouts more emphatic than the speaker's gavel. Occasionally there would come a lull, and then some doughty honorable, with hair on end (if he had any), or with bald pate red with excitement, if the capillary adornment was wanting, would either shout his sentiments in a staccato voice, which broke into ten thousand fragments before it reached the galleries, or drop his utterance to a low, mouthing guttural, which the speaker did not care to understand and nobody else attempted to hear.

No "gang" of college graduates ever outdid those honorables, who, on the last day of their congressional labors, exhibited after adjournment the wild hilarity of an uproarious, though good natured, mob. They shouted, sang, screeched, laughed, wrung hands, slapped shoulders, and jested, their antics so unlike what would naturally be expected from so grave and dignified a body as the house of representatives ought to be that it was not surprising to hear a noted London lady, who had often looked on when the English parliament was indulging in a similar "racket": "Well, well! I can't see that liberty has done very much to civilize the Americans after all!"

As the official acts of this dissolving body will have been heralded everywhere by telegraph before these pages are in type, I need not stop the reader to repeat them here; but will introduce him to the senate chamber, where a graver, older, smaller and more dignified set of honorables were getting ready to adjourn *in die*. Many of the senators had not slept for several days, so intent had they been in their determination to hold the prancing and unruly hobby horses of the government in check till their riders should be made to pass appropriation bills and conclude much other most important business ere the fourth of March should ring the witching hour of noon. It was almost

impossible to crowd one's way through the curious throngs that blocked the corridors and lingered at the gallery doors. But those who were fortunate enough to have friends among the senators were provided with mystic bits of card board which the doorkeepers uniformly respected. The holders of these bits of paper could not enlarge the senators' gallery though, nor open the president's private slip; and "our crowd" were about turning away, disappointed, when the diplomatic gallery was placed at the disposal of as many as could enter, and from this favored perch the lucky occupants could see the "show" without obstruction. But seeing was all. Nobody, not even Captain Bassett, the famous factotum of the senate, who strikingly resembles the noted singer and poet, James G. Clark, in his declining years, who turned the hands of the clock backwards repeatedly to postpone the encroachment of Father Time, was able to hear one half that anybody tried to say. The little closing speech of Vice President Morton, read by him in a weak, piping voice that would have been inexcusable in the women's convention, was absolutely inarticulate. There is no doubt that the placid, urbane, old banker is a good man; but, until he shall come west and get a broader comprehension of this country's magnitude than is obtainable beyond the Alleghanies, he can not know enough to qualify him for the position he now holds.

The grand, great marble pile we call the capitol was built in utter defiance of the laws of sanitation. No wonder senators grow gray and stooped and old before their time. Less wonder that famous men die suddenly, and less wonder still that anybody will enter upon such a life for the mere glory in it.

The senate chamber, like the house of representatives, is enclosed on all sides, like an incubating box. There are no side windows, and the dim light coming through the stained glass ceiling is as ruinous to the eyes as the foul air that does feeble duty for the honorables' lungs and then rises to the galleries to be breathed again by the visitors, is deleterious to health. And then, added to the bad air and worse light of these chambers, are the midnight suppers and general social dissipation that comprise the congressional home life. No wonder the middle aged and old grow sated with it all. No wonder that grim indigestion presides at numerous feasts, and relentless death stalks silently through stately palaces. No wonder that many women, with naturally narrow scope of thought, find their lives so filled to overflowing with the glitter and display of this so-called republican city that, like the butterfly that shines its brief season and dies, they "have all the sights they want." The great wonder is that any of them rise, as many do, to the great significance of their positions as the wives of prominent men, and with social fortitude that borders on sublimity, reach out in patriotic fervor toward the true principles of a noble life, and thus give aid and comfort to the earnest purposes of women who seek to rise, through powers of inherent genius, regardless of men's help or hindrance to the higher planes of intellectual light and political liberty.

Through the courtesy of our Oregon senators, who are ever ready to extend the hospitalities of the city to their visiting constituents, I was graciously ushered into many an official presence, chief of which was that of his excellency, the president, of whom I can only say that his appearance at short range is a bitter disappointment. There were, perhaps, a dozen men in waiting around the old historic cabinet room, where shades of Lincoln, Stanton and other lesser lights passed in review before my mental vision, as I advanced to grasp the hand of the chief magistrate, but there was not one of the dozen who would not out-rank him in personal appearance and, I believe, in intellect. His face is ashy, flabby and indescribable, his hands ditto, and his little eyes are half shut, with no perceptible depth in them. Maybe he'll succeed himself in 1892. You can never count with certainty upon the average white man's vote; but the prospect isn't flattering. The *de facto* president is James G. Blaine, or I'm not good at guessing.

The new secretary of the treasury was a fellow passenger in the Pullman on my homeward route a few days later; and, though he (Foster) is a very ordinary looking individual, he looks an Apollo beside the president. Many of the senators are very fine, intellectual appearing men, and I note with pride that such men, whether in congress, cabinet or president's chair, are not afraid to give the women of the land an equal chance beside themselves in the great race for liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

President Harrison frankly admitted in the minute's chat we had together that he had been unable to live up to the spirit and letter of his famous "letter of acceptance," though he said he had honestly tried to do so. While this confession did more honor to his heart than his head, it, nevertheless, explained why he was president. There are times when strong men are not wanted as chief magistrate. These are the days of the lust of power and plutocracy. A Lamont or a Whitney, a Blaine or an Ingersoll can never be elected under present conditions. Men of lesser caliber will be chosen in their stead by men who can not be elected themselves, but who can "run" the feeble machines after they are chosen. Never again till another political convulsion culminates in open rupture between the rival factions of both national parties will a strong man like Abraham Lincoln become the nation's chief, *de facto* and *de jure*.

ABIGAIL SCOTT DUNIWAY.