

LETTER FROM MAJOR DOWNING.

To Uncle Joshua Downing, of Downingville, Jan 1st, 1850

Dear Uncle Joshua, - I have just got back from Washington, where I have been for the last fortnight watching the old ship of State lay in to a sort of three-cornered gale of wind. His gale struck her the 2d of December, and threw her all aback, and the gale holds on yet tight as ever, and there she has been layin now seven weeks, head to the wind, rolls and pitchin, and hasn't gained ahead a rod. I've seen rough times in the Two Pollices, and long gales of wind, and hurrykanes, and whirlpools, and all sorts of weather, but this is the first time I've seen a craft lying so long in a three-cornered gale for two months upon a strick, in a choppy sea worse than the Gulf Stream in a thunder-storm. But don't you be frightened, Uncle Joshua; she won't go down, but will live through it, and go on her voyage by-and-by all right. Our old ship of State is a staunch craft; she is built of the very best stuff, and put together in the strongest manner, and there isn't a spar nor a plank nor a timber-head in her but what is as sound as a nut. She's the best ship in the world, and the Two Pollices is next. So you needn't be feared that any sea will ever swamp her; and if ever she should be in danger of running ashore or on the breakers, by the squabbles and foolin of her officers, she's got a crew that will take care of her.

You know, Uncle, I've been sailin round Cuba and up the Gulf a good while, trying to carry out the plans of our Congress at Ostend and Aix la Chapelle, to take Cuba because our country couldn't get along without it; and self-preservation, you know, is the first law of nature. We should get through that job long ago, if our Cabinet hadn't backed out about it.

I sent despatches to General Pierce about it more than three months ago, but never got any answer. And finally I got tired holdin on out there alone, and hearin all the time that the Home Department kept stopping all the reinforcements from coming out to help me; so I up helm and headed the Two Pollices for Downingville. When we got along in the latitude of New-York, that terrible 5th of January storm overtook us, and we got made out to weather the gale and get invid of Sandy Hook and come to anker. The pilots come aboard and treated us very kind.

When they see the Downingville militia was aboard, and Sergeant Joel at the head of 'em dressed up in his uniform, one of the pilots took me one side and whispered to me that he would advise me as a friend not to go up to New-York, for if we did the Two Pollices was a gone goose.

"If that's the case," says I, "I'll leave the Two Pollices at anker here, and I'll be off to Washington and see how the land lays."

So I called up Capt. Jumper, the sailing master, and told him to keep things all snug and tight while I was gone, and told Sergeant Joel to take good care of the men, and I'd try if possible to be back in a fortnight.

When I got to Washington I thought I would just run in a few minutes and see how Congress was getting along first. I had let my beard grow pretty long, and was dressed so different from what I used to, that I didn't feel afraid of any body's knowing me; so I went right into the Representatives' chamber and took a seat in the gallery. Business seemed to be going on brisk and lively. A man was standing up in front and reading off, in a good loud voice, Banks 105, Richardson 73, Fuller 31, Pennington 5, scattering 4.

Then I went out and went into the Senate. - But there business seemed to be very dull. I couldn't find out as any thing was doing. Some was reading the newspapers, and some was talking a little and some was settling as calm and quiet as so many bears in their winter den with nothing to do but suck their paws. I soon got tired of this and went back into the House again. I had but just got seated in the gallery when the man in front got up and read off again, Banks 105, Richardson 73, Fuller 31, Pennington 5, scattering 4.

I turned round and whispered to the man who sat next to me, and says I, "That's just the same tune they had when I was in here half an hour ago."

"Exactly," says he; "they don't play but one tune, and that hasn't no variations."

"Well, what upon air is they doing?" says I.

"Oh, they are choosing a Speaker," says he.

"Choosing a Speaker?" says I. "For gracious sake how long does it take 'em to do that?"

"I can't have the slightest idea how long," says he. "They've been at it now about six weeks, and if they continue to gain as fast as they have since they began, I guess it might take 'em from July to eternity."

"If that's the case," says I, "I'll clear out, for I can't wait so long as that." So I hurried out and made tracks straight for the White House. I rung to the door and the servant let me in. I told him I wanted to see the President. He said, very well, the President was in his private room, and he would take my card to him. I told him he might go and tell General Pierce that an old friend of his and a fellow-soldier in the Mexican war wanted to see him. Presently he came back and asked me to walk up. I found the President alone, walking back and forth across the room, and looking kind of riled and resolute. It made me think of Old Hickory when he used to get his dander up about Hiddle's bank, and walk the floor all day and lay awake all night planning how he could upset it. The General knew me as soon as I went into the room, in spite of my beard, and shook hands with me and said he was very glad to see me.

"Well now, General," says I, "I want to come to the pint the first thing I've left the Two Pollices at anker down to Sandy Hook, and I want to know right up and down if she's to be mabbed or not. You know how 'tis General; you know we went out in good faith under the orders of the Ostend Congress; and you know the Home Government backed us up in the beginning of it; but now you've turned agin us, and I understand you've been sailing and overhauling every vessel along shore that had its bowsprit pointed towards Cuba or Central America; and I was told if the Two Pollices went up to York she'd be swarmed the same as we. Now, I want to know how we stand, that's all. If you don't want the help of the Two Pollices there's enough that does; and if you don't give her a clear passport out and in, she'll be off pretty quick where she can find better friends."

"Why, my dear Major," said the President, and the tears almost come into his eyes; "My dear Major," said he, "you misunderstand me entirely. You and the Two Pollices hav'nt got a better friend in the world than I am. The fact, I've been very much tried ever since that Ostend Congress business. It made a good deal of hard feeling in my Cabinet, and as things worked we were obliged to come out agin it. And then we had to make a show of sticking up very strong for the neutrality laws; and that's why we applied so many vessels. But you needn't give yourself the least uneasiness about the Two Pollices. I pledge you the honor of the Executive that she shan't be touched. And, besides, I'm in a good deal of trouble now all round, and I want you and the Two Pollices to stick by me; for, if you don't, I don't know who will."

"Agreed," said I, "uff said; that's talking right up to the mark. Give us your hand, General; I'll stick by you as close as I did by my old friend General Jackson. Now, what do you want me to do?"

"Well Major," says he, "I've got a good many ticklish jobs on hand that I don't hardly know what to do with, nor which to take hold on first. You know there's a Democratic Convention to meet at Cincinnati to make the nominations for the next term." (Here the President got up and locked the door, and set down close to me and talked low.) "The main thing is how to bring things to befall on that convention so as to make the nomination go right. Marcy wants it, Buchanan wants it, and Wise wants it, and Dickinson wants it and perhaps Cass too, though he says he don't, and I don't know how many others. All good Democrats, you know; but we can't all have it; so you see I've got a hard town to pull against. As for Douglas, I think he'll go for me if I'll go for him afterwards. The Cabinet and I have been trying to get things ready before the nomination, to give the Administration the credit of being the smartest and spruikiest Administration we ever had. We want if possible to go a little ahead of Jackson. You know we have already blowed Gray down to atoms. We've struck a heavy blow to knock off the Danish Band dues, and shall be ready for a splendid rumpus in the spring. - We've got a considerable cake kindling up between us and England, which will be just the thing if we can touch it off at the right time. But you know these things sometimes take fire too soon and do mischief both sides. I feel a little uneasy about this, and wish that stupid Congress would ever get organized so as to take part of the responsibility. - Then we got a quarrel brewin, too, with Calous Walker, out there in Nicaragua, and have refused to receive Col French as his minister. If Walker chooses to resent it as a national insult, we are ready for him. We shan't give back a hair. Now, Major, what do you think of the chances for the nomination?"

"Well, General," says I, "I think if you manage right you'll get it. I'll do what I can for you, any how."

The General chuck my hand, and got up and walked the floor says he, "The greatest difficulty now is with this confounded, still unrieked, Congress. They won't organize—that is, the House won't—and they so as determined to throw a dagger on the Administration somehow or other. Here they've been feedin away their time six weeks and lettin the whole country hang by their eyelids—war and all. I had to keep my message on hand a month and let it almost spile just because the House won't organize. At last it happened to think it was a good chance for me to take the responsibility. So I let drive and fired my message right in among 'em. It made quite a flutter among 'em. Some was quite wroth, but I didn't care for that. I just set to let 'em know I'd show 'em a touch of old Hickory if they didn't mind how they carried all. But here 'tis now gone on two months and every thing is at a dead stand because the House won't show no speaker. We can't have any certainty of getting enough money to keep the Government a gait till we get a Speaker and all our plans be in

danger of being knuckled in the head. Now, Major, I wish that you would stir round among the members a day or two, and see if you can't bring out here to a pint; I'll do it with you who is speaker, if they'll only organize."

"No, I went round among the Members two or three days and did my best. I found 'em all very stiff, and the lobby members were as stiff of any. The third day I went brg to the President agin, and says he, "Well, Major, how does it stand now? Does things look any more encouraging?"

"A little grain," says I, "but not much."

"Well, how is it?" says he.

Says I, "It is Banks 105, Richardson 73, Fuller 31, Pennington 5, Scattering 3."

"But that's the same old tune," says he; "just the same that's been for the last six weeks."

"No," says I, "you mistake. Don't you see the scattering has fell off one? Isn't that a little encouraging?"

The President looked disappointed. Said he "That's a very small straw for a drowned man to catch at. But how do they talk? Do they grow any more pliable?"

"Well, the Fuller men seem to be the most pliable," says I, "of any 'em. They say they was perfectly willing and ready to organize at any time, and the only difficulty was the Banks men and the Richardson men standing out so much."

"What do our true Democrats in friends, the Richardson men, say?"

Says I, "I hear say they'll stand there and fight till the crack of doom before they will allow the Black Republicans to get the upper hand."

"Well, that's good speak," said the President; "but the worst of it is this business will crack my administration some time before the crack of doom. Well, how do the Banks men talk? Is there any hope from that quarter?"

"I hear say they are in no hurry," says I. "They had as leave vote as do any thing else. They've got money enough and can stand it, and they'll stick where they are till they starve the Administration out."

The President jumped up and I must say he looked more like Old Hickory than I ever see him before. Says he, "Major Downing, this will never do; we must have a Speaker by hook or by crook. Can't you contrive any way to bring this business about?"

"Well," says I, "there is one way I think the business may be done; and I don't know but it's the last chance; and that is, for me to go and bring the Two Pollices round here, and bring her guns to bear on the Capitol. Then send in word and give 'em one hour to organize. If they don't do it, then batter the house about their ears, or march in the Downingville militia and drive 'em out, as old Cromwell did the Rump Parliament."

The President stood a minute in a deep study. At last he said, "Well, Major, a desperate disease sometimes needs a desperate remedy. If you think you are right, go ahead."

So here I am, Uncle Joshua, aboard the Two Pollices. I just stop to write this account to you, and shall now up anker and make all sail for the Potomac. And if things is no better when I get there you may expect to hear thunder.

I remain your loving Nephew,
Major Jack Downing.