

RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS

JOSEPH HOWE AND HIS TIMES.

And Incidental References to Some of His Prominent Public Contemporaries.

By "Historicus," Fredericton, N. B.

NO. 12.

[Nova Scotians in New York—Silver Cup.]

As soon as the news of the trial and its result reached New York, upwards of one hundred Nova Scotians doing business there called a meeting to express their sympathy and jubilate over the victory. Patriotic speeches were made and resolutions passed pertinent to the occasion—

one of which favored an Address to Mr. Howe and the presentation of a piece of plate, which afterwards took the form of a Silver Pitcher, at a cost, as near as I can remember, of \$120, subscribed mostly by those present. It may not be out of place here to state that the writer of this was present on that occasion; and little thought had he then, when requested to write the Address and the Inscription upon the Cup, that in a little over fifty years after the event he would feel himself called upon to refer to that occasion historically, as he is now doing.

The Address itself has been mislaid, but the following inscription engraved upon the plate embraces the substance of it:—

PRESENTED TO
JOSEPH HOWE, ESQ.
BY
NOVA SCOTIANS RESIDENT OF NEW YORK,
as a testimony of
THEIR RESPECT AND ADMIRATION
for his honest independence in publicly exposing
IMPROVING THE MORALS,
and correcting the errors of men in office,
AND HIS ELOQUENT AND TRIUMPHANT DEFENCE
IN SUPPORT OF
THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.
CITY OF NEW YORK,
1855.

Thomas Forrester, an extensive dry goods merchant (doing business opposite St. Paul's Church) and afterwards member of the Legislature, was requested by letter to make the presentation, which took place at the Exchange in the old Court House building, Market Square. According to the newspapers of the day the room was crowded—speeches were delivered by several of the leading Liberals, all highly complimentary of the contributors and the occasion. Mr. Howe of course accepted the present in a modest becoming manner.

Mr. Howe Elected a Member of the Legislature.

The House of Assembly was dissolved by Proclamation in 1836, when Mr. Howe for the first time offered himself as a candidate for the County of Halifax, and was elected by a thousand majority over his next competitor, which showed that the popularity he had achieved in his libel suit did not only continue, but was growing in strength every day. Instead of the elections being all got through with in one day and simultaneously throughout the Province as at present, they lasted for a whole fortnight, during which time there was much rioting, debauchery and drunkenness, and the friends of the respective candidates frequently collided, and broken heads not a few were the order of the day, and the night too. The Cork elections in October, where the Parnellites and the McCarthyites found a battle ground for the political expression of their feelings on both sides, emphasized with good sound hickory bludgeons, will convey to the reader an idea of the great interest attached to elections at the time of which we are writing—when Howe was elected in 1836. Every party or faction had its shibboleth by which it was recognized far and wide. On the banners of the Howe party were inscribed "Joe Howe, our Patriot and Reformer." The sobriquet "Joe Howe," now became household words, not only in the County of Halifax, but throughout the Province. It was "Joe Howe" here, there and everywhere—nothing could be done without Joe Howe's presence. He was the Jupiter Olympus on all ordinary as well as extraordinary occasions. By one leap and bound in the course of a single year, he cleared all obstacles and became the most prominent man and loudest talked of in all Nova Scotia.

Having thus been elected to the Legislature at the early age of 32, Mr. Howe now had his feet firmly planted in the stirrups, with a fine hobby to ride, over a wide road, upon which he could give reins to his ambition, no matter what the character of the pacers he might encounter upon the road, and these were not a few nor less fast full of fire than himself. "The mills of the gods grind hard, and Howe in his novitiate must expect nothing but hard pressure between the upper and nether millstones of the House, so that he must depend altogether upon his powers of resistance. It is true Howe had the metal and the bottom, but a mishap, or slip, or stumble, a mistake, an error of judgement, might at any moment precipitate him to earth; for those "old stagers" he would be required to face, well versed in all the technicalities and practices of the Parliamentary arena, and of great experience, from their long service in the Legislature, would have no bowels of compassion for poor Howe, "the upstart" and obnoxious intruder upon the rights and franchises of the old noblesse and monopolists—so that it he tripped or got himself into what is commonly called a "tight

place," he might as well have expected sympathy or mercy from the Turks, had he been bold enough to have gone into their midst and disputed the tenets of their Koran.

For be it known that at this time the House of Assembly contained a number of men who for their talents and abilities, and



PITCHER PRESENTED TO JOSEPH HOWE.

speaking powers, would have shed lustre upon a much more pretentious Parliamentary body—such as Alexander Stewart, James B. Uniacke, William Young, (late Sir William) Mr. Marshall, Mr. Dodd, Martin Wilkins, J. W. Johnston, the great lawyer, and several other brilliant men—all of whom (except Young) were in opposition to the young Reformer and inexperienced beginner.

Before we go with him into the House of Assembly, where after all Howe's great trial was to begin, let us for a moment or two inquire why this young man should take it upon himself to wage war upon a system of government which had stood the strain of upwards of one hundred years, and no one till now had any complaints to utter, and thus incur the enmity of nearly the whole community—for every strand in the great political cable was compactly knit and bound together without the possibility of a break. Was it ambition to shine? No doubt this had something to do with it, but ambition cannot stand alone—to succeed in any great undertaking ambition must have something more than the vain hope of success to rest upon, even great talents allied to great courage and great natural resources. Howe well knew that it there were laurels to be gained, it was not by peaceful walks through green pastures. Briars and thorns, and hidden hornet's nests, and pitfalls, lay along his path. The highway to success with him was one beset with immense difficulties. No—his ambition was that of John Bright, who, to provide the people of England with cheap food, and that the wings of commerce might expand to breezes more favorable to trade, boldly encountered the hostility of the great landed gentry and aristocracy of the Empire. It was the ambition of John Hampden, who, with Selden and Pym, was determined to resist the unwarrantable encroachments of the Crown upon the privileges of Parliament and the rights of the people. (Indeed the cases of Howe and Hampden are remarkably alike. Charles vented all his spleen upon Hampden, as Lord Falkland did upon Howe, because each resisted their official superiors—but the Falkland embroglio will come up hereafter.) It was the ambition of Kosuth, who, to free his country, Hungary, from the tyranny of Austria, led his people into hostility, and when success was near at hand the bloody Muscovite came down upon them, and by his interference crushed all hope of emancipation. It was the ambition of the great and good John Howard, the English philanthropist, who during the latter part of the last century spent his life in the reformation of the Prisons and Hospitals of England and the Continent, and in the pursuit of which he travelled continually, spending large sums of money from his own private purse. Wretched noisome prisons and cells, where the suffering of the unfortunate and helpless were terrible, were exposed and their management altogether reformed. Finally he fell a martyr to his own zeal, having contracted a fever in the Crimea, while pursuing his noble work. It was the ambition of Wilberforce, who as soon as he entered Parliament, when quite a young man, devoted all his talents and energies for the suppression of the Slave Trade. This accomplished by Act of Parliament, he next turned his attention to the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, and lived just long enough in 1833, to see this accomplished, and to receive the thanks of the Nation for his philanthropic zeal. It was the ambition of Cobden for his devotion in the cause of Free Trade, and having succeeded in England, next addressed himself to the Continental Powers, with the desire of doctrinalizing his views upon all its respective governments, and brought France over to his faith, and doubtless had he lived a little longer would have succeeded with such statesmen as Cobden and Bright live in the hearts of Englishmen, what is called "Imperial Federation," must be reckoned among the political impossibilities—for England can never go back upon a record which occupied thirty years to bring about

through fiercest agitation. It was the ambition of Gladstone (for many years the leading statesman of Europe) who at the age of 82 is struggling among his countrymen for Irish autonomy and other important measures, all of which he is destined to see accomplished. In short, it was the ambition of a great heart and a great mind so essential to all great patriotic undertakings that actuated Howe throughout.

This then was our hero, and this was his mission, on entering the Parliament of his native Province in 1836; and in everything he undertook he succeeded—alas, with but one exception, as will appear hereafter.

The Legislature convened in January, 1837. The Reformers commenced to show their heads almost immediately. Laurence O'Connor Doyle, moved a series of resolutions, one of which was in opposition to the doors of the Legislative Council being kept closed to the public. Mr. Howe delivered his maiden speech on this occasion, and in the presence of all the great guns of the House awaiting an opportunity to discharge their heaviest metal upon him. It might be here stated, that however much the "compact" of Nova Scotia assimilated in all its essential particulars to that of New Brunswick, indeed as was the case in all the Provinces alike, the Council doors of this Province had been thrown open to the public many years before 1836, which went to prove how hard and tight was the grip which held so many of the old school together in Halifax, and did not care to have the light of day let in upon their legislative doings. Doyle's resolutions passed unanimously, and were sent to the Council for its concurrence—for even the obstructives in the House could not resist that which everybody knew was reasonable and sure to come about. They would rather reserve their fire for an opportunity more momentous to the party with which they were identified and would require all their talents and speaking energies to defend.

The Council in its reply to the House spoke in this wise: "His Majesty's Council denies the right of the House to comment upon its modes of procedure. Whether their deliberations were open or secret was their concern, and their's only." This is a mere specimen of the language employed, to which taunts were added to open defiance. Here then was the commencement of a fierce wrangle between the two branches which lasted for several years, before the Council doors were forced open by the Reformers.

Then the duration of the House was for seven years as in England today. In order to get the time reduced to four years the Reformers had many a hard up hill fight. "Annexation" was not then one of the war cries—the Reformers were all "Republicans." Had any Politician in 1836 been bold enough to suggest "Independence," he would have been throttled by both parties alike, and probably have the tongue cut out of his mouth in a figurative or disfigurative sort of way and been silenced forever. We understand those things better now-a-days. We are at liberty to discuss any question that affects the interests of the people, so long as we keep within judicious bounds.

When the Bill came up for reducing the term of the House to four years, Mr. Alexander Stewart, (afterwards Master of the Roll) one of the old school advocates led an attack upon Mr. Howe. Now Stewart had a sharp tongue, good voice, and was an effective speaker; but like many of the legal gentry of whose fluency of speech and the reading of the same speech in print, are as dissimilar as though two distinct individuals had been concerned in the manufacture, Stewart appeared more formidable than he really was. He took occasion—now that he had Howe before him, and a chance to pay him off, or give him what is not inaptly called a good dressing—to resent the Editor's old newspaper criticisms upon the conduct of the last House, and he did this with great bitterness and severity, and there and then challenged Howe to a discussion of the points involved and to a defence of his opinions upon that floor. Stewart's speech occupied over an hour, three-fourths of which was devoted to pouring cayenne pepper and vitrol upon poor Howe's head, whose friends in the House and gallery were numerous, and felt for their champion, and that an impromptu reply was impossible from so inexperienced a youth. When Howe rose there was a breathless silence; while his enemies chuckled in their sleeves over Stewart's scathing victory, as they were sure Howe's friends on the other hand trembled as it were at the awkwardness of the situation—viz: their man to be flayed alive in their presence, after he had been in the house only four days and never before engaged in a public encounter. But once on his legs, and his feet firmly planted, he stood forth like "a giant refreshed with new wine," and as soon as he began his reply all doubt of the man's power and ability to accept the gage of battle and do himself justice was removed. He did not only defend every political statement he had ever made, but in turn defied Mr. Stewart to contradict any one of them. He did not only argue all the points but elaborated upon them, showed up the evils of the system of government that existed, and bore down upon them with even greater vehemence, by his voice, than his pen was even capable of. Having thus disposed of the charges made in the challenge, and carried the house with him by storm, Howe next went at his adversary personally, the man who was to crush the political life out of him at the outset, not like the bull dog who feels he has his victim within his power, but like the feline with poor mouse, who plays with and worries it before making a meal of it. He turned the tables so completely upon his adversary, by anecdote, sarcasm, and gentle hits a little below the mental ribs, and the whole House was convulsed with laughter, nor could his able opponents refrain from joining in and all at poor Stewart's expense. I know of nothing like it, unless it be Webster's reply to Hayne on the floors of Congress once upon a time, so familiar to all American readers.

Howe's enemies from this time forward knew the quality of their man, and what to expect from him and how to govern themselves accordingly. No man had greater power of sarcasm, and the faculty of holding and pleasing an audience than Joseph Howe.

I propose in the next article to make an extract from one of this gentleman's speeches, delivered a few days after his reply to Mr. Stewart that the reader may judge for himself his style of composition and force of language.

Witchcraft in Russia.

In Russia the popular belief in witchcraft resembles that of the whole world many centuries ago. Ralston in "Songs of the Russian People," states:—"But a little time ago every Russian village had its wizard, almost as a matter of course, and to this day it is said there is not a hamlet in the Ukraine that is not reported to keep its witch." When I was travelling in the interior of that country, accompanied by a master of the Russian language, I found that the peasants still believe that witches and wizards can steal the dew and the rain, send whirlwinds hide the moon and the stars, and fly through the air on brooms and tongs. Their chief meetings take place three times a year, on "bald hills," and there are thousands of stories of witches going up chimneys and flying through the air. An analogy exists between these and the ancient German legends on the same subject. They chalk crosses on their huts and windows, hang up stove-rakes for protection, the knots, and wear amulets. Plagues in men and cattle are popularly attributed to witches. Epileptics, and those afflicted with St. Vitus's dance, are supposed to be bewitched. According to popular belief in Russia, witches assume the form of dogs and cats and owls, but the shape they like best is that of a magpie. The Metropolitan Alexis solemnly cursed a magpie, "on account of the bad behaviour of the witches who have assumed its plumage."

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