NEGLECTED PRECAUTIONS AGAINST A “CLEAN SWEEP.”

THE charge which some critics have been making against the Republican orators in the present canvass, that they are refraining, apparently with care, from all mention of civil-service reform, is not strictly accurate. They all, or a very large number of them, do draw attention to the very serious consequences which would result from the “clean sweep” of the offices which would be sure to result in case the Democrats got into power. On this point they are generally very emphatic in their remarks, and their objection to this clean sweep rests, as far as it goes, upon the very grounds on which the civil-service reformers ask the Republicans to set the Democrats a good example. Every orator, therefore, who urges this argument is pro tanto a civil-service reformer. Every voter who is influenced by it into voting against Hancock is pro tanto a civil-service reformer. He objects to having the Government offices treated as the booty of the party which happens to get most votes at the polls; to having competent men who are familiar with their work expelled from these offices because they happen to hold a particular set of political opinions and to have voted for a particular candidate. He objects to having the salaries annexed to these places treated as a property subject to a tax to which no other kind of property is exposed—a tax levied, too, without authority of law, and yet, in practice, levied under a penalty, in case of default, to which payers of no other kind of tax are liable, and disbursed by a body unknown to the law, and which renders no public account of the use made of the money. The difference between such an orator and voter and the regular civil-service reformer, who “sips cold tea” and is “goody-goody,” and clamors for “the schoolmaster’s test,” lies simply in the application of the rule. Mr. Sherman and his brother orators think the rule an excellent one, evidently, but think it ought only to be applied to the Democrats, because the Democrats are such bad men and have such evil designs. They would not apply it to the Republicans, because the Republicans are such good men and have such noble designs. This view of moral obligations is a very old one, and has excited the merriment of many generations. But we are willing to concede, for the sake of argument, that it is sound—that the Democrats are bad men and the Republicans good men, and that things done by Republicans might be very harmless which if done by Democrats would be very mischievous. But action based on this view can only be safe—indeed, one might say can only be rational—if accompanied by precautions as insurmountable as human skill and strength can make them against the Democrats ever coming into power.

We need hardly say that no such precautions are possible, or desirable if possible. This Government, like every other constitutional government, is framed and carried on on the theory that two parties or more are competent for possession of power, and that power may, and perhaps frequently will, pass from one to the other. If there were no such theory elections would be a farce. Voting is the exercise of a choice between two sets of men and two sets of ideas. All the speeches the Republican orators are making to-day are appeals to the voters not to make any change in the depositaries of power; but they are also very emphatic admissions that the voters may make such a change next November. If there were no likelihood or no risk of their making it, there would be no occasion for the speeches, and the voting would be a mere form. Moreover, power has heretofore often passed from one party to another in the United States. The Federalists gave way to the Republicans; the Republicans gave way to the Whigs; the Whigs gave way to the Democrats, and the Democrats gave way to the Republicans again. No rational and intelligent Republican would maintain that no other similar change is likely to occur, or that the Democrats, or some party essentially embodying their spirit and aims, are sure not to get hold of the Government in place of those who now hold it. As a matter of fact, the Democrats for some time back have been in actual possession of Congress in both branches, and came within a hair’s-breadth of securing the Presidency in 1876. Moreover, no observant man can deny that the Democratic tide has, for some years, been slowly rising—that is, that the voters who have the Democratic way of thinking about government and legislation have been for some time gaining on the Republicans, and diminishing their majorities in States in which the Republicans have been strongest. We may, therefore, set it down as undeniable that the Democrats, or some other party like them, may come, and very probably will come, into power again. In other words, Democratic ascendency—we are now looking at the matter from the standpoint of a very Stalwart Republican—is one of the dangers to which the Republic is most exposed. It is more likely than a foreign war, for which we prepare by keeping a militia on foot; more likely than a run on the Treasury, for which we prepare by keeping a reserve of specie; more likely than the inability of the Government to pay cash in a general commercial emergency, for which we prepare by affirming its power to manufacture and issue paper money; more likely than that the separate States should destroy the Federal credit by taxation, for which we prepare by forbidding such taxation in the Constitution. In fact, there is hardly a single risk to the National Government or its belongings, now guarded against by either the Constitution or the laws, which is nearly so probable as that the Democrats will one day get possession both of the Presidency and Congress, and be thus enabled to make that “clean sweep” of the public offices, with its attendant horrors, over which our Secretary of the Treasury and his brother orators are so eloquent.

It is, therefore, proper and desirable for every voter who hears them to ask them what preparations they have made for this contingency which they paint in such black colors. A party in power in Holland, whose orators, every time they took the stumps, declaimed on the horrors of inundation, but made no mention of what they had done or proposed to do about making or repairing dykes, would naturally call forth much interrogatory criticism from the audience. The Republicans who are conducting this canvass, from General Garfield down, seem to us very much in this position. They lay themselves open to some very awkward questions, of which we may give the following as a sample:

“If, as you confess, the danger of the Democrats getting possession of the Government is not an imaginary danger, and if, as you say, they will, if they get power, make the dreadful thing called a ‘clean sweep,’ you, as the party which has for fifteen years held the Government in all its branches, and in a measure created the civil service as it now exists, must surely have taken some means to prevent this clean sweep. What have you done? You cannot possibly believe that the Democrats will be prevented, if they get a chance, from turning your men out and putting their own in all the offices, by the feeling that they are themselves too wicked for such an undertaking. Have you, therefore, passed any law or constitutional amendment making a ‘clean sweep’ impossible when there is a change of administration? If not—if this has been impossible—have you made an effort by your own example to embody in American political usage the rule that a man’s tenure of office in the public service shall not depend on his political opinions, but on his character, skill, and efficiency? If so, where, when, and to what extent? You dwell a good deal on the power of the 80,000 offices on the corrupt imagination of the Democrats in stimulating their exertions at the coming elections, now, what have you done by your own practical and moral power to raise popular feeling against the doctrine that the offices are the fair prize of party victory? Is there anything in your example to suggest to any Democrat that treating offices as ‘spoils’—that is, giving them to the members of one party exclusively as the reward of electing—is a disreputable system? Can you imagine any spectacle more likely to stimulate their dignity than the spectacle you are yourselves offering to the world at this moment of the levy of illegal assessments for your own purposes on the salaries of your office-holders? Would there not be something ludicrous in one of you preaching the sacredness of property to a mob from a balcony while his confederates were gutting the house and dividing the goods in full view of the street? When your candidate, too, proposes publicly to fill offices by the advice of Congressmen of his own party, can you expect a Democratic President to refrain, whenever he gets a chance, from doing likewise? Your plan, too, or at all events the only plan you offer, of preventing the derangement of the public business by a sweeping change of public servants is keeping you in power, because your men, having been twenty years in the business, understand it. But does this not suggest to your opponents the obvious answer that when you began you were as green and awkward as they would be, and that they have as much right to learn to administer by long administration as you have, and will draw as good an argument from this
source against being turned out of office at the end of twenty years as you now draw? In fact, does it not seem as if your allusions to the evils of change were highly unbecoming in you, who have carefully maintained a system which not only tempts millions into clamoring for change, but makes the change, when it does come, in the highest degree mischievous?

"THE CORMORANTS AND THE COMMUNE."

We print elsewhere a letter from a highly esteemed correspondent which is in several ways very suggestive. The personal character of a possible Vice-President is undoubtedly a subject of legitimate interest to voters, and a man's "treatment of his unfortunate debtors" is an important indication of character. But no man's personal character can be depicted to the voters in a trustworthy manner by the researches of a campaign newspaper reporter among his private papers. To any one who knows anything of the frame of mind in which this functionary enters on the examination of a candidate's life and manners, there is something very ludicrous in treating his revelations of any candidate's treatment of debtors as a proper basis for a judgment about his humanity. The one thing certain which appears from the list of Mr. English's foreclosures is that he made a large number of loans to persons whose credit was very poor, and on the only security they could offer, and presumably at the legal rate of interest. Any one who makes great numbers of such loans must needs, unless he means to lose a great deal of money, or convert his property into a charitable fund, make a great many foreclosures. Mr. English, it appears, made three hundred and ninety-two within the last two years, which proves that he had made three hundred and ninety-two loans, and did not seek to enforce his security until there was no other way of getting either principal or interest, for he could not foreclose until the debtor defaulted on both. It suggests, too, that he had probably made twice as many loans on mortgages which he did not foreclose, because he could not, unless he were Satan himself, select as his debtors only those who would be sure to become insolvent. Moreover, it appears that the security in those cases in which he did foreclose was very poor, because in most of them he had to buy the property in himself and got it, in the absence of competition, for less than the assessed value. The theory of his critics, therefore, apparently is that he ought to make thousands of loans on mortgage, but not foreclose in the only cases in which foreclosure would be necessary—that is, where the debtor is poor—and ought to have taken the property himself in the open market, not only for more than any one else would give, but for enough to cover his debt. We should like to know who has ever foreclosed a mortgage on anybody but a poor debtor. Foreclosures on rich or well-to-do debtors are at least very rare. The mortgage is taken lest the debtor should become poor. There is not a particle of proof that Mr. English was harsh in his treatment of the debtor in any case. He may have been; but every transaction between a creditor and debtor has two sides to it, and before being used against the character of either should be examined by some impartial tribunal. The last person in the world to report on it is a campaign reporter getting up "stories." We know nothing about Mr. English's private affairs, but we think the researches among his foreclosures, and the inferences based on them, have been more ludicrous and discreditable than such things usually are. It may be that Mr. English has used his "capital as an instrument for wrecking," but do not let us convict any man of this on the strength of a list of foreclosures published in the midst of a canvass, with comments of his own by an industrious "staff correspondent."

It is to be observed, too, that a man who has a house and lot to pledge for a loan of money is usually a man of considerable intelligence, who knows what pledging it means, and knows the probable consequences of any failure to pay the interest on the loan. Moreover, the law protects him in this kind of a loan against any sharp practice on the part of the creditor. The creditor cannot snap him up for one, two, or ten days' default, as an insurance company can, and cut off his equity of redemption. The law gives the debtor ample time to look about him for means of relief in the shape of a fresh loan, on the same property, or on other property, or the sale of the property itself. So that the presumption is, and Mr. English is entitled to the benefit of this presumption as well as everybody else, that mortgagees are a class of men who understand their own business, who know what risks they run when they make a mortgage, and who are prepared to bear the penalty of their default when the time comes. According to the campaign view of these English debtors, however, they are a band of unfortunate paupers who borrow money on contracts to which they do not expect to be held, and who are grievously wronged because they are held to it.

If it be asked why we attach enough importance to this particular campaign story to make it the subject of any lengthened discussion, we answer because it has made more impression on the public mind than such stories usually make, and seems to have a more substantial basis than such stories usually have; but, above all, because we think it a kind of story which the Republican party should by all means avoid as a weapon of attack. The Republicans appeal to the country in all their platforms and speeches as for excellence the conservative party, which is the only safeguard of industry, property, intelligence, and order against that combination of violence, envy, slothfulness, and greed known as "the Commune." The "Commune" is, in fact, frequently referred to by Republican orators as one of the things we have to fear if the Democrats get back into power, and some of them were so much frightened at last year, even that they were almost prepared to protect themselves against it by the sort of veiled dictatorship called "Grantism." We do not deny that there is something in the country which may be called "the Commune"—that is, a body of persons who look on all owners of capital, no matter whether composed of the workingman's savings or the idle man's inheritance, as their natural enemies, and to whom all power, influence, or authority acquired by superior training, skill, or intelligence is detestable. The Greenback party contains a considerable body of them; the Democratic party contains most of them. They are the sworn enemies of public and private credit. They like high taxes, to be paid by the industrious people who save. They like also to have money made plentiful without labor, by the free use of the printing-press. They hate colleges and all institutions of learning as producing persons with marks of mental superiority to the simple Democrat who carries the hod up to the bricklayer. They do not care to have the world carried forward in civilization, because their highest ideal of civilization is expressed in the phrase "plenty to eat and drink and little to do." They are the curse of any country in which they abound, and though they are less numerous in this country than in most others they have the power of making more trouble. They have within a year or two arrested the prosperity and seriously endangered the future of one American State—California. They may any day disorganize the industry or lower the credit of some other in which they may happen to secure a temporary ascendancy or hold the balance of power. The "cormorant" clause of the Democratic platform was put in order to placate them, and by "cormorants" they understand everybody who has savings out at interest. They are as hostile to the investments of the savings-banks as they are to those of Mr. Vanderbilt. Any country which was governed by them, or had its domestic or foreign policy shaped by their ideas, would speedily disappear from the community of civilized states.

Now, all indiscriminate abuse of capitalists and "money kings" for heartlessness and greed furnishes these people with their whole stock in trade. A capitalist ought to be reproached for heartlessness, greed, and extortion when he is proved guilty of them, but no sooner. We have no right to infer heartlessness, greed, and extortion from the fact that he has much money and many debtors, and brings many foreclosure suits or holds people to their contracts. We must let him live under the common law and hold his character on the same tenure as other people. So, also, it becomes the Republican party, as the party of intelligence and education, to endorse such sentiments as Mr. G. F. Hoar's denouncing General Hancock because he was regularly trained in the national military school and had honorably followed the calling for which he was trained, and had not, like General Garfield, begun life as a day-laborer. This view of the comparative merit of callings and careers is essentially Kearneyite and barbarous. What we need in the United States is more, and not less, regular training for honorable callings, and steady pursuit of the callings for which the training has prepared. It is to be regretted that a
PARLIAMENTARY OBSTRUCTION.

London, August 26, 1850.

Probably before this letter reaches you the Parliamentary session will have come to an end. It has been marked by a struggle between the efforts of the Government and of the majority to do the business of the country, and of the minority in opposition to prevent that business being done. The temporary return of Lord Hartington to the leadership of the House of Commons has probably been to the advantage of the Government and of the party. He possesses a certain thickness of skin, a lack of which is Mr. Gladstone’s chief defect as a politician. When there is any question of argument or passion, he is always ready to retreat to the doctrine that an obstructive minority has to be taught that the forces of the country are behind the Prime Minister. Mr. Gladstone is without rival or second. But in dealing with the vexatious details of obstruction Lord Hartington’s slowness in intelligence and less sensitive temper give him great advantages. He allows things to pass partly because he does not perceive the point to which opposition is directed, partly because he is not stunned into retort by attacks which he does not feel and therefore does not resent. He does not by any coincidence of ideas in the ministerial majority; his reticence is too valuable to be risked to disclose secrets. Mr. Gladstone’s chief defect as a philanthropist is that he looks at the fact of a question as if his view of it comprehended the whole of the ground. It is, however, possible that when Mr. Disraeli came into power he will be a powerful opponent. Knowing every artifice, and having practised most of them, by which the forms of the House can be evaded for the purpose of delay and resistance, he was well fitted to watch over their execution and to maintain them against transgressions less bold and skilful than himself. Mr. James Lowther was made, first, Under-Secretary of State, and then Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Mr. Cavendish Bentinck became Judge-Advocate General. The example of their promotion has been somewhat too effective in being applied to the Opposition. The political youth of the House of Commons is supposed to be just beginning its career. Lord Randolph Churchill, Sir Henry Wolf, and Mr. Gort, among the Conservatives below the gangway, are practising the arts which were pursued with success by Mr. Raikes, Mr. James Lowther, and Mr. Cavendish Bentinck. They will doubtless have their reward. They have already hustled aside poor Sir Stafford Northcote, who scarcely affects to control the party which he nominally leads, and is little more than a figure-head and symbol of a political chief.

But it may be doubted whether they will exceed in their more immediate purpose. They are bent upon wasting time, and the Government is wisely giving them as much time as they like to take. It has hitherto been, to use the phrase of Lord Hartington, an unwritten law of Parliament that it was to rise early in August, some days at least, before the 12th, and only in the extremest cases to remain sitting a few days after it. If business was not done, it was the duty of the House for the sake of business to chance on passing before a certain date had to be dropped and to be started with anew in the next session. Mr. Gladstone has adopted a new course, which it is to be hoped will be persisted in. He is resolved to keep Parliament sitting until the measures which are brought before it shall either have been passed or shall have been definitively rejected. He has made up his mind not to allow the deliberate proposals of the Cabinet to slip through the Ministerial fingers. If either House refuses to pass them, the blame or the merit of their failure will, as far as can be expected, attach to the Minister who has before them. The Government will be without responsibility. This method has provoked vehement outcries of indignation. Attempts have been made to censure the Ministers for pressing measures at a time when, it is alleged, they cannot be fully and fairly considered. But they can be fully and fairly considered in September or October, if the peers and members of Parliament will remain in town to consider them. If they choose to go away for their own amusement or their private affairs, it is right for them to confine their business to persons who will attend to it at any time and every season. The existence of a class of professional politicians in the United States is sometimes sneered at, and sometimes deplored as an evil injurious to the working of republican institutions, and as one from which England is happily free. But we have in this country another evil. A very large number of members of both Houses are persons to whom a Parliamentary career is simply an amusement—something to occupy their leisure when they are in town and cannot be killing something on the moors or among turnips. To them the two Houses are simply clubs of mixed politics, like the Athenaeum or the Travellers. It is these people who maintain that only on much business ought to be done as can be packed between the months of February and August, and that whatever cannot be accomplished within that time must be