

## FAMOUS FEUDS.

### I.

#### CONKLING, BLAINE, LAMAR.

On the 18th of June, 1879, the second debate of the extra session on the Army Bill was in progress in the Senate.

The Democratic majority was strenuously pressing the bill to its passage, with a clause prohibiting any expenditure of the appropriation for the payment of troops as police to keep the peace at the polls.

The Republican minority, foreseeing defeat, had resorted to filibustering, dilatory proceedings, and motions to adjourn. Mr. Lamar took no part in the debate, although voting uniformly with his party.

During the morning hour, before the Army Bill was taken up for consideration, Lamar called up the bill to create a Mississippi River Commission, in which he was much interested, reported from the committee of which he was chairman.

The consideration of this measure consumed the morning hour, and the time appointed for taking up the Army Bill as the special order arrived. Mr. Lamar suggested that the Commission Bill could be disposed of in a few minutes, and asked unanimous consent for that purpose.

Mr. Withers, of Virginia, who had the Army Bill in charge, had given notice that he would ask for a final vote before adjournment that day, and declined to consent to Mr. Lamar's

request, unless it was agreed that a vote on the Commission Bill should be taken without further discussion.

Mr. Allison suggested, "In a few minutes."

Mr. Withers insisted upon his rights under the rules. Mr. Conkling asked if, notwithstanding unanimous consent was given to Mr. Lamar's request, the Senator from Virginia would insist upon a vote that day on the Army Bill. Mr. Withers replied that he would. Mr. Conkling then suggested that the Senator from Mississippi have unanimous consent to conclude the consideration of his bill, and if, when a reasonable hour of adjournment had been reached, there were senators who wanted to be heard on the Army Bill, the vote should be postponed until the following day.

Mr. Withers insisted that it was important that a vote should be had that day. Mr. Conkling did not think this fair. Senator Gordon, of Georgia, explained that the Commission Bill would not take more than ten or fifteen minutes. Mr. Conkling then stated that, for himself, he would consent and trust to the other side of the chamber, when the ordinary hour of adjournment was reached, that if any senator desired to be heard, he should not be cut off or pushed into the night.

Mr. Withers here interrupted, and said: "The Senator must not trust to my courtesy in the matter, if he alludes to me."

Mr. Conkling retorted, with contemptuous irony: "I did not indicate the Senator from Virginia as one to whose courtesy I would trust."

After further desultory discussion, Mr. Lamar limited his request to twenty minutes, and at last unanimous consent was given. The bill was quickly disposed of and the Army Bill was immediately taken up.

The legislative session was prolonged until noon of June 19. Late in the sitting—it must have been about midnight—a wrangle occurred between Senators Blaine and Saulsbury, in which the latter charged the former and his party with obstructing legislation.

At this juncture Senator Conkling arose and referred to Mr. Lamar's request of that morning, and said that he had given his consent, relying on the courtesy of Democratic senators that the final vote would not be pressed on the Army Bill that day.

He continued: "Looking to that side, I received a nod, not from one, not from two, not from three, but from five Democratic senators."

Upon these assurances he had offered a motion to adjourn, assuming that there would be no objection.

He concluded by saying: "The Senator from Virginia rose with such a disclaimer as he had a right to make in order that he might keep within the bounds of his instructions from the committee; but when I heard every Democratic senator vote to commit such an outrage as that upon the minority of this body and upon the Senator from Wisconsin, I do not deny that I felt my full share of indignation; and during this evening, Mr. President, I wish to assume all my own responsibility, and so much more as any Republican senator feels irksome to him, for what has taken place. I have endeavored to show this proud and domineering majority—determined, apparently, to ride rough-shod over the rights of the minority—that they can not and they should not do it. But I am ready to be deemed responsible in advance for the assurance that while I remain a member of this body, and, at all events, until we have a previous question, no minority shall be gagged down or throt-

tled or insulted by such a proceeding as this. I say, Mr. President, and I measure my expression, that it was an act not only insulting, but an act of bad faith. I mean that."

It would be quite difficult to exaggerate the air of elaborate and haughty insolence with which this arraignment and threat was delivered. The concentrated and sonorous contempt of his denunciation of the majority, the bitter scorn of his contumelious epithets passed all bounds. It was unparliamentary and beyond the limits of debate, but he was not called to order.

It gave Mr. Lamar the opportunity for which he had been waiting so long. He rose to a personal statement, and said: "I am not aware of anything that occurred which would produce such an impression. If I had, although I would not have been instrumental consciously in producing such an impression, I should have felt myself bound by it, and would have made the motion for an adjournment, in order to give the Senator from Wisconsin an opportunity to discuss this bill.

"With reference to the charge of bad faith that the Senator from New York has intimated toward those of us who have been engaged in opposing these motions to adjourn, I have only to say that if I am not superior to such attacks from such a source, I have lived in vain. It is not my habit to indulge in personalities; but I desire to say here to the Senator, that in intimating anything inconsistent, as he has done, with perfect good faith, I pronounce his statement a falsehood, which I repel with all the unmitigated contempt that I feel for the author of it."

This was a solar-plexus blow. Mr. Conkling had contributed much to the acrimony and exasperation of the time. His attitude toward the Southern Democracy had been that of

unrelenting severity. He was aggressively radical. He advocated drastic measures for the protection of the negro and the assertion of the national authority. His manner was often offensively dictatorial and domineering. He trampled upon the sensibilities of his adversaries like a rhinoceros crashing through a tropical jungle. They grew restive, and there were subterranean rumors from time to time that they "had it in" for Conkling and intended to "do him up" at the earliest opportunity.

In the code of honor, so called, to give the lie is equivalent to a blow. It is the supreme verbal affront, and can be expiated only by blood. It is the intolerable stigma. The man who is branded as a liar publicly is in a *cul-de-sac*. He can go no further. He must wear the epithet or fight. To bite the thumb, or thrust out the tongue and say, "*Tu quoque*," does not shift the burden of dishonor in the estimation of gentlemen.

For the first time in the six years that I had known him, Conkling was, figuratively speaking, "knocked out." Accustomed to obsequious adulation which had swollen his egregious vanity to the point of tumefaction, his habitual attitude was that of supercilious disdain.

He was by far the most picturesque and commanding figure of an historic epoch.

His self-consciousness was inordinate, but justified by a magnificent presence, by the possession of extraordinary intellectual gifts, by national reputation, and the devotion of a great constituency.

In the Senate he had no rivals. No one challenged him. If any differed with him, it was with deference, almost with timidity. He seemed indifferent alike to approbation or censure. Like Wolsey, he was

"Lofty and sour to them that loved him not;  
 To those men that sought him, sweet as summer."

That this Alcibiades of Republicanism should be called a liar and denounced as an object of unmitigated contempt in the forum of his most imposing triumphs, before crowded galleries, by a "Confederate brigadier," was an indignity that seemed incredible. Had a dynamite bomb exploded in the gangway of the brilliantly lighted chamber, the consternation could hardly have been more bewildering.

Instantaneous silence fell. The gasping spectators held their breath. Mr. Conkling acted like one stunned. He became pallid and then flushed again. His disconcertion was extreme. He hesitated and floundered pitifully. He pretended at first not to have heard the insult, and asked Lamar in effect to repeat it.

He said: "Mr. President, I was diverted during the commencement of a remark the culmination of which I heard from the member from Mississippi. If I understood him aright, he intended to impute, and did, in plain and unparliamentary language, impute to me an intentional misstatement. The Senator does not disclaim that?"

Mr. LAMAR: "I will state what I intended, so that there may be no mistake—"

The Presiding Officer: "Does the Senator from New York yield?"

Mr. LAMAR: "All that I—"

The Presiding Officer: "Does the Senator from New York yield to the Senator from Mississippi?"

Mr. LAMAR: "He appealed to me to know, and I will give—"

The Presiding Officer: "The Senator from New York has the floor. Does he yield to the Senator from Mississippi?"

As he had asked Lamar a question which that senator was endeavoring to answer, the interrogations of the Chair seemed superfluous, but they afforded time for reflection, and at last Mr. Conkling said: "I am willing to respond to the Chair. I shall respond to the Chair in due time. Whether I am willing to respond to the member from Mississippi depends entirely upon what that member intends to say, and what he did say. For the time being I do not choose to hold any communication with him. The Chair understands me now; I will proceed.

"I understood the Senator from Mississippi to state in plain and unparliamentary language that the statement of mine to which he referred was a falsehood, if I caught his word aright. Mr. President, this is not the place to measure with any man the capacity to violate decency, to violate the rules of the Senate, or to commit any of the improprieties of life. I have only to say that if the Senator—the member from Mississippi—did impute, or intended to impute, to me a falsehood, nothing except the fact that this is the Senate would prevent my denouncing him as a blackguard and a coward." (Applause in the galleries.)

The Presiding Officer: "There should be no cheering in the galleries. If there shall be any more, the Chair will order the galleries to be cleared. The Senator from New York will proceed."

Mr. CONKLING: "Let me be more specific, Mr. President. Should the member from Mississippi, except in the presence of the Senate, charge me by intimation or otherwise with falsehood, I would denounce him as a blackguard, as a coward, and a liar; and understanding what he said as I have, the rules

and the proprieties of the Senate are the only restraint upon me. I do not think I need say anything else, Mr. President."

Mr. LAMAR concluded: "I have only to say, that the Senator from New York understood me correctly. I did mean to say just precisely the words, and all that they imported. I beg pardon of the Senate for the unparliamentary language. It was very harsh; it was very severe; it was such as no good man would deserve and no brave man would wear."

Mr. Conkling never seemed quite the same afterward. His prestige was gone. His enemies—and they were many—exulted in his discomfiture. Two years later he resigned his seat in the Senate, and his life afterward was a prolonged monologue of despair. To-day he is a splendid reminiscence. To the next generation his fame will be a tradition.

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But of all the feuds of the century, the most far-reaching in its tragic consequences was the political duel between Conkling and Blaine, which began with their appearance in Congress and ended only with their lives. They were rivals and foes from the start. Of about the same age, they both aspired to leadership, but in temperament and intellectual habits they had nothing in common. They were altogether the most striking personalities of their generation. They were enemies by instinct. Their hostility was automatic.

Their first altercation occurred April 30, 1866, in a debate on the charges against Provost-Marshal General Fry, in which it was alleged that Mr. Conkling, while a member of Congress, had taken a fee of \$3,000 as a judge-advocate.

During the discussion, which was extremely sensational, Mr. Blaine said: "I do not happen to possess the volubility

of the gentleman from the Utica District. It took him thirty minutes the other day to explain that an alteration in the reporter's notes for the *Globe* was no alteration at all; and I do not think that he convinced the House after all. And it has taken him an hour to day to explain that while he and General Fry have been at swords' points for a year, there has been no difficulty at all between them. The gentleman from New York has attempted to pass off his appearance in this case as simply the appearance of counsel. I want to read again for the information of the House the appointment under which the gentleman from New York appeared as the prosecutor on the part of the Government."

Mr. Conkling replied that no commission had been issued to him by the Judge-Advocate General.

Mr. Blaine interrupted, and the Speaker inquired: "Does the gentleman from New York yield to the gentleman from Maine?"

To this Mr. Conkling savagely answered: "No, sir; I do not wish to have anything to do with the gentleman from Maine, not even so much as to yield him the floor."

"All right," said Mr. Blaine; and Mr. Conkling resumed and presently said: "One thing further: If the member from Maine had the least idea how profoundly indifferent I am to his opinion upon the subject which he has been discussing, or upon any other subject personal to me, I think he would hardly take the trouble to rise here and express his opinion."

As soon as he obtained the floor, Mr. Blaine responded: "As to the gentleman's cruel sarcasm, I hope he will not be too severe. The contempt of that large-minded gentleman is so wilting; his haughty disdain, his grandiloquent swell, his majestic, supereminent, overpowering, turkey-gobbler strut

has been so crushing to myself and all the members of this House, that I know it was an act of the greatest temerity for me to venture upon a controversy with him. But, sir, I know who is responsible for all this. I know that within the last five weeks, as members of the House will recollect, an extra strut has characterized the gentleman's bearing. It is not his fault. It is the fault of another. That gifted and satirical writer, Theodore Tilton, of the *New York Independent*, spent some weeks recently in this city. His letters published in that paper embraced, with many serious statements, a little jocose satire, a part of which was the statement that the mantle of the late Winter Davis had fallen upon the member from New York. The gentleman took it seriously, and it has given his strut additional pomposity. It is striking. 'Hyperion to a satyr,' Thersites to Hercules, mud to marble, dunghill to diamond, a singed cat to a Bengal tiger, a whining puppy to a roaring lion. Shade of the mighty Davis, forgive the almost profanation of that jocose satire!"

Conkling was a good hater, who neither forgave nor forgot. He never spoke to Blaine afterward, nor recognized his existence. The "turkey-gobbler strut" and the "Hyperion curl" stuck to him and became the staples of the cartoonists. Mutual friends endeavored to bring about a meeting and reconciliation in the campaign of 1884, but in reply to the request that he should make one speech for Blaine, who was the Republican candidate, Conkling replied, with diabolical sarcasm, that he had given up criminal practice.

Froude, in his "Life of Cæsar," says that the quarrels of political leaders have always given direction to the current of history.

Conkling's implacable hatred defeated the nomination of Blaine in 1876, and his election in 1887. Indirectly it caused the death of Garfield, and prevented the renomination of Arthur, whom he described as "the prize ox in American politics."

The chief actors in this stupendous drama have all crossed the frontier of the dark kingdom. After life's fitful fever, they sleep well or ill; but whether well or ill, they sleep. They played mighty parts. They appealed to the passions of a majestic audience. The curtain has fallen; the lights are out; the orchestra has gone; and upon another stage we have the continuous performance, vaudeville and marionettes.

## II.

### LAMAR AND HOAR.

Political passion in the United States culminated in the Presidential campaign of 1876-77. The fatal blunders of Reconstruction left the South like a pyramid poised on its apex instead of its base. The unstable fabric, supported by sword and bayonet, stood for a while, and, when these were withdrawn, fell in a crash of blood and flame that came near engulfing our whole system in the vortex of its own destruction.

The whites of the South, organizing into White Leagues and Ku-Klux Klans, overthrew the State governments set up by negro majorities and their Northern allies, and sent the civil and military leaders of the Confederacy to the Senate and House of Representatives.

The exasperation of the Republicans of the North was intensified by the consciousness that they had "nursed the

pinion that impelled the steel," and it seemed for a time as if a renewal of civil strife were inevitable.

Collision between the partisans of Hayes and Tilden was averted by the invention of the Electoral Commission, a contrivance supported by each party in the hope of cheating the other, and which ended in defrauding both; but the rancor and asperity of debate did not subside until the inauguration of Garfield in the year 1881.

Prominent among the Southern Democrats in the Senate was L. Q. C. Lamar, of Mississippi. He had been a member of Congress before the war, and was an implacable Secessionist.

Though not a soldier, his relations with the Confederacy were confidential and important. He apparently accepted the consequences of the surrender, and attempted the perplexing rôle of propitiating the North and retaining the confidence of the South.

He pronounced a eulogy upon Charles Sumner, which caused his fidelity to the lost cause to be suspected at home, and therefore omitted no appropriate opportunity to reinstate himself by asserting his constancy to his original conviction, which he did faithfully.

He had the singular fortune to be appointed by President Cleveland a Justice of the Supreme Court, without ever having tried a reported cause in any tribunal, and without having been admitted as an attorney to practice in the court of which he became a member. His career was unique in American politics.

Mr. Lamar was not what Mrs. Partington called a "fluid speaker." His aspect was sombre and dejected. He usually seemed sunken in reverie and abstraction. He was absent-minded. He had no facility in off-hand, extemporaneous

debate. He was a dealer in oratorical shelf goods. His venom was not secreted, but distilled. He prepared his retorts in advance, and waited for the occasion to use them. He employed fixed ammunition. His speeches, which were infrequent, were written out and committed to memory; but, having rich rhetoric and dramatic energy in delivery, he was an exceedingly effective orator.

The Legislature of Mississippi censured and requested him to resign on account of his position on financial questions. At the next State convention, at Jackson, he made his defense, and one of his colleagues told me that Lamar came to his room in a hotel the preceding midnight for the benefit of his judgment, and, standing before this single auditor, for two hours rehearsed in a loud voice his entire address, tones, gestures, and all, without once referring to his manuscript, exactly as he delivered it before the convention the following day.

On the first of March, 1879, the bill granting service pensions to the surviving veterans of the Mexican War was being considered in the Senate.

It was opposed by many Republicans on the ground that it would place on the roll ex-Confederate soldiers who had fought in the war with Mexico.

Mr. Hoar, of Massachusetts, offered an amendment to the bill in the following words: "Provided further, that no pension shall ever be paid under this act to Jefferson Davis, the late President of the so-called Confederacy."

This precipitated a crisis. Every Southern senator arose in his place, one after the other, and said in substance that Jefferson Davis stood in the same position they stood in, and

that every man in the South who believed in secession stood in, and that if Jefferson Davis was a traitor, they were traitors:

Senator Garland, of Arkansas, in the course of his eulogium, alluded to the courage which Jefferson Davis had exhibited on Mexican battlefields, to which Mr. Hoar meekly responded: "Two of the bravest officers in our Revolutionary War were Aaron Burr and Benedict Arnold."

This was the red rag. Mr. Lamar, tremulous with indignation, sprang to his feet, and said: "It is with supreme reluctance that I rise to say a word on this subject. I must confess my surprise and regret that the Senator from Massachusetts should have wantonly, without provocation, flung this insult."

Bang went the gavel. Senator Edmunds, of Vermont, was in the chair. He presided like a school-master. He said, with severe emphasis: "The Senator from Mississippi is out of order. He cannot impute to any senator either wantonness or insult."

Mr. Lamar stopped, looked inquiringly at the Chair, and sneeringly said: "I stand corrected. I suppose it is in perfect order to insult certain other senators, but they cannot be characterized by those who received the blow."

This made the breach worse, and the Chair, rising, called Lamar to order, and directed him to take his seat until the question of order was decided.

Mr. Lamar shortly arose again, and said: "The observations of the Senator from Mississippi, in his own opinion, are not only in order, but perfectly and absolutely true," and thereupon appealed from the decision of the Chair.

The Chair submitted the question to the Senate. His decision was overruled; whereupon Mr. Edmunds said: "The

judgment of the Chair is reversed. The Senate decides that the words uttered by the Senator from Mississippi are in order, and the Senator from Mississippi will now proceed."

Mr. Lamar resumed, very slowly and deliberately, with no apparent agitation, and said: "Now, Mr. President, having been decided by my associates to have been in order in the language I used, I desire to say that if it is at all offensive or unacceptable to any member of this Senate, the language is withdrawn; for it is not my purpose to offend or stab the sensibilities of any of my associates on this floor. But what I meant by that remark was this: Jefferson Davis stands in precisely the position that I stand in, that every Southern man who believed in the right of a State to secede stands in."

Senator Hoar interrupted to explain that in making his motion for the amendment offered he had not thought that anyone stood in the same position as Mr. Davis. "I should not have moved," said he, "to except the gentleman from Mississippi from the pension-roll."

Mr. Lamar replied by insisting that there was no difference. He defended Jefferson Davis from the charge of treason which had been urged in the debate, and said: "I say this as a Union man this day. He [Mr. Hoar] intended to affix (I will not say that he intended, but the inevitable effect of it was to affix) upon this aged man, this man broken in fortune, suffering from bereavement, an epithet of odium, an imputation of moral turpitude. Sir, it required no courage to do that; it required no magnanimity to do it; it required no courtesy. It only required hate, bitter, malignant, sectional feeling, and a sense of personal impunity. The gentleman, I believe, takes rank among Christian statesmen. He might have learned a better lesson from the pages of heathen mythology."

Here he paused a moment and appeared to hesitate. He leaned toward Senator Thurman, three seats away, and said, *sotto voce*, but loud enough to be heard over half the chamber: "What was the name of the man who was chained to the rock?"

"Prometheus," was the reply, in a stage whisper.

Of course the name was familiar, but this made it seem like a sudden inspiration of genius.

He concluded: "When Prometheus was bound to the rock, it was not an eagle, it was a vulture, that buried his beak in the tortured vitals of the victim."

During his eulogy and exculpation of Jefferson Davis the Northern senators sat in silence; the boldness of the performance was paralyzing; such an emergency had not been anticipated. No one was ready. The passionate and excited spectators in the galleries wondered why no champion of the North took up the glove.

Toward the close of the debate a note fluttered over the balustrade of the northeast gallery, and, wavering in the hot air, was caught in its descent by a page, who carried it to Senator Chandler, of Michigan, to whom it was addressed. It was written on a leaf torn from a memorandum-book, without signature, and begging him in God's name to say something for the Union soldiers and for the North.

Chandler was a giant in stature, a politician of the practical type, with a jaw of granite and the fibre of a walrus. He was destitute of sentiment, and spent no time in reverie. He was chairman of the Republican National Committee, and the author of that celebrated dispatch, "Hayes has 185 votes, and is elected." He was not an orator like Conkling or Lamar. His weapon was the butcher's cleaver, and not the rapier.

He was a rough-and-tumble fighter, who asked no odds and feared no foe.

He read the anonymous note brought from the gallery. The black fury of his eyes blazed from the pallor of his face. At the first opportunity he obtained the floor, and delivered a tremendous Philippic against Jefferson Davis. It was evidently wholly unpremeditated, and therefore the more effective.

He said: "Mr. President, twenty two years ago to-morrow, in the old hall of the Senate now occupied by the Supreme Court of the United States, I, in company with Mr. Jefferson Davis, stood up and swore before Almighty God that I would support the Constitution of the United States. Mr. Jefferson Davis came from the Cabinet of Franklin Pierce into the Senate of the United States, and took the oath with me to be faithful to this Government. During four years I sat in this body with Mr. Jefferson Davis and saw the preparations going on from day to day for the overthrow of this Government. With treason in his heart and perjury upon his lips he took the oath to sustain the Government that he meant to overthrow.

"Sir, there was method in that madness. He, in coöperation with other men from his section and in the Cabinet of Mr. Buchanan, made careful preparation for the event that was to follow. Your armies were scattered all over this broad land, where they could not be used in an emergency; your fleets were scattered wherever the winds blew and water was found to float them, where they could not be used to put down rebellion; your treasury was depleted until your bonds bearing 6 per cent, principal and interest payable in coin, were offered for 88 cents on the dollar for current expenses, and no buyers. Preparations were carefully made. Your arms were sold under an apparently innocent clause in an army bill providing

that the Secretary of War might, at his discretion, sell such arms as he deemed it for the interest of the Government to sell.

"Sir, eighteen years ago last month I sat in these halls and listened to Jefferson Davis delivering his farewell address, informing us what our constitutional duties to this Government were, and then he left and entered into the rebellion to overthrow the Government that he had sworn to support! I remained here, sir, during the whole of that terrible rebellion. I saw our brave soldiers by thousands and hundreds of thousands, aye, I might say millions, pass through to the theatre of war, and I saw their shattered ranks return. I saw steamboat after steamboat and railroad train after railroad train arrive with the maimed and the wounded; I was with my friend from Rhode Island [General Burnside] when he commanded the Army of the Potomac, and saw piles of legs and arms that made humanity shudder; I saw the widow and orphan in their homes, and heard the weeping and wailing of those who had lost their dearest and their best. Mr. President, I little thought at that time I should live to hear in the Senate of the United States eulogies upon Jefferson Davis living—a living rebel eulogized on the floor of the Senate of the United States! Sir, I am amazed to hear it, and I can tell the gentlemen on the other side that they little know the spirit of the North when they come here at this day and with bravado on their lips utter eulogies upon a man whom every man, woman, and child in the North believes to be a double-dyed traitor to his Government."