

## HALIBURTON ON MEN AND THINGS

"Men and things are my topics," wrote Haliburton, near the close of his authorial career, concerning *The Season-Ticket*. The same avowal might have been made with equal truth about any other of his satirical-humorous works. That he should have had an unusually intimate acquaintance with both men and things in his native province of Nova Scotia is no cause for wonder, of course. Living as he did for much of his life at Windsor, "the cross-roads of the eastern colonies" in pre-Confederation days, and year after year driving the far from lonely routes of the provincial judges' circuits, while like his own Sam Slick keeping his ears and eyes open to "hear, see, and learn what I can," he readily and steadily accumulated the unrivalled store of Bluenose tavern-told yarns and jests and the factual data regarding one-time sharply varied Bluenose living conditions and their sharply varied settings, without which he could never have undertaken the *Clockmaker* series and its sequels. Indeed it was in the process of collecting that now priceless material that he found the very genesis of all his literary endeavors in so far as they relate to his homeland. How he could have carried on a similar process of accumulation (though with a good deal less than similar results) when he transferred the didactic operations of Sam Slick overseas, with only five comparatively brief visits there upon which to base them, is, however, cause for considerable wonder—unless one accepts the too easy explanation that it can be sufficiently accounted for as a natural consequence of his decidedly marked personal endowment in Yankee curiosity. Aside from his references to contemporary writers and their writings, Haliburton in the more widely read of his books presents a truly astounding range of first-hand knowledge of what was going on among all classes of the social order in England during the late 1830's and the early 1840's.

Among the things of his declared limits of interest for mention and comment on which he contrived to inform himself abroad may be cited: the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Victoria; the parade of wealth and fashion in the public park at Richmond; the formal receptions and dance parties at Almack's Assembly Hall in London; the stage triumphs of the reigning stars in ballet and opera; the horse market at Sadler's Wells and the trotting races at Ascot ("2:47," the mile record); the Xanthian and Elgin Marbles at the British Museum; the Nelson Monument at Liverpool; the suspension bridge (an engineering marvel) at Bristol; the Argand

safety lamp for miners; Lord Rossi's improvements in the telescope; the tunnel under the Thames (in process of construction); the "bank machine" for separating light from standard weight coins (an early instance of automation?); the political cartoons of "H. B." (i.e. John Doyle, whose identity was a well-kept secret); the Great American Circus then showing in London (a circus of the same name is described as on tour in Nova Scotia in *The Old Judge*); the sailings of the steamer "Great Western" and the growing interest in trans-Atlantic steamship service; the after effects of the first Reform Bill (among others the threat of universal suffrage); Chartism and its "five points" petition to parliament and the related riots and rick burnings; the spread of religious dissent and the growing desire for disestablishment of the Church of England; the agitation for an independent Ireland; the demand for the repeal of the Corn Laws; the attempt to pack the House of Lords; the political upsurge of the manufacturing class and the resultant deterioration in parliamentary representation; the proposals to abolish the import duties protecting colonial timber; the pending legislation to lower the postal rates; the failure of Sir James Graham's educational bill; the excitement over differing "right of search" claims; the "Opium War" against China; the talk over the French intrusion in Algiers; Van Amberg's performing tame animal act; the feature billing of "General" Tom Thumb and the Kentucky "giant;" and the popular cults of phrenology and "animal magnetism" (mesmerism).

Of the men about whom Haliburton made free to have his say at some length or make more or less pointed allusion to in pursuit of topics for comment in Great Britain, much the greater number, as could be expected, were politicians. But there were others too. A partial listing of them shows the names of such prominent clergymen (irreverently referred to by Sam Slick as "them sort o' cattle") as Dr. McNeil of Liverpool, Dr. Chalmers of London (temporarily), Cardinals Wiseman and Newman, and the Irish priest "Father Matthew." Scientists, or near-scientists, who are mentioned include Jonathan Burchell, the London surgeon; Dionysius Lardner, the mathematician; Richard Arkwright, the inventor; and "Professor" (Sir Richard) Owen, the authority on mermaids. Joseph Sturge, the industrialist, and Captain Claxton of the Cunard Steamship Line board of directors, represent business. Maclise and Barry stand witness for the arts, and so, in a way, does the son of J. S. Copley, who held a seat in the House of Lords. Robert Owen and William Wilberforce are classed as "reformers," a word which, as he applies it to them, Haliburton uses for once with not more than a tinge of censure. Public men bent on qualifying for recognition for services rendered outside of Parliament,

though sometimes members of it, inevitably prompted (Haliburton's prejudices being what they were) the pillory-posting of Lord Durham as their arch-villain for having compiled, with his aides, the famous *Report on Affairs in British North America*. Cataloguing the more usual type of politician summoned on the carpet by Haliburton is a risky venture, for party lines during the years of his vogue had a way of dissolving so as to make strange bed-fellows of once rival vote-bidders. About Daniel O'Connell there is no doubt, however: Haliburton had only one label for him, that of "agitator." Joseph Hume and J. A. Roebuck he regularly termed "radicals." Lord Elgin and the Duke of Wellington were "good old" Tories, true blue. Disraeli, a late-comer on the political scene under survey, was a "young" Tory, and hence none too good. The Conservatives, who, for Haliburton, were often rated as no better than renegade Tories, mustered as their front-running candidates for office Sir Robert Peel and Lord Stanley. Gladstone, who moved from their company to that of the "liberals," earned for his cross-over Haliburton's utmost contempt. On his roster of Whigs, whom in general he ranked barely a notch above the foot of the political scale, Haliburton found room for, among others, Richard Cobden, John Bright, Sir Thomas Spring-Rice, Earl Grey, and Lords Brougham, Melbourne, Palmerston, and John Russell.

In speaking his mind about the last named of these political figures, Haliburton indulged himself in the most uninhibited and persistent criticism he ever directed against one individual. It failed of effectiveness largely through his becoming entangled (though without any show of embarrassment) in a double shift of attitude towards its target. While holding forth on Russell *the legislator* speaking from the floor of the House of Commons, Haliburton condemned the Whig politician for his share in dispatching Lord Durham's fact-finding mission to Canada, declaring that the necessitated investigations would tend to increase the spread of unrest in the colonies, and so lead to their eventual separation from the mother country. But when Russell opposed the plan that Durham brought back for granting responsible government to the colonies—on the ground that it would set up an *imperium in imperio* and make the colonial governors subject equally to two masters, their legislatures and the Crown (Haliburton's own arguments against it)—Haliburton commended him. And then, when Russell, finding his constitutional forebodings unwarranted, supported the directive of Earl Grey, the Colonial Secretary, to the colonial governors formally inaugurating responsible government in the colonies, Haliburton again condemned him. While telling the (reading) world his opinion of Russell *the cabinet minister* who held the portfolio

of Colonial Secretary during the critical period of agitation for government reform in the colonies, Haliburton lampooned his lordship as the head of a department manned by incompetent place-holders, whose ignorance of colonial conditions was attested by their complete indifference to what they were being instructed was the one thing needed in the colonies, colonial patronage for colonials; and almost in the same breath, concealed only by the thin disguise of anonymity, he importuned Russell for some administrative or advisory appointment such as might be in his power to bestow, or for recommendation to a civil list pension, or a comparable honour, in recognition of his merits as an author.

The first mention of Russell by name in the *Clockmaker* volumes occurs near the end of the second in the series. It is a relatively innocuous reference, presumably to Russell's fame-winning biography of his seventeenth-century forebear, Lord William Russell, who was beheaded for alleged treason, though the reference may have been to a more recent work of Russell's on the causes of the French Revolution: "John Russell's writin' got him the birth [sic] of leader of the House of Commons." Evidently Haliburton was already considering his own eligibility for a literary award. "Come down handsom', minister," is an obvious hint of similar intent addressed to the occupant of the Colonial Office before Lord John took over there. The third *Clockmaker* opens with a reminder to the Colonial Secretary, by then Lord John himself, "who has other objects in view than the security of place, and the interests of a party," to the effect that extension of patronage to colonials would not come amiss. Some pages farther on Haliburton, with the help of Sam Slick, really begins to apply the lash:

If I was only alongside Lord Sir John on the state-box, I'd teach him in six lessons so that he could manage them [disaffected colonists] by whisperin' . . . [I] could put his royal highness Lord John Russell up to a thing or two he don't know, . . . He ought to go to the colonies and see for himself . . . If I was him, I'd jist slip off on the sly to the provinces . . . and travel as plain Mr. Russell . . . and jist take the soundin's of these folks myself. He'd hear the truth then . . .

*The Letter-Bag of the Great Western*, written with the lately announced coronation honors freshly in mind, was dedicated to Russell, but in terms obviously not calculated to ingratiate its author with its recipient:

I have selected your Lordship as my Macaenas . . . solely on account of the very extensive patronage at your disposal. Your Lordship is a colonial minister, and I am a colonial author; the connexion between us therefore . . . is so natural that this work has not only a claim on your protection, but a right to your support. All the world will say that it is vain for the Whig ministry to make protestations of regard for the colonies, when the author of [*The Letter-Bag*] remains in obscurity in Nova Scotia, languishing for want of timely patronage, and posterity . . . will pronounce that you failed in your

first duty, as protector of colonial literature, if you do not do pretty on this occasion. . . . I have inscribed it to you, therefore, not for the purpose of paying a compliment to your Lordship, but that you may have an opportunity of paying a very substantial compliment to me. . . .

Like a good shepherd, my Lord, open the gates and let down the bars [that exclude the colonists from colonial patronage] . . . . It does not become me, my Lord, to say what I expect for myself; but if the office of distribution of honours and promotions is vacant, as there are no duties to perform and the place is a sinecure, it would suit me uncommonly well, and afford me leisure to cultivate talents that are extremely rare among the race of officials. . . .

The subsequent naming (three times) of Russell in *The Letter-Bag* refers not to his neglect of colonial claims to colonial patronage, but to his service in behalf of reform at home. Haliburton's appraisal of what that amounted to may be summed up in the words of one of his letter-writers: "and so reform, it seems, is no great shakes arter all Lord John's flams [i.e. insincerities] about it."

Russell retired from the Colonial Office in 1841. The comments about him in the two series of *The Attaché* (1843, 1844) look back to the time when he was still in charge there. They begin with Sam Slick's retailing a (probably apocryphal) piece of gossip concerning the one occasion on which Russell condescended to appoint a "settler" to office. The position involved was a seat in the Legislative Council of Prince Edward Island, "a berth that has no pay, and takes a feller three months a year away from home." In offering it, Russell is reported to have demanded a retainer for his clerk. The poor but proud colonist's indignant response to the affront was that "The office ain't worth the fee. Take it and sell it to some one else that has more money nor wit." Russell's instructions to Poulett Thompson, the Governor-General sent to the Canadas following the receipt of Lord Durham's Report, seem to have been drawn in such a way that while they denied the principle of responsible government, they permitted a close approach to it in practice. At least they were so interpreted and applied by Thompson (according to Haliburton, it was rumoured in Canada that Thompson himself dictated his instructions!), and he was not recalled. Haliburton, like the rest of the anti-reformers in the colonies, was outraged. "Mesmerise John Russell [to ensure his telling the truth] into a caterwaulin' or a catalepsin' sleep," he wrote of him next in *The Attaché*, "and Lord John will say—'I was sincere'; (and I believe on my soul he was. He is wrong beyond all doubt, but he is an honest man, and a clever man, and if he had taken his own way more, and given Powlett Thompson his less, he would have been a great colony secretary; and more's the pity he is in such company. He'll get off his beam ends, and

right himself though, yet, I guess.)" Later he said of Russell that he was "the great noble—the leadin' Whig statesman," and he described his personal representative in Canada in the following manner:

The greatest mischief [there] was done by Poulett Thompson; shrewd, sensible, laborious, and practical [in another passage he was "either a very weak or a very unprincipled man"], he had great personal weight, and as he was known to have unlimited power delegated to him, and took the liberty of altering the tenure of every office of emolument in the country, he had the greatest patronage ever known in a British province at his command . . . [His] one great error . . . was in strengthening . . . the democratic, and weakening the aristocratic, feeling of the country, than which nothing could be more subversive of the regal authority and influence.

Yet, later still, when Russell was questioned about responsible government, apropos of what was going on in Canada, Haliburton commented that "Lord John looks wise and says, 'it's not unlike prerogative—its existence is admitted—it's only its exercise is questioned'." Russell indeed, in Haliburton's opinion of him, had, though "upper crust," "a cussed long [i.e. slippery] tongue."

By the time *The Old Judge* appeared, responsible government in Nova Scotia had been officially confirmed, and Haliburton briefly called a halt to his satiric flickings of Russell's political hide. But he kept up his censure of the Colonial Office, then under the direction of Earl Grey, for its continued failure to appoint colonials as colonial executives. And he questioned the constitutionality of the Colonial Secretary's authorization of the recent "organic changes" in colonial government without first having obtained the consent of the provincial and Imperial legislatures. Nothing came of the query, however. Haliburton resumed the overt verbal whipping of his chief public aversion in *Wise Saws and Modern Instances*. Just why he should have jibed at Russell for cheering a "good Latin quotation" in the House of Commons is not clear, but he did. And then, perhaps to even up the score a little, he permitted himself a good word for Russell for being willing to take a place in Lord Palmerston's cabinet shortly after having ousted Palmerston from his own (Russell was Prime Minister, 1846-52). But whatever the effect of that slight touch of conciliation, it was cancelled out before long by the remark that Russell's Reform Bill of 1832 "lowered the House, but raised him," and increased "republicanism" in England, and by the question, "What the plague does Lord John Russell know about reform in college?" apparently inspired by Russell's interest in doing away with the religious tests that barred Jews from Oxford.

With *Nature and Human Nature* Haliburton's scourging of Russell reached its lowest level in uncalled for partisan ill-will. Perhaps the record depth to which it could sink is registered in this seemingly cryptic comment—seemingly cryptic, that is, until one realises that it combines a reference to the beheading of Russell's ancestor, Lord William Russell, on the charge of treason, and a reminder of Russell's one-time opposition to responsible government in the colonies for fear of what granting it would mean to the exercise of the royal prerogative there: ". . . they [townsfolk] know John Russell, who never says I'll be hanged if I do this or that, but I'll be beheaded if I do; in allusion to one of his great ancestors who was as innocent of trying to subvert the constitution as he is." Mean-spirited as this is, its pettiness comes close to being matched by the insinuations that follow Sam Slick's "I am glad that I am not an Englishman, or as true as the world, a chap like Lord John Russell would ruin me for ever," which opens a tirade against Russell's not over-selectively discreet editing of Thomas Moore's diary:

"Now a biographer [or the editor of a diary, who is a politician] like that man is like a bee; he travels a zig-zag course . . . he is here and there and everywhere; you don't know where the plague to find him; he courts all and is constant to none. But when his point is gained and he has wooed and deceived all, attained his object, and his bag is filled, he then shows plain enough what he was after all the time. [He neither] knows or cares for any of them who contributed to his success. His object is to enrich himself and make a family name. A politician therefore is the last man in the world to write a biography. Having a kind of sneakin' regard for a winding, wavy way himself, . . . he overlooks little peccadilloes, as he calls the worst stories, and thinks everybody else will be just as indulgent as himself. . . . Who the plague hain't done something, said something, or thought something he is sorry for, and prays may be forgot and forgiven; . . . [It's not] the part of a friend to go and rake all those things up, and expose 'em to the public, . . . It's astonishing how many friends Moore's disloyalty made him. A seditious song or a treasonable speech finds more favour with some people in the old country than building a church . . ."

Possibly the fact that Russell was instrumental in obtaining a pension for Moore contributed something to the bitter irony of those last two sentences.

Elsewhere in *Nature and Human Nature*, Sam Slick replies to an inquiry concerning the destiny of the British North American colonies:

"I could tell you, if I was Colonial minister, because I should then have the power to guide that destiny. . . . No English statesmen have the information, the time, or the inclination to meddle with the subject. To get rid of the bother of them [the colonies], they have given up all control and said to them, 'There is responsible government for you, now turtle off hum, and manage your own affairs.' . . . They [the colonists] are your younger sons. . . . Do you treat them like your other younger children that remain at

home? Then you put in your army and navy, . . . or you send them to the church or the bar. 'If you prefer diplomacy' (you say to them) 'I will place the ladder before you; ascend it. If you like politics, I will place you in parliament, and if you have not sufficient talents for the House of Commons, you shall go out governor of one of our colonies.' [That italicised possessive is Haliburton's signal for Colonial Office bunkum]. Those appointments belong of right to them, but they can't help themselves at present. . . . The representative of any little insignificant German state, of the size of a Canadian township, has a place assigned to him on state occasions. Do you ever show the same attention to the delegate of a colony, of infinitely more extent and value than Ireland? . . . Do you suppose for a moment that proud-spirited, independent, able men . . . will long endure the control of a Colonial minister, who, they feel, is as much below them in talent, as by accident he may be above them in rank? . . . How does it happen that this country [Canada] is filled with grief and humiliation from one end of it to the other? I will tell you. [Its affairs are] managed by a branch of the Colonial Office. . . . a Colonial Office, in which there is not a single man that ever saw a colony . . ."

From Sam Slick, again, the concessions made by Russell and his associates to the colonies at one time or another draw only this ungracious acknowledgement—or is it a belated prediction? (The statement is equivocal.): "An honest statesman will not refuse to do justice—a willy [sic] politician will concede with grace what he knows he must soon yield to compulsion." Immediately thereafter he warms up to one of his meanest stings:

"there is no truth in liberalism. . . . Liberalism said Pass the Reform Bill, and all England will be satisfied; well, though it has not worked well for the kingdom, it has done wonders for the radical party, and now another and more extensive one is promised. The British Lion has been fed on living raw meat, and now roars for more victims. . . . There is at this time a postponed Reform Bill. The proposer actually cried when it was deferred to another session. It nearly broke his heart. . . . Most likely the father of the strangled Reform Bill [Russell, whose attempts to secure the enactment of a second Reform Bill in 1849 and 1854 has been beaten down in the House of Commons] comforted himself with the same reflection [as that of a n'er-do-well in Slickville, who accepted the death of his twelfth child as a mercy] only he thought it wouldn't do to say so."

In the light of all this innuendo and outspoken badgering, it will prove somewhat more than a mild surprise to come across this letter, as one does, in the Webster Manuscript Collection of the New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, New Brunswick:

Jan. 25, 1855.

Dear Judge Haliburton

I am sorry to tell you of the effect your American birds produced on us—but it is right to do so—

We ate very small portions each, but about 3 hours afterwards we all felt sick, with a great falling of the pulses, & cold hands and feet—this morning a dog who ate a portion of the bird cold was immediately sick.



Perhaps something used to preserve the birds in their voyage may have produced these unpleasant consequences. At all events you had better guard your own family from such awkward symptoms.

I remain yours faithfully

J. Russell.

No, Haliburton had not tried to poison Russell. A well-meant courteous gesture had simply turned sour. In spite of its mildly stiff tone, one can only conclude from Russell's reply to it either that Haliburton, like Sam Slick's cat ("pitch it up in the air as high and as often as you please"), always landed on his feet, or that he was blessed with a more than usual amount of social charm. Perhaps both. For anyone interested in following the relations between Haliburton and Russell, there is still another surprise in store. Haliburton went right on needling Russell!

In *The Season-Ticket* the reforming ardour of Lord John is said to have "radicalized London to that degree that its citizens slap their breeches pockets, which are full of sovereigns [symbolizing their complete conversion to money-making commercial ventures], and say 'money is no object. . . .'" But vulgarly rich though they have become, they are critical enough of government spending to qualify their endorsement of it with, ". . . don't pay people enormously for doing nothing [like the officials at the Colonial Office], who to avoid the name of idleness, strive to bring something to pass, and always do it wrong. Let them play if you like, but don't let them play the devil." The generally popular Palmerston administration of 1855-58, in which Russell served as Foreign Secretary, is dubbed "foolhardy," perhaps because it supported the persistently advocated Russell policy of lowering the franchise "below what is safe," according to Ephraim Peabody, Sam Slick's stand-in of *The Season-Ticket*. Russell's long-continued championship of the, in 1860, still disenfranchised classes brought down on his reforming head another comment, which with its unfeeling ironies as to the genuineness of his declared sympathy for the voteless coupled with an allusion to his diminutive stature takes at least second place from the bottom in the list of Haliburton's satirical meannesses, barely above the uncharitable dredging-up of the treason imputed to Russell's beheaded ancestor previously noted:

". . . some say that Lord John Russell, who bids at a political auction (where long credit is given on renewable paper), like a feller that has no real capital to trade on, is going to destroy the constitution by letting in as many outsiders [to the privilege of the ballot] as will swamp all the real estate [i.e. propertied classes] in the kingdom, and to my mind they ain't far out in their reckoning either. No man need tell me, after seeing him, that bleeding ain't good for the human frame. That man's feelings are so tender, and his innards are so thin-skinned, his heart has been bleeding without stopping for thirty

years, for the unrepresented class. It would have burst its boiler long ago, if that large safety-valve hadn't been fixed in him originally hard and fast. What a wonderfully constructed system he must have for his heart to have sustained such a continued drain of blood from it; and, great as the demand has been, the supply has always been equal to it! He looks as well (indeed, some folks say better) than he ever did. The tears also that he has shed over small boroughs, especially those of the Tories, would actily float a river steamer; still there are fellers who say he is a dangerous and venturesome critter, and that he is too small a man to wade into such troubled waters as those of reform."

Elsewhere Peabody linked Russell and John Bright together in the allegation that they had plotted to frighten "timid politicians" into believing that England, as compared with the democratic United States, was "going to the devil." The final infamy with which the unforgiving Tory in Haliburton charged Russell was not (be it said to his credit) that Russell had endeavored to have Jews seated in the House of Commons, as he had, but that in making the attempt he had set at defiance the law of the land:

The Whigs, who are expert at removing land-marks, to enlarge the sphere of their own action, have more than once shown a disposition to take the law into their own hands. Lord John Russell was prepared on a recent occasion to admit the Jews to the legislature, in defiance of the law, by a mere resolution of the House, to which he wished to give the effect of an Act of Parliament, utterly regardless of the collision it would produce between the House of Commons and the judges.

Haliburton may have been both lucky and socially charming, but he surely never learned that too much of a poor joke is more than enough.