When to Set a Hen.

To the Editor of the Press.

SIR: The longer I live—and I seem to be living a little longer every day of my life—and the more I observe the action of learned and prominent, and presumably wise men, the more firmly am I convinced that the highest type of Wisdom ever masquerades in the motley garb of Folly, and that the best writers on Mental Science and Political Economy are Charles Godfrey Leland and "Josh Billings." President Cleveland never read "Josh Billings." Had he done so he would have grappled to his memory with hooks of steel this bit of homely, priceless wisdom: "The time to set a hen is when the hen is redy to set."

The president, in the matter of the captured battle-flags, has been guilty of the useless folly of trying to make the hen "set" when her mind is far away on the piney hill, and cool, forbidden scratching places in the kitchen garden, while she regards the nest with only forgetful indifference, develops successively into hesitation, reluctance, protestation, aversion, peremptory refusal and riotous outbreaking and obstinate rebellion.

Nobody was saying anything about these battle-flags. Now and then a company of union veterans, making a reunion pilgrimage to some old battlefield, carrying with them, in a glow of good fellowship and fraternal feeling, a flag captured by them long ago from their friends the enemy, and now being hospitably entertained by him, crowned the reunion of old-time friends and foes by returning the flag to the hands that first unfurled and then so bravely defended it. If the veterans wish to do this no man will say nay. In fact it was rather a pleasant thing for the boys to do when their hearts prompted them to do it. They captured the flags; it is their right to do with them as they will.

But here comes a man who never captured a flag, who never saw a rebel flag until long after it had been captured; who abode nigh onto the Canada border when he had every opportunity to go a gunning for battle flags; he hears the contented monologue of the hen that is foraging through the strawberry bed and occasionally dividing the spoils with the weak, though much oftener with the strong, and mistakes it for a reckless "cluck" of a hen moved by promptings of the maternal instinct to brood over a whole nest full of the unsearchable possibilities whose fruitful harvest may, good wot, dominate the electric barnyard. He said: "I will go into this obliteration and reconciliation business as a jobber. I will take that up that I laid not down; I will gather where I have not strawed, reap where I did not sow. I will weather these flag returners and cross the line ahead of the whole fleet by a clean majority."

Alas for the man who would set a "non-setting" hen, or, finding a willing one setteth her upon dragon's teeth.

That hen wasn't ready to set, and the mistaken president has crumpled his linen, overheated himself, impaired his dignity, filled the air with dust and feathers, and set the whole national barnyard into wild commotion, and the hen which he sought to "set" is perched high on the reel of the old Grant reaper, which has been under the shed since 1865, where she makes the farm ring with her violent protest. Even if she was half ready to set, President Cleveland isn't the man to set her. He hasn't been with her long enough. Somehow, she seems to roost too high every time he comes around the barnyard. If she had seen more of him now, say when she was about twenty-five years younger, it might have been different.

Any man old enough to be president ought to be old enough to see when a hen wants to set. A hen is such a fool she reminds me of men; and even a president is but a man. See, now; I have a quarrel with my brother, with whom I have lived pleasantly enough ever since our father died, away back in 1776. We fight a long time, but at last I "lick" him, take away his marbles and make him come back into the house and behave himself; I give him the best place at the table, and, by and by, acquiesce when he says it is his turn to run the house. In a moment of good feeling and fraternal love I begin to give back the marbles I took from him. He doesn't ask for them, but I give them to him. I want to do this; it pleases him and makes me feel better. While I am doing this long comes my stepfather, who hid himself under the bed all the time we were fighting, and only sent the hired man to represent him—he comes along now and says:

"Here, Jefferson, I'm going to give you back all the marbles that Abraham took away from you."

Will I give my brother another solitary marble? Not by a long chalk. I'll lick my stepfather first. By this ultimed, meddlesome interference in a matter that didn't concern him, he has retarded what he sought to promote.

And finally, brethren, when the hen is ready to set she "sets." All the presidents from Washington to Mexico can't stop her. If you destroy her nest and lock her out of the hennery, she will set with perfect faith and tireless patience under the bobs of an old wood shed on a bottle neck and a bureau knob. She may even be reduced to the necessity of setting standing up, but she will set. When it comes time to return the battle flags the men who captured them will restore them, and no man who stayed in Buffalo all through the battle-flag season need feel called upon to tell them when that time arrives. The hen will be apt to know it herself. A man who would tell a hen when it was time for her to set would have "gall" enough to tell a man on shipboard that he would come around and tell him when to get seasick.

"The time to set a hen is when the hen is reddy."

Cut that out and paste it in your hat, Mr. President, it may save your second term. ROBERT J. BURDETTE.

Bryn Mawr, June 17.

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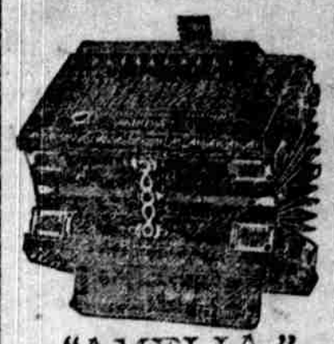

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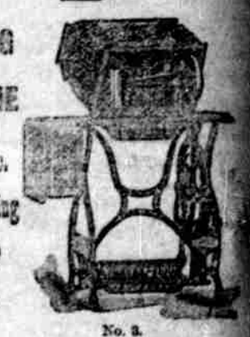

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