

CORRESPONDENCE.

Pinchback—The History of the New Orleans Gambler.

Editor Pomeroy's Democrat:

NEW ORLEANS, Dec. 27, 1873.

If "coming events cast their shadows before," it may be safely assumed that the action to be taken by Congress in the Louisiana case was determined upon in advance of the meeting of that body by the leaders of the Republican party in secret conclave assembled; and that it was to be of such a character as to be claimed as an endorsement, as well as an approval, of the action of the President in not only recognizing as the *de facto* government of this State, what he must have known to be "a gross usurpation," but ordering it to be maintained and enforced as such by Federal bayonets, regardless of the will of the people as expressed through the medium of the ballot box.

The course pursued by Mr. Morton in the Senate and General Butler in the House, would seem to leave no doubt that they had been put forward to engineer through their respective houses the programme agreed upon by the parties and in the manner above suggested. The seating of Pinchback in the Senate, and Sypher and Sheldon in the House, might, with some show of truth as well as propriety, be claimed as an endorsement, as well as approval, of the unwarranted and unauthorized action of the President in recognizing and maintaining the Kellogg usurpation as the *de facto* government of this State, for it is well known that neither of the individuals above named are any more entitled to the seats they claim, than is Kellogg to the office of governor. They are both part and parcel of the usurpation.

Sypher and Sheldon, the two carpet-baggers who claim to represent the first and second congressional districts of Louisiana, and who have been admitted to seats, have already gained a very extended but unenviable notoriety. But as yet Pinchback is left out in the cold. Still, as there is at least a possibility that the majority of the Senate will do as did the majority in the House—yield obedience to the declared will of the President, and seat the mongrel aspirant to senatorial honors, upon false and fraudulent credentials, for which he is indebted to Kellogg, a brief sketch of his origin and antecedents may not be uninteresting to the many thousand readers of the DEMOCRAT.

As to Pinch's origin, there appears to be no question in the minds of those who know him longest. His father being a white man, and his mother a female of the colored persuasion, he is a mulatto. This fact dissipates the false impression he has attempted to create in the mind of the distant public, that he is a quadroon, and therefore the representative of a large, respectable and wealthy class in Louisiana.

Pinch's mother having been the slave of his father, he was born a chattel under the law. But he did not long remain in that condition, for when he was quite young his father sent his colored concubine and her progeny to Cincinnati, and it was owing to this circumstance that Pinch became for a time a resident of the great State of Ohio.

Whether Pinch's father was actuated by a conviction that holding his own flesh and blood as slaves, was contrary to the law of nature, even if sanctioned by that regulating the "peculiar institution," or a desire to get rid of his youthful progeny, is a mooted question. Be this as it may, he sent his slave son to Ohio, where he became free, and where he acquired a smattering of learning.

As to which one of the slave States was the birth-place of the subject of this sketch, there is some question. The general impression appears to be, however, that Pinch was born in Alabama, and that soon after that event his father moved to that section of Mississippi known as the "Yazoo country." It was from that region his father sent him to Cincinnati.

There are grave doubts whether Pinch inherited his name or assumed it. There are some who believe that in his youth, on account of his color as well as the mixture of his blood, he was nicknamed Pinchback, and that he subsequently adopted it as a surname, changing its significance by substituting an *n* for an *e*, thus converting Pinchb-*e*-ck into Pinchb-*a*-ck. The fact that the "oldest inhabitants" do not remember a planter who went by the name of Pinchback, affords ground for this belief. He afterward added the prefixes Percy Benton Shelly, but for shortness he signs himself P. B. S. Pinchback.

Pinch's introduction to the public was in the capacity of boot-black on board of one of the floating palaces that plied on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, for the accommodation of the traveling public. He next appeared in the character of cabin boy, and from that position he worked his way up until he reached that of head steward. And no matter in what position fortune placed Pinch, he always made it pay.

It was while holding the position of head steward that Pinch learned the manners and habits of gentlemen, which he has so successfully affected since Congress emancipated the slaves of the south, and converted the negroes into a political element. And now, for the reason that it is to his interest to be so considered, Pinch puts himself forward as the representative of the negro race, when, in fact, he entertains little friendship for the colored people. He has publicly declared that he was not proud of his negro blood, as some professed, and that he would not be a negro if he could help it.

Pinch became disgusted with the cabin of a steamboat, and determined that no such "pent up Utica should contract his powers," and he sought a more enlarged field for his budding genius by entering a popular gambling saloon in this city, where he served in a varied capacity, sometimes as waiter and at other times as errand boy and "go-between." It was in this school that Pinch became an adept in the "ways that are dark and the tricks that are vain," which have since enabled him to live by his wits and cunning, instead of honest industry.

It was in the gambling saloon that Pinch picked up the smattering of politics which has constituted his principal capital stock in trade since Congress enacted him into a suffragan, for it is a well known fact that the gamblers of this section of country as well as elsewhere, are blatant politicians, not from principle, but as a matter of business. And, strange to say, they are generally on the winning side. This may be owing, in a great measure, to the fact that when gamblers take an interest in a ticket, they not only resort to all the tricks known in politics to insure its success, but they put up their money.

After graduating from the gambling saloon Pinch became a "roper" and lived by "roping in" and fleecing poor ignorant slaves of their little earnings. And to enable him to more successfully carry on his nefarious practices, it was said he was the secret proprietor of, or silent partner in, several dens into which negroes were inveigled by Pinch's "ropers," and there fleeced of whatever small change they might be possessed of. True, his winnings were small compared with what they have been since he became a politician of low degree, but his style of living was not so extravagant then as now.

At the time Pinchback set up as a "gay gambolier," the law was very strict in regard to the landing of negroes from steamboats, whether slave or free. They were not permitted to remain on shore except under certain restrictions, unless they came with their masters. Notwithstanding the vigilance of the police, free negroes would frequently succeed in getting ashore. This they would sometimes do by getting some one who came on the boat with them to pass them off as their attendants. It not unfrequently happened that "fancy pieces" of the colored persuasion were smuggled ashore by interested parties. It is charged that Pinchback was at one time employed by the chief of police as a special detective or spy to hunt up the negroes who were in the city in violation of law, particularly this latter class, for the purpose of levying black mail upon them, or those who were interested in their remaining. As the individual who was then chief of police is yet in the city, the truth or falsity of the charge could easily be proved by placing him under oath.

Some serious suspicion of foul play on the part of Pinch led to serious altercations between him and his victims. These were not of such a serious character as to make the interference a necessity, but to cause Pinch to be regarded as a dangerous and suspicious character. But for some cause or other he never came to grief, until after General Butler's advent into this city. Soon after his occupation he abolished the municipal courts, and in their stead established a provisional or provost court. Before this tribunal Pinchback was arraigned on a charge of larceny, preferred by one of his relations. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to the penitentiary for two years—the workhouse in this city being then used as a State prison, owing to the exposed position of that institution at Baton Rouge. He was afterwards pardoned out, but whether by Butler or Backs, or for what reason, is not now remembered.

For a time after this unpleasant episode, Pinch

was lost sight of by the public. But when emancipation became a military necessity, and it was deemed right and proper to make breast-works of the newly enfranchised, Pinch came to the front with his "sword in arms and eager for the fray." He raised a company and was elected captain. If the "colored troops fought nobly" under his command, the fact has not been recorded. Neither is it anywhere mentioned that he was promoted or commended for gallant service. It appears that Pinch, tiring of the life of a soldier, soon resigned, and retired upon the glory that attaches to the title of captain.

When the election was held for a delegate to a constitutional convention, Pinch was a candidate, and as all the negroes were allowed to vote, while thousands of white men were disfranchised, there is no question but that he received a majority of the votes in the district in which he was a candidate. At the majority of the convention was made up of ignorant blacks, Pinch was enabled, by his superior intelligence and cunning, to play not only a prominent but a leading part in that body. And he was credited with having been more liberal and kindly disposed towards the old white population, than were the white carpet-baggers and the scalawags. This, however, is attributed to the fact that at that time Pinch was in doubt as to which was the dominant race in this State. His subsequent course affords good ground for the suspicion that he was not actuated by honest motives while a member of the constitutional convention.

At the election held to accept or reject the reconstructed or black-and-tan constitution, and officers of State by it provided for, Pinchback was a candidate for State senator. That election was held under the supervision of the officer in command of this department. To him the returns were made. These returns showed that Pinch was not elected. But the negroes, carpet-baggers and scalawags being in the majority, he was seated without any regard to the result of the election. At that time Pinch was hard up, and of this fact it is said William Pitt Kellogg took advantage, and proposed to aid him pecuniarily by having his name put on the "post-roll" of the custom-house, and have him seated as senator. If he would pledge himself to not only vote for him (Kellogg) for United States senator, but use his influence in his behalf, Pinch, it is said, accepted the proposition, and thus became a State senator. At that time Kellogg was collector of this port and wielded an immense influence in the legislature by reason of the fact that a considerable number of the members were on the "post-roll."

When Lieutenant-Governor Oscar Damm died, H. C. Warmoth, who was then governor, conceived the idea of strengthening his waning power by having Pinch elected to fill the vacancy. This he felt assured would insure to him a large proportion of the negro vote in the ensuing contest. To carry out this design, he scarcely waited until the body of the deceased lieutenant-governor was cold in his grave ere he issued his proclamation convening the senate in extra session for the purpose of filling the vacancy caused by his death. Both Conservative and Republican senators protested against the extra session—first because it would be illegal, and, second, because it was unnecessary, inasmuch as the general assembly would meet in less than a month thereafter. But all to no purpose. There were enough senators who owed their official existence to Warmoth to enable him to carry out his design.

At the regular session Pinch would have been ousted, had Warmoth bribed one of the custom house Republican senators. But he afterwards beat him out of the bribe, by surreptitiously abstracting it from a tin box in which it was placed, notwithstanding said box was deposited in a bank, with the understanding that it was only to be delivered to the parties depositing the same. Not only this, but to sustain himself, Pinch had to vote twice, first as Senator and then as President of the Senate, to prevent a tie. It was thus that Pinch became President of the Senate and ex-officio Lieutenant-Governor. Afterwards he adhered to the fortunes of Warmoth until he went off on the Liberal Republican tangent. Pinch would doubtless have adhered to Warmoth to the bitter end, had he not become convinced that he was not considered by the Conservative element with which the so-called Liberal Republicans sought an alliance of sufficient importance to place him on the State ticket. Until that time he had kept up the split in the Republican party, which grew out of the contest in 1871 between the custom-house officials and the Warmoth faction for the control of the State executive committee. But when he became convinced that there was neither place nor money to be had by going into the fusion of parties, he sold out his adherents for a nomination on the Republican ticket as candidate for Congress for the State at large.

When it was ascertained that the Kellogg ticket was defeated, and that the only hope of retaining control of the political affairs of the State in the hands of the carpet-baggers was to invoke the unwarranted interference of Judge Durall, of the United States District Court, Pinch agreed, for a valuable consideration, to play the role of Governor as soon as the bogus legislature, created by the order of a federal judge, could trump articles of impeachment against Warmoth. The result is well known. When Pinch became governor by this means, and was protected in the exercise of his usurped authority by federal bayonets, beyond what he had been engaged to do, and used the power and influence his position gave him to secure his own election to the Senate of the United States. This was more than the custom-house faction bargained for, but they could not help themselves without upsetting the whole usurpation. It is doubtless owing to this fact that the custom-house officials have taken so little interest in Pinch's contest for a seat in the Senate. It is very generally believed that a majority of the white Republicans of the State would be pleased to see Pinch rejected, if it could be done without endangering the Kellogg usurpation.

Such is a brief sketch of the origin, antecedents, and status of Percy Benton Saelby Pinchback, the gay and festive mulatto who aspires to represent the once proud State of Louisiana in the Senate, and who is likely to be seated as such, because it is necessary to the maintenance of the usurpation that the President recognized as the *de facto* government of this State. But brief as it is, it is sufficient to show that Pinch is neither morally nor intellectually qualified for the position into which Senator Morton is attempting to foist him, solely with a view to screen the President from the just censure and condemnation of Congress for having usurped the right of declaring who should be governor, and who should constitute the Legislature of the State of Louisiana. If this can be done in one State, what is to prevent the same course being adopted towards other States, when the majority of the voters decline to swear in the language of the powers that be. It will be establishing a dangerous precedent to permit the President's unauthorized, unwarranted action in regard to Louisiana to go uncondemned or uncensured. It will be preparing the way for the speedy assumption of the whole powers of government by one man. The fate of Louisiana for many years to come depends upon the action of the Senate in rejecting or admitting Pinchback to a seat in that body. If he is admitted it virtually fastens upon this State the most unscrupulously corrupt set of men that ever claimed to act in an official capacity. It will foist upon the people of Louisiana a government so corrupt as to sink into insignificance that of Warmoth, which was infamous.

CRESCENT.