

# THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN.

Senator Sumner's Speech on the Alabama Claims—First Response from a British Crown Source.

(From the Toronto (Canada) Gazette—British Crown organ in British North America—April 12.]

Senator Sumner evidently knows, from long experience, the exact amount of "bunkum" and "sap-doodle" which his countrymen can swallow with impunity, and presumed upon it in the speech on the Alabama claims treaty, which he made with great success in the United States Senate on Tuesday. The rather rough and brief synopsis of his remarks, which leaked out through the closed doors of the Senate chamber, do not define the stand he has taken in a very satisfactory manner; but from the general tenor of what was communicated to the press, in order to fire the Northern heart, it is easy to discover that he endorsed the furious, uncompromising, absurd policy advocated by such reckless journals as the *New York Herald*, and that if a compromise is ever brought about through the offices of any American or other statesman, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, although usually, and as he should be, reflective and cool-headed, will not be a party thereto.

Some of the charges in his long indictment are so absurd that they would never be preferred in any state paper from the hand of any statesman who has the remotest conception of the duties of international comity. Mr. Sumner, of course, knew this, but he none the less presumed upon the ignorance of his auditors and the gross gullibility of a nation which has always refused to think for itself, and throws the duty and profitable labor upon the willing shoulders of "professional politicians" like Mr. Sumner. It would be almost unfair to assume that the synopsis now before us contains anything like a correct version of his views; but on one or two points Mr. Sumner is only consistent. Several years ago, at popular meetings, not in his place in the Senate, he denounced England for issuing a proclamation of neutrality and conceding belligerent rights to the Southern insurgents, as well as for the blockade running proclivities of some of her daring, hardy adventurers; but no sensible man, no one at all acquainted with the views of even the American publicists on these branches of international law, ever supposed that they would be seriously propounded by Mr. Sumner in his present capacity as the mouthpiece of the administration. Wheaton, the standard American authority, is directly opposed to Mr. Sumner on both of these grounds, holding that blockade running is a venial offence condoned by the risk which the parties to it incur; holding further that no State has a right to institute a blockade unless it makes it effective; and on the other point raised by Mr. Sumner, that a State has an inherent right to define its relations towards another, and decide whether it shall remain neutral or otherwise in any contest between any two Powers or parts of a Power. The United States government has frequently acted upon these well known, universally recognized doctrines, and even now is about to issue a proclamation warning its constituents not to violate the neutrality of the State by taking part in the contest now going on in Cuba. Ah, but, says Mr. Sumner, the South was in a state of rebellion against a sovereign Power, with which you were on friendly terms, and yet you hastened to recognize the rebels as belligerents, and thereby give them a status which they could not otherwise have acquired—a position which enabled them to carry on operations on the high seas in cruisers recognized by you as belonging to an independent Power, to the destruction and ruin of our vast and widely extended commerce. If this be "the head and front of the" English "offending" the United States government was just as great a sinner. And why? Let us suppose that England had not conceded belligerent rights to the South, what would have been the consequence according to all the writers on international law? Only this, that as soon as the Sumpter, the Nashville and the other earlier Confederate cruisers arrived in England after burning the *Brilliant* and other Northern merchant vessels, their officers and crews, having no recognized status, would have been subject to the law and amenable to trial and execution as pirates, although, too, they were only exercising their recognized belligerent right to make reprisals. England very properly refused to act as hangman for the American government, and when the same question came up for trial and disposal in the United States courts in the memorable case of the confederate crew seized, almost red-handed, off Charleston harbor, that government abated its previous pretensions and ended by adopting a similar course. In other words, the crew in question was tried and sentenced to death for piracy, but a little reflection showed government that it would be unwise and unnatural to carry out the sentence, and in the end the "pirates" were exchanged as regular prisoners of war. What difference was there, after all, in the position assumed by both governments? England called and treated the Southerners as belligerents. The North went still further, and by exchanging prisoners gave them the legal status and the recognized position of—what England all along refused to give, notwithstanding the representations of France—an independent Power. And yet Mr. Sumner and the other sympathizers with every rebellion on the face of the earth except their own, do not hesitate to outrage law and common sense by the stand which he is reported to have taken on such a well understood and so clearly a defined international question. It would, in fact, appear from his utterances and those of many other Northern writers and politicians, that they "went in for the war" with the impression and expectation that all the advantages would be on their side, and wrong, hideous, sinful, for the South to strike back, no matter how plundered, devastated and impoverished. That was the case they should have counted the cost before they began. It is now rather late in the day to cry and whine about it, especially when the reparation so arrogantly insisted upon will probably have to be purchased, if England only possesses a portion of her former spirit, at a cost of life and treasure far greater than that poured out in the last American war.

## The View From an American Source.

(From the Boston Daily Advertiser—Senator Sumner's organ—April 16.]

For undertaking what must be deemed under the circumstances an almost official exposition of the reasons for which the Alabama convention is rejected, Mr. Sumner frankly says that he does not disguise the importance of the act. Nobody can doubt that the step is the gravest that has been taken for years in our foreign relations. It is the rejection of what is proposed as a settlement of outstanding questions of the most irritating kind, between two Powers which are both as jealous of honor as they are desirous of peace, and under circumstances which seem to make the present renewal of negotiations hopeless, while the differences left open are to the last degree dangerous. No man can say to what the rejection of a proposed settlement in such a case may not lead, and we can well understand therefore the painful anxiety with which a thoughtful statesman must approach the duty of advising such a step.

As we took occasion, however, to declare when the convention was first made public, the proposed settlement offers a choice of evils which leaves no doubt as to the expediency of rejecting it. English writers and speakers assure us that the temper of their people on this subject is not understood in America. This may well be, and it is, on the other hand, absolutely certain that the temper of the American people is not understood by them. Indeed, it is probably less understood now than ever, since the exuberant follies of the minister whom we unfortunately charged with the negotiation of this very treaty. On both sides, then, the negotiation has proceeded in ignorance of the true character of the grievances between the two nations and of the remedies necessary for their thorough removal. Can it be doubted that a settlement of this sort, which simply assumes to enforce silence hereafter and yet leaves the root of bitterness untouched, must finally have proved unable to accomplish its purpose? The convention as negotiated might have ended formal applications for redress for the time; but on this side at least it would have marked the beginning of a concentration of wounded pride and unsatisfied sense of injury which would have sought and at last found, beyond all peradventure, the occasion for full satisfaction. Diplomats may have thought the claims for damages ready for examination and liquidation; but so long as the two nations failed to comprehend each other's feelings and at any rate so long as the wrongs under which one of them burns are not understood and hence are ignored by the other, the international controversy is not ripe for adjustment, whatever the state of the individual claims.

Mr. Sumner's purposes in undertaking the thorough explanation of the wrongs under which this nation smarted will no doubt be misconceived at first. He will perhaps be charged with a desire to hold the English precedent in *terror* over the head of England herself, and to keep alive a grievance, even if he is not credited with some scheme for extorting a great cession of territory from the mother country. But at the risk of temporary misconceptions of this sort, extending far beyond any error as to the views of a single statesman, it is better that the whole truth should be told now, and that as a preliminary to any further attempt at settlement the two countries should learn to understand the true nature of that which now divides them. It is only by the full recognition of the fact that there is something in this business which goes far deeper than the mere footing of a schedule of ships and merchandise sunk by the Alabama and her consorts that we can hope to reach a full and lasting settlement of the difficulty.

It will no doubt be found that with the full statement of her wrong doing before her, as it now rankles in the mind of our people, England may shrink from facing the full responsibility of her position, and thus we shall see the controversy, after a period of excited unofficial discussions, laid aside for the present. This is not a satisfactory or even a safe disposition to make of a dispute which involves so much as this; but the United States are not the least able of the two parties to afford such a postponement of the debate. And even England herself can better afford it than to commit herself to a settlement which excludes from consideration the insult to national sovereignty, and seeks to raise some inconsiderable individual losses above their true rank as the symbol of a great international wrong, and to represent them as its very substance.