

## Anecdotes of Public Men.

BY J. W. FORNEY

More than fifty colored delegates in the Republican National Convention at Philadelphia, June 5, 1872; Shades of John C. Calhoun, Barnwell Rhett, Dixon H. Lewis, John Slidell, W. L. Yancey, is this to be permitted? Little did the lords of slavery twenty years ago think that such an offence would ever be dared. When I recall Dawson of Louisiana, with curls and jewels and gold-headed cane; Ashe of North Carolina with his jolly yet imperious style; John S. Barbour of Virginia, with his plantation manners; Gov. Manning of South Carolina, as handsome as Mrs. Stowe's best picture of the old Southern school in Uncle Tom's Cabin; Pierre Soule, with his handsome, haughty face, true types and apostles of the peculiar institution, I wonder how they would feel to see the South represented in a National Convention by their former slaves. A little more than ten years have sufficed to disprove all the predictions against the colored race, but in nothing so much as in the intelligence of their representative leaders and in their own general improvement. If you were to compare the chiefs of the freedmen with the chief slaveholders, knowing them as I knew them, you would soon realize that John M. Langston, Professor of the Law Department of the Howard University, is as thorough a lawyer as Pierre Soule in his best days; that Robert Brown Elliott is a better scholar and speaker than Laurence M. Keitt, who having helped to create the rebellion, died in fighting for it, and Benjamin Sterling Turner, of Selma, Alabama, a self-educated slave, and now a freedman in Congress, is as practical a business man as John Forsyth or George S. Houston.

Friederick Douglass was famous as an orator before the war. With the fall of slavery however, he rose to the highest position. His eloquence is formed on the best models. Captivating, persuasive, and often profound, he wields an increasing influence in both races.

But among the colored delegates in the Republican National Convention, none attract more attention than Robert Purvis of Philadelphia. I hope some day to relate the romance of his life. Born in Columbia, South Carolina, he left it fifty-three years ago, when about seven years old. A few weeks since he returned to his native city, and was eagerly welcomed by his own people and by many of the old citizens, who favorably remembered his father and mother, and had watched his own career with friendly eyes. The changes wrought in this more than half a century were more than revolutionary. The stone rejected by the builders had become the head of the column. The magnates had disappeared, and those who had made them so had taken their places. It was a bewildering dream; yet the retributive fact stood prominent.

The descendants of Calhoun, Rhett, McQueen, Hayne and Brooks, no longer ruled like their fathers. New influences and new ideas prevailed. Mr. Purvis stood among his kindred like another Rip Van Winkle, with the difference that he was not forgotten; and as he walked the streets of Columbia and received the ovation of his friends in Charleston, he saw and felt that although slavery was dead and the old slave lords deposed, the sun shone, the grass grew, the flowers bloomed, the birds caroled and the waters ran, as when the magnates lived on the labor of others as good as themselves,

and often died confessing that their bad work must come to a bitter end.

Robert Purvis is one of the best proofs of the influence of education, travel, good associations, and natural self respect. Few would distinguish him to be what he often proudly calls himself "a negro." His complexion is not darker than that of Soule or Manning. His manners are quiet and courtly. His general knowledge is large, and his conversation easy and intellectual. Educated at some of the best of our Philadelphia schools before there was any prejudice against the reputable man or woman of color, and when colored votes were thrown at all the elections, he has reached sixty, universally esteemed. His family is among the most refined in the aristocratic country neighborhood where he lives, and he commands respect of others by the courage with which he and his children respect themselves. Yet while he walks erect in all circles, and yields to none in the graces of manhood and in the observance of what we call society, he is the ardent friend of his people; determined that they shall eventually secure all their civil, as they have now their political rights. No more useful or influential man sat among the delegates to the Philadelphia National Convention on Wednesday, the 5th of June, 1872.

As these colored colleagues of Robert Purvis from the South gather around their friend and teacher, how many a story they could relate of their individual lives. Each has had his romance of hard reality. Their struggles as slaves—their experience as freedmen—their hair-breadth escapes by flood and field—their restoration to family and friends, the fate of their old master—what material for the poet, the novelist, the historian and the philanthropist!