

WHO PLANNED THE ASSASSINATION?

Whether Jefferson Davis and other Rebel leaders contrived, authorized, or will openly approve the assassination of President Lincoln is a question to which we cannot yet give a direct answer. The evidence in the case is collateral and illustrative rather than positive. When Preston S. Brooks of South Carolina assaulted and tried to murder Charles Sumner, we of the North said: The South will denounce that act as cowardly and infamous; but on the contrary the South by her newspapers and public men without one exception applauded it. Since then, beside making war on the Republic the South has evinced its fiendish hatred of the North by the atrocities committed on our dead soldiers at Bull Run, by the massacres at Milliken's Bend and Fort Pillow, by the systematic cruelties inflicted on our prisoners, by the Alabama outrages, by the St. Albans and other piracies on the border, by the hotel-burning plots. And so far as threats went, there has been abundant evidence that assassination was deemed an equally legitimate and justifiable method of warfare. The advertisements and editorials, appearing repeatedly unrebuked in Southern papers, proposing rewards for the murder or kidnapping of Mr. Lincoln, show that the Rebel leaders did not object to such schemes, though they may not—or may—have incited them.

The event reminds us of certain letters published in our columns last year from a correspondent who had for some time been on duty inside the war-office at Richmond, and who, escaping to Washington, sent us thence a great deal of valuable and timely information. He wrote subsequently from Canada, disclosing and thereby preventing more than one scheme for a murderous foray across the border. He foretold the plot which culminated in New-York in the attempt to fire the hotels. And he revealed the particulars of a conspiracy to kidnap President Lincoln, which the following details will show to have been considered and approved by the Rebel President, Secretary of State and Secretary of War. We quote in full a passage from a letter published in THE TRIBUNE of March 19, 1864:

In a former communication I stated that a plan had been submitted to the Rebel War Department by Col. Margrave, who had been for a considerable time an emissary in the North, to kidnap President Lincoln and carry him to Richmond, or if it should be found impossible to escape with him to the Rebel lines, to assassinate him. Owing to a change in the position of the armies about this time, the plan proposed was rendered impracticable.

In the early part of November, and only a few days before he was sent North, Col. Margrave submitted another plan, the details of which may be interesting to the reader. To give the plan in minutia would occupy too much space, and a digest of it will prove quite intelligible.

One hundred and fifty picked men were to go secretly North and take quarters in Washington, Georgetown, Baltimore and Alexandria, so as to be able to communicate daily with each other, and, upon a day fixed by their leader, were to assemble in Washington for the purpose of making the seizure. The President, it was claimed, could be easily seized at a private hour at the White House, or in going to or returning from church, or on some other favorable occasion, and thrust into a carriage and driven off. The carriage was to be joined a few miles out of the city by 25 or 30 armed men on horseback. It was proposed to drive to Indian Point, about 25 miles south of Washington, on the Potomac—two or three relays of fleet horses being stationed on the way—where a boat was to be in waiting to cross the river, and land the captive a few miles south of Occoquan, when it would be an easy matter for his captors to work their way with him through the woods by night into the Rebel lines. To prevent pursuit, every bridge between Washington and Indian Point was to be mined beforehand, and blown up as soon as the captive and his captors had crossed. Huge trees were also to be ready cut and thrown across the road in various places, as soon as they had passed, by men stationed along for the purpose, who were afterward to separate and escape as best they could.

The Secretary of War thought this scheme might succeed; but he doubted whether such a proceeding would be of a military character and justifiable under the laws of war. He promised, however, to consult the President and Mr. Benjamin; but what conclusion was arrived at I am unable with certainty to say. About a week, however, after the plan was submitted, and the same day that Col. Margrave left for the North, I asked Mr. Wellford, who is familiar with all the secrets of the Department, if the plan had been adopted, and he answered, "You will see Old Abe here in the Spring as sure as God." A few days afterward I was sent to Atlanta, and never returned to Richmond to hear about the matter.

But this is not the only scheme by any means that has been devised for kidnapping our President. Last Summer a club or society of wealthy citizens of Richmond was formed for the purpose of raising a fund for this object. Circulars were sent to trustworthy citizens in every other city and town in the Confederacy, inviting cooperation in the grand undertaking, and an immense sum of money was subscribed. The firm of Merry & Co., bankers, in Richmond, subscribed \$10,000, and Sumner & Arents, auctioneers, subscribed \$5,000; and I have heard on good authority that there were several in the capital who subscribed even more liberally than the parties named, but who they were I did not learn. One man of Charleston, S. C., whose name I have forgotten, subscribed \$20,000. It was proposed, when all was ready, to obtain a furlough for Mosby, and make him leader of the enterprise.

Whether these schemes have been abandoned, or whether the kidnapers are only awaiting a favorable opportunity to execute them, remains to be seen; but certain it is that too much caution cannot be observed by the President, or the military commanders stationed at the capital.

As these statements were questioned by sundry Rebel journals at the North, the writer subsequently forwarded us the following documentary evidence, being a letter from Calhoun Cullom, Captain in a North Carolina regiment, and well known in the Confederacy. The original letter was sent us, enveloped, post-marked, stamped with a Confederate ten-cent postage stamp, and addressed to Mr. Wellford, a clerk in the war-office at Richmond. Although it was published in THE TRIBUNE so long ago as April 23, 1864, its genuineness has never been denied, nor its statements contradicted.

"MORGANTOWN, Sept. 30, 1863.

"MY DEAR WELLFORD: I have for several weeks been looking for a letter from you on the subject of our last conversation. On yesterday, Mr. Gaither, M. C. for the IXth District, came to see father and dined with us. He spent the week before last at Richmond, and had a number of conversations with the President, Secretary of War, and other officials. I inquired of him if he had heard anything of the *ruse de guerre* to capture "Honest Abe," and he said he had, but that the affair would probably be managed rather by individual enterprise than by the Government. He gave me the names of the most prominent workers in the project in Richmond, and as you must be acquainted with them all, I beg you to put in a timely word for me. If the affair was to be managed by the Government, I know your influence, and that of my other friends, with Mr. Seddon would get me assigned to the part I desire to play in the grand comedy or tragedy, as the case may be; but if it is to be managed by the citizens of Richmond, my chances are not so good, and I may have to depend entirely on you. Speak a good word for me at once, and I will see you next week. As I told you, I would willingly sell my soul to the devil for the honor of playing a conspicuous part in the destruction of the great hydra.

"My arm is nearly well, and I find it quite useful again, as you will conclude from my being able to dispense with an amanuensis.

"Don't neglect me.

"Your sincere friend, CULLOM."

Now it is remarkable that this kidnapping scheme is the same which Booth at first contemplated, as shown in his recently published letter, but which he subsequently abandoned for the assassination. If, then, one part of the plot of which Booth was the agent was concocted at Richmond by Davis, Seddon and Benjamin, is it, or is it not, likely they knew of the other part, and of the more horrible shape which it finally took?

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