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The Human Side of the News

RECENTLY our President has been fishing off Dry Tortugas out beyond Key West. As he cast about for the big ones and turned his gaze to the low, yellow sands of Tortugas, he must have thought of the famous prisoner once confined there—one who might be called the Dreyfus of America—Dr. Samuel Mudd, unjustly accused, it is now believed, of taking part in the conspiracy to murder President Lincoln.

The true story of that assassination may never be known. There are, perhaps, dark chapters in the story which should never be known. A famous writer in recent months has even accused the then secretary of war, Edwin W. Stanton, of prior knowledge of the assassination, and of taking such steps, after the murder of Lincoln, as to conceal the identity of the persons who were really behind John Wilkes Booth, the actor, who fired the fatal shot in Ford's Theater, Washington, on the night of April 14, 1865.

Mudd Sets His Leg

THAT night with a broken leg, suffered when he leaped from the President's box to the stage with the cry: "Sic semper tyrannis!" and his foot caught in an American flag draping the proscenium arch, Booth, with a young companion, fled on horseback over into Maryland.

Late at night they pulled up in front of the home of a country doctor of good repute—an intelligent, gentle, kind and well-liked man—Dr. Samuel Mudd. Young Herold, Booth's companion, half carried, half dragged the assassin into Doctor Mudd's house. And there the surgeon set the broken leg and put the patient to bed.

But hot on Booth's trail were the federal officers, and Booth, even with that broken leg, had to flee—this time to refuge in a Virginia barn, and there he shot himself, after setting fire to the barn. Such, at least, was the story Secretary Stanton allowed to go to the press—although there were many, even then, who doubted its whole truth.

In Doctor Mudd's house,

under the bed where Booth had slept, the federal officers found one of Booth's riding boots. They accused the doctor of sheltering one he knew to be an assassin—of complicity, in short, in the plot to kill Lincoln. Despite Doctor Mudd's protests, and evidence he was able to bring to bear, he was convicted in the hot passion of the time, and sent for life to this very Tortugas off which our President was so peacefully fishing.

Then Yellow Fever

IT WAS a Devil's Island in its own right—a hell on earth. And to the miseries and brutalities was added yellow fever. Men dropped like flies. Of 200 officers and men, 37 died in the first two months of the epidemic. Among the first stricken was

the prison surgeon, Major Smith, a kindly and humane man.

Terror spread through the prison. The commandant was forced to go to Mudd's dungeon and beg him to administer to the sick. Doctor Mudd agreed on condition that he be given a free hand. Night and day he worked, fighting the battle all alone. Not an officer or an officer's wife would go near the fever victims—only the outcast convict.

Scourge Checked

DOCTOR MUDD had the walls of the fort broken down to let the breezes sweep through. He stopped the removal of bodies and buried the dead in lime. He checked the disease. Other medical help arrived, and finally, when only two convalescent cases remained, Doctor Mudd himself was stricken. The government doctor from New York coldly refused to treat him, and he was left to the care of Arnold and Spangler. The two watched over him every minute and pulled him through.

Two more years elapsed before the story of Doctor Mudd's heroism and devotion reached Washington, and President Andrew Johnson granted a pardon. But the hell of Tortugas, yellow fever and injustice had broken this unfortunate man, body and spirit. He died in less than two years after his heroic work in saving others.