THE CHICAGO CONSPIRACY.

From The Atlantic Monthly for July.

On the eve of the last general election, the country was startled by the publication of a Report from the Judge-Advocate of the United States, disclosing the existence of a wide-spread conspiracy at the West, which had for its object the overthrow of the Union. The conspiracy, the Report stated, had a military organization, with a commander-in-chief, General and subordinate officers, and 500,000 enrolled members, all bound to a blind obedience to the orders of their superiors, and pledged to "take up arms against any Government found waging war against a people endeavoring to establish a Government of their own choice."

The organization, it was said, was in every way hostile to the Union, and friendly to the so-called Confederacy; and its ultimate objects were "a general rising in Missouri," and a similar "rising in Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Kentucky, in cooperation with a Rebel force which was to invade the last-named State."

Startling and incredible as the report seemed, it told nothing but the truth, and it did not tell the whole truth. It omitted to state that the organization was planned in Richmond; that its operations were directed by Jacob Thompson, who was in Canada for that purpose; and that wholesale robbery, arson and midnight assassination were among its designs.

The point marked out for the first attack was Camp Douglas at Chicago. The 8,000 Rebel soldiers confined there, being liberated and armed, were to be joined by the Canadian refugees and Missouri "Butternuts" engaged in their release, and the 5,000 and more members of the treasonable order resident in Chicago. This force, of nearly 20,000 men, would be a nucleus about which the conspirators in other parts of Illinois could gather; and, being joined by the prisoners liberated from other camps, and members of the order from other States, would form an army a hundred thousand strong. So fully had everything been foreseen and provided for, that the leaders expected to gather and organize this vast body of men within the space of a fortnight! The United States could bring into the field no force capable of withstanding the progress of such an army. The consequences would be that the whole character of the war would be changed—its theater would be shifted from the Border to the heart of the Free States; and Southern independence, and the beginning at the North of that process of disintegration so confidently counted on by the Rebel leaders at the outbreak of hostilities, would have followed.

What saved the nation from being drawn into this whirlpool of ruin? Nothing but the cool brain, sleepless vigilance and wonderful sagacity of one man—a young officer never read of in the newspapers—removed from field duty because of disability, but commissioned, I verily believe, by Providence itself to ferret out and foil this deeper-laid, wider-spread and more diabolical conspiracy than any that darkens the page of history. Other men—and women, too—were instrumental in dragging the dark iniquity to light; but they failed to fathom its full enormity, and to discover its point of outbreak. He did that; and he throttled the tiger when about to spring, and so deserves the lasting gratitude of his country. How he did it I propose to tell in this paper. It is a marvelous tale; it will read more like romance than history; but, calling to mind what a good man once said to me, "Write the truth; let people doubt if they will," I shall narrate the facts.

There is nothing remarkable in the appearance of this young man. Nearly six feet high, he has an erect, military carriage, a frank, manly face, and looks every inch a soldier—such a soldier as would stand up all day in a square hand-to-hand fight with an open enemy; but the keenest eye would detect in him no indication of the crafty genius which delights to follow the windings of wickedness when burrowing in the dark. But if not a Touché or a Vidocq, he is certainly an able man; for, in a section where able men are as plenty as apple-blossoms in June, he was chosen to represent his district in the State Senate, and, entering the army a subaltern officer, rose, before the battle of Perryville, to the command of a regiment. At that battle a Rebel bullet entered his shoulder, and crushed the bones of his right elbow. This disabled him for field duty, and so it came about that he assumed the night blue of the veterans, and on the second day of May, 1864, succeeded Gen. Orme in command of the military post at Chicago.

When fairly settled in the low-roofed shanty which stands, a sort of mute sentry, over the front gateway of Camp Douglas, the new commandant, as was natural, looked about him. He found the camp—about 60 acres of flat, sandy soil, inclosed by a tight board fence, an inch thick, and 14 feet high—had a garrison of but two regiments of veteran reserves, numbering, all told, only 700 men fit for duty. This small force was guarding 8,000 Rebel prisoners, one third of whom were Texas rangers, and guerrillas who had served under Morgan—wild, reckless characters, fonder of a fight than of a dinner, and ready for any enterprise, however desperate, that held out the smallest prospect of freedom. To add to the seeming insecurity, nearly every office in the camp was filled with these prisoners. They served out rations and distributed clothing to their comrades, dealt out ammunition to the guards, and even kept the records in the quarters of the Commandant. In fact, the prison was in charge of the prisoners, not the prisoners in charge of the prison. This state of things underwent a sudden change. With the exception of a very few, whose characters recommended them to peculiar confidence, all were at once placed where they belonged—on the inner side of the prison-fence.

A post-office was connected with the camp, and this next received the Commandant's attention. Everything about it appeared to be regular. A vast number of letters came and went, but they all passed unsealed, and seemed to contain nothing contraband. Many of them, however, were short epistles on long pieces of paper, a curious circumstance among correspondents with whom stationery was scarce and greenbacks were not over-plenty. One sultry day in June, the Commandant bunked a fire, and gave these letters a warming, and lo! presto! the white spaces broke out into dark lines breathing thoughts blacker than the fluid that wrote them. Corporal Snooks whispered to his wife, away down in Texas, "The forthe of July is comin' Sukey, so be a man; fur I'm gwine to celebrate. I'm gwine up loike a rocket, et I does come down loike a stick." And Sergeant Blower said to John Copperhead of Chicago, "Down in 'old Virginny' I used to think the fourth of July a humbug, but this prison has made me a patriot. Now, I'd like to burn an all-fired sight of powder, and if you help, and God is willing, I shall do it." In a similar strain wrote half a score of them.

Such patriotism seemed altogether too wordy to be genuine. It told nothing, but it darkly hinted at dark events to come. The Commandant bethought him that the Democratic Convention would assemble on the fourth of July; that a vast multitude of people would congregate at Chicago on that occasion; and that, in so great a throng, it would be easy for the clans to gather, attack the camp, and liberate the prisoners. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," and the young Commandant was vigilant. Soon Prison-Square received a fresh installment of prisoners. They were genuine "Butternuts," out at the toes, out at the knees, out at the elbows, out everywhere, in fact, and of everything but their senses. Those they had amply about them. They fraternized with Corporal Snooks, Sergeant Blower, and others of their comrades, and soon learned that a grand pyrotechnic display was arranged to come off on Independence-day. A huge bonfire was to be built outside, and the prisoners were to salute the old flag, but not with blank cartridges.

But who was to light the outside bonfire? That the improvised "Butternuts" failed to discover, and the Commandant set his own wits to working. He soon ascertained that a singular organization existed in Chicago. It was called "The Society of the Illini," and its object, as set forth by its printed constitution, was "the more perfect development of the literary, scientific, moral, physical, and social welfare of the conservative citizens of Chicago." The Commandant knew a conservative citizen whose development was not altogether perfect, and he recommended him to join the organization. The society needed recruits and initiation-fees, and received the new member with open arms. Soon he was deep in the outer secrets of the order; but he could not penetrate its inner mysteries. Those were open to only an elect few who had already attained to a "perfect development"—of villainy, he learned enough, however, to verify the dark hints thrown out by the prisoners. The society numbered some thousands of members, all fully armed, thoroughly drilled, and impatiently waiting a signal to explode a mine deeper than that in front of Petersburg.

But the assembling of the Chicago Convention was postponed to the 29th of August, and the 4th of July passed away without the bonfire and the fireworks.

The Commandant, however, did not sleep. He still kept his wits a-working; the bogus "Butternuts" still ate prisoners' rations; and the red flame still brought out black thoughts on the white letter-paper. Quietly the garrison was reinforced, quietly increased vigilance was enjoined upon the sentinels; and the tranquil, assured look of the Commandant told no one that he was playing with hot coals on a barrel of gunpowder.

So July rolled away into August, and the Commandant sent a letter giving his view of the state of things to his commanding-general. This letter has fallen into my hands, and, as might sometimes might makes right, I shall copy a portion of it. It is dated August 12, and, in the formal phrase customary among military men, begins:

"I have the honor respectfully to report, in relation to the supposed organization at Toronto, Canada, which was to come here in squads, then combine, and attempt to release the prisoners of war at Camp Douglas, that there is an armed organization in this city of 5,000 men, and that the rescue of our prisoners would be the signal for a general insurrection in Indiana and Illinois. . . . . .

"There is little, if any, doubt that an organization hostile to the Government, and secret in its workings and character, exists in the States of Indiana and Illinois, and that this organization is strong in numbers. It would be easy, perhaps, at any crisis in public affairs, to pass this organization into acts of open disloyalty, if its leaders should so will. . . . .

"Except in cases of considerable emergency, I shall make all communications to your headquarters on this subject by mail."

These extracts show that, 17 days before the assembling of the Chicago Convention, the Commandant had become convinced that mail-bags were safer vehicles of communication than telegraph-wires; that 5,000 armed traitors were then domiciled in Chicago; that they expected to be joined by a body of Rebels from Canada; that the object of the combination was the rescue of the prisoners at Camp Douglas; and that success in that enterprise would be the signal for a general uprising throughout Indiana and Illinois. Certainly, this was no little knowledge to gain by two months' burrowing in the dark. But the conspirators were not fools. They had necks which they valued. They would not plunge into open disloyalty until some "crisis in public affairs" should engage the attention of the authorities, and afford a fair chance of success. Would the assembling of the Convention be such a crisis? was now the question.

The question was soon answered. About this time, Lieut.-Col. R. H. Hill, commanding the Military District of Michigan, received a missive from a person in Canada who represented himself to be a Major in the Confederate service. He expressed a readiness to disclose a dangerous plot against the Government, provided he were allowed to take the oath of allegiance, and rewarded according to the value of his information. The Lieutenant-Colonel read the letter, tossed it aside, and went about his business. No good, he had heard, ever came out of Nazareth. Soon another missive of the same purport, and from the same person, came to him. He tossed this aside also, and went again about his business. But the Major was a Southern Yankee—the "critest" sort of Yankee. He had something to sell, and was bound to sell it, even if he had to throw his neck into the bargain. Taking his life in his hand, he crossed the frontier; and so it came about, that late one night, a tall man, in a slouched hat, rusty regimentals, and immense jack-boots, was ushered into the private apartment of the Lieutenant-Colonel at Detroit. It was the Major. He had brought his wares with him. They had cost him nothing, except some small sacrifice of such trivial matters as honor, fraternal feeling, and a good faith towards brother conspirators, whom they might send to the gallows; but they were of immense value,—would save millions of money and rivers of loyal blood. So the Major said, and so the Lieutenant-Colonel thought, as coolly, with his cigar in his mouth, and his legs over the arm of his chair, he drew the important secrets from the Rebel officer. Something good might, after all, come out of Nazareth. The Lieutenant-Colonel would trust the fellow—trust him, but pay him nothing, and send him back to Toronto to worm out the whole plan from the Rebel leaders, and to gather the whole details of the projected expedition. But the Major knew with whom he was dealing. He had faith in Uncle Sam, and he was right in having it; for, truth to tell, if Uncle Sam does not always pay, he can always be trusted.

It was not long before the Major reappeared with his budget, which he duly opened to the Lieutenant-Colonel. Its contents were interesting, and I will give them to the reader as the Union officer gave them to the General commanding the Northern Department. His communication is dated August 16. It says:

"I have the honor to report that I had another interview last evening with Major ——, whose disclosures in relation to a Rebel plot for the release of the prisoners at Camp Douglas I have you in my letter of the 8th instant. I have caused inquiries to be made in Canada about Major —— and understand that he does possess the confidence of the Rebel agent, and that his statements are entitled to respect.

"He now informs me that he proceeded to Toronto, as he stated he would when I last saw him; that about 200 picked men of the Rebel refugees in Canada, are assembled at that place, who are armed with revolvers and supplied with funds and transportation-tickets to Chicago; and that already 150 have proceeded to Chicago. That he (Major ——) and the balance of the men are waiting for instructions from Capt. Hines, who is the commander of the expedition; that Capt. Hines left Toronto last Thursday for Chicago, and at this time is doubtless at Niagara Falls, making the final arrangements with the chief Rebel agents.

"Major —— states that Saunders, Holbrook, and Col. Hicks were at Toronto while he was there, engaged in making preparations, etc. The general plan is to accomplish the release of the prisoners at Camp Douglas, and in doing so they will be assisted by an armed organization at Chicago. After being released, the prisoners will be armed, and being joined by the organization in Chicago, will be mounted and proceed to Camp Morton (at Indianapolis) and there accomplish a similar object in releasing prisoners. That for months Rebel emissaries have been traveling through the North-West; that their arrangements are fully matured; and that they expect to receive large accessions of force from Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. They expect to destroy the works at Ironton.

"Major —— says further that he is in hourly expectation of receiving instructions to proceed to Chicago with the balance of the party; that he shall put up at the City Hotel, corner of Lake and State-sts., and register his name as George ——; and that he will then place himself in communication with Col. Sweet, commanding at Chicago."

The Major did not "put up at the corner of Lake and State-sts.," and that fact relieved the Government from the trouble of estimating the value of his services, and, what is more to be deplored, rendered it impossible for the Commandant to recognize and arrest the Rebel leaders during the sitting of the Chicago Convention. What became of the Major is not known. He may have repented of his good deeds, or his treachery may have been detected and he put out of the way by his accomplices.

It will be noticed how closely the Rebel officer's disclosures accorded with the information gathered through indirect channels by the astute Commandant. When the report was conveyed to him, he may have smiled at this proof of his own sagacity; but he made no change in his arrangements. Quietly and steadily he went on strengthening the camp, augmenting the garrison, and shadowing the footsteps of all suspicious newcomers.

At last the loyal Democrats come together to the great Convention, and with them came Satan also. Bands of ill-favored men, in bushy hair, bad whisky, and seedy homespun, staggered from the railway stations and hung about the street corners. A reader of Dante or Swedenborg would have taken them for delegates from the lower regions, had not their clothing been plainly perishable, while the devils wear everlasting garments. They had come, they announced, to make a Peace President, but they brandished bowie-knives, and hollowed for war even in the sacred precincts of the Peace Convention. But war or peace, the Commandant was ready for it.

For days reinforcements had poured into the camp, until it actually bristled with bayonets. On every side it was guarded with cannon, and day and night mounted men patrolled the avenues to give notice of the first hour the gathering. But there was no gathering. The conspirators were there, 5,000 strong, with 5,000 Illini to back them. From every point of the compass,—from Canada, Missouri, Southern Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, New-York, and even loyal Vermont, bloody minded men had come to give the Peace candidate a red baptism. But "discretion is the better part of valor." The conspirators saw the preparations and disbanded. Not long after, and one of the leaders said to me, "We had spies in every public place,—in the telegraph-office, the camp itself, and even *close by* the Commandant's headquarters, and knew hourly all that was passing. From the observatory, opposite the camp, I myself saw the arrangements for our reception. We outnumbered you two to one, but our force was badly disciplined. Success in such circumstances was impossible; and on the third day of the Convention we announced from headquarters that an attack at that time was impracticable. It would have cost the lives of hundreds of the prisoners, and perhaps the capture or destruction of the whole of us." So the storm blew over, without the leaden rain, and its usual accompaniment of thunder and lightning.

A dead calm followed, during which the Illini sunk back to their holes; the prisoners took to honest ink; the bogus "Butternuts" walked the streets clad like Christians, and the Commandant went to sleep with only one eye open. So the world rolled around into November.

The Presidential election was near at hand—the great contest on which hung the fate of the Republic. The Commandant was convinced of this, and wanted to marshal his old constituents for the final struggle between Freedom and Despotism. He obtained a furlough to go home and mount the stump for the Union. He was about to set out, his private secretary was ready, and the carriage waiting at the gateway, when an indefinable feeling took possession of him, bidding him back, and warning him of coming danger. It would not be shaken off, and reluctantly he postponed the journey till the morrow. Before the morrow facts were developed which made his presence in Chicago essential to the safety of the city and the lives of the citizens. The snake was scotched, not killed. It was preparing for another and a deadlier spring.

On the 2d of November, a well-known citizen of St. Louis, openly a Secessionist, but secretly a loyal man, acting as a detective for the Government, left that city in pursuit of a criminal. He followed him to Springfield, traced him from there to Chicago, and on the morning of November 4, about the hour the Commandant had the singular impression I have spoken of, arrived in the latter city. He soon learned that the bird had again flown.

"While passing along the street" (I now quote from his report to the Provost-Marshal-General of Missouri), "and trying to decide what course to pursue—whether to follow this man to New-York, or to return to St. Louis—I met an old acquaintance, a member of the order of 'American Knights,' who informed me that Marmaduke was in Chicago. After conversing with him awhile, I started up the street, and about one block further on met Dr. E. W. Edwards, a practising physician in Chicago, (another old acquaintance), who asked me if I knew of Southern soldiers being in town. I told him I did; that Marmaduke was there. He seemed very much astonished, and asked how I knew. I told him. He laughed, and then said that Marmaduke was at his house, under the assumed name of Burling, and mentioned, as a good joke, that he had a British passport, *given* by the United States consul under that name. I gave Edwards my card to hand to Marmaduke (who was another 'old acquaintance'), and told him I was stopping at the Briggs House.

"That same evening I again met Dr. Edwards on the street, going to my hotel. He said Marmaduke desired to see me, and I accompanied him to his house." There, in the course of a long conversation, "Marmaduke told me that he and several Rebel officers were in Chicago to cooperate with other parties in releasing the prisoners of Camp Douglas and other prisons, and in inaugurating a rebellion at the North. He said the movement was under the auspices of the 'Order of American Knights' (to which order the Society of the Illini belonged), and was to begin operations by an attack on Camp Douglas on election day."

The detective did not know the Commandant, but he soon made his acquaintance and told him the story. "The young man," he says, "rested his head upon his hand, and looked as if he had lost his mother." And well he might! A mine had opened at his feet; with but 800 men in the garrison it was to be sprung upon him. Only seventy hours were left! What would he not give for twice as many? Then he might secure reenforcements. He walked the room for a time in silence, then, turning to the detective, said, "Do you know where the other leaders are?" "I do not." "Can't you find out from Marmaduke?" "I think not. He said what he did say voluntarily. If I were to question him he would suspect me." That was true, and Marmaduke was not of the stuff that betrays a comrade on compulsion. His arrest, therefore, would profit nothing, and might hasten the attack for which the Commandant was so poorly prepared. He sat down and wrote a hurried dispatch to his General. Troops! troops! for God's sake, troops! was its burden. Sending it off by a courier—the telegraph told tales—he rose, and again walked the room in silence. After a while, with a heavy heart, the detective said "Good night," and left him.

What passed with the Commandant during the next two hours I do not know. He may have prayed—he is a praying man—and there was need of prayer, for the torch was ready to burn millions of property, the knife whetted to take thousands of lives. At the end of the two hours, a stranger was ushered into the apartment where the Commandant was still pacing the floor. From the lips and pen of this stranger I have what followed, and I think it may be relied on.

He was a slim, light-haired young man, with fine, regular features and that indefinable air which denote good breeding. Recognizing the Commandant by the eagle on his shoulder, he said, "Can I see you alone, sir?" "Certainly," answered the Union officer, motioning to his secretary to leave the room. "I am a Colonel in the Rebel army," said the stranger, "and have put my life into your hands, to warn you of the most hellish plot in history." "Your life is safe, sir," replied the other, "if your visit is an honest one. I shall be glad to hear what you have to say. Be seated."

The Rebel officer took the proffered chair, and sat there till far into the morning. In the limits of a magazine article I cannot attempt to recount all that passed between them. The written statement the Rebel Colonel has sent to me covers fourteen pages of closely-written foolscap, and my interview with him on the subject lasted five hours by a slow watch. He disclosed all that Judge Holt has made public, and a great deal more. Sixty days previously he had left Richmond with verbal dispatches from the Rebel Secretary of War to Jacob Thompson, the Rebel agent in Canada. These dispatches had relation to a vast plot, designed to wrap the West in flames, sever it from the East, and secure the independence of the South. Months before, the plot had been concocted by Jeff. Davis at Richmond; and in May previous, Thompson, supplied with $250,000 in sterling exchange, had been sent to Canada to superintend its execution. This money was lodged in a bank at Montreal, and had furnished the funds which fitted out the abortive expeditions against Johnson's Island and Camp Douglas. The plot embraced the order of "American Knights," which was spread all over the West, and numbered 500,000 men, 350,000 of whom were armed. A force of 1,500 men—Canadian refugees and bushwhackers from Southern Illinois and Missouri—was to attack Camp Douglas on Tuesday night, the 8th of November, liberate and arm the prisoners, and sack Chicago. This was to be the signal for a general uprising through the West, and for a simultaneous advance by Hood upon Nashville, Buckner upon Louisville, and Price upon St. Louis. Vallandigham was to head the movement in Ohio, Bowles in Indiana, and Walsh in Illinois. The forces were to rendezvous at Dayton and Cincinnati in Ohio, New-Albany and Indianapolis, in Indiana, and Rock Island, Chicago, and Springfield, in Illinois; and those gathered at the last-named place, after seizing the arsenal, were to march to aid Price in taking St. Louis. Prominent Union citizens and officers were to be seized and sent South, and the more obnoxious of them were to be assassinated. All places taken were to be sacked and destroyed, and a band of a hundred desperate men was organized to burn the larger Northern cities not included in the field of operations. Two hundred Confederate officers, who were to direct the military movements, had been in Canada, but were then stationed throughout the West, at the various points to be attacked, waiting the outbreak at Chicago. Captain Hines, who had won the confidence of Thompson by his successful management of the escape of John Morgan, had control of the initial movement against Camp Douglas, but Colonel Grenfell, assisted by Colonel Marmaduke and a dozen other Rebel officers, was to manage the military part of the operations. All of these officers were at that moment in Chicago, waiting the arrival of the men, who were to come in small squads, over different roads, during the following three days. The Rebel officer had known of the plot for months, but its atrocious details had come to his knowledge only within a fortnight. They had appalled him; and though he was betraying his friends, and the South which he loved, the humanity in him would not let him rest till he had washed his hands of the horrible crime.

The Commandant listened with nervous interest to the whole of this recital; but when the Southern officer made the last remark, he almost groaned out,—

"Why did you not come before?"

"I could not. I gave Thompson my opinion of this, and have been watched. I think they have tracked me here. My life on your streets to-night wouldn't be worth a bad half-dollar."

"True; but what must be done?"

"Arrest the 'Butternuts' as they come into Chicago."

"That I can do; but the leaders are here, with five thousand armed Illini to back them. I must take them. Do you know them?"

"Yes, but I do not know where they are quartered."

At two o'clock the Commandant showed the Rebel officer to his bed, but went back himself, and paced the floor until sunrise. In the morning his plan was formed. It was a desperate plan, but desperate circumstances require desperate expedients.

In the prison was a young Texan who had served on Briggs's staff, and under Morgan in Kentucky, and was, therefore, acquainted with Hines, Grenfell and the other Rebel officers. He fully believed in the theory of State rights, that is, that a part is greater than the whole, but was an honest man, who, when his word was given, could be trusted. One glance at his open, resolute face showed that he feared nothing; that he had, too, that rare instinct which delights in danger, and counts heroic enterprise from pure love of peril. Early in the war he had encountered Col. De Land, a former commandant of the post, on the battle field and taken him prisoner. A friendship then sprang up between the two, which, when the tables were turned, and the captor became the captive, was not forgotten. Col. De Land made him chief clerk in the medical department, and gave him every possible freedom. At that time it was the custom to show citizens free access to the camps, and among the many good men and women who came to visit and aid the prisoners was a young woman, the daughter of a well-known resident of Chicago. She met the Texan, and a result as natural as the union of hydrogen and oxygen followed. But since Adam courted Eve, who ever heard of woman going on in a prison? "It is not exactly the thing," said Col. De Land; "had you not better pay your addresses at the lady's house, like a gentleman?" A guard accompanied the prisoner; but it was shrewdly guessed that he stayed outside, or paid court to the girls in the kitchen.

This was the state of things when the present Commandant took charge of the camp. He learned the facts, studied the prisoner's face, and remembered that he, too, once went a-courting. As he walked his room that Friday night, he bethought him of the Texan. Did he love his State better than he loved his affianced wife? The Commandant would test him.

"But I shall betray my friends! Can I do that in honor?" asked the Texan.

"Did you ask that question when you betrayed your country?" answered the Commandant.

"Let me go from camp for an hour. Then I will give you my decision."

"Very well."

And, unattended, the Texan left the prison.

What passed between the young man and the young woman during that hour I do not know, and could not tell, if I did know, for I am not writing romance but history. However, without lifting the veil on things sacred, I can say that her last words were, "Do your duty. Blot out your record of treason." God bless her for saying them! and let "Amen" be said by every American woman!

On his return to camp, the Texan merely said, "I will do it," and the details of the plan were talked over. He was to escape from the prison, ferret out and entrap the Rebel leaders. How to manage the first part of the dangerous programme was the query of the Texan. The Commandant's brain is fertile. An adopted citizen, in the scavenger line, makes periodical visits to the camp in the way of his business, and him the Commandant sends for.

"Arrah, yer Honor," the Irishman says, "I ha'n't a traitor in me, but I love yer beautiful sowl! I love the kintry; and besides, it might damage me good name and me party profession."

He is assured that his name will be all the better for dieting a few weeks in a dungeon, and—did not the same thing make Harvey Birch immortal?

Half an hour before sunset the scavenger comes into camp with his wagon. He fills it with dry bones, broken bottles, decayed food, and the rubbish of the prison; and down below, under a blanket, he stows away the Texan. A hundred comrades gather round to shut off the gaze of the guard; but outside is the real danger. He has to pass two gates, and run the gauntlet of half a dozen sentinels. His wagon is fuller than usual, and the late hour—it is now after sunset—will of itself excite suspicion. It might test the pluck of a braver man; for the sentries' bayonets are fixed, and their guns at the half-trigger, but he reaches the outer gate in safety. Now St. Patrick help him! for he needs all the impudence of an Irishman. The gate rolls back; the Commandant stands nervously by, but a sentry cries out,—

"You can't pass; it's agin orders. No wagins kin go out after drum-beat."

"Arrah, don't be a fool! Don't be a-fther obstructin' a honest man's business," answers the Irishman, pushing on into the gateway.

The soldier is vigilant, for his officer's eye is on him.

"Halt!" he cries again, "or I'll fire!"

"Fire! Waste yer powder on yer friends, like the bloody-minded spalpeen ye are!" says the scavenger, cracking his whip, and moving forward.

It is well he does not look back, if he should, he might be melted to his own soup-grease. The sentry's musket is leveled; he is about to fire, but the Commandant roars out,—

"Don't shoot!" and the old man and the old horse trot off into the twilight.

Not an hour later, two men, in big boots, slouched hats, and brownish butternuts, come out of the Commandant's quarters. With muffled faces and hasty strides they make their way over the dimly lighted road into the city. Pausing, after a while, before a large mansion, they crouch down among the shadows. It is the house of the Grand Treasurer of the Order of American Knights, and into it very soon they see the Texan enter. The good man knows him well, and there is great rejoicing. He orders up the fatted calf, and soon it is on the table, steaming hot, and done brown in the roasting. When the meal is over, they discuss a bottle of Champagne and the situation. The Texan cannot remain in Chicago, for there he will surely be detected. He must be off to Cincinnati by the first train; and he will arrive in the nick of time, for warm work is early expected. Has he any money about him? No, he has left it behind, with his Sunday clothes, in the prison. He must have funds; but the worthy gentleman can lend him none, for he is a loyal gentleman, of course he is! was he not the "peoples candidate" for Governor? But no one ever heard of a woman being hanged for treason. With this he nods to his wife, who opens her purse, and tosses the Texan a roll of greenbacks. They are honest notes, for an honest face is on them. At the end of an hour good-night is said, and the Texan goes out to find a hole to hide in. Down the street he hurries, the long, dark shadows following him.

He enters the private door of a public house, speaks a magic word, and is shown to a room in the upper story. Three low, prolonged raps on the wall, and—he is among them. They are seated about a small table, on which is a plan of the prison. One is about forty-five—a tall, thin man, with a wiry frame, a jovial face, and eyes which have the wild, roving look of the Arabs. He is dressed after the fashion of English sportsmen, and his dog—a fine gray bloodhound—is stretched on the hearth-rug near him. He looks a reckless, desperate character, and has an adventurous history.* In battle he is said to be a thunderbolt—lightning harnessed and inspired with the will of a devil. He is just the character to lead the dark, desperate expedition on which they are entered. It is St. Leger Grenfell.

At his right sits another tall, erect man, of about thirty, with large, prominent eyes, and thin, black hair and mustache. He is of dark complexion, has a sharp thin nose, a small, close mouth, a coarse, harsh voice, and a quick, boisterous manner. His face tells of dissipation, and his dress shows the dandy, but his deep, clear eye and pale, wrinkled forehead denote a cool, crafty intellect.† This is the notorious Captain Hines, the right-hand man of Morgan, and the soul and brains of the Conspiracy. The rest are the meaner sort of villains. I do not know how they looked, and if I did, they would not be worth describing.

Hines and Grenfell spring to their feet, and grasp the hand of the Texan. He is a godsend,—sent to do what no man of them is brave enough to do,—lead the attack on the front gateway of the prison. So they affirm with great oaths as they sit down, spread out the map, and explain to him the plan of operations.

Two hundred Rebel refugees from Canada, they say, and a hundred "Butternuts" from Fayette and Christian Counties, have already arrived; many more from Kentucky and Missouri are coming; and by Tuesday they expect that 1,000 or 1,200 desperate men, armed to the teeth, will be in Chicago. Taking advantage of the excitement of election night, they propose, with this force to attack the camp and prison. It will be divided into five parties. One squad, under Grenfell, will be held in reserve a few hundred yards from the main body, and will guard the large number of guns already provided to arm the prisoners. Another—command of which is offered to the Texan—will assault the front gateway, and engage the attention of 800 troops quartered in Garrison-square. The work of this squad will be dangerous, for it will encounter a force four times its strength, well armed and supplied with artillery, but it will be speedily relieved by the other divisions. Those under Marmaduke, Col. Robert Anderson of Kentucky, and Brig.-Gen. Charles Walsh of Chicago, Commander of the American Knights, will simultaneously assail three sides of Prison-square, break down the fence, liberate the prisoners, and, taking the garrison in rear, compel a general surrender. This accomplished, small parties will be dispatched to cut the telegraph-wires and seize the railway-stations; while the main body, reinforced by the 8,000 and more prisoners, will march into the city and rendezvous in Court-House-square, which will be the base of further operations.

The first blow struck, the insurgents will be joined by the 5,000 Illini (American Knights), and, seizing the arms of the city,—six brass field-pieces and 800 Springfield muskets,—and the arms and ammunition stored in private warehouses, will begin the work of destruction. The banks will be robbed, the stores gutted, the houses of loyal men plundered, and the railway-stations, grain-elevators, and other public buildings burned to the ground. To facilitate this latter design, the water-plugs have been marked, and a force detailed to set the water running. In brief, the war will be brought home to the North; Chicago will be dealt with like a city taken by assault, given over to the torch, the sword, and the brutal lust of a drunken soldiery. On it will be wreaked all the havoc, the agony, and the desolation which three years of war have heaped upon the South; and its upgoing flames will be the torch that shall light a score of other cities to the same destruction!

It was a diabolical plan, conceived far down in hell amid the black blackness, and brought up by the arch-fiend himself, who sat there, toying with the hideous thing, and with his cloven foot beating a merry tune on the death's-head and cross-bones under the table.

As he concludes, Hines turns to the new comer—

"Well, my boy, what do you say? Will you take the post of honor and of danger?"

The Texan draws a long breath, and then, through his barred teeth, hisses out:

"I will!"

On those two words hang thousands of lives, millions of money!

"You are a trump!" shouts Grenfell, springing to his feet. "Give us your hand upon it!"

A general hand-shaking follows, and during it, Hines and another man announce that their time is up.

"It is nearly twelve. Fielding and I never stay in this d—d town after midnight. You are fools, or you would do it."

Suddenly, as these words are uttered, a slouched hat, listening at the keyhole, pops up, moves softly through the hall, and steals down the stairway. Half an hour later the Texan opens the private door of the Richmond House, looks cautiously around for a moment, and then stalks on toward the heart of the city. The moon is down, the lamps burn dimly, but after him glide the shadows.

In a room at the Tremont House, not far from this time, the Commandant is walking and waiting, when the door opens and a man enters. His face is flushed, his teeth are clenched, his eyes flashing. He is stirred to the depths of his being. Can he be the Texan?

"What is the matter?" asks the Commandant.

The other sits down, and, as if only talking to himself, tells him. One hour has swept away the fallacies of his lifetime. He sees the Rebellion as it is—the outbreak and outworking of that spirit which makes hell horrible. Hitherto, that night, he has acted from love, not duty. Now he bows only to the All-Right and the All-Beautiful, and in his heart is that psalm of work, sung by one of old, and by all true men since the dawn of creation, "Here am I, Lord! Send me!"

The first gray of morning is streaking the east, when he goes forth to find a hiding-place. The sun is not up, and the early light comes dimly through the misty clouds, but about him still hang the long, dark shadows. This is a world of shadows. Only in the atmosphere which soon inclosed him is there no night and no shadow.

Soon the Texan's escape is known at the camp, and a great hue and cry follows. Handbills are got out, a reward is offered, and by that Sunday noon his name is on every street corner. Squads of soldiers and police ransack the city and invade every Rebel asylum. Strange things are brought to light, and strange gentry dragged out of dark closets; but nowhere is found the Texan. The search is well done, for the pursuers are in dead earnest; and, Captain Hines, if you don't trust him, now, you are a fool, with all your astuteness!

So the day wears away and the night cometh. Just at dark a man enters the private door of the Tremont House, and goes up to a room where the Commandant is waiting. He sports a light rattan, wears a stove-pipe hat, a Sunday suit, and is shaven and shorn like unto Samson. What is the Commandant doing with such a candy? Soon the gas is lighted, and lo, it is the Texan! But who in creation would know him? The plot, he says, thickens. More "Butternuts" have arrived, and the deed will be done on Tuesday night, as sure as Christmas is coming. He has seen his men—two hundred, picked, and every one clamoring for pickings. Hines, who carries the bag, is to give him ten thousand greenbacks, to stop their mouths and stuff their pockets, at nine in the morning.

"And to-morrow night we'll have them, sure! And, low say you, give you shackles and a dungeon?" asks the Commandant, his mouth wreathing with grim wrinkles.

"Anything you like. Anything to *blot out my record of treason.*"

He has learned the words—they are on his heart, not to be razed out forever.

When he is gone, up and down the room goes the Commandant, as is his fashion. He is playing a desperate game. The stake is awful. He holds the ace of trump—but shall he risk the game upon it? At half past eight he sits down and writes a dispatch to his General. In it he says:

"My force is, as you know, too weak and much overworked—only eight hundred men, all told, to guard between eight and nine thousand prisoners. I am certainly not justified in waiting to take risks, and mean to arrest these officers, if possible, before morning."

The dispatch goes off, but still the Commandant is undecided. If he strikes to-night, Hines may escape, for the fox has a hole out of town, and may keep under cover until morning. He is the king-devil, and much the Commandant wants to cage him. Besides, he holds the bag, and the Texan will go out of prison a penniless man among strangers. Those ten thousand greenbacks are lawful prize, and should be the country's dower with the maiden. But are not republics grateful? did not one give a mansion to Gen. McClellan? Ah Capt. Hines, that was lucky for you, for, beyond, a doubt, it saved your bacon!

The Commandant goes back to camp, sends for the police, and gets his blue-coats ready. At two o'clock they swoop to the prey, and before daybreak a hundred birds are in the talons of the eagle. Such another haul of buzzards and night-hawks never was made since Gabriel caged the Devil and the dark angels.†

At the Richmond House Grenfell was taken in bed with the Texan. They were clapped into irons, and driven off to the prison together. A fortnight later, the Texan, relating these details to a stranger, while the Commandant was sitting by at his desk writing, said:

"Words cannot describe my relief when those bandcuffs were put upon us. At times before, the sense of responsibility almost overpowered me. Then I felt like a man who has just come into a fortune. The wonder to me now is, how the Colonel could have trusted so much to a Rebel."

"Trusted!" exclaimed the Commandant, looking up from his writing. "I had faith in you; I thought you wouldn't betray me; but I trusted your own life in your own hands, that was all. Too much was at stake to do more. Your every step was shadowed, from the moment you left this camp till you came back to it in irons. Two detectives were constantly at your back, sworn to take your life if you wavered for half a second."

"Is that true?" asked the Texan in a musing way, but without moving a muscle. "I didn't know it, but I felt it in the air!"

In the room at the Richmond House, on the table around which were discussed their hellish plans, was found a slip of paper, and on it, in pencil, was scrawled the following:

"COLONEL: You *must* leave this house *to-night*. Go to the Briggs house to-night. J. FIELDING."

Fielding was the assumed name of the Rebel who burrowed with Hines out of town, where not even his fellow-fiends could find him. Did the old fox scent the danger? Beyond a doubt he did. Another day, and the Texan's life might have been forfeited. Another day, and the camp might have been sprung upon a little too soon; and who that reads this manifest can doubt that through it all he was led and guided by the good Providence that guards his country?

But what said Chicago, when it awoke in the morning? Let one of its own organs answer:

"A shiver of genuine horror passed over Chicago yesterday. Thousands of citizens, who awoke to the peril hanging over their property and their heads in the form of a suspicious foray upon the city from Camp Douglas, led by Rebel officers in disguise and Rebel guerrillas without disguise, and concocted by home Copperheads, whose houses had been converted into Rebel arsenals, were appalled as though an earthquake had opened at their feet. . . . Who can picture the horrors to follow the letting loose of 8,000 Rebel prisoners upon a sleeping city, all unconscious of the coming avalanche? With arms and ammunition stored at convenient locations, with confederates distributed here and there, ready for the signal of conflagration, the horrors of the scene could scarcely be paralleled in savage history. One hour of such a catastrophe would destroy the creations of a quarter of a century, and expose the homes of nearly 200,000 souls to every conceivable form of desecration."—(Chicago Tribune, Nov. 8, 1864.

But the men of Chicago not only talked, they acted. They went to the polls and voted for the Union; and so told the world what honest Illinois thought of treason.

More arrests were made, more arms taken, but the great blow was struck and the work over. Its head gone, the Conspiracy was dead, and it only remained to lay out its lifeless trunk for the burial. Yet, even as it lay in death, men shuddered to look on the hideous thing out of which had gone so many devils.

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* Since the