GUITEAU!

A VIVID DESCRIPTION OF THE MURDERER.

The Trial Described—The Lawyers—Judge Cox Looks like a Soldier—The Wretched Prisoner—A Clear and Graphic Analysis.

From the Atlanta Constitution.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 3.—"You will now witness," said Emory Speer, as with Mr. Harrington of Columbus we filed into the Federal court room in this city, "the most famous, and, in many respects, the most interesting, trial of record."

The court room was packed. As we entered, the voice of the Sheriff was heard ordering the doors closed, as there was standing room for no more people in the court room. The crowd was of better class than I had expected to find. The most elegant women and men of position and character made up the staple, with here and there a strip of rough people, admitted by the connivance of some doorkeeper or subordinate. I do not know how the ladies stand the spicy details which Guiteau throws into the proceedings on occasions, but I suppose the old ones are too wise to be giddy and the young ones too innocent to blush. At any rate they sit through it, alongside their casual or regular mates, and give the glitter of diamonds and bloom of downy cheeks to a scene that they brighten, if they do not adorn.

"If I ever saw a hanging jury," said Speer, "that is one. I have studied it carefully, and in the light of considerable experience, I think it is the most determined jury I ever saw. Along either line there is not a face that promises the least sort of sentiment or qualmishness. Even the third juror in the front row who goes to dozing in the first half hour, and sleeps peacefully until the bailiff rouses him at the close of the session, wakes with a vigor that ill-betides the prisoner. It is rumored that some of the jurors have hereditary insanity in their families, and that this may cause a mistrial. This is hardly probable, though. Guiteau is before a hanging jury, if ever any man was."

Mr. Scoville, who has charge of Guiteau's defence, has won general respect by his conduct of the case. Not a skilled criminal lawyer, his very frankness and candor commend him to the jury, while his ready confession of ignorance as to the technicalities of the court excuses many an error that he could not defend. He seems to feel keenly the odium of his place, has the ingenuous air of one who is manfully shouldering a responsibility he would never have taken on of his own motion, and rarely closes a day without having won the sympathy of the audience. John W. Guiteau, a low middling sample out of the same field in which the assassin was storm-cotton, sits by Scoville and apparently worries him with suggestions. Of the prosecution Corkhill is probably the weakest of the lot. He is a blondish, round-headed man, with a full, well-fed face and a moustache. Porter is the oratorical lawyer of the bunch, interjecting little speeches here and there almost as irregularly as Guiteau does.

"That is Davidge, the manager of the prosecution," said Speer, pointing to a chirpy old man with a smooth face and a suffusive smile, tripping by the jury. "See how he bows to the jury, with all the unction of Sergeant Burfoz, and smiles on each one with brotherly affection. He will now go over and shake hands in a deprecating way with Scoville, and then turn and look at the jury as if to say, 'See how generous I am?'"

Judge Cox, who walked with a quick, firm step to his seat promptly at 10 o'clock is a short, thick-set man, with military erectness of figure and manner, and moustache and goatee trimmed to a point, reminding one of a young Joe Johnston. The wisdom of his course in allowing Guiteau such unusual latitude is now generally understood. With the almost certainty of conviction, he has given the prisoner such liberal rulings that it will be practically impossible to secure a new trial by exceptions. He has been roundly abused for his course, but has never moved one jot or title from the path he first laid out. As he sat straight as an arrow in his chair and looked out over the miserable court room, he showed no sign of giving way to emotion, and it was easy to see the steadiest will that he has set a new precedent in criminal trials, and stood by that precedent through thick and thin.

"There comes Guiteau," ran around the court room, as the door opened and Marshal Henry's burly form appeared. Behind the Marshal, walking so close to the jury that he actually brushed its knees, came a shambling figure. The shoulders, square and broad, were hunched up—the closely-shaved head, well settled and crouching between them, moved furtively from one side to the other. This was Guiteau, the assassin of Garfield. He was clad in a cheap gray suit that fit loosely. A pair of cheap eyeglasses hung from his coat lappel. His hair was cut very close, and showed the bumps of an ugly skull. His mouth was large, and of changeable expression, the thin lips twitching and curving constantly. He appeared to recognize no one in the crowds through which he passed, his eyes shifting uneasily until he reached the counsel's desk. There he stopped and whispered a few words to Scoville, who listened with a weary, half-sad air. Scoville made no reply, and the assassin, putting his shoulders up again and dropping his head down between them, hustled on to the prisoner's dock. Reaching that, he adjusted his chair, pulled two newspapers out of his pocket, and sat down. Suddenly he said, in a loud voice: "Happy New Year to all of you. I've had a very happy New Year. I had a big reception—high-toned, middle-toned, low-toned folks. This shows that the public is with me, and wants me acquitted."

It is impossible to describe the vague, perfunctory way in which this was said. The utterance was purely mechanical—the manner abstracted. It was addressed to nobody, being delivered apparently to his newspaper. The tones were dry, hollow, without the slightest emphasis, pause, or inflection. They were delivered precisely as if they were turned out of a cast-iron throat by a crank. Indeed, they reminded me of only one deliverance I ever heard. That was when a curious Swiss clock opened its dial and a cuckoo hopped out, crew three automatic crows, wheeled on its metallic base, and vanished into the clock again. Having made his speech, Guiteau took his eyeglasses, held them to his eyes, and apparently buried himself in his newspaper. I took advantage of the lull to study the face of the most remarkable assassin of history. I approached this study bewildered by two opinions. Stilson Hutchins had said to me with that fine emphasis for which he is famous:

"His eye is a wonderful one. It is not the eye of a wild beast, but it is the eye of a human being with a savage beast behind it glaring at you through it."

I was at some pains to justify the picturesque statement, but I confess that I was unable to do so. I saw no savage beast behind Guiteau's eye, nor any trace of one; and as I have been to a menagerie or two, I flatter myself that I know a wild beast when I see it. I only saw a furtive, cunning eye, with a scared, hunted look in it that the fearless unconsciousness of insanity never gives to its subjects. I was sure that Mr. Hutchins let his love of the picturesque get away with his judgment. The other opinion with which I found myself burdened came from Henry Watterson, who had written:

"He is a weird and wizened apotheosis of dead-beatism."

I am unable to say whether I saw this in Guiteau or not. I don't think I would have known what it was if I had seen it. So that Mr. Watterson may have been right. Certainly no one can ever prove that he was wrong. As for me, it struck me that Guiteau was the brightest man in the court room. I do not think so smart a prisoner ever before went on trial for his life. His defence is unique—it is sparkling—and full of an audacity and cheek that is either sublime or insane. Probably it is certainly not insane. It is too well ordered for that. He never misses a point in the trial. He never throws in a shot at random. With wonderful self-control, he sits, his eye glasses resting on his paper, but his eyes, half shut, throbbing rolling under his glasses, hearing every word that is said, noting every motion that is made, conscious that at any moment he may be shot dead in his seat; yet sitting silent, with a smile on his lips, and only his half-sheathed eyes showing the tormenting fears that devour him.

What a miracle he has worked already. He is the hero of the most conscienceless, wanton, and atrocious assassination that ever stained human annals. Only a month ago running a muck through howling and cursing crowds as he hurried from the court room to his van, and now the easy and chatty centre of a court room that laughs good humoredly at his speeches and only complains that he does not talk enough. Only a month ago that same court room sat hushed and horror stricken as the bones of the murdered President were placed before his assassin, and now the ghastliness of that scene is forgotten, and the trial of that assassin is esteemed the best farce of the day. Will the cunning that has made this change in the public, that hangs about the court room, affect the jury?

I think not. Guiteau is surrounded by a mesh that he cannot break through. As shrewd as he is, he has not been able to deceive a single expert who has examined his case. The prosecution has summoned the ablest experts in the country, and their testimony has been uniform, positive, and intelligent against the prisoner. His previous life has been sifted, and nothing found to justify the belief of insanity. It has simply demonstrated that he was an unconscionable dead beat, too lazy to work, but greedy of good things, and hence a petty thief. His whole career has been one of makeshifts—first swindling a boarding-house keeper, next bleeding a politician, then beating a community. The key note to his life is his inordinate vanity. Possessed with the idea that he was a lecturer, an author, an orator, a preacher, a lawyer, a statesman, and having not the slightest qualification of either, he has been a sort of insane Tuttlehead Tittlemen, with higher vanity, deeper wrongs, and swifter impulses than his English prototype.

The only possible ground for convincing the jury that he is insane is that the act itself proved insanity. It does look incredible that any man of such light weight, such petty methods, such shallow affections, should deliberately shoot down the President of the United States, in the heart of a great city, in open day, without being insane. John Wilkes Booth might have done it; the Nihilist assassin might have done it; any other assassin in the world's history; any man of deep convictions, of strong character, of tragic leaning or inclination, might have done it, and sternly smiled as he paid forfeit with his life. Heretofore assassination has furnished its explanation in the tremendous and inexorable forces that moved the assassin, deliberate, brooding, and absolute, to his crime. But that this will-o'-the-wisp—this mean trifler and vicious sneak, whose predatory instincts led him no further than the lunch counter, and who was a terror only to impecunious landladies—should have committed a crime that, in daring and atrocity, has no parallel from Brutus to Booth, at first seems incredible on any hypothesis save that of insanity.

The explanation, I suspect, is this: Through a long life of petty meannesses this man had become so depraved that he believed Grant, Arthur, and Conkling would protect him. The same abnormal vanity that led him to so overvalue his own importance unbalanced his judgment in everything else. His weak brain was heated by the factional frenzy then raging, and his governless nature was fed by his accumulating reverses. If he believed that Grant and Arthur would protect him, his crime loses its audacity, and a mistaken cunning supplies in him the sleepy stuff that moves the ordinary assassin. That he did so believe is proved by many things. By his first exclamation, "I am a Stalwart of the Stalwarts;" by his hurried declaration that he killed Garfield so that Arthur might be President; by the request to Gen. Sherman to simply see that he was protected from the instant fury of the mob, and by the arrangement he made with the hack driver to simply carry him beyond immediate danger; but, more than all, by the stupefaction that seized him when he first read in the papers that Grant and Arthur denounced his crime, and indicated that he ought to be hung. He seemed to be utterly unable to comprehend this for some time, and when he did his whole manner changed. His present theory of the defence was formulated. Nowhere did he mention or suggest "the inspiration of the Deity," that is now his sole defence, until after he realized that Grant and Arthur had deserted him. The "Deity" was an afterthought.

I was struck as I sat listening at the trial—the lumbering, heavy lawyers, the tedious witnesses, the sharp interruptions of the prisoner, the light cheeriness of the audience, and the dark tragedy that was behind it all—with the uniqueness of this trial among all trials of this sort. What an enormous distance this shaved-skull clown has led us all from the gloom and sorrow of a few weeks ago; how far he had carried that audience from the broken-hearted mother and sorrowing widow at Mentor; how jauntily he jingles his fool's cap and bells over a grave on which the funeral flowers have hardly lost their bloom. What a difference in the scene if presented, and the trial of the Nihilist assassins! What sort of trial would this have been with John Wilkes Booth in the prisoner's dock? What tremendous and profound interest would there have been in probing the depths of his tragical nature, in bringing to light the secret springs of his life, and laying bare the tense passions of his soul! The world would have waited breathless as the great lawyers confronted the great actor, and sought to wring from him the names of his accomplices, or put before him as a witness the one woman he ever loved. How meagre, and flippant, and trifling is all this trial compared to what the superb and stormy scenes of the other would have been! How wretchedly scant of all that is serious or thrilling! With what slight accessories is the trial made up! A few faded landladies, whose meat and bread the poor devil had eaten without pay; a wife from whom he was divorced simply because he didn't care to support her; a half dozen cranks with whom he once associated in crank communities; two or three book agents to prove that, when a book agent himself, he collected money without delivering goods; a woman or two to prove that he had on occasions been insane; a life plastered over with misdemeanors, and yet not steadied with one serious thought or weighted with even one respectable crime. It is the incongruity between the man and the deed, the disproportion between this and other assassins, the flippancy of the proceedings of this trial as compared to others, that have taken the people off their feet and bred an infectious lightness in the court room atmosphere that may extend to the jury.

Strange as it may seem, I felt a pity for the poor devil of a prisoner as I watched him in his dock. An expert has predicted that Guiteau will break down and go babbering an idiot before the end of the trial, sane as he was when it started. It is a curious and pitiful spectacle. The tremendous strain upon this small creature, as he turns, baffled in his purpose, deserted by those he counted his protectors, and confronts his assailants alone, cornered, set upon, involved in messes that a bear could not break through, he dashes against them with the frenzied impotence of a trapped rat. I never saw such a mass of flippant carelessness put over such a terror-stricken face. The indescribable, hunted look that is under the surface of every feature, the vague appeal for protection or sympathy that flickers in his eyes, the uneasy, ceaseless tremor of the hands, and the scared turns of the head—all these tell of the torment he suffers. His cuckoo-like speeches, that were juicy and springy when they came as a first inspiration, are now dry and inhuman, since they have failed to deceive, and only cause a laugh where they once started inquiry. There is a weariness and distrust in his manner now, since those terrible experts have demonstrated in cold logic that it is impossible for him to be insane. The wretcher with the deserted landladies, the deserted wife, and the buyers of books never delivered, he stood very well; but these technical experts, that stand not as the accusers of his past life, but the interpreters of his crime, have been too much for him.

That he should be hung there is no doubt. That he will be hung there is scarcely less. But I could not help pitying him as I witnessed his unequal and hopeless struggle. And back of this what a hard, unloved life was his, with its shabby makeshifts—with its hungry nights and its daily days of disappointments—its mortifying beggary, its looming ambitions and its wretched performance—its misery, its worthlessness, its vagueness, its abjectness, its homelessness, its friendlessness, its misproportions. How many weak and vicious fellows as he is, with his misguided aims and mistaken purposes, with maladjustments and miscestimates, are drifting on the swirling current of life—as worthless as he, but less known, simply because they haven't yet been thrown on the rocks. An outcast from all sympathy, devoured by a consuming vanity as deadly as the delirium of drink, a miserable slink, despised, avoided, dodged, mistrusted, and kicked out. The jailer says that there seems to be only one human being that feels the slightest interest in his future, and that is his wife in Chicago. Beyond this one love, he is the utter outcast from human sympathy he has always been. He looks into the crowd that has already made two attempts to take his life, and feels that even now it may be preparing for the third. And so he sits there shrivelled in his seat, a dwarfish creature, with a face in which a soul, alone stricken in its heart, masking its terror with ignoble flesh—tossed by a strange slip from a petty criminal into a tremendous one—a Jeremy Diddler turned into a murderer—a jackal thrown into a tiger's place! Just before I left the court room I called my boy's attention to the prisoner. Guiteau saw me as I did so. The boy looked at him with openeyed wonder, for he knew the careless scoops of the assassin were fixed as they rested upon the fresh young face of the child. The scared, hunted look died out of the murderer's face for the moment, and he gazed steadily into the bright, innocent eyes only a few feet away from him. His expression changed. His quivering mouth grew serious, and—"Papa, he is looking at me!" whispered the boy, dropping his eyes and cuddling closer to my side. At this moment Guiteau rose from his chair, turned it completely around, and sat down, with his back facing the audience—a favorite position with him. The outline of his shabby head, cuddled between his broad shoulders, was sharply made against the light. His great ears stood out like handles to his skull. There was a noticeable flatness on one side of his head as compared with the other, and a depression on one side of the top skull with an upheaval on the other. He made a little awning of a newspaper, and held it like a hood between his face and the sun. When I left the court room, a half hour later, he had not moved.

Fickle Sallie Gordon.

From the Chicago Herald.

MEMPHIS, Jan. 11.—P. M. Stanley, an old citizen and a deacon in the Methodist church, and Miss Sallie M. Gordon, a young lady, were to have been married last night, and a large number of friends were invited. On Monday, J. E. Wharton, a dashing young man and former lover of the young lady, appeared, renewed his vows, and was accepted. The deacon was notified yesterday, and got word to the minister in time, but could not prevent a large concourse assembling at the church at the appointed time last evening, only to be disappointed. Miss Gordon will marry the prodigal this evening.

A New Excuse for Crime.

From the Savannah News.

A Macon wife beater entered the novel plea in Judge Hopkins's court last Tuesday, that when he thrashed his better half he was in a somnambulistic state and not responsible. He got $200 or three months in jail.

An Appeal to the President.

From the Chicago Tribune.

A man who wanted to see the President very much wrote on his card, as an inducement to be let in: "My wife is a personal friend of one of your goosemen."

Court Calendars This Day.

SUPREME COURT—CHAMBERS.—Nos. 9, 31, 36, 39, 46, 66, 87, 92, 94, 99, 103, 105, 108, 132, 133, 135, 140, 144, 146, 149, 151, 157, 159, 160, 161, 170, 172, 174, 176, 177.

GENERAL TERM—Nos. 50, 121, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 137, 143, 144½, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181.

SPECIAL TERM—Nos. 50, 121, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 128, 137, 143, 144½, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181.

SPECIAL TERM—Clear, Nos. 254, 255, 256, 43, 198, 113, 138, 34, 110, 96, 250, 264, 220, 248, 262, 83, 228, 182, 257, 121, 122, 134, 39, 51, 125.

Part 1—Clear, Nos. 990, 1337, 1744, 1094, 1840, 905, 1166, 1525, 1592, 1123, 957, 1536, 1483, 1646, 972, 1645, 1662, 1114, 1665, 967, 968, 1319, 1098, 792.

Part II. Same case on. Part III.—Clear, Nos. 1330, 1344, 1345, 1346, 1347, 962, 963, 919, 1354, 146, 1404, 1261, 875, 1469, 968, 1416, 1601, 1042, 1366, 2283, 1324, 1027, 1011, 1023, 1630, 1664, 1665, 1374, 1343, 1377, 2475, 1337, 1231, 1366, 850, 1349, 1025, 934, 1493, 1267.

SUPREME COURT—SPECIAL TERM.—Nos. 20, 29, 4, 5, 6, 40, 57. Part I. Set down for hearing, Nos. 522, 293, 346, 483, 471, 230, 527, 598, 731, 219, 712, 612, 360, 650, 324, 104, 566, 736, 774, 510, 168.

COMMON PLEAS—GENERAL TERM—Adjourned to first Monday in February. SPECIAL TERM—No. Calendar. Part I—Nos. 1054, 604, 1255, 1279, 1404, 1063, 1176, 1365, 413, 1157, 1418, 898, 1293, 1202, 1193, 1187, 578, 1342, 1381, 1307, 1068, 1216, 1064.

MARINE COURT—Part I—Nos. 4862, 6818, 6073, 6874, 6681, 6703, 6749, 6710, 6631, 6646, 6652, 6657, 6658, 6664, 6666, 6672, 6673, 6675, 6676, 6677, 6678, 6680, 6684, 6686, 6687, 6688, 6689, 6690, 6691, 6692, 6693, 6694, 6696, 6697, 6698, 6699, 6700, 6701, 6702, 6703, 6704, 6705, 6706, 6707, 6708, 6709, 6710, 6711, 6712, 6713, 6714, 6715, 6716, 6717, 6718, 6719, 6720, 6721, 6722, 6723, 6724, 6725, 6726, 6727, 6728, 6729, 6730, 6731, 6732, 6733, 6734, 6735,