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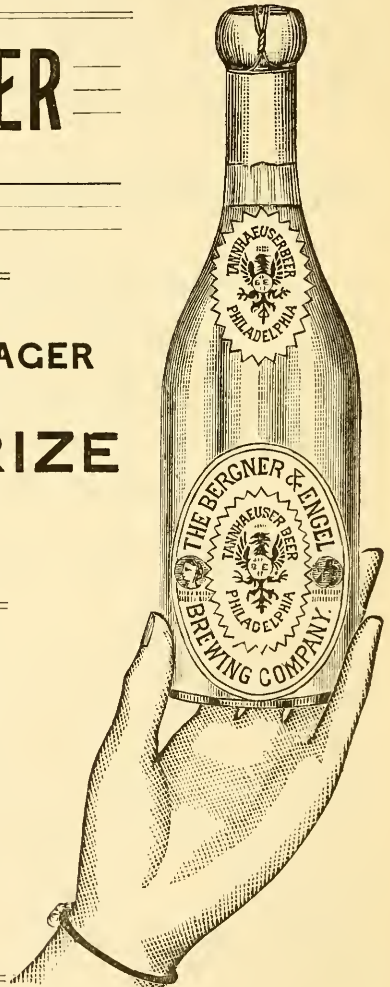

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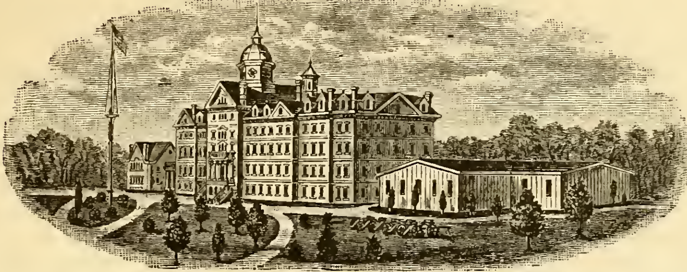

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THE STORY OF A CRIME.[1]

So much has been said, so much has been written, in relation to the man who stood at the helm when our country was struggling in the throes of the mightiest conflict in the history of the world, that it is difficult for one who was but an humble unit in the great army that fought for the maintenance of our union of States to write anything pertaining to that gloomy hour on the night of the 14th of April, 1865, which would not be characterized as a plagiarism.

Nevertheless, it was the great and sorrowful misfortune of the writer to have been an eye-witness of the greatest tragedy of modern times.

On the 8th of April, 1865, I arrived with my company of fifty marines at Philadelphia, from Turkey Bend, on the James River, where I had been ordered after the fall of Fort Fisher.

We left for Washington the next day at 11 A.M. I remember well with what pride I marched my little command through the streets of the loyal city of Philadelphia to the station at Broad and Prime Streets. We received an unexpected ovation from the good citizens along the route, and you can readily appreciate how the inmost recesses of our hearts were stirred as we marched proudly along, welcomed by the bright smiles of fair women and the cheering words of brave men. We reached Washington in due time and were assigned to duty at the barracks in the navy-yard.

On the morning of the 14th of April, the daily papers announced that the President, General Grant, and other distinguished men would be present that evening at a representation of "Our American Cousin" in Ford's Theatre.

I determined to go, and in company with a brother officer, a native of Washington, left the barracks at 6 P.M. We walked leisurely down Pennsylvania Avenue until we reached the old Kirkwood House, where Vice-President Johnson was then living. We entered, and, seating ourselves in the reading-room, my attention was soon directed to an individual who came in dressed in dark clothes, a slouch hat, trousers inside of his boots, and Mexican spurs strapped to his heels. He spoke to my friend, and passing on, entered the bar-room, where I saw him

[1] Read before the United Service Club of Philadelphia.

refresh the inner man. In response to my natural query in regard to this man, the answer was, "His name is Harold, a 'ne'er-do-well,' whose father occupied a clerk's position in the navy-yard for many years, but who is now dead." This was about 7 P.M.

At the proper time we entered the theatre, having secured seats three rows from the stage on the left-hand side. The President's box was in the second tier on the right, so that we had an uninterrupted view of the occupants of the box from our position.

Soon the President came in with his wife, Major Rathborne, and Miss Harris. Mr. Lincoln sat in a rocking-chair close to the front of the box, and next to the front row of seats outside. A person seated in that row could have easily touched the President. Mrs. Lincoln sat directly opposite her husband, Miss Harris in the rear of Mrs. Lincoln, and Major Rathborne in the rear of and to the right of the President.

The house was, of course, crowded from pit to dome. The three rows of seats directly in our front remained vacant during the first act. During this act occurred an incident which did not seem of particular moment at the time, but viewed from the light of subsequent events became of terrible and significant import when recalled.

John Wilkes Booth walked down the left-hand aisle to the proscenium box, and, leaning his arm on the projection of the stage, took in the situation with an apparently cool and critical eye. He was dressed in an evening suit, with white satin waistcoat, which was the fashion in those days. Soon he sauntered out as deliberately as he had entered, and the incident passed from our minds, only to be recalled vividly when the tragedy was consummated. Soon the curtain fell, and immediately afterwards a crowd of men came in, completely filling the rows of seats described as vacant.

The President sat chatting during the interval, and all careful observers concurred in the opinion that he exhibited a buoyancy of spirits greatly in contrast with his usual manner. He seemed to fully appreciate that he was surrounded by sympathetic and loyal hearts; that the dark clouds were dissipated, and that a regenerated nation had arisen, phœnix like, from the ashes of internecine war.

But, alas! the dread shadow of death was even then insidiously approaching, and soon its icy hand would blot out forever a noble life.

Why was not that occult power, so often discussed by learned men, that premonition of sudden calamity, vouchsafed to the illustrious victim, or to some of us in that crowded assembly, to warn us of his impending doom? A few moments before the rise of the curtain on the second act, Mr. Lincoln arose laughingly from his chair, retired to the rear of the box, put on his overcoat, and resumed his seat.

The curtain rose slowly on the second act, and while all were enjoying the eccentricities of Asa Trenchard, "our American cousin," a muffled pistol-shot was heard. It seemed at the first second of time

to have come from behind the scenes; then the stillness of death ensued; an overpowering sense of something awful pervaded every mind; when suddenly a woman's piercing shriek rang out, a noise of scuffling in the President's box was heard, and immediately an agile form sprang upon the rail of the box. He poised himself for a second, long enough to shout in stentorian tones those memorable words, "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" jumped to the stage, his spurs tearing the flags with which the rail was decorated, and fell upon one knee. Like lightning he arose, and with a bowie-knife in his uplifted right hand, glided rapidly across the stage to the left, facing the audience as he passed, his eyes glaring with the wild light of insanity. Miss Harris, with frantic cries, endeavored to seize the assassin by the tails of his coat, but they were torn from her grasp, and she could only exclaim, "He has shot the President."

Major Rathborne was disabled by a stab in the arm, and Mrs. Lincoln had fainted at the feet of her husband. Thus the great tragedy was accomplished.

As soon as Booth disappeared many gentlemen jumped upon the stage and hastened to the rear entrance which opened into an alley. Nothing could be seen; the alley was deserted, the assassin and his confederate, Harold, had disappeared in the darkness.

Within the theatre great excitement for a time prevailed; men wept and breathed vows of vengeance. Laura Keene appeared in front of the foot-lights, and with uplifted hands to heaven cried in impassioned tones, "Kill him! Kill him!"

The prompt appearance of the provost-guard soon calmed the excitement of the people, and they quietly and sadly dispersed.

The unconscious President was placed upon a mattress and removed to the house opposite, where he died the next morning.

The first issue of the daily papers contained a request from the Secretary of War to all officers who had witnessed the assassination to report at the Department. In obedience to this order the writer presented himself and was examined by the assistant secretary. The same story was told, substantially as related above, with the remark, that "could I have been possessed of that necessary characteristic of a soldier,—presence of mind,—which I doubted under the circumstances, and had I been armed, I could easily have shot Booth." The reply was made that the men referred to as having occupied the three front rows were supposed to be Booth's confederates, and an attempt to have arrested his progress in the manner indicated might have resulted disastrously. Another significant feature in the connecting incidents of the tragedy was the fact that all of the proscenium boxes and the front row of seats next to the President's box were secured but not occupied, thus lessening the chances of any one observing the execution of the deed.

On the 15th, and for several days afterwards, the wildest rumors were circulated in the city of Washington; the sentinels at the various posts were doubled, and the indefatigable and untiring energy of General Augur and his able subordinates brought order out of chaos and allayed the fears of the timid citizens.

The guard under the writer's temporary command at the navy-yard was strengthened, sentinels were doubled, and two monitors, the "Saugus" and the "Montauk," were moored at the navy-yard wharf, upon which a strong detachment of marines were stationed under the command of Captain Munroe, with Lieutenants Young, Mannix, Miller, and Bigelow as his subordinates, to provide for contingencies.

The first man arrested was Paine, who was brought at midnight to the navy-yard in a closed carriage. He was received from the detectives and transferred to the monitor, where he was confined in double irons, in a cell closely guarded. The next one received was Azteroth, then came Spangler, Arnold, O'Laughlin, and a Portuguese gentleman whose name I cannot recall. This latter person exhibited the utmost terror, crying bitterly, protesting his innocence, and praying to be released. He was released a few days afterwards.

Finally Harold was brought in with Booth's body, and we had all of the prisoners under our charge, with the exception of Mrs. Surratt.

Paine, in the extremity of his despair, attempted suicide by beating his head against the iron walls of his cell. To prevent any future attempts, a padded hood was constructed which completely covered his head, leaving nothing but his mouth and nostrils exposed, and secured under his chin by a throat-latch securely locked.

These men were kept on the monitors for a period of a week after the autopsy on Booth's body, and were then transferred to the arsenal.

Booth's body was brought to the navy-yard and placed upon a carpenter's bench on the monitor "Montauk," securely guarded. Visitors were excluded from the yard, no one being permitted to enter except with a pass signed jointly by the Secretaries of War and Navy. An autopsy was performed upon the body of Booth by distinguished medical officers of the army and navy, and Dr. May, an eminent civilian, in the presence of other officials; also in the presence of the ubiquitous Colonel Baker, chief of the detective force of the United States. This gentleman who sometimes permitted his zeal to outrun his discretion, reported the young officer in charge of the body to the Secretary of War for neglect of duty, in permitting rebel sympathizers to cut off locks of hair from the assassin's head and carry them away as sacred relics, imagining, I suppose, that some of the distinguished officers engaged in the autopsy were disloyal. It is needless to say that no difficulty was experienced in establishing the loyalty of the accused officers, nor that the young officer had failed in his duty, although it entailed a slight correspondence through the usual red-tape channels.

It now became a question with the authorities how to dispose of the body of Booth. It was at first determined to place the remains in the hands of Colonel Baker, with orders to sink it at sea; this idea was abandoned at the eleventh hour, and at midnight, after the autopsy was performed, the body was delivered to the chief of detectives. He conveyed it to the old penitentiary in the arsenal grounds, where it was buried in a cell. Subsequently, it was removed and buried at the foot of the gallows with the other malefactors who were executed. The writer has been informed that some years afterwards, Edwin Booth, who was always known as a loyal man, and who went into dignified retirement immediately after the tragedy, requested permission from the government to remove his brother's remains. This request was granted, and the dust of John Wilkes Booth repose in the family lot in a cemetery in Baltimore.

This imperfect narrative is written entirely from memory, and after a lapse of nearly twenty-four years. Some important incidents have, no doubt, been forgotten, yet that which has been related are facts which came under the observation of a subordinate actor in the events of that period.

I cannot close without referring to the gallant chieftain, General Hancock, "*le beau soldat.*" Called to Washington subsequent to the events I have narrated, by his wisdom, knightly bearing, and consummate skill as a soldier he preserved order during the trial and execution of the conspirators. With a stern sense of duty, his gentle heart bled that a woman should be sacrificed, and to the last moment, hoped that executive clemency would be exercised in behalf of Mrs. Surratt.

To one other I would also refer, a distinguished and gallant officer, detailed as provost-marshal of the great military court and district. From the hour of removal of the prisoners from the navy-yard to the arsenal, the faithful and conscientious discharge of this most important duty by General Hartranft merited that which he received and deserved, the commendations of his superiors and the respect and thanks of his countrymen.

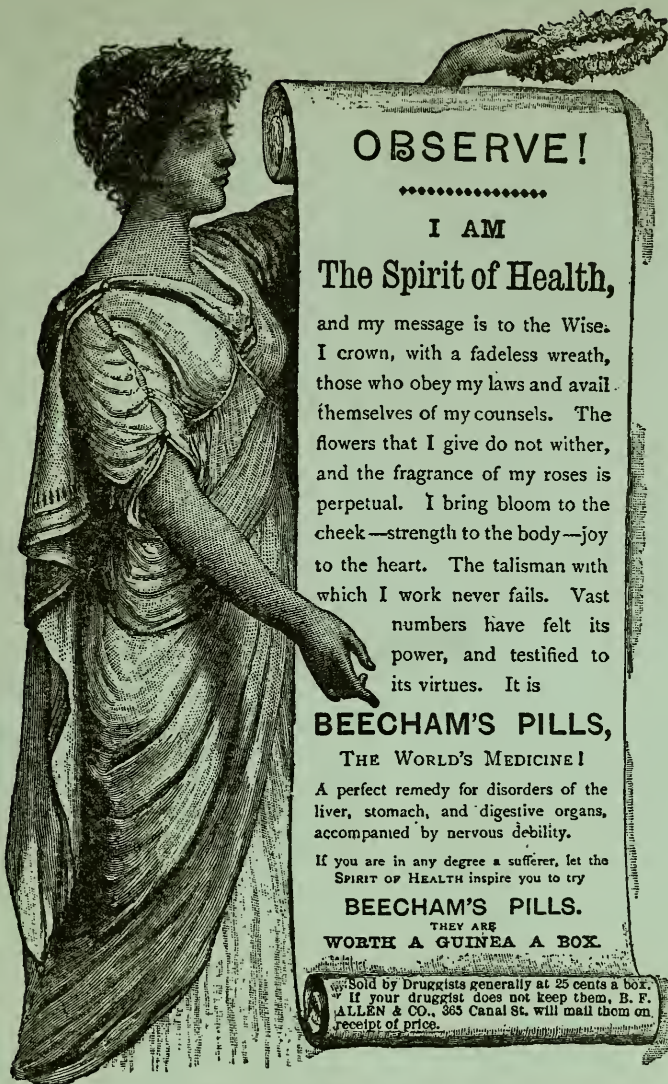
R. S. Collum,
Captain U.S.M.C.

BATTLE TACTICS.

The first requisite of tactics is that they shall suit the national genius and character. If the art of war is to make good its claim to be an art, it must show some property in the general principles which rule the other arts.

For instance, if, during the period when sculpture, painting, letters, and philosophy sank out of sight beneath the *débris* of the barbarian flood, it had happened that the conduct of war became better, that disposition and organization were able to win against superiority in numbers, weapons, or physical qualities, the inference would be that war was no true art, that proficiency was attained merely by constant practice, and that the more barbarous a nation was the less would be its temptation to be diverted into the paths of peace and the greater its pre-eminence in war. A similar deduction would be justifiable if the revival of art and letters had left war where it found it, or if the tremendous energy set free by the revolution of 1789 had not been felt in every battle-field of the nineteenth century. The truth is, that the art of war did keep fairly abreast of the other arts, and that the restoration of infantry to its normal place, at the hands of the Spaniards and Swiss, marks the beginning of modern scientific war.

Art, to have any value, must be to some extent indigenous. It can adapt, it can assimilate, but it cannot copy. No nation has ever yet been successful in war that did not conduct war by some method growing out of and suitable to national traits. Even apparent exceptions will, when carefully studied, often confirm this truth. Bonaparte, that tremendous apparition upon the dawn of the nineteenth century, was, after all, the resultant of local and national influences, projecting a figure of the fourteenth century, with whom war was at the same time a trade and a passion, into a world seething with forces long pent up, and but recently released with God knows what of turmoil and terror. His combinations were so profound and striking that they not only paralyzed his opponents, but have, to some extent, confused the judgments of history, making it an unconscious ally of this strange nature which did so much greatly and yet clutched all credit so meanly, which never forgave a service if the occasion of that service could detract from the reputation of foreseeing everything. He certainly inherited,



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