

INTELLIGENCE FROM RICHMOND.

REBEL TACTICS.

Plots to Assassinate or Kidnap President Lincoln.

NEGRO SLAVES AS SOLDIERS

THE SPRING CAMPAIGN

DESTITUTION IN RICHMOND.

Correspondence of The N. Y. Tribune.

WASHINGTON, March 15, 1864.

A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of exposing a bogus letter published by *The Daily News*, purporting to have been written by T. Butler King of Georgia. This letter, as I then stated, formed a part, but only a part, of a scheme devised for Rebel plots in Richmond and Copperhead leaders in the North to make political capital out of the great Peace party. They knew it would be readily inferred by the Northern people that no distinguished statesman and shrewd politician as Mr. King would not, especially while a candidate for office, openly write a letter expressing a desire on certain terms to sheath the sword and restore the Union, unless there were thousands upon thousands of others in the Confederacy entertaining similar sentiments, and they expected, after creating this impression, to be able, by publishing from time to time other bogus documents of similar tenor, to convince a great mass of the Northern people that this Administration is proceeding the war unecessarily, and that peace and the Union could be restored without further bloodshed by electing a Peace candidate to the Presidency, &c.

Among the other documents prepared and sent North with this letter was a petition, or what purported to be one, to be presented to Congress, signed by a large number of Southerners, praying that Commissioners be sent, or received by the Federal Government, or that all the States might be convoked in Convention, to negotiate terms of peace, on the basis of reconstruction. This petition, after a long preamble, continued: "There, fore we, the undersigned, loyal citizens of the United States, pray," &c.

To obtain signatures for this document, a petition of very different import, apparently designed for presentation to the Rebel Congress, was prepared with several pages of foolscap pasted together attached to it, upon which the signers were to put their names. Dupliques were made and left at several bar-rooms in Richmond, and a man was stationed with one in the vestibule of the Post-Office to solicit signatures; and copies prepared in the same style were sent to trusted persons in all the principal cities of the South. Signers were requested to write their places of residence opposite their names, which was uniformly done. In this manner several thousand signatures were procured from all parts of the Confederacy. They were afterward discarded from the petition to which they had been signed and appended to the petition for peace, to be presented to the Federal Congress.

The documents were prepared with the same general view, but it is probable that the sad fate of the King letter will induce their predecessors to use them for worse paper, or leave them to rust and mildew in obscurity. I will not spend time to describe them. I have referred to the petition in connection with the King letter the more fully to show the duplicity and ardent knavery of the Copperhead politicians, and the Machiavellian and dissembling devices their Rebel friends are ready to resort to to assist them in their efforts to bamboozle and betray credulous and unwary electors in the North.

In a former communication I related 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 minutes would occupy too much space, and a digest of it will prove quite satisfactory.

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 quiet 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 loaded, a few miles out of the city, by twenty-five or thirty armed men, on horseback. It was proposed to drive to Indian Point, about twenty-five miles south of Washington, on the Potomac—two or three miles of feet horses being stationed on the way—where a boat was to be waiting to cross the river, and land the captive a few miles south of Oceanon, 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. Three troops were also to be ready out and thrown across the road in various places, so soon as they had passed, by men stationed along for the purpose, who were afterwards 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. Welles, 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 well as God." A few days afterward I was sent to Atlanta, and never resumed 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 co-operation in the grand undertaking, and an immense sum of money was subscribed. The firm of Messrs. A. & Co., bankers, in Richmond, subscribed \$10,000, and Messrs. A. & Co., merchants, 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 \$30,000. It was proposed, when all was ready, to obtain a fortnight for money, and make him leader of the enterprise.

Whether these schemes have been abandoned, or whether the kidnappers 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.

I have had occasion in several of my letters to speak of Col. Margrave, and it may not be amiss to offer a few observations specially in regard to him. "Margrave," I have heard stated on good authority, is merely a name of guerre, assumed by him on joining Walker's Expedition to Central America, and retired

by him at the commencement of the present war. He is a native of South Carolina, and according to the same authority his real name is Elbert. He was at one time a member of Beauregard's staff, and at the battle of Shiloh was shot through the body and carried off the field for dead. Unfortunately life was not extinct, and he is again working to destroy his country. He is one of the most cool and reckless villains in the Confederacy—one who can smile, and murder while he smiles. For a villainous and desperate enterprise, no better leader could be found. He is now in the Canadian, and I verily believe for the purpose of heading a gang of desperadoes to commit some depredation on our frontier. He has numerous friends in Baltimore, and I heard him boast that he had put up at the most public hotels, and walked the most public streets of that city, without the slightest fear of detection.

There has been a great deal of discussion in the Rebel Cabinet during the past six or eight months as to the propriety and expediency of arming the slaves. Gen. Sherman of Alabama, Brown of Georgia, Benham of South Carolina, Pettus of Mississippi and many other distinguished Rebels have addressed letters to the Rebel President in favor of the proposition. Gen. Brown urged that the large accession to the slave population of his State rendered it necessary that the emigrants should be provided for in some way by the Government, as there was little or no employment for them, and many of them were in a starving condition, and he knew of no way in which they could be so profitably used as in the army. Messrs. Seddon, Meminger and Watts long ago declared themselves in favor of such a measure, while Benjamin, Mallory and Reagan expressed themselves in opposition to it.

The opposition of Mr. Benjamin, however, is not very great. He merely argues that the necessity has not yet arisen for the adoption of so desperate an expedient, but he says when it is proved that they have no white men enough to carry the war to a successful issue, he will advocate the arming, if necessary, of every able-bodied negro in the Confederacy. It is understood that the Rebel President's views on the subject coincide with those entertained by Benjamin. There can be no doubt that as a *desperate resort* the Rebels will try the experiment, dangerous as it may be, of arming their "negro property."

In truth there are a considerable number of negroes bearing arms in the Rebel army now. They are not so employed by any order of the War Department, nor are they generally formed in companies by themselves, but when they fight they fight side by side with the white soldier. These negroes for the most part belong to the officers and men of the commands to which they are attached. In the Confederate service a private may, if he chooses, be accompanied by a servant, on paying a certain sum for his rations. This is not allowed by any regulation, but it is a privilege that has been permitted from the beginning of the war; and in the cavalry especially a large number of the men, as well as the officers, have their servants to feed and take care of their horses, cook, and do such chores as may be required of them. Many, in fact most of these negroes have been favorites with their young masters at home and are greatly attached to them, and if given a swig or two of Rebel lightning (corn whiskey) are ready to fight to the death by their sides.

When an engagement is about to take place such of these negroes as are willing to fight are equipped and go into battle with their masters. In March last I was sent as courier by the Secretary of War to Gen. J. Z. B. Stuart, and was with him command in Col. O'Neal's (of the 34 Virginia) regiment, located to Pittsburgh Lee's brigade, at the battle of Kelly's Ford. This regiment is a very select one, being composed of young men, nearly every one of whom claims to be of an F. V., and there are fully a quarter as many negroes in the command as soldiers. At the battle referred to, these negroes fought magnificently by the side of their masters, and several of them were killed. The servant of McClellan, Adjutant of the regiment, displayed a courage and desperation that challenged the admiration of all who saw him, and the day after the fight he received from Col. O'Neal the present of a handsome sword for his bravery.

This Adjutant McClellan, by the by, is a direct cousin of Gen. George B. McClellan, the Union hero of the seven days' battles around Richmond. He is a *fac-simile* of the General, at least in appearance, and for his devotion to the Rebel cause was recently promoted to Major on Gen. Stuart's staff.

But to return for a moment to the negro soldiers: Gen. Bragg, in a communication to Mr. Seddon, stated that at the battle at Stone's River four companies of negroes, which had been formed out of servants attached to the army, and colored by white men, conducted themselves with great credit, exhibiting a fearless determination not excelled by the best soldiers of his command. He recommended the immediate organization of 300,000 soldiers of this class, to be distributed in companies and regiments in the armies then in the field.

But you may not assent that, although there are a few slaves who would fight for their masters in aid of the Rebellion, that nine out of ten of them have now too large a sense of freedom to assist in riveting tighter the chains of bondage upon themselves and fellows; and I believe that the arming of 300,000 of them would, in effect, be equal to an addition of 300,000 soldiers to our armies.

An impression appears to prevail in the North that the Rebels are preparing to evacuate Virginia; but I know, or at least I am confident, that such is not the case. That they will remove their Capital I have no doubt, but you may depend that they will hold Virginia until expelled foot by foot by the Northern armies. Gen. Lee would not listen for a moment to the voluntary abandonment of the State, and the Virginia soldiers would instantly throw down their arms if such a course were determined on. There is no mistake about this. And without Lee, and his brother Virginians, what would become of the Rebellion and the Confederacy?

At the time of Sherman's raid in May last, Richmond was considered in danger, and the citizens were evoked by placards carried about the streets by negroes, and other calls, in Capital Square. Here they were addressed by Gov. Letcher, Mayor Mayo, and other prominent Rebels, who urged them to form themselves into companies and regiments for defense of the city. They declared that if the city should be captured the State could not be held, and that if the State were abandoned the Virginia soldiers would fight no more, and the Confederacy would fall. Letcher said that the Virginia soldiers would feel, if their State should be lost, that there was nothing left for them to fight for. They would not be blind enough to hope that if lost, it could ever be regained. You may, therefore, depend that the Rebels will defend Virginia with the desperation of despair; but let them be driven beyond its boundaries, and eight out of ten of the Virginians will gladly avow themselves of the President's Amnesty Proclamation in order to return. Let Virginia be reclaimed, and the Confederacy will tumble like an inverted cone.

Desperate efforts will be made this Spring to drive Grant's army out of Northern Georgia and Southern Tennessee. The occupation of Chattanooga by the Unionists created great consternation among the Rebel authorities. The Secretary of War sterned like a madman. He declared that they might better have lost Richmond or Charleston, than to have allowed the enemy to obtain a foothold at Chattanooga, thus placing at his mercy the fertile valleys of Northern Georgia and Alabama, and that he must be driven back, regardless of the cost. The wholesale conscription which is being mercilessly enforced throughout the Confederacy will enable the Rebels to concentrate an immense army in

front of Grant by the 1st of April, and unless the latter is heavily reinforced, all that has been gained in that region may be lost.

But many Rebel officers are confident that if the Unionists should obtain a foothold in Northern Georgia, they would never be able to penetrate to the interior of the State. Fortifications of a formidable character have already been thrown up around Atlanta and Decatur; and at every point along the Chattahoochee River (which runs twice or fifteen miles north of Atlanta), at which an army could possibly be crossed, extensive works for defense have been erected. The physical labor on these works was, of course, performed exclusively by negroes.

A short time ago the municipal authorities of Richmond tendered Gen. Lee \$60,000 to enable him to purchase a residence in that city, and we learn from the Rebel papers that the great hero and patriot declined the gift, preferring that the amount should be expended for the benefit of the soldiers in the field. But I happen to know that motives other than those of patriotism and an affectionate regard for his soldiers prompted Gen. Lee to refuse the munificent offer.

A conversation which occurred between Mrs. Lee and her friend Mrs. Vaughn, which I heard the latter innocently repeat in presence of a dozen persons, will disclose the true reason of the General's declining the handsome present. It was well known for a considerable time before the authorities took formal action in the matter that they intended such a gift for their favorite General; and Mrs. Vaughn on calling on Mrs. Lee in her humble apartments, congratulated her on the prospect of her soon occupying an elegant mansion again. Mrs. Lee knowing that her friend alluded to this contemplated present from the Rebel authorities, said she did not expect to occupy more commodious quarters during the war—that the General would not receive, if offered, a residence in Richmond—that they had been obliged to abandon one home, and that as the fate of the city was yet undecided and uncertain, they might if they had a residence there be compelled to abandon that also; and that they preferred to live as they were living, ready to leave without loss or care if the chances of war should require them to do so. She said if after the war the country desired to reward the General for his labors and sacrifices, its grateful owners would likely be so disposed.

It is clear enough that Gen. Lee's patriotism does not render him so indifferent to his own personal welfare as he would like to have it believed. He evidently apprehended that a residence in Richmond would not long be of value or service to him; and he saw that by declining to receive the sum tendered him to purchase one, and suggesting that the amount be expended for his soldiers, he would increase his popularity with his army, and to his already great reputation for patriotism and a readiness to sacrifice everything for the benefit of his country. Besides, Gen. Lee is shrewd enough to understand that if the Rebellion should succeed, this spirit of self-denial displayed by him would be remembered in his favor; and that instead of \$60,000, in almost worthless Treasury notes, a grateful country would reward him to ten times that extent.

But the misfortune and losses of Gen. Lee, which he and his friends are pleased to call sacrifices to a noble cause, great as they may be, are but a merited punishment for his treachery; and yet they do not exceed the losses sustained by hundreds of innocent people who have been reduced by the war from affluence to poverty. There are many families in Richmond, who have never voluntarily aided the Rebellion, living in garrets, with scarcely any furniture, without the means of procuring a more than the most frugal kind sufficient to allay the cravings of hunger, who, before the war, occupied spacious mansions, surrounded by all the comforts and luxuries wealth could procure. Ladies who three years ago scarcely knew how to sew a handkerchief, are forced to solicit from benevolent Jews and tradesmen sewing, for which they receive a miserable pittance, in view of the exorbitant prices charged for everything necessary for their subsistence; and they may be seen hugging great bundles of soldiers' clothing and uniforms which, in times past, they would hardly have allowed a favorite servant to tread with along the public streets.

I have seen ladies in the most public street in the city, attired in all dresses and mantillas, and rich-looking bonnets, of patterns worn by the fashionable three years ago, without shoes or stockings to their feet—with their feet protected only by common rags, sewed together something like moccasins; and on more than one occasion I have seen them dressed in this way with their feet entirely naked. These were not women of bad character, but ladies, who have been reduced by the Rebellion to poverty. Their dresses, bonnets, and shawls, not being severely taxed with wear, remain to them, while their shoes and stockings, subjected to daily service, have been worn away, and they are without the means to pay the extravagant prices demanded for new ones.

I intended to give you a picture of the condition of things in Richmond, of its mysteries and miseries, but my communication has attained so great length that I must reserve the subject for my next letter.