

CHAPTER IX.

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

It was but a few weeks after the close of the war, and the assumption of his great but perilous position, that the good, plain, blunt, honest, and fearless Abraham Lincoln was foully done to death by a crazy assassin, named Wilkes Booth, the son of an English actor once well known in London. A thrill of horror ran through the whole country when the event was made known—a horror increased, if that were possible, by the simultaneous attack made upon the life of Secretary Seward, lying on a sick-bed at the time. The first impulse of Mr. Secretary Staunton and the “war Christians” of the North was to accuse the defeated Southern leaders of having instigated the crime; and a proclamation was issued by Mr. Staunton, offering a large reward for the apprehension of Mr. Jefferson Davis, then endeavouring to escape into

Texas, and of Mr. G. N. Sanders, Mr. Beverley Tucker, and four other Southern refugees in Canada—all as innocent of the crime, and as free of any sympathy with it, as the King of Dahomey, or the "Man in the Moon." There were not wanting rabid zealots who maintained that the semi-English assassin had been instigated to the crime by the British Government—an insane opinion which found expression, a day or two after the occurrence, on board of the Staten Island ferry steamboat to New York, by which I was a passenger. A man, occupying a respectable position in the wholesale trade of New York, known to me by name and reputation, broke out, in tones loud enough to be heard by everyone on deck, against the British Government in general, and against the newspaper correspondents in particular, who wrote letters from New York to the London press, stirring up animosity against the United States, and vehemently expressing his wish that all such people, if found on the deck of a steamer, should be thrown overboard, or if found on land, should be strung up to the nearest lamp-posts. The fellow was drunk, and, moreover, was an Irishman and a Fenian. I was more disgusted than alarmed at his behaviour, and took no notice of his speech, except by removing to another part of the vessel, to which he did not follow me. Perhaps, like other bullies, he was a coward, and might have suspected that I had a revolver about

me (which, however, I had not), and that I might use it if his provocation were renewed. I often met him afterwards when he was sober, but he took no notice of me, or I of him.

SECRETARY SEWARD.

BEFORE my arrival in New York in 1862, and before I was connected with the *Times*, my old friend, the Honourable W. H. Seward, the Secretary of State or Foreign Minister under Mr. Lincoln's administration, a post nearly equivalent to that of Prime Minister in Great Britain, wrote me a letter to London as follows, inviting me to pay another visit to America. I omit the purely personal and domestic preliminary compliments :—

Washington,

MY DEAR DOCTOR MACKAY,

Nov. 7, 1861.

. Will you not make another visit to this country? Come out here and give us what we want, and what will immortalise you—a song for the Union! It is a sacred theme. Come, I pray you, with your wife, and take shelter in my home here. I want to repay all your kindnesses to me.

Faithfully your friend,

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

Two or three days after the receipt of this cordial letter, and before I had answered it, news

was received in London of the forcible and illegal seizure of Messrs. Slidell and Mason, Confederate envoys on a diplomatic mission to Europe, on board of the British mail-steamer the *Trent*. This high-handed proceeding had excited the greatest indignation in political circles in London, and afterwards throughout the whole country. The press was nearly unanimous on the subject, and loud in its demands that the Federal Government should be called upon, in a manner about which there could be no mistake, for the immediate surrender of the captives, on the penalty of the rupture of diplomatic and friendly relations between the two countries, to be followed by war if the United States should continue to refuse redress.

Never before had I witnessed such excitement as there was in Pall Mall, not only in the political and military, but in the non-political and social clubs, and, as far as I could gather, such unanimity of sentiment; and, while the subject was, as it were, red-hot, I stepped into the Reform Club and took the opportunity of answering Mr. Seward's letter, and informing him of the state of public feeling, of which I was both a witness and a participator.

In that friendly communication I represented, in as strong terms as I could employ, the danger that would result if Messrs. Slidell and Mason were not released; that war would inevitably ensue between

the two countries ; and that, as soon as it was declared, Great Britain would recognise the Confederate States, and destroy all hope of the restoration of the Union on which Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Seward, and a majority of the Northern and Western people had set their hearts. I adjured and conjured him, as he loved his country, to do his best to prevent such a consummation, if his influence in the councils of the President and in the country was as great as it was universally believed to be. I reminded him that he would thus acquire undying honour in the page of history, by not only preventing a fratricidal war between the two greatest nations in the world, but by not rashly and unnecessarily destroying the only chance for the restoration of the Union by leaving the two parties of North and South to fight out their battle single-handed, without either the aid or the opposition of any European power.

The weekly mail for the United States, per the Cunard steamer, was to be despatched on the morrow, and, while the ink was still undried, as it were, on my letter, I took a cab to Portland Place, where Mr. Dallas, the American Minister, then resided. I sought an interview with that gentleman, explained to him the urgency of my missive, and requested him to include it among his despatches, which he promised to do, and which he did. Mr. Dallas was surprised to be informed of the pre-

vailing excitement at the clubs, of which he had not heard a syllable. Knowing my intimate personal relations with Mr. Seward, he expressed in warm terms his satisfaction that I had taken the pains to inform that gentleman of the condition of the public mind in London.

I learned afterwards that Mr. Lincoln, influenced by the popular clamour and excitement that the incident had created, and swayed more or less by the Anglophobia then too prevalent in the Northern States, was as violent as a man of his gentle nature could be in the determination to refuse to give up the Confederate envoys, or to render any satisfaction or apology to Great Britain; but that Mr. Seward took a calmer and more statesman-like view of the question.

I am not vain enough to think that my letter was mainly conducive to the production of this frame of mind in the Foreign Secretary; but I am not so very modest and self-depreciatory as to believe that my earnest missive was wholly without effect in impressing upon Mr. Seward, at this important crisis in the affairs of the Union, that discretion was the better part of valour, and that the Federal Government would have quite enemies enough to contend with in the people of the Confederate States, without adding the people and Government of Great Britain to the number.

I had at this time no thought or intention of

revisiting the United States, and would not have done so had it not been for my unexpected engagement on the *Times* a few months afterwards. Neither had I inclination to write a song to Mr. Seward's order, or to that of any other person, on the subject of the American Union; for all my life long I have laboured under the utter incapacity of writing, either in prose or verse, on any subject whatever that was suggested to me by others, or that did not spontaneously present itself to my own mind and fancy.

When, a few months after my arrival in New York, my business as a correspondent called me to Washington, I left my card for Mr. Seward. I was not fortunate enough to find him at his office, as he was temporarily absent at his home in Auburn, in the State of New York. In the interval that had elapsed since I had received Mr. Seward's friendly letter, my business in New York had become known, and my impartial communications to the *Times*—in which I endeavoured to do justice both to the North and the South (without pleasing either)—had been widely read in America.

A mysterious visitor, deputed to see me by Mr. Seward, who had sent him from Washington to New York for that purpose, asked me to lunch with him at Delmonico's famous restaurant in Broadway. I accepted the invitation, and learned in the course of conversation that Mr. Seward was

disappointed with my neutrality between North and South, and wished me very earnestly to come out more boldly on the Northern side, which he maintained to be that of freedom against slavery, of civilisation against barbarism, of right against wrong, and hinted, in a delicate but unmistakeable manner, that a fund of secret service money was at Mr. Seward's disposal, and any services I might render to the Federal Government would be better rewarded than my services in a neutral capacity were likely to be by the *Times*.

Neither Mr. Seward nor his messenger knew or suspected that I had a conscience—that I could not write as I was bidden to do for the sake of lucre, if I were not thoroughly convinced in my own mind of the justice of the cause I was asked to advocate, and that my first allegiance was due to the *Times*, which had sent me to express my honest and independent opinions, through its powerful columns, to the British people and to all Europe. The interesting interview ended without any other result than the expression of my regret, which I wished to be conveyed to Mr. Seward, that I had not been fortunate enough to meet him when I was in Washington, and that I hoped for better luck next time.

I learned afterwards from an intimate friend of Mr. Seward that the Secretary of State was willing to bestow a liberal proportion of secret service money upon me, if I would zealously support the

cause of the North in the *Times*—and, as he said, “make my fortune.” The proposition was never formally made; but, if it had been, I could not and would not have changed my conscientious opinions with regard to the impolicy and non-necessity of the war, which I had so long and so often expressed; neither could I have undertaken to promise that the *Times*, even if I had done such violence to my convictions, would follow my lead, or run counter to the then prevalent opinion in England—from Lord Palmerston downwards—that the war was a mistake, and that it was waged, not for the abolition of slavery—though that might, and probably would, be the outcome of it. As my letters continued to express the views which I had all along promulgated in the *Times* during my residence in New York, Mr. Seward apparently came to the conclusion that I was unpurchasable, and never resumed the subject which he had delicately broached to me, and seemed as if he would drop my acquaintance.

When the attack was made upon him in his sick-bed, and he was wounded in the face, by one of the Wilkes Booth gang, on the day when the harmless President was assassinated, I wrote him, as an old friend, a letter of condolence on the outrage, and congratulation on his escape from death, and his favourable chances of recovery from his wound. He made no reply, either by himself—which he was probably unable to do—or by his

private secretary, which he certainly might have done, and I judged that my opinions on the war had given him unpardonable offence, which I regretted, though I was not surprised at, considering how violently political passion was excited at the time amongst all classes of American society.

When, some months after the close of the war, and a tour through Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, which I made at the request of the *Times*—and of which I shall have something to say in a subsequent chapter—my departure for England was announced in the American papers, I received the following letter from my old friend—not wholly estranged from me, it would appear, but deeply grieved at my heterodoxy, my independence, and my indocility :—

Washington,

Nov. 3, 1865.

MY DEAR SIR,

To-day, for the first time, the casualties, personal and official, which have befallen me have permitted me to receive and read the kind and sympathising letter which you wrote to me on the 20th of May last. I thank you for it most sincerely and gratefully.

Of political matters it is as unnecessary as it would be ungrateful to speak. My country is saved through fire, and I give thanks to Almighty God for that great exercise of Benefice (*sic*) to her and to the human race. It has been very hard to find you, the friend of my best manhood, among her enemies. I pray God to forgive you for the great crime you have committed.

Your old Friend,

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

All my former personal friends among the war party and the Abolitionists were not so intolerant as Mr. Seward, and, at a farewell dinner given to me at the New York Hotel a few days before my departure for England, so many of them attended, in compliment to and in social intercourse with their once embittered but now reconciled opponents, that the dinner, when reported in the New York papers, was designated as a "Love Feast."

I was particularly gratified by the presence and support of Mr. Horace Greeley, the distinguished editor of the *Tribune*, and afterwards a candidate for the Presidency in opposition to General Grant. Mr. Greeley was the high priest and grand llama of Abolitionism long before Mr. Seward gave his faint and wavering support to the cause, and originally a sturdy upholder of the right of Secession, and an advocate of the secession of all the Northern and New England States from the slaveholding South, and their union with Canada, if need were, rather than submit to an enforced union with white men who held black men in bondage.

Mr. Greeley had advocated war *à outrance* while it lasted, but bore no animosity against the Southern leaders, who were merely carrying out a principle which he had conscientiously supported fifteen or twenty years previously, immediately after the surrender of General Lee, and, while the angry passions

of the Northern and Western people were still in a state of effervescence, stood almost alone among the leaders of public opinion in recommending a general amnesty to all the Southern people, from Mr. Jefferson Davis down to the humblest soldier in the Confederate armies.

Mr. Greeley ran counter to public opinion in this respect, though public opinion ultimately and by slow degrees advanced to the high Christian and statesman-like platform on which he stood. The people, both of North and South, learned to respect his character and do justice to the purity of his motives, and, when finally the passions engendered by the conflict cooled down, no man's name stood higher in popular estimation than that of Horace Greeley, friend of the white man as well as of the black.

THE AMERICAN BUONAPARTES.

DURING my residence in New York, I once had occasion to return to London on private business. In my temporary absence—which did not extend beyond two months, at the close of the year 1863—my place was filled by Mr. Antonio Gallenga, as recorded by that gentleman in his autobiography entitled *Episodes of my Second Life*, published in 1885.* On stepping on board of the then favourite Cunard steamer, the *Persia*, commanded by my old

* The following correspondence on the subject appeared in the *Athenæum* and other literary journals:—

“DR. MACKAY AND MR. GALLENGA.

“SIR,

“Mr. Gallenga having stated, in his *Episodes of my Second Life*, that I was *recalled* in 1863 from the position I occupied in New York as the correspondent of the *Times*, and that he took my place and held it until the arrival of a *new* correspondent, I lost no time in pointing out to that gentleman the error into which he had fallen. This was the more necessary, because the previous remarks of Mr. Gallenga were liable to the interpretation that I was ‘*recalled*’ because of the independent opinions on the Civil War which I had expressed in my correspondence. I was not ‘*recalled*,’ but took a couple of months’ holiday-trip to London on leave of absence, and returned to my post in December 1863. I remained in New York, in my former capacity, until the close of the war in 1865. Mr. Gallenga replied to my complaint in the following letter, which, on his suggestion, I forward to you in the hope that you will give it insertion in

friend Captain Lott, with whom I had made three previous voyages across the Atlantic, I observed among the passengers a gentleman who bore a remarkably strong resemblance to all the published portraits of Napoleon I.

I asked Captain Lott if he could tell me who the gentleman was. He told me that it was Mr. Paterson Buonaparte, of Baltimore, who, with his mother, Mrs. Paterson Buonaparte, was going to

the *Athenæum*. The erroneous statement, if allowed to remain uncontradicted, is likely to injure me in the estimation of my political friends in the United States as well as in England.

"I am, yours truly,

"CHARLES MACKAY.

"Reform Club, January 15."

[COPY.]

"Llandogo, Coleford,

"January 13, 1885.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I see with great regret that at page 343, vol. ii., of *Episodes of my Second Life*, I stated that, 'On the recall of Dr. Mackay I had temporarily to take his place.' That was an involuntary mistake on my part; I should have said, 'During the temporary absence of Dr. Mackay from his post,' as I know that you went back to New York on my departure, and remained till the end of the Civil War. I beg you to accept this apology, which I think is due to you, and of which you may make whatever use may best rectify my error.

"Very truly yours,

"A. GALLENGA.

"Charles Mackay, Esq., LL.D."

Paris on a visit to Napoleon III. He shortly afterwards introduced me to mother and son, having previously ascertained from them both that the introduction would be agreeable. Mr. Buonaparte was an elderly gentleman of few words, without conversational power—or, if he possessed any, he was very chary of exhibiting it. Madame, on the contrary—known to Baltimore society as “the Queen”—was very lively, agreeable, and communicative, and in full possession of her bodily and mental faculties, though she had long outlived the three-score years and ten, the traditional limit accorded in Scripture to the minority of the human race. She was a very handsome old lady—and she knew it; and must have been, in her first youth—when Jerome Buonaparte, the youngest brother of the great Emperor, fell desperately in love with her—a very beautiful young woman.

I afterwards heard—from the current scandal of Baltimore—that Jerome, a young lieutenant of marines, did not at first care to marry her, but that she married him *nolens volens, vi et armis*, in spite of himself, as it were, and chained him to the chariot-wheels of her superior, imperious, and all-conquering will. The alliance was destined to be but of short duration. The great Napoleon, when he was promoted, or when he promoted himself, from the dignity of First Consul to that of Emperor, had other plans for his youngest brother,

and was not content to see him the husband of a plebeian American lady, however fascinating and beautiful she might be.

He insisted that the marriage was illegal, inasmuch as it had been contracted in opposition to his commands as head of the family, and that it was otherwise invalid for weighty reasons of State policy. The Emperor was dispensing thrones among his brothers, as smaller men dispense New Year's gifts or Christmas-boxes to their relatives and dependants, and insisted that Jerome, who was as weak as he was vain and ambitious, should repudiate his American wife, marry into one of the royal families of Europe, and become King of Westphalia. The circumstances are all historical, and need not be recapitulated.

Madame Paterson Buonaparte, during the voyage to Liverpool, bestowed a great deal of her society upon me, in fine weather sitting or walking with me on the deck, and in bad weather engaging me in conversation in the saloon. She informed me that, some years previously, her son had paid a visit in Paris to his father, the ex-King of Westphalia, and had been privately but kindly received by him, but that he had not been introduced to his half-brother, Prince Jerome, who was known at the time to the mob of Paris by the disparaging epithet of "Plon-plon," and sometimes as "*Craint plomb*," in allusion to the unfounded

imputations of cowardice that were current against him during the Crimean war.

“Neither,” she added, “did he desire to make the acquaintance of that person, though so closely allied to him in blood and half-parentage; and I suppose,” she added, “that the disinclination was mutual.”

She also informed me of the object of her visit to Paris at her advanced age, stating that she very greatly desired to have my opinion and advice on the subject. The Emperor, it appeared, had great objection to her assumption of the name of Buonaparte, and desired that she should call herself Madame Paterson only, and not Madame Paterson Buonaparte. He had offered, if she would do him this favour, to confer the title upon her son of the “Comte du Champ de Mars,” and upon herself that of “Duchesse de Satory,” together with a pension of 75,000 francs, or £3,000, per annum. The sole condition on which the liberal bribes were conferred was, that she and her son should formally renounce the name of Buonaparte, to which he insisted that they had no legal right, inasmuch as the marriage with his uncle had been declared invalid.

“I have at times,” she said, “an inclination to accept the offer; but I hesitate on account of my boy”—the elderly gentleman whom she usually designated by that juvenile and endearing title—“on whose birth I should hardly consent to affix

the stigma of illegitimacy, which priests coarsely call bastardy."

On this knotty point she asked my candid opinion and my friendly advice. Before answering, I inquired what her son's opinion was. She replied that he had no very decided opinion on the subject, but inclined, on the whole, to accept the offer, seeing that facts were facts; that all the world was acquainted with them; that the divorce, desired for political reasons by Napoleon I., was neither morally nor religiously binding; and that it was not attended by any personal shame, either to her or her offspring; and that it did not signify whether they were known to the world as Patersons, Buonapartes, Smiths, or Joneses. When King Louis Philippe took refuge in England, after the Revolution of 1848, under the name of William Smith, he did not cease thereby to be really Louis Philippe d'Orleans. The pension, in the "boy's" opinion, was worth having, only he thought that it should be conferred upon him as well as his mother, and that it should run for at least three lives.

I thought the "boy" gave sound advice, adding that, although she might abandon the name of Buonaparte, the name of Buonaparte would not abandon her, more especially in America, which was her home and that of her family, and where she expected to pass the remainder of her life. I also reminded her of the fact well known to her,

that, although titles of nobility were not legally recognised in the United States, they were, nevertheless, of great social value, especially among the "upper ten thousand," and that, in being known to the Baltimoreans as the Duchess of Satory, she would not forfeit the name of Buonaparte, but add to it a dignity that in her case did not previously belong to it.

"I am half inclined to think you are right," said the old lady, "and I will consider the question in all its bearings before I see the Emperor and come to a final decision."

I afterwards learned that she had refused the Emperor's offer, though, whether the negotiations had failed on the point of family pride and honour, or on that of the Emperor's refusal to grant the pension for three lives, I could never satisfactorily ascertain. I believe, however, that it was not on the question of money that the project fell to the ground, for Madame Paterson Buonaparte was exceedingly rich, though possibly not so rich as her fellow-citizens of Baltimore reported her to be. She avowed to me one day her love of money, and her desire to accumulate it.

"There is much hypocrisy in the world," she said, "as regards money. The clergy of all sects denounce it, though none of them can live without it. They call it 'mammon,' 'vile dross,' 'filthy lucre,' and other opprobrious names, 'dissembling

their love,' if I may parody the old saying, by kicking its object down-stairs.

'Twas all very well to dissemble your love,
But why did you kick me down-stairs?

I, for one, am not a hypocrite in this respect. I love money, because it confers power, influence, authority, and because it enables me to play the despot when opportunity offers."

"Granting that money is good, from the power of enabling its possessor to do good with it," I observed, "I think there is one bad thing attendant upon all who are known to possess much of it: it brings them acquainted with the worst side of human nature, in the mean, paltry, debasing efforts that are constantly made by the vicious, the lazy, the scheming, and the unscrupulous to obtain a share of it."

"Yes," said the bright old lady, with a flashing eye and strong emphasis; "to be known to be rich is to be like a dead body lying unburied in a field, which attracts the rats, the stoats, the weasels, and the wolves of the earth, and the carrion crows, the vultures, and the cormorants of the air, to feed upon it. But I love money, nevertheless, and I take care that those unclean beasts and birds do not feed upon it while it remains in my possession—that is to say, while there is flesh upon my bones."

No portion of Madame Paterson Buonaparte's

great wealth was derived from her connection with the family of the great Napoleon, but from her father, a merchant or keeper of a general store in Baltimore, in the early days of the colony of Maryland. Mr. Paterson was of Scotch extraction, and proud of the land of his ancestors, a pride which was not inherited by his beautiful and clever daughter. She never married again after her quasi-divorce or separation from Napoleon's weak and ductile brother.

She narrated to me, with evident pleasure, the experiences of her cordial reception in fashionable society in London, and of her wit-combats with Lady Morgan, the then popular novelist, whom in her heart she secretly admired, though she professed to hate her. London society was in doubt which of the two was the more brilliant talker, and whatever amount of hatred she felt—if, indeed, she felt any—came from jealousy, and from disappointment at the fact that undiscerning society could have had any doubt as to her own superiority over her showy but less beautiful rival.

She died at a great age in her native city of Baltimore. No portion of her abundant wealth, as I am informed, was devoted either to public or private charity, or overflowed beyond the narrow limits of her family connections.
