

**RADICAL RULE: MILITARY OUTRAGE
IN GEORGIA. ARREST OF COLUMBUS
PRISONERS: WITH FACTS CONNECTED
WITH THEIR IMPRISONMENT AND
RELEASE; PP. 1-195**

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RADICAL RULE:

MILITARY OUTRAGE IN GEORGIA.

ARREST OF COLUMBUS PRISONERS:

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PREFACE.

If a proper conception of the Military Despotism which has oppressed the South is conveyed to the Northern mind through these pages, their object will have been accomplished.

MILITARY OUTRAGE IN GEORGIA.

GEORGE W. ASHBURN.

THE death of this man was the pretense upon which Gen. Grant, Gen. George G. Meade, and the Radical party based the infamous outrage upon the personal liberty of citizens of Georgia, the details of which this work will contain.

Ashburn made his appearance in Columbus, Georgia, immediately after the war, in the capacity of a Government spy in search of property belonging to the late Confederate States. Here he might have lived and died without a thought from the public of his antecedents, but his ardent, intense love for the colored people soon brought to light and into general comment the fact that before the war his usual occupation was that of an overseer remarkable only for his cruelty to the slaves placed under his control by the gentlemen who owned them. This vicious trait of his character rendered it difficult for him to retain his position of overseer very long on the same plantation, and he made other shifts for a maintenance. He was at one time steward or waiter in the Oglethorpe Hotel, in Columbus, Ga., and while there was well caned for his insolence by a boarder, a young man still a resident of that city. It is not the writer's desire or intention to exonerate his murderers upon the plea of his low instincts and habits. His assassination was a crime. His death in a negro brothel of the lowest order renders comment upon his life unnecessary; but whatever his character might have been, until accused of crime as directed by the law, and convicted to death by a jury of his peers, no human being had a right to take his life. This man was politically odious and morally infamous to the respectable portion of the community in which he lived; but that his death was the result of political differences, as claimed by the

Radical press throughout the country, is not sustained by facts. He was a thorn in the side of his own party and not considered as formidable by his opponents. That there are bad men in the Columbus community, as in others, there is not the least doubt. Ashburn was killed at the dead hour of night, and doubtless by men who did not dare meet a foe in open day. There are good reasons for believing, too, that the assassins were Radicals, black and white, to whom he was a stumbling-block in the road to office. In proof of the correctness of this suspicion are produced the following facts.

Previous to the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention of Georgia, and in the temporary absence of Ashburn from Columbus, a hand-bill was issued signed by fifteen or twenty Radicals—the entire white element of the party in the city—calling a meeting to appoint delegates to a nominating Convention at Cusseta. The leader in the movement avowed uncompromising hostility to Ashburn, and expressed a determination that Ashburn should no longer control the party. Ashburn returned before the day for the meeting, went in and took possession of it, and appointed delegates to his liking, himself among the number.

So hostile had the feeling become between Ashburn and two leading Federal office-holders in Columbus, that he threatened to have them removed. Time sped on. The nominating Convention assembled at Cusseta and put out candidates for the senatorial district suited to the taste of Ashburn—himself among the number, from Muscogee county. Ashburn, having the ear and confidence of the negroes and full control of the Loyal Leagues, whipped in the fight, and proved himself master of the situation. His ticket was elected. The Convention met, did its work, and ad-

CHAS. V. V.

journed. Ashburn returned to Columbus, avowed his intention to be elected by the Legislature to the Senate of the United States, and set to work to organize his colored friends and secure the election of such members from his senatorial district as would support his senatorial pretensions.

On the Saturday before he was killed, through his influence, a large number of negroes assembled in the Court-house square and were harangued by him, and a ticket was nominated for the House and Senate, composed, for the House, of one of the delegates to the Convention and a negro, and the head of the Freedmen's Bureau, a known friend of Ashburn's, for the Senate. What part, if any, his former Radical opponents took in this meeting, or whether they were present at all, the writer can not say.

On the Monday night succeeding the meeting referred to, the career of Ashburn was brought to a close. Between dark and the time of his death the President of the Loyal League, named Bennett, handed Ashburn a letter from one Costin, a negro of Talbot county and representative elect from that county to the Georgia Legislature. Ashburn threw this letter into Bennett's face. Afterward, while a prisoner for obtaining goods under false pretenses, Bennett gave it to the Sheriff. It was written upon paper furnished the Constitutional Convention, of which Costin was a member. He abused Ashburn in unmeasured terms as a pensioner upon his party, and reminded him that he (Costin) had raised the embargo placed on his baggage by a hotel-keeper in Talbatton. He closed by offering to bet two hundred and fifty dollars that he would never represent Georgia in the United States Senate, and two hundred and fifty dollars more that he would not receive fifteen votes upon joint ballot.

Bennett declared, the day after his death, that he would have killed him if the mob had not. Woodfield, another Radical, who disappeared immediately after the murder, had stated that Ashburn must settle a debt he owed him or he would kill him.

After he was dead, and had come to his death, too, at the hands of assassins, what was the conduct of the Columbus Radicals? If they had felt any pangs of grief or indignation at this outrageous act, is it not reasonable to suppose they would have interested themselves so much, at least, as to

have called to see the corpse and given some assistance toward the final disposition of his remains. Not one of the white members of his party did his remains even the honor of a call. Being a pauper, the expenses of his funeral were borne by the city. His remains were attended to the depot for shipment to Macon by only two white men—his son and a Radical Jew named Coleman.

The above facts are sent forth to the world for what they are worth. Many other things could be told to show the hostility of feeling which existed between leading Radicals of this city and Ashburn, but their relation would spin out the subject to too great a length.

Between the citizens of Columbus and Ashburn there existed no feeling of antagonism. They looked upon his course as mischievous in its tendency. They knew, however, that he was no worse in his intentions than other men of Radical proclivities in Columbus, and that to destroy him would accomplish nothing. Having more sense than half a dozen of the others, and having aspirations, he was looked upon as less dangerous than the herd that were pursuing him. The citizens outside of the Radical ranks did not come in contact with him in any shape, and had no more reason to desire the destruction of his life than those of others of less sense. Aside from this, the people had all the time used every precaution against permitting anything to be done that could, in the remotest degree, give capital for Radical rule to feed upon.

REIGN OF TERROR.

Ashburn's death was succeeded by a period of deep excitement. Negroes openly avowed their intention to avenge his death, and threats were made upon the streets to burn Columbus.

On Wednesday night following his murder, a meeting of the Young Men's Democratic Club was startled by a message from Mayor Wilkins, that intelligence had reached him that an attempt to fire the city would be made that night. If such an intention existed it was defeated by prompt action. On the 6th day of April, the Monday after the assassination, the excitement was raised to fever heat by the military arrest of nine white and three colored citizens. W. D. Chipley, Doc. E. J. Kirksey, Columbus C. Bedell, Wm. R.

Bedell, James W. Barber, Alva C. Roper, Thos. W. Grimes, Robert Ennis, and Wm. L. Cash, white; and John Wells, John Stapler, and Jim McHenry, colored; were arrested by Capt. Mills, commanding post, and confined in the Court-house. All were men of respectability and character, and the negroes stood well in their sphere, though unpopular with their race because they were Democrats. The next day one Wade Stephens, a low rowdy, was added to the party, as the sequel will show, in the capacity of a spy, though he may not have known it at the time. No cause was assigned for the arrest, and the repeated and untiring efforts of the prisoners, their friends and their counsel, failed to arrive at any. The men arrested were so far above any suspicion of complicity in Ashburn's murder that it was difficult to associate the two events; yet following each other so closely, with no other alleged cause, an occasional surmise would rest in that direction. This conclusion would never have been reached by any one but for their knowledge of the malice of certain Radicals toward these men as Democrats, and especially Chipley and Kirksey, who were working men in their party.

Before these arrests were made it was positively known that a man holding civil position by military appointment had offered bribes for affidavits against Mr. Columbus Bedell, and it was not unnatural for persons knowing these facts to surmise that the arrests were made upon suborned evidence. The manner in which the charge and names of the accusers were withheld, and the absence of all investigation, strengthened this belief, and occasioned a general feeling of uneasiness.

Capt. Mills stated that he did not know the cause of the arrests, which nobody believed, and it is only mentioned here to show how arbitrary the arrests were and the weakness of the case. After four days and nights in durance vile, Capt. Mills informed the prisoners that their most gracious Majesty Gen. Meade had concluded to release them under bond of twenty-five hundred dollars each to appear whenever Gen. George G. Meade, commanding Third Military District, or his successor, should desire it. There was a general feeling among the prisoners to decline this offer and test the legality of their arrest; but older heads thought the bond would be the best of it, and advised them to accept

the terms and return to their families and business. A general bond was then prepared, a copy of which is given in Appendix, together with its signers. The names exceed four hundred, and would have reached three times that number had the citizens been allowed sufficient time to sign it. Nothing more occurred in this connection until the 14th of May, when James W. Barber, and the fellow Wade Stephens and two negroes—John Wells and John Stapler—were re-arrested and hurried off to Fort Pulaski. Mr. Barber was not even permitted to see his wife.

On the 18th May, W. D. Chipley, indignant at his illegal and unwarranted arrest, and being unable to secure an investigation in any other way, sought one through Congress. His letter to Hon. James B. Beck, of Kentucky, and action of the House on Mr. Beck's resolution, are given in Appendix. The action of the House was significant, and shows that the Radical plotters at Washington were afraid of an investigation.

On the 23d May, Mr. R. H. Daniel, a gentleman, and George F. Betz, a dissipated loafer, were arrested and sent to the Government bastille at Savannah. Very soon Bennett and a courtesan of the lowest stripe, called Amanda Patterson, followed. These two, like Stephens, it was understood, were to be suborned. Betz, at that time (though a man of no character), was thought to be above swearing a man's life away for gain or safety.

On the 2d June, W. D. Chipley, E. J. Kirksey, Clifford B. Grimes, and Columbus Bedell were arrested, and on the 3d sent to Atlanta and confined at McPherson Barracks.

On the 16th June, Isaac Marks, Jacob Marks, Alva C. Roper, Robert A. Wood, James L. Wiggins, Drew W. Lawrence, and Wm. L. Cash were taken into custody by the omnipotent Mills and forwarded to Meade's Hotel, at Atlanta. Sergeant Chas. Marshall, of Mill's company, was also sent along, for the purpose developed by the trial. On the 19th June, Robert C. Hudson and James Lawrence were started, preceding Wm. A. Duker some five days. The charges against these men were still mere matters of conjecture. From the best information that could be gathered, the parties had been arrested upon negro testimony, much of it forced, whilst with others bribery had been the instrument used. In

addition to \$500 offered by the city of Columbus, Gen. Meade's military Governor of Georgia, through his proclamation, announced a reward of \$2,000 for the first and \$1,000 for each additional party connected with the assassination, with proof to convict. This was a large sum of money, in the eyes of a bad negro, as an inducement to bear false witness. With such inducements no citizen of Columbus, however exemplary his walk in life, felt that he was exempt from arrest. No one knew where the arrests would end, and what number of citizens would be incarcerated, under the influence of such testimony—no one could conjecture. As arrest after arrest succeeded each other, the best citizens would exclaim: "Tis but an accident that I am left!" and they extended their sympathy to the unfortunate men with a consciousness that it was but a chance that placed the prisoners there instead of themselves.

TREATMENT OF PRISONERS.

The treatment of the Columbus prisoners will ever remain a blot upon the fame of American soldiers. These men, arrested at a moment's notice, were carried from family, friends and business, and without an opportunity being given them to prove their innocence, were thrown into cells which law and humanity dictated as only proper for the confinement of condemned criminals. The murder occurred during the night, between the 30th and 31st of March. The first arrests were made on 6th April; they were renewed through May and June. Yet, in this great and free country, no charges were delivered to the prisoners until the 27th day of June. Their trial was set for 29th of the same month. The enormity of the proceedings in this connection may possibly be appreciated, when it is stated that the intervening day between the reception of a copy of charges brought against them and the day set for their trial was Sunday. The Holy Sabbath day was given them upon which to prepare their defense against the charge of "MURDER," and that too when removed 140 miles from the scene of the crime and the residence of their witnesses. This outrage upon the personal liberty of these men should make boil the blood of every freeman who reads these

pages. But to return to their physical treatment.

This was barbarous in the extreme. Those who were carried to Fort Pulaski were confined in cells four feet by seven feet. There was no ventilation whatever, and a greater portion of the time the small hole which admitted light was closed and the cell left in darkness. These dungeons were their sole habitation. Calls of nature were attended to in a vessel that was removed once in twenty-four hours. Their rations consisted of a slice of bread, and coffee (if they had a cup) in the morning; another piece of bread and soap in the same cup in which coffee was served at breakfast, with an occasional ration of fat pork, constituted their dinner. For supper, bread alone was issued. Yet the friends of these prisoners would have been glad and did offer to furnish them any comforts they might desire. Will the world not say they were entitled to different treatment, until their guilt had been established, or at least until something besides *ex parte* testimony had been produced? In these horrid holes, borne down by the heat of the climate, and driven almost to madness by the myriads of mosquitoes, these men were detained day after day, denied the privilege of visits from friends or *counsel*, and not even allowed to write to or receive letters from their families. Humanity must have suggested an exception to this rule in the case of one of the prisoners, whose wife was expecting to be confined, but if so the whispers were not heeded by the "genial and popular commander of Fort Pulaski." He added another laurel to the wreath that marks his victories. "The gallant Cook," with heroic fortitude, saw that no word of love and sympathy reached the young wife in her trying hour. It may be well for the reader to remember just here, that the witnesses for the prosecution stated on their examination that they were told that if they did not make disclosures they would be kept in prison—as Bennett expressed it, would have to "rot there." On the other hand, by making disclosures they would secure their liberty, and protection from "harm" from the Government. The removal of the Pulaski prisoners to McPherson Barracks, Atlanta, was an improvement in climate and some other respects. They were permitted to correspond with their friends, but all letters, although only breathing the affection and sympathy of a

wife, were submitted to rigid inspection. How disgraceful in the representatives of a great government! Chipley, Kirksey, Grimes and Bedell reached the barracks on the 3d day of June, having no suspicion of imprisonment. They were unprovided with bedding. It was three days and four nights before bed or blanket was furnished. Friends were not allowed to visit them nor counsel to see them. On the 8th these four men were placed under bond in comfortable quarters. When Daniel arrived from Fort Pulaski he was placed in the house with them, and there he and Grimes remained until released. On the 12th Bedell was returned to the cells. On the 15th Chipley and Kirksey followed. On the 19th the last two were returned again to quarters outside of the guard-house, and next morning Bedell joined them. On 22d he and Kirksey were returned to cells, and Roper was placed with Chipley. The other prisoners were in cells. This status was continued until the 14th July, when Chipley was offered bail with the liberty of Atlanta, which he declined. On the 16th, the entire party were removed to comfortable quarters, where they remained until released. The cells up to the 16th June were five feet ten in width by ten feet long. The window, two feet by one foot six inches, was eight feet high from the floor, and in addition to bars was so slatted as to prevent the inmate of the cell from seeing either heaven or earth. There was no other means of ventilation, and with the door closed (which was always the case, except when the guard was humane enough to transcend his orders,) a gale might blow outside without sending one puff of fresh air to relieve the distended bursting veins of the prisoner, although the opening of the cell door would create a draft that was often objectionable. The prison sink, just at the end of the hall upon which the cells opened, emitted such a stench as to render the risk of suffocation preferable to the horrid odor. But all this was not sufficiently horrible. With twenty vacant houses that might have been used, the military commenced on the 16th June to make more prison room by dividing the cells, reducing them in width to exactly two feet ten inches. Will an indignant public believe this? A positive, horrible truth. Not until the memorials of Dr. Chipley and Col. Lamar to Congress had

elicited a deep and earnest protest from the press of the whole country, did the treatment of the prisoners change. On the 19th June some of them were allowed to see counsel, although in the absence of charges, it was impossible to plan any definite line of defense. Soon after the remainder saw counsel, and a few friends were permitted to pay short visits and send delicacies to the prison. The embargo on certain newspapers was also raised. On the 22d June C. B. Grimes and R. A. Daniel were released, and a week later the Messrs. Lawrence, the Messrs. Marks, and W. L. Cash. No evidence whatever has been produced against either one of these gentlemen, and the only explanation that is given them for the torture they were subjected to is, that it was a mistake. At no time was the private correspondence of the prisoners relieved from inspection.

CAUSE OF THE ARRESTS.

On the 6th of April, ten white and three colored men were arrested and placed in confinement in court-house at Columbus. On the trial the prosecution rested their case upon evidence which did not claim that any disclosures were made to the military, or other authorities, before the last week in May, except by the witness Bennett. This creature professed to have made statements to Capt. Mills the day after the occurrence, implicating five men. These men were all accessible, yet in the list of thirteen arrested in April, the name of but one of Bennett's five can be found. Another one, Marshall, was in the room several times during their incarceration, but as a visitor. How improbable it must appear to every reader that Bennett charged Marshall with being one of the murderers before his Captain, as that officer, twenty-five days later, allowed him to leave his company on a thirty days' furlough. The question very naturally arises, why were the first arrests made? The mystery was easily solved, and its solution does not involve a midnight murder. A general apathy had pervaded the Democratic party in regard to registering and voting. The policy of inaction had governed the party, but the result in Alabama occasioned new acts of Congress that rendered this policy no longer available, and an active canvass was inaugurated. Mr. Chipley, as Chairman of the Executive