

Case of Charles Heidsieck.

This individual, it appears, was the head of the great French house of dealers in Heidsieck champagne. He was a native and citizen of France, but had come to the southern states to look after his delinquent creditors, and had resided, for some time, at Mobile. He entered his name upon the books of the Dick Keys and the Natchez, steamboats permitted by General Butler to convey provisions to New Orleans, as bar-tender; made five trips in that disguise, and brought to and from Mobile a very large quantity of letters, several of which, containing treasonable information, were sent to Washington by General Butler. As Heidsieck was departing for Fort Jackson, he called on his consul for help. "I have the honor," he wrote, "to ask you to see what you have to do for me in this matter, having come and left this city under a flag of truce." What the consul concluded he had to do for him we shall see in a moment. After several months' imprisonment at Fort Jackson and Fort Pickens, he was released by orders from Washington. He then forwarded to the government a memorial, in the French manner, asking *reparation* for his detention. This impudent claim from a man who had only escaped the ignominious death of a spy by the clemency of the government, elicited from General Butler an amusing narrative of the case, which the evidence before me at this moment proves to be true in every particular.

"Let us," remarks the general, "in the light of the facts, examine Heidsieck's claims and pretensions. Of a very respectable social position, he claims to have engaged as a bar-tender on the steamer 'Dick Keys,' whose former bar-tender was conveniently sick, for the purpose and object of getting his letters from the consulate at New Orleans, and for the purpose of making money by the sale of his wines on board the boat during her trips. Now, a bar-tender at the South is one of the most menial employments, and is usually, on board steamers, intrusted to a negro steward. Is it likely that Heidsieck, without a controlling motive, would make one voyage from Mobile to New Orleans in that capacity? Is not a gentleman *disguised* when he takes upon himself such an employment? Is it an answer to say, that his full name was on the shipping articles, and by that he was to be recognized when 'bar-tender' was, as he admits, affixed to it? If we had found the name of 'Augustus Caesar,' which might have been the name of the former black bar-tender whose place Heidsieck took, upon the shipping

articles, should we have looked for and expected to find the Roman emperor?

"The motive for undertaking this menial occupation, as Heidsieck alleges, was to get his letters from the consulate. Why not send for them? If the military authorities would not let them go with his messenger, then he had no right to come in disguise and fetch them. But admit, for the sake of the argument, that his desire to get his correspondence was a sufficient motive for Heidsieck to take one such trip as bar-tender, why make five during a space of more than *two months*?

"To this he answers that the profits of the sales of his wines as bar-tender on board the boat, were not to be despised. But he admits that the boat could and did carry no passengers. To whom then was the wine to be sold, as he says that the boat was kept under strict surveillance. * * * Besides which, he admits that he spent his time between trips in the city of New Orleans. Indeed, what need of a bar-tender on board of that boat at all, especially one who was to be paid by the sale of wine? Is it possible that the crew of a small steamboat at the South drink enough of even so poor a wine as 'Heidsieck's champagne,' as to make it profitable for a gentleman to spend his time selling it as a menial? Again, if the bar-tender of the steamer 'Dick Keys' was sick, and the captain was willing to make such a bargain for such a bar-tender, how is it that when the 'Dick Keys' went out of the employment of carrying flour between Mobile and New Orleans, that the 'Natchez' which was employed in her stead, should also have a sick bar-tender and a captain who should be willing to make so remarkable a contract, as to give passage, board, and lodging where the cost of living was extremely heavy, to gentlemen to sell liquor to his own crew, as he could have no other customers? Still farther, after these boats were stopped by the United States authorities, because of the corrupt intelligence conveyed by them, Heidsieck was again found going to New Orleans, under the pretense of carrying dispatches to the French consul there, he having no business whatever in the city. Why not send the dispatches by Mr. Greenwood, the city agent? He was kind enough to take Heidsieck, dispatches and all, upon his schooner gratis; would he not have taken the dispatches alone?

"The facts with regard to Heidsieck may be stated in a word. I learned that intelligence was being conveyed to New Orleans and Mobile for the rebels. I believed the city agent to be trustworthy. There was no channel except the employes of the boat, no passengers being allowed. I caused an inquiry to be made, and found Heidsieck on board in disguise, and that he spent all his time, between trips, in this city. Before I had the facts reported to me, he had gone to Mobile with the last trip of the steamer. It may be assumed I was glad to see him, when he returned, in his true character of 'bearer of dispatches.' I arrested him as a spy—I

confined him as a spy—I should have tried him as a spy, and hanged him upon conviction as a spy, if I had not been interfered with by the government at Washington.

“He had, when arrested, a canvas wrapper, of the size of a peck measure, firmly bound up with cords, covering letters from the French, Swiss, Spanish, Prussian, and Belgian consuls, also a great number of letters to private persons, mostly rebels, or worse, intermeddling foreigners, containing contraband intelligence. A portion of these letters were forwarded to the honorable secretary of state, in December last, by me. To show the utter falsity of Heidsieck’s narrative, let me advert to his statement, that he stole away a paper which, he says, ‘I recognized as the envelope of my dispatches; the envelope, by the folds, to which the remnant of the seals still adhered, which could alone give to M. De Mejan the correct idea of the bulk of the dispatches.’ It will be recollected that it has already been stated by me that the letters were inclosed in a canvas wrapper, tied up with cord, which Heidsieck, in his memorial, represents me as being engaged for some minutes in ‘cutting and breaking.’ How then could any paper show the size of the package? I sent Heidsieck to Fort Jackson, which was, at that time, the only military prison in my department, and where confinements were usually made. Immediately after his arrest, the French consul notified me that he had referred the matter to his minister at Washington, and I accordingly sent my dispatch to the secretary of state, and rested in taking measures for the trial until I received instructions from the government.

“A number of French residents of New Orleans, however, petitioned me as an act of grace to release Heidsieck, and allow him to go to Europe, to remain during the war. I finally consented, and gave orders for his release upon that condition, as an act of clemency. For this order his friends were very grateful, and so expressed themselves both by letter and in person. This parole was declined by Heidsieck, although I supposed the application had been made by his consent and his procurement. Perhaps, however, this refusal may be explained by the fact stated in his memorial, that the French consul, two days afterward, started for Washington ‘on my account.’

“It will be seen, in all points, Heidsieck claims that all suspicion should be diverted from himself as to his neutrality, because he was acting in concert with the Count Mejan, the French consul at New Orleans; but it will not escape recollection that M. Mejan’s own propriety of conduct and neutrality has, by subsequent revelations, been shown to have been worse than doubtful—the repository of almost a half million of specie loaned by the Bank of New Orleans to the Confederate government, for the purpose of purchasing army clothing, and receiving a commission for his agency. Count Mejan has been, very properly, recalled by his government, and can

hardly, by his character, cover the suspected acts of Heidsieck traveling between rebel cities in the guise of a bar-tender.

"Heidsieck was removed, with the other prisoners, to Fort Pickens, in August, because I was informed of a threatened attack by the rebels upon Fort Jackson, and I did not deem it proper that prisoners should either be exposed to the hazard of combat, or embarrass the defenders of the fort by their presence.

"Heidsieck's complaint as to his treatment during his confinement must be unfounded, because there was never any restriction, save in the matter of intoxicating liquors, upon prisoners and their friends furnishing any and everything desired by them for comfort or convenience; and his own memorial does not claim that any representations by him, or any other prisoner, were ever made to me on the subject, as indeed there were not.

"His complaint, that he was obliged to 'cook for his own mess,' will hardly excite much sympathy. I am unable to see the hardship to one who has, by his own confession, turned bar-keeper for a living, cooking his own food.

"His complaint that he could not write to his wife, because the officer, admitted by him to be 'a perfect gentleman,' who was to examine his letter, was too young to be trusted with the delicate revelations of a husband to his wife, who was three thousand miles away, is too absurd for comment.

"I received the order from the commanding general of the army, to release Heidsieck upon his giving his parole not to visit the Confederate States, which was transmitted in the usual course of business, and he accepted the condition, which only differed from the one offered by me in this, that by mine he was to go to Europe.

"He now desires reparation for his confinement. Let Heidsieck be ordered back into confinement; let a court-martial of impartial officers at New Orleans be ordered to try him as a spy, with a competent judge advocate; and if he is acquitted, I pledge myself to the extent of my private means, to make good to him all he has suffered, provided his government will agree, that if found guilty, he shall be hanged, as he ought to be, without any intervention on its part.

"If Heidsieck had not been taken out of my hands by the action of my government, I should have ordered him before a court for trial, and I believe he would have suffered for his crimes against the country that had given him the protection of its laws."

So much for Charles Heidsieck, bar-tender and dealer in champagne. We come now to an affair that made more noise in the world.