THE KU-KLUX CONFESSION.

JUDGE TOURGEE GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE DEATH-BED CONFESSION OF DR. ROAN, THE KU-KLUX MURDERER, AS PUBLISHED IN PROGRESS.

THE AUTHOR OF "A FOOL'S ERRAND" WRITES AN INTERESTING LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF PROGRESS.

The publication in PROGRESS of January 10 of the death-bed confession of Dr. Roan, one of the foremost participants in the murder of State Senator John W. Stephens in North Carolina twenty-five years ago, together with the story of the murder as told in "A Fool's Errand," aroused a great deal of interest, and we have received many letters relating to the subject.

The following from Judge Albion W. Tourgee, whose "Fool's Errand" done so much to awaken the nation to a realization of the atrocious political crimes committed in the South, will we are sure be read with interest:

MAYVILLE, N. Y.,
Sixteenth January, 1890.

MY DEAR MAGNIS;

Your letter and copy of PROGRESS received.

I am half afraid that the notice of Roan's confession is post dated. One of them died a year or more ago and made confession before his death. My recollection or understanding was that this was Roan. I have a notion that the *Press* correspondent's "recently" does not mean a few days ago, but perhaps a year or more. However, I may be mistaken. I certainly have never seen all the details as given in this letter; I mean with regard to Mrs. Stephens, etc. Substantially, the story is just as it was told me by two colored servants of a family with whom Wiley stopped on his way home and to whom he told the story.

Within less than a year this very incident has been stigmatized by an America critic as "too wildly improbable" to be tolerated in fiction. The simple fact is, that the North can never be made to understand that Kukluxism and its natural progeny lynching and burning of negroes, was the expression of the spirit of the best people of the South—the richest, the most cultured and religious. Here was Caswell county, one of the richest in the State, having fewer poor white people than almost any other, being chiefly owned by large tobacco planters, and having a colored majority of about 1,000 voters, under the moderate and liberal direction of Stephens, electing Democrats to every county office—sheriff, clerk and probate judge, treasurer, county commissioners, every one of them a white Democrat, elected by colored Republicans votes. Three white Republicans were chosen justices of the peace and two colored ones, out of thirty, or forty. Only the senator and representatives in the legislature were Republicans. Yet several hundreds of the very cream of the white people of the county conspired to put him to death. Probably half of the crowd in the meeting which was being held upstairs at the time, knew that he was being killed—certainly hundreds knew that men had been designated to kill him and who they were.

No one can appreciate it until they know who these men were and what they represented. Roan's father was chairman of the board of county commissioners—elected by Stephens's favor. Wiley was an ex sheriff and hoped to be elected again. Richmond was, as all the others were also, of a very prominent family. Roan was one of the most cultivated young men in the county. They all represented the very first families. That such men, backed by hundreds of others of the same type, should become common assassins, for mere political reasons the Northern man cannot understand, simply because he does not know anything about what politics means at the South, and never will know. The fact is that murder, lynching, burning alive, etc., are the crimes of the best elements of the South. The coarser element, the "poor white," as you know, never acts except as he is moved and instigated to do.

Then look at the hypocricy of it. Two or three days afterwards these very men who had instigated the killing met to bewail the fact and deny participation in it. My recollection is that Roan's father presided at the meeting.

The extract from "A Fool's Errand" in PROGRESS has just been read to me and I am inclined to think the report there given more nearly correct than the report of the confession. There were certainly more than four concerned in the killing—probably eight or ten. I have always understood that the detail made to do the killing was ten. Probably the confession has been doctored or was incorrectly reported. There are several statements in the report that are incorrect, as the finding of a bucket of blood in the room. The truth is that no blood at all was found in the room except one drop or two on the window ledge and a few in the wood-box, where his body was crowded and the wood piled on it.

I do not think there was any stab in the breast, and the artery on one side of the neck only was cut. The bucket of blood was undoubtedly passed out to confederates either in the hall or at the window—most probably in the hall. The purpose, no doubt, was to make way with the body after dark. One leg was broken, and the account given by Wiley that night, which was overheard by the three servants at Barksdale's, was no doubt the correct one.

Come to think of it, Stephens did have a stab in the breast, made after the blood had drained off by the jugular. Taken all round, it was the most cold-blooded and infamous affair on record. Roan and Richmond were the physicians at the inquest. Not a word is said in the confessions about the money taken from his person, yet it was known that he had several hundred dollars in his pocket. Not a cent was found. The aristocratic assassins were not above being thieves.

Well, well, the confirmation of what I wrote fifteen years ago is coming slowly, but every one of the incidents given in "A Fool's Errand" in regard to such outrages was an absolute fact, based on positive knowledge or sworn information. I think it is the truest and most realistic novel ever written.

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Yours truly,
ALBION W. TOURGEE.