

HELPING SURRETT TO ESCAPE

TALK WITH ONE OF HIS COMRADES.

HENRY LIPMAN'S EXPERIENCE AS A FELLOW SOLDIER OF JOHN H. SURRETT IN THE PAPAL ARMY—MAKING A RESERVED MAN'S ACQUAINTANCE—AIDING HIM TO ESCAPE FROM AN AMERICAN DETECTIVE.

The originator of the movement recently set on foot in this city for the benefit of the Transvaal Boers is a little red-faced, thick-set Hollander named Henry Lipman, with a peculiar history. He speaks six languages fluently and understands Latin and Greek. He has travelled in Europe, Asia, Africa and America, and has taken part as a volunteer in several campaigns in both hemispheres. Of all his achievements, however, there is not one upon which he dwells with more apparent pride than his share in one of the escapes of John H. Surratt, the plotter against Lincoln. Mr. Lipman is a man of few words, but the other day, at the headquarters of the Boer Committee in Hudson-st., he was induced to relate his experience to a TRIBUNE reporter.

"This is how it was," he began in excellent English. "I was born and brought up in Deventer, a little out-of-the-way Dutch town, where one sees little of the world. When I attained my majority—that was in 1867—I grew restless and tired of my monotonous, 'one-horse' existence, and made up my mind to enter the military service of the Pope. This resolution was greatly due to the fact that the Pope's emissaries and recruiting bureaus in Belgium were busy at the time, promising all manner of advantages and the happiest of prospects, both in this world and the hereafter, to recruits. Well, on February 14, 1867, I left my home, received my bounty, and went off to the Papal States, where, after my arrival, I was duly drafted into the 6th company, 1st Battalion, of the Pontifical Zouaves, then stationed at Velletri, a point somewhat north of Rome. I cannot express in words the pride and joy I felt on first donning the pretty gray uniform, the tasselled kepi, the white garters, and on shouldering a new musket.

"Three weeks after my enlistment I took advantage of a first leave of absence to visit Rome to witness the ceremonies at St. Peter's. While sitting in the cars on the return journey to Velletri, my attention was called to a handsome young soldier with a black mustache and goatee, who wore a uniform like mine and who seemed to be muttering something to himself. After a while, thinking that he might be one of my comrades, I approached him and spoke to him in French. An embarrassed look came over his features and he evidently could not understand me. Then I tried Italian, German and Dutch, but with an equally poor result. Finally, and as a last resource, I scraped a few English words together, and to my great satisfaction he was able to understand. We then had a pretty long conversation together, in the course of which I learned that his name was Watson; that he was an American by birth, and that he was serving in the 3d company, 1st Battalion, Pontifical Zouaves stationed at Veroli. More he would not say, and soon after he left me at a station on the road.

"Two months later, in consequence of the movements of several Garibaldian bands on the frontier, my company was transferred to Veroli. I then met Watson for the second time, and became very intimate with him. In fact we shared the same room in the barracks. Yet he always remained an enigma to me, and try as I might I never succeeded in making him speak of his past. Sometimes in the middle of the night I would hear him sobbing and praying. Then again he would be murmuring something about his 'poor mother,' and 'her terrible end,' and so go on, till at last overcome with fatigue he would sink back upon his pillow and fall asleep. Time passed, and Watson and I were detailed for duty at Coli Pardo, where a number of brigands had lately been committing ravages. About this time an American named St. Mary, who had shortly before enlisted in our battalion, attracted some attention by the persistency with which he inquired whether any of his countrymen were serving with the Zouaves. The battalion being some 1,400 men strong, however, it was no easy thing for him to obtain the desired information. Meanwhile I noticed a change in Watson's demeanor. He was paler, more nervous, and more reserved than usual. We had not remained many days at Coli when he came to me and asked me whether I thought he could obtain leave of absence to go to Rome. I referred him to our sergeant, Halgand by name, an old French veteran. Halgand was unable to grant the request, but he advised Watson to go back to Veroli and seek permission. Watson took the advice and started immediately for Veroli, wishing me an affectionate good-bye. But he had hardly started, when a detachment of fifty men under Lieutenant de Monsty arrived and asked for the American. We then all learned that our melancholy comrade was none other than John H. Surratt, one of the assassins—as they then called him—of President Lincoln. St. Mary was a United States detective in search of him.

"When De Monsty heard of Watson's departure he concluded that the fugitive had not gone to Veroli, but was on his way to the frontier. The detachment started immediately in pursuit, and after a sharp ride caught up with Surratt at a village not far from Tuscany. He was brought in irons to Veroli and thrown into the barrack dungeon. Now you must know that the barrack is built on an elevation overlooking Veroli, and that while the entry to the dungeon staircase is on the crest of the hill the dungeon-window is almost at its base, thirty feet below. Orders had been received from Rome to secure and keep the prisoner, even if a thousand men were needful for the task, and so De Monsty detailed twelve of us, among whom were a Maltese, named Catania, a Scotchman, McCrossan, and myself—all tried friends of Watson—to guard the dungeon and its inmate. Ten of us were posted on the narrow staircase, and two (Catania and McCrossan) were outside. Soon night fell upon us, and all around became as quiet as death. Next to the dungeon was a small compartment containing the entrance to the barrack sewer. As had been arranged between Surratt and ourselves, as soon as the clock struck twelve he was allowed to enter this compartment, as prisoners were in the habit of doing. Apparently we forgot him, but at ten minutes to 2 we all made a rush to the dungeon, and as several among us expected, Surratt had disappeared. He had lowered himself into the sewer and had made his way out at an opening into the neighboring rivulet. The discovery led to a furious fusillade on our part, its object being naturally to divert suspicion and to make believe that we were trying to stop the fugitive. As soon as the Lieutenant heard of the escape, he ordered the entire party on watch to be put under arrest, but I remember that a sense of satisfaction seemed to play around his lips, and there is no doubt in my mind that he secretly rejoiced at what had occurred.

"Not so the Captain. When the news was broken to him he exclaimed, 'I am ruined forever!' and sent off a regiment of cavalry in pursuit of Surratt. They arrived at the frontier to be told by an old woman that the American was washing himself at a brook half a mile distant—but on Victor Emanuel's territory. The Captain's anger then only increased, and all twelve of us were put in irons and imprisoned on bread and water for an entire month.

"What became of Surratt? Well, as far as I heard, he was arrested again at the American Minister's instance at Piedmont, but succeeded in escaping from a hospital there—where he lay sick—in woman's disguise. He was finally captured, I believe, while boarding a vessel at Constantinople and then brought to this country. The most curious part of the story is, that when I attended a lecture he gave in this city in 1870, he singled me out among the audience and embraced me with gratitude."