

## A STARTLING STORY.

THE SOCIÉTÉ INTERNATIONALE SAID TO HAVE FIRED CHICAGO.

[We give the following extraordinary story for what our readers may think it worth. If not true, it is certainly a well concocted romance, and the numerous instances of incendiarism discovered during the terrible fire, give it an air of probability that does credit to the ingenuity of its author.—Ed. C. I. N.]

(From Chicago Times, October 23.)

The following document is given without the expression of any opinion as to its authenticity. Though it appears at the first thought to be utterly romantic and improbable, there are not wanting confirmatory circumstances. For example, the original explanation of the origin of the fire has been denied by two persons on oath, which is sufficient to disprove the statement in a court of justice. Then it can be attested by every one who listened to Train at Farewell Hall, on the night of the fire, that he used the language recited below, predicting the destruction of the building in which he spoke, and saying that a great calamity was about to overtake the city. Finally, there is abundant evidence going to show that the fire was set in more than one place. Thus, a well-known lady, who resides in the vicinity of the Franklin school, on Division street, states positively that while the fire was progressing north in the north division from the river, she saw a man walk up to the side of a primary school, a frame building, in the rear of the Franklin school, turn out a lot of shavings from a bag, and immediately after the man had turned his back upon them saw the shavings flaming up. With these observations the alleged confession is given in the precise language that it was received, as follows:

I am a member of the Société Internationale. The headquarters of the organization are in Paris, and its ramifications extend all over the world. There are branches in London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool, Dublin, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Naples, Florence, Vienna, and other cities in Great Britain and on the continent, and in New York, Boston, Washington, New Orleans, Baltimore, and Chicago, in this country. Its members are bound by a fearful oath never to divulge any of the plans or operations of the society, and were it known that I was about to relate the story I have commenced, I should never live to finish it, while if the author of this ever becomes known I will die a death more horrible than that which met any of the victims of the inquisition. It is, therefore, with fear and trembling that I sit down to write the true story of the origin of the Chicago fire, and nothing but the sternest sense of duty and a desire to clear my conscience of a load that is too heavy for endurance would induce me to pen these lines. I fancy the sneer of incredulity with which some will greet my announcement that the destruction of Chicago was accomplished by the International Society or Commune, but when I have unfolded the details of the plot and the motives that prompted its conception, incredulity will give place to astonishment that human beings could be found so blinded by fanaticism as to become parties to so great and overwhelming a crime. The events of the past two weeks have awakened me from a dream so wild and improbable that, were it not for the dreary evidences of its reality that I see about me, I could scarce believe, and still more reluctantly can I believe, that in the terrible tragedy that has been enacted I was one of the principal actors; that, though blinded by a fanaticism more fearful than the worst form of lunacy, I permitted myself to become the cause of so much misery and woe. To begin at the beginning I must revert to the organization of the Société Internationale, its extent, its objects, and its plans. The society was organized during the troublous times that preceded the election of Louis Napoleon to the Presidency of France. A Commune, in which the poor should be equal with the rich and the rich equal with the poor, was much talked of at that time, and this organization was formed with that object in view. The election of Napoleon to the Presidency and his subsequent *coup d'état* by which he seated himself upon the throne for a time defeated the plans of the socialists. Notwithstanding the fact, however, the organization was not abandoned, but was rather more closely cemented and more widely diffused. The evils of the reign of the third Napoleon seemed to add fuel to the fire that was smouldering in France, and the society drew into its ranks all the element of discontent throughout the empire. The result of the late war between France and Germany was to incorporate a more dangerous element into the society, and it was determined to seize upon the opportunity offered by the withdrawal of the Prussians from Paris for putting the principles of the society into execution. The reign of the Reds in Paris is too fresh in the mind of every reader to need recapitulation at my hands. Its horrors are painted on every mind in colours that can never be effaced. It will never be forgotten how, in their blind fury, the communists destroyed not only every vestige of monarchy, but everything that served as a reminder of the old distinctions between the rich and the poor. Neither palaces, nor works of art, nor cathedrals escaped the mad fury of the mob that held high carnival in the beautiful capital of the world, where war and famine wrought such sad devastation. The defeat of the Commune, through the perfidy of some of its members, did not serve to discourage it in the endeavour to secure the ascendancy of the principles of socialism, but it was reorganized on a basis more enduring than before. The society in France was thoroughly cemented, and to-day it is stronger numerically than ever before.

Emissaries were despatched to all the commercial capitals of the world, and, together with those who had fled from the Versailles government, formed branches in all the leading cities, not only in Europe but in America. There was not lacking those who were so deeply imbued with an insane desire for the triumph of communistic principles that they were willing to undertake any desperate plan that gave promise of success, even though attended with infinite misery and suffering. The long existing conflict between capital and labour had prepared thousands of persons in every large city, and especially in manufacturing districts, for any desperate work that would avenge the real or fancied wrongs they had received at the hands of the moneyed aristocracy of the land. In this field the emissaries of the Commune laboured with a zeal that would have done credit to a better cause. The utmost care was exercised to prevent any disclosure of the plans of the organization, and only a few were admitted to its councils, although these are the men who, in case of an emergency, could sway the mob by the eloquence of their daring. It is but justice to the labouring men to say, however, that they were not true representatives of the class, but those who, by prating upon the wrongs of the labouring men, secured for themselves a competency out of the hard-earned

wages of their dupes. Throughout Great Britain and the United States, agents of the Commune were in every labour union, and are to-day among the most implicitly trusted members not only of those organizations, but permeate every department of the State, municipal and national governments.

In England much was expected from the society, and much has been accomplished. The labour strikes at Newcastle-on-Tyne, the immense demonstrations at Hyde Park, at Dublin, and in the manufacturing districts, were all incited and upheld by the Internationals. So insidious and so secret are their plans of operation that not one in a thousand of those who are themselves participants in the outbreaks know from whence their inspiration comes. Thus far the great cities of Great Britain have escaped the ordeal of fire through which Paris and Chicago have passed, but perhaps before this recital reaches the eye of the reader, some of the greatest capitals of the world may be, as Chicago is to-day, a mass of smouldering and desolate ruins, inhabitable only by the foul birds of the night. During a short residence in Paris, in 1867, I was thrown much into the society of leading members of the Commune. Being an American, it was supposed that I would favour anything that would tend to bring about an absolute equality between all men. At first I laughed at all such notions, regarding them as not only utterly impracticable, but as tending to overthrow all law and order. But as expedient after expedient was suggested, some of them seeming to be feasible, I caught the infection that animated my associates, and soon became a blind enthusiast in the cause of socialism. While there I became a member of the Société Internationale, and it is not surprising, therefore, that on its first organization in Chicago, some eight months ago, I was selected as one of the prime movers. Since I had returned from France I had been in correspondence with some of those prominent in the movement there, among whom were M. Henri Martin, who was among the first to fall a victim to the Versailles troops at the capture of the city; M. Assi, whose tragic fate is so fresh in the minds of all, and M. Julius Garadine, from whom I learned the progress the society was making, and many of its future plans. The organization in Chicago was formed under the direction of two communists who had fled from Paris, and myself. As elsewhere, none but the most daring and trustworthy were admitted. The avowed purposes of the society were harmless in themselves. They were to endeavour to elevate the working-men to the level of the rich; to promote communistic sentiments among the masses, and, as soon as possible, to inaugurate the reign of socialism, when everybody should enjoy equal benefits, and poverty and want should be unknown. To these declarations there was a codicil binding the members, if it were found impossible to secure the results by peaceable means, to resort to whatever measures should be deemed advisable by the directors of the organization. The first two months of the existence of the society were consumed in fruitless attempts to stir up strife between the mechanics of the city and their employers. But the disastrous consequences of the eight-hour strikes in 1867 were yet fresh in remembrance, and for once the labour unions refused to do the bidding of their prompters. This was a discouraging blow, but the members of the society were determined. In no city of the Union was more to be feared to communism from a continuance of the existing condition of affairs, for colossal fortunes were being amassed in an incredible short space of time, and an aristocracy of wealth was springing up that threatened to become so strong as to defy overthrow. Plan after plan was suggested, and abandoned as impracticable.

Finally, the burning of the business portion of the city was suggested. Appalled by the thought of working such desolation in the fairest city on the continent, I at first shrank from participation in the transaction. I protested that instead of promoting the objects of the society it would only retard them. But all the others were firm, and, weakly, I yielded. Gradually the insanity produced by being a promoter of a calamity that would shake the world to its centre took possession of me. Sleeping or waking, my thoughts were filled with the plan. To mature the details of the plot required the utmost caution. The project of raising a mob by means of some popular excitement and to burn and pillage the city was debated at length, but at last abandoned because of its hazardousness and the inevitable loss of life that it would involve, for to take life was not our object—it was only to humble the men who had waxed rich at the expense of the poor. The incendiary's torch was finally fixed upon, and on the 9th day of August preparations were actively begun to carry it into execution. Several times a day was fixed for the awful tragedy, but as often abandoned.

The co-operation of the elements was needed. The torch was first applied to the warehouse on the corner of State and Sixteenth streets on the gusty morning of the 20th of September. It was hoped that the high south wind then prevailing would carry the flames to the row of frame buildings to the northward, but a sudden change in the wind defeated the project by enabling the fire department to quench the flames. Again on the Saturday night preceding the catastrophe a match was applied on Canal street, and for a few hours all seemed to be working well, and but for the failure of one of the petroleum mines to ignite Sabbath morning would have seen Chicago in ashes. But the doom that was overhanging the city was delayed but a day, and that day came near proving fatal to our plans, for then and only then were we in danger of betrayal. George Francis Train, a member of the Société Internationale, lectured in Farwell Hall on the evening of the fated Sunday. In the course of his address his manner changed for a moment while he made use of these words:

"This is the last public address that will be delivered within these walls. A terrible calamity is impending over the city of Chicago. More I cannot say; more I dare not utter!"

It was well for him he closed as he did, for there were half a score of hands grasping half a score of pistols that would have checked any further utterance forever. It is with much hesitancy that I approach a recital of the scenes of that horrible night.

All day long we had been in secret conclave where no mortal could spy our doings. Petroleum mines had been laid in a score of places, and trusty men were stationed at each of them to apply the match at the proper moment. The plot had been so arranged that all should appear as accident, our part being mainly to assist the progress of the flames, for we knew that once beyond a certain limit no agency could stay them. The place above all others in the city which promised the great measure of success was in the barn on De Koven

street. No "old Irish hag" was milking her cow at the time, as the reporters of the city press are determined to have it. A human being of a different sex was there, however, but had disappeared, as if by magic, before any mortal eye had remarked his presence. Before the arrival of the jaded firemen at the scene of the conflagration, half-a-dozen mines had been touched off, and their efforts to subdue the flames were as futile as the effort of a child to stem the raging cataract of Niagara. When the flames had reached the river, work began on the south side. Simultaneously a mine was sprung at the gas-works, and another near Van Buren street bridge, and two whole blocks were a seething hell of flame in less time than it takes my unaccustomed pen to tell it. From thence onward the fire was assisted by a mine, set on Wells street, near Monroe, another block and-a-half further east, and still another in Farwell Hall. Little did those who listened to citizen Train on that eventful Sunday night suspect that they were sitting over a magazine that needed but the touch of a match to involve them in a perfect hell of flame. From that point the destruction of the south side, with its massive granite piles and well stored warehouses, was assured. Onward sped the flames, and wherever they appeared likely to skip a new magazine was fired, and ruin with its fearful front involved the fair city. I had been delegated to explode the powder magazine on South Water street.

Our only fear of want of success was that the authorities, failing to stay the mad current of fire by ordinary means, would resort to the last and only hope—lay a few blocks in ruins by means of gunpowder. To guard against this a train had been laid communicating with the magazine, and required but a spark to destroy it. When the work had been so fully inaugurated I hastened to the point to which I had been assigned, and with a frenzy more terrible than any I had ever before experienced, I reached the spot where the match should have been applied. A coal lay within a few feet of it; a slight kick from my foot would have placed it over the hidden fuse, but the streets were thronged with people, and I shrank from committing the act that would have plunged hundreds of human beings into eternity.

That moment's hesitation was their salvation. The powder brigade arrived almost upon the instant, and the explosive was removed from the building. Among the first barrels removed were these with which the train communicated, and although a stray spark afterward fired the fuse no explosion followed. Hardly had I recovered from the momentary flash of humane feeling that vered me than I was placed in imminent peril of my life. The flames had advanced northward on both sides of where I stood, and we were rushing toward me with fearful rapidity. Dazed by the various conflicting emotions that had filled my breast I had not noticed this, and when I awoke from my trance the most horrible of deaths stared me in the face. Hemmed in on every side in a crucible of fire, I for a moment gave way to despair. But despair gave me strength, and, breaking down a heavy door, I rushed through a store to the river and plunged into its waters. A boat moored at the dock assisted me to cross, although I did not waste time in getting into it, but pushed it before me as I swam. Reaching the north side I ran with all my speed through the streets towards the city limits, seeking to escape from the terrible scenes my eyes had beheld. In the meantime, my co-workers in crime had not been idle. As the current of fire passed northward from Van Buren street it appeared that a large tract bounded on the north of Madison street, and on the west by Dearborn street, including a valuable section of the city, would escape the terrible destruction that had visited the remainder of the city. The flames had proceeded along Harrison and Van Buren streets to Fourth Avenue, and here seemed to have spent their force. It was a terrible moment for millions were trembling in the balance. A few brave men battled with the demon, and but for the omnipresence of the Internationals would have stayed its progress. But a man rushed into a house that had been abandoned by its occupants, ostensibly for the purpose of saving some household utensils that had been left, and returned laden with goods; but a moment afterwards the rear of the building became a mass of flame, and a gust of wind carried it eastward to the lake and northward over the district that had thus been spared, thus completing the universal ruin. On the north side it had been intended to destroy but few buildings and these the business headquarters and residences of the affluent. As during the progress of the fire on the south side mines were sprung in various localities as the flames advanced, but only where the natural course of the flames was likely to leave the work but imperfectly done. The fire progressed too slowly. The water works were in full blast, and there was danger that through their agency some of the buildings doomed to demolition would be saved. The works had been prepared for destruction, but the time had not arrived, as the fire was several blocks away. But notwithstanding this fact the match was applied, and the workmen were obliged to fly for their lives. In their flight the man who had fired the mine was overthrown and badly injured, and as the fire advanced he fell a victim to its fury. Thus ended the work of the incendiaries of the Société Internationale. The elements completed the destruction, and the loveliest portion of Chicago is now a waste, drear ruin, inhabitable only by ghouls and the ill-omened birds of the night. The results are more than had been anticipated, but are yet not satisfactory. Many buildings that had been doomed by the Internationals escaped the fiery ordeal, while a large tract that it had been determined to spare is now a ruin.

Retribution is not long in following the perpetrators of great crimes. Two of the original founders of the organization in Chicago met death in the terrible conflagration they had instigated, and I alone am spared to suffer worse than a thousand deaths from the stings of conscience. Seven of the men delegated to assist the fire in its progress also perished miserably in the hell they had conjured up, while two others are probably maimed for life. As for myself, I have little hope of escaping the vengeance of the Internationals.

The oath to which I subscribed carries with it the penalty of a death in a form more horrible than any that has been visited upon mortal since the sun first rose over chaos. The organization is omnipresent, permeating every circle of society, each member being bound to mete out the penalty of the oath to any one who may divulge its secrets. This, its greatest of secrets, has been written under the load of a guilty conscience. Life has lost all its attractions for me, and I scarcely care to live, save to see the damage caused partly through my instrumentality repaired. But if it shall appear that I cannot escape from those who have already involved me in so much misery I will yet not die at their hands, but will prefer to lie in accursed ground.