WESTERN WHISKY FRAUDS.

GEN. HORACE PORTER'S TESTIMONY.

HIS EXAMINATION BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE—WHAT THE GENERAL HAD TO SAY IN REPLY TO BLUFORD WILSON—THE "TOP AND BOTTOM" LETTER—THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOYANCE OVER THE AFFAIR—BABCOCK AND "BLACK FRIDAY."

WASHINGTON, Aug. 12.—Gen. Horace Porter, former Private Secretary of President Grant, was examined this morning before the Committee on Whisky Trials in St. Louis, and was asked to state what had occurred in the interview which he had had with Bluford Wilson touching a certain letter written by the latter to Mr. Henderson in St. Louis. His reply was as follows: That interview occurred in a purely accidental manner. I will state just how it occurred as it has been quoted erroneously in the testimony of Mr. Wilson. In November last, or possibly in the early part of December, I spent a day in Washington. I called at the Executive Mansion to pay my respects to the President and his family. In passing through Gen. Babcock's room I fell into a conversation with him and one or two others who were present, in the course of which he said he had received, through an anonymous source, a very extraordinary letter, which he handed me to read. It was contained in an envelope postmarked "St. Louis," bearing a recent date. It appeared to be a copy of a letter written by Mr. Wilson, addressed "Mr. Henderson." It was the "bottom and top" letter, which the committee has had before it, and it was headed at the top "a true copy." Then followed what purported to be a copy of a letter from Wilson to Henderson; it was not an original letter, and did not purport to be an original letter; as I understood, neither Gen. Babcock nor any of his assistants recognized the handwriting of the anonymous sender; after reading the letter I stated that I did not believe Mr. Wilson had been guilty of writing a letter of that character, and that it was my practice in business not to pay any attention to anonymous letters. Gen. Babcock stated that that was the course he always pursued, and that he did not think it worth while to show this letter to the President. I understood him to say that it had been shown to Mr. Pierrepont and Mr. Bristow. I told him that I thought it would only be an act of justice to Mr. Wilson to send the letter to him, and I thought the best way to treat the subject was with entire frankness. He said that this had been his intention, but I think he said Mr. Wilson had been absent from the city, and that he had not yet had an opportunity to bring the letter to his notice. I am not so positive about this statement. I said that if the letter were given me I would volunteer to take it to Mr. Wilson and do him the justice to show it to him. The letter was handed to me, and, in the course of the day, I went to call on Mr. Wilson. I think I met him on the street or at his hotel, and walked with him to his office in the Treasury Department. I told him that such a letter had been received, and I handed it to him. He appeared to know all about it, and said that he was not surprised, as he had learned that the letter had been lost or stolen in the Court-house in St. Louis. He said it was not a correct copy of his letter, and after a while he brought out his letter-press copy-book and turned to the press copy of his original letter, one of us reading the press copy while the other read the copy which I had brought. My recollection is that they were identical, except as to the letters "W. H.," which in the anonymous copy were inserted in parenthesis after the word "top." On this discrepancy being pointed out, I saw at once that the letters "W. H." had been interpolated, and I told Wilson that I was perfectly satisfied of that fact. He then went on to make an explanation in regard to the letter. He stated very positively that the letter had no reference whatever to the President or to Gen. Babcock; that it had no reference whatever to the visit of the President's party to St. Louis the previous Fall, but that it related entirely to whisky thieves in St. Louis. I think, he said, that there was a motion pending to quash the indictments against some of them, and he thought it was necessary to have an increased watchfulness during the next ten days after writing the letter to prevent their escape, but he said he meant to stand or fall by that letter. He only wanted the truth in regard to it to be understood. I told him that according to my understanding the letter had not been shown to the President, and that I saw no necessity for its being shown him. He then asked me personally to show this letter to the President, and to state to him the "W. H." was interpolated in the copy, and also to make to the President the same explanation which he had made to me. You will observe that I had a copy of a letter with me, not an original letter, and not purporting to be an original letter, and that the letters "W. H." were not inserted in an original letter, and in a different handwriting, as has been asserted, so that I could not have said I saw this forgery in the original letter. In the course of conversation Mr. Wilson asked me what I understood to be the origin of the term "Sylph," and the explanation of the "Sylph" dispatch. I knew nothing in regard to the origin of that term or any circumstances connected with it of my own knowledge. I merely repeated to Mr. Wilson what Gen. Babcock had told me at Long Branch the previous Summer, when from motives of curiosity I asked him what the explanation was. What I repeated to Mr. Wilson as coming from Gen. Babcock was as follows: That in the Fall of 1874 Gen. Babcock visited St. Louis with the President's party; that on one occasion McDonald, then Supervisor of that district, was present (with some other Government officers) with Gen. Babcock either at a hotel or at a fair which was being held in the city; that McDonald pointed out a handsome woman, but rather large in size, and called her a "sylph;" that that was done in such a manner as to create considerable amusement; that it was referred to afterward by way of a joke, and that it became a sort of by-word. I did not understand that the President was present on this occasion, nor did I understand that there was any reflection upon the lady's character. The allegation that I uttered or even repeated a gross and vulgar slander on the President in that connection, or in any other connection, or that I ever uttered language which could by any possibility be construed into a reflection upon his character, is so utterly absurd as to bear its own refutation on its face; but I want right here, under the solemnity of an oath, to give to that statement a broad and absolute and unqualified denial.

Mr. Bluford Wilson says or insinuates that I stated that the "Sylph" telegram referred to the movements of some parties who were going out to St. Louis on bridge business. Now, mark the perversion. What I stated to him in regard to that was precisely this: In speaking of telegrams, and for the purpose of illustrating how suspicious a telegram might be on its face, and yet how innocent might be its nature, I stated that Col. Stevens had recently told me that he once received a telegram from Gen. Babcock in Washington while he [Col. Stevens] was in St. Louis, which read as follows: "No one going from here." The Colonel remarked that on its face and without explanation that telegram might look very suspicious, but that a day or two before he (being a railroad manager, and hearing that the President and his party were coming to St. Louis to attend the opening of the St. Louis bridge on the Fourth of July) telegraphed to Gen. Babcock to know when the President would reach there and of how many his party would consist, and that it was in answer to that telegram that Gen. Babcock sent him the very innocent reply: "No one going from here." I took occasion, in compliance with Mr. Wilson's request, to speak to the President in relation to the "bottom or top" letter; in my interview with the President I showed him the copy, and explained to him that I had compared it with Mr. Wilson's letter-press copy and that the "W. H." was an interpolation, and I gave him the explanation which Wilson had given to me; the President exhibited considerable feeling in regard to the letter, and did not appear to regard the "W. H." as at all important. It was the general tone of the letter to which he objected. I suggested that he should send for Mr. Wilson, see the letter-press copy himself, and hear the explanation from Mr. Wilson himself, as I did not want to be a vehicle for transmitting any explanation, now, I want to say here that I made this call on Mr. Wilson from motives of kindness, and with a disposition to do him an act of justice, and that the only reward I have received thus far is having my name drawn into an unseemly discussion in reference to a matter about which I know little or nothing and care still less; the President was annoyed by the letter and looked upon it as very disrespectful and as an effort to set spies upon him during his visit to St. Louis. The President said that Mr. Wilson ought to be removed, and that was what led me to ask that he might send for Mr. Wilson himself.

Q.—I read from Mr. Wilson's testimony on page 359: "I asked him—meaning you—if he had seen the handwriting of the original 'W. H.,' and he said he had, and he said at once, Wilson, I do not want to hear anything more. That is an end of the matter; the letter is a forgery beyond question, and that lets you out.' Was there anything to that effect said? A.—I did not make that remark. I could not make it, for I never saw the original, and do not know anybody who ever did see it.

Q.—In speaking to Mr. Wilson of this woman, styled by McDonald as "Sylph," did you allude to her as a lewd woman? A.—Not at all; I am placed in the attitude by the statement of Mr. Wilson not of suggesting to him an explanation of the "Sylph" dispatch, but of giving what I understood to be an explanation in reply to his question; Gen. Babcock had made an explanation of this to the President, he had made it to Mr. Pierrepont, he had made it to Mr. Bristow, and if Mr. Wilson was familiar with the case, as he undoubtedly was, he understood the explanation, which was the only explanation that I had ever heard of as being given in reference to the "Sylph" dispatch; therefore his testimony would put me in the attitude of suddenly inventing, in reply to his question, a romance differing entirely from the explanation which had been given to the President and his Cabinet.

Q.—And one which reflected very severely on the President? A.—Yes, I not only give a broad denial to that "Sylph" statement, but knowing the President as I do, I do not believe any person has ever been permitted to enter his presence and recite such a piece of vulgarity to him.

Q.—I wish to call your attention to another part of Mr. Wilson's testimony on page 359. "He (meaning you) said to me, without going further into the explanation, that the most estimable service in my power to render to the President of the United States was to shield and save Gen. Babcock from exposure; that these matters were of a character which could not be gone into without giving all parties the greatest trouble and concern." Do you recollect anything of that kind, or anything that could be construed into it? A.—I never said that; I said this to Wilson, (and it is the only thing in that connection which occurs to me,) that Gen. Babcock was a distinguished officer in the Army; that he had declared himself entirely innocent of the charges which had been made against him; that if there should be unfair means used for subjecting him to the annoyance and humiliation of a criminal trial, and that if it should turn out in the end that he would be pronounced innocent of all those charges when such secret correspondence, suspicious in its nature, like this "bottom and top" letter, should come out, and it were found that the prosecution was conducted in that unusual way, it might lead to a disturbance of the pleasant relations existing between the President and the members of his Cabinet and officials, and that proved a prediction which has been verified.

Mr. Porter was cross-examined at considerable length by Mr. Cochrane, and in reply to questions he denied any knowledge of any speculations on the part of Gen. Babcock on Black Friday, and said that the only business transaction which he had had with Gen. Babcock was in the purchase of two lots of real estate in New-York, in the purchase and sale of which Major Gardner had acted as a friend; he did not believe that any papers implicating Gen. Babcock were ever presented to the President in connection with Black Friday proceedings, because he had been assured by Gen. Babcock that he had no earthly connection with anything of the kind, and that no papers implicating him could exist unless they were forged. He was asked by Mr. Cochrane whether the President had ever mentioned to him that he had in his possession such documents as were indicated, or that he had ever made any statement to him as to documents of that character. Witness replied that he would rather not refer to any conversation which he had with the President, and that if he did his answer would throw no light on the subject. Mr. Cochrane, however, insisted on a reply to his question, and the witness stated that the President had intimated to him that nothing whatever had come to his knowledge implicating Gen. Babcock, directly or indirectly, with the "Black Friday" speculations.

On being further pressed on this point, the witness, after much hesitation, and with evident dislike, stated that the papers which had been handed to the President as implicating Gen. Babcock, were simply papers in reference to a mortgage and sale of real estate before referred to, the purchaser on this occasion being Mr. Fahnestock, of Jay Cooke & Co., and the lawyer who managed it being Major Gardiner. On being pressed to state by whom these papers had been transmitted to the President, the witness declined to answer. Reverting to the copy of the "W. H." letter, he stated that after showing it to Wilson he had returned it to Babcock, and had got it again yesterday from Mr. Storrs, Gen. Babcock's counsel. He denied positively the version of the "Sylph" story which Mr. Wilson in his testimony had ascribed to him. He had repeated to Mr. Wilson merely what Gen. Babcock had said to him in explanation of that matter. The examination then proceeds as follows, the questioner being Mr. Cochrane:

Q.—Do you know of the President having at any time spoken of a conversation with Mr. Wilson in regard to your explanation of the Sylph telegram; if so what did the President say and what are your means of knowledge? The witness first declined to answer the question, but finally said: The President made no statement to me or in my hearing and anything that I may have heard in the way of rumor as to what the President said I must decline to state in evidence.

Q.—Did you hear anything from anybody, and if so, from whom, in regard to the matter? A.—Yes, I heard something.

Q.—From whom? A.—From Mr. E. A. Storrs.

Q.—What did Mr. Storrs say? A.—That the President said that the statement made by Mr. Wilson in his testimony was incorrect; that Mr. Wilson did not recite this vulgar slander to him; that he commenced to say something about an improper woman, and that the President stopped him instantly, and did not permit him to recite or discuss the matter.

Q.—Then you understand from Mr. Storrs that the President had had a conversation with him on this subject since the testimony of Wilson, and that the President had admitted that Wilson, in making the statement of a conversation which he had had with you, commenced to speak about your having mentioned a lewd woman? A.—I did not say that; that latter part is not correct.

Mr. Cochrane—What fact stated in the question is not correct? A.—I stated that the President said that Wilson commenced to make some remark about an improper woman, and that he stopped him instantly and emphatically and did not listen to the recital of that story, or discuss it with Wilson.

MR. WILSON FURTHER CONTRADICTED.

Mr. William B. Moore, Special Treasury Agent, contradicted in his testimony statements by Mr. Wilson concerning him. Among other things, he denied having ever stated that he saw Gen. Babcock receive a letter from Joyce; on the 27th of April he received a communication from Bluford Wilson requesting him to resign; subsequently, in a conversation with Mr. Wilson, he asked Wilson his reason for requesting him to resign, when Wilson stated that it was because the witness forced himself before this committee to testify against his friend, Mr. Yaryan. The witness informed him that his information was false, and this he could prove by a member of this committee, [meaning Mr. Glover.] On the 3d of May he called on Wilson in company with Mr. Glover, when Wilson said, as a reason for removing the witness from office, that he did not propose having any subordinate hanging round to testify against Yaryan. Glover stated to Mr. Wilson that the points on which the witness had been called to testify came from a source unknown to witness, and that the latter was not a voluntary witness. Mr. Wilson expressed himself satisfied with Mr. Glover's statement, and left them to infer that he would revoke the order of dismissal. The witness made an appeal to the President, and on the 8th of July, after the retirement of Secretary Bristow, Secretary Morrill, his successor, restored him. The witness had received full compensation from the date of his restoration in July.

The committee have adjourned a further examination of whisky frauds until the next session of Congress.

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