

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

Glycerine and Greek Fire—Plot to Blow Up the Spanish Flotilla—How and Why It Failed—Who Engineered It.

At one o'clock yesterday morning the Spanish flotilla, anchored since the day before in the waters of the lower bay, ten miles below Staten Island, started for their destination. The delay was made for the purpose of paying off the sailors and marines in advance. It is understood that the commander of the Pizarro intended to await the arrival of the Isabella, but the threatening aspect of affairs and the freely circulated rumors of torpedoes, nitro-glycerine and other dangerous combustibles being sent down the harbor in tugboats determined him upon weighing anchor without another moment's delay. At midnight on Sunday two tugboats, with about fifty men on each, well armed and carrying on board one swivel gun, were seen prowling around the anchorage ground of the Spanish fleet. According to one of the crew, who refused to disclose the name of the leader in the enterprise, it was the intention to have blown up the Pizarro and fired all the boats. For this purpose 200 pounds of nitro-glycerine were put on the tugs, done up in quart bottles and tin cans, and with fuses attached so that on being hurled against the woodwork of the vessels it would immediately explode. There were also twenty-five gallons of the extraordinary composition with which the Fenians threatened to burn down the principal cities of England, called Greek fire, which all the water that fell upon the sheltering ark that held Noah, his lamby and his fortunes could not extinguish. The Greek fire was put up in bottles, which would break readily on being thrown at the boats. Balls of cotton yarn were saturated with this terrific solution, and were ready for instant use. Each man was armed with a breech-loading carbine and revolver. After spending one hour hovering about the moonlit waters of the lower bay the commander of the daring expedition ordered the boats to return, as the thing was altogether impossible of execution owing to the absence of the friendly mantle of unillumined night. The moon persisted in shining down in cloudless brilliancy, and the night watch on the gunboats and the Pizarro had a clear prospect all round them for miles. The buccaners on the tugs swore that the moon as well as the official lights of Washington was in the pay of the Spanish government.

Outside the harbor for the last three days two tugs have been floating about with the purpose of intercepting the Pizarro by an ingenious arrangement of ropes and torpedoes. When the Pizarro came along the tugs were to stand off from each other and make the rope connecting them all taut. On this rope, five or six hundred yards long, a series of torpedoes were arranged at intervals like so many regular knots on a string. When the bow of the approaching war vessel struck the rope the tugs were to yield and the torpedoes, flying back against the sides of the vessel exploded with awful suddenness and terrific force. A revenue cutter, supposed to be the Hugh McCulloch, came in sight at that particular and pertinent moment, when the design just outlined was about being put in execution, and the tugs of course beat an immediate retreat.

There is hardly any question but that for the inopportune appearance of the full moon and the Hugh McCulloch the Pizarro, the pride of the Spanish navy, and the eighteen cacklers under her wing would now be but a dream of things that were, "a schoolboy's tale, the wonder of an hour." The men selected for this forlorn if not fool-hardy business were picked braves of the Gardiner's Island expedition, which came near grasping the glistening guerdon of gallantry under the lead of Rocky Mountain Ryan, who, for aught people know to the contrary, may have been the leader in the latest desperate attempt to avenge the plighted patriotism of Cuba.

Simultaneous Sailing of the Gunboats from New York and the Ram Triumph (Late Atlanta) from the Delaware—A Naval Battle Expected.

[From the Philadelphia Press, Dec. 20.]

The rebel ram Atlanta, which has been lying in the Delaware ever since her arrival from Savannah, where she was captured, was lately purchased from the government, ostensibly by Haiti. Since the purchase the vessel has been thoroughly refitted, and is now in good sea-going condition. The departure of the Atlanta has from week to week been delayed by some trivial excuse; but a few days ago she dropped down the Delaware to Lewes. Her movements have all along been shrouded in complete mystery, and latterly suspicions that she was destined to be used in the interest of the insurgent Cubans became rife.

A STARTLING COINCIDENCE.

It has been currently rumored that she was watching the Spanish gunboats at New York, and last evening, as it in confirmation of the rumor, the two following despatches were received simultaneously at the office of the Press:—

LEWES, Del., Dec. 19, 1869.

The ram Triumph, late Atlanta, said to belong to the Haytian government, went to sea at quarter-past four P. M. Despatches were sent off to her before she sailed.

NEW YORK, Dec. 19, 1869.

At ten o'clock this morning eighteen of the Spanish gunboats, whose departure has been hourly expected during the past week, took up position in the wake of the Spanish war vessel Pizarro, which has been lying in the North river for three weeks, and following her, steamed slowly down the bay. Few spectators were present, and there was no demonstration whatever. Twelve unarmed gunboats yet remain at the Delamater wharf.

OMINOUS.

That portion of the telegram from Lewes which says that despatches were sent to the Triumph, *née* Atlanta, before she went to sea, coupled with the New York despatch announcing the sailing of the Spanish gunboats, would seem to confirm the rumor that the Triumph belonged to the Cubans.

THE TRIUMPH

is a powerful vessel, built in the most approved manner, and in the event of her meeting the Spanish gunboats the latter would have no alternative but fight. Her sea-going qualities were proved on her voyage from Savannah to Philadelphia.

As the matter now stands it is impossible to say what will be the next development in this mystery. Before night we may learn of the destruction of the modern Spanish Armada, and we may not. If the Triumph is really a Cuban vessel her presence upon the sea must play havoc with the Spanish navy, which has no man-of-war capable of competing with her.

The Status of Spain Towards Cuba and the United States.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

In your issue of Saturday, 12th, "Norwood" asks what is the difference between the Alabama case and that of the existing Spanish Armada? In reply, I would try to inform "Norwood" that there is a vast difference. It is not a parallel case. The Alabama was built by rebels to aid rebellion against a government, while the Spanish Armada was built by a government to aid a government in suppressing a rebellion in its own dominions.

France might aid England with 50,000 men in suppressing an insurrection at home or in India, without the smallest risk of creating a war between each other; but France could not aid the insurgents against the English government without running a great risk of bringing on a war.

The United States government has, therefore, no right whatever to interfere or detain the gunboats, except under the law of retaliation for alleged unfriendly acts; and no matter how far the American people may sympathize with the Cuban insurgents the United States government has a perfect right to aid Spain if called upon to do so.

J. C. B.

DECEMBER 20, 1869.