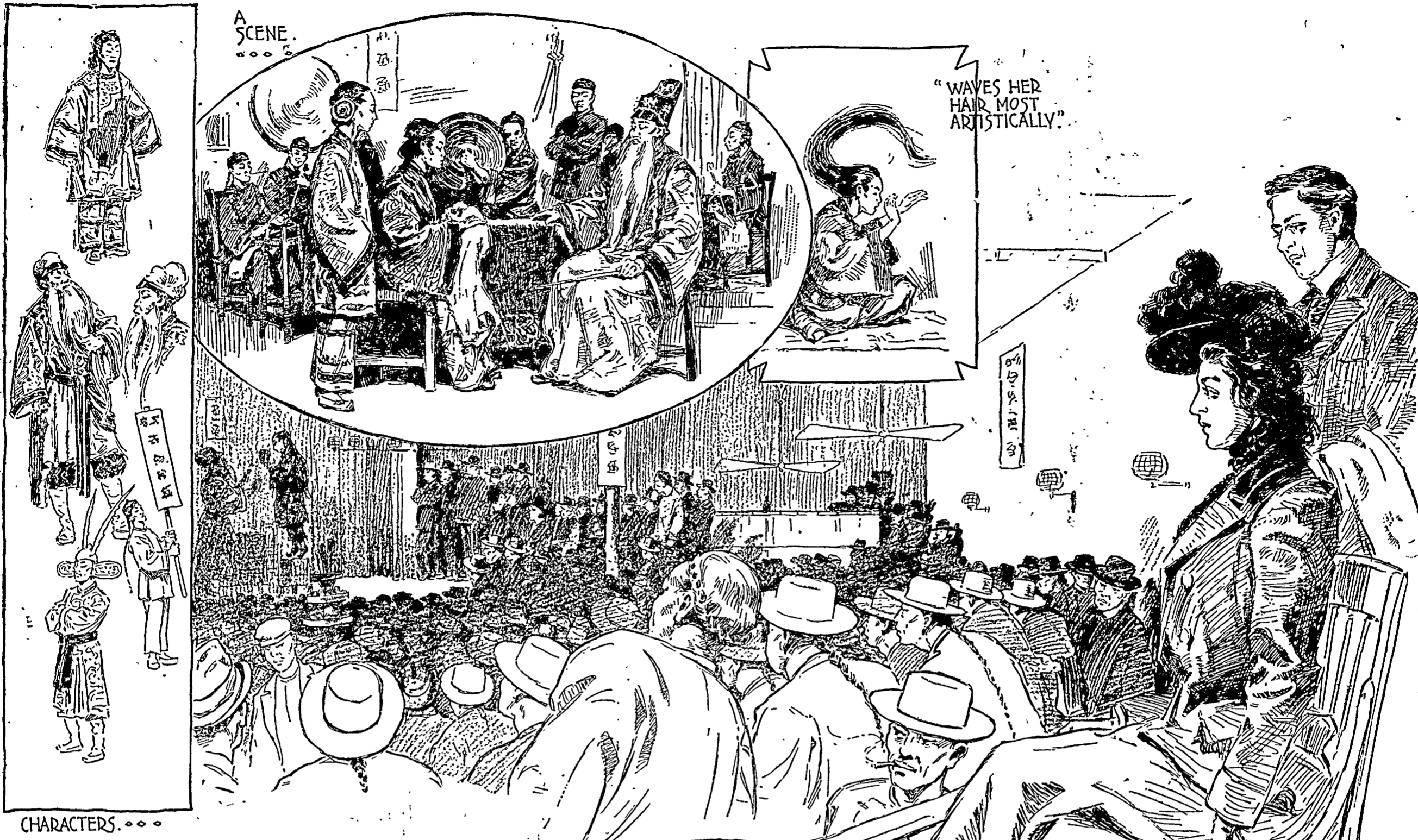


"A VIVID PICTURE OF A GREAT ACTOR HARASSED BY CENTURY OLD TRADITIONS."

Fon Chong Mai, the most famous actor of China, a "female impersonator," sketched in his New York engagement, now playing in Chinatown.



CHINA'S GREAT ACTOR.

PLAYING IN NEW YORK.

A Night at the Choy Ting Quoy Reveals a Fine Artist Harassed by Century Old Traditions.

It may surprise the unlearned to know that the greatest actor in the world is now making his first American tour, and, furthermore, that he is playing in New York. You may perhaps not agree with me in the statement that he is the greatest actor in the world, nor shall I quarrel with you if you don't. I take the word of Luk Ling for it, and Luk Ling is a man of much knowledge of the drama.

If you wish to see for yourself go down to the Choy Ting Quoy, in Doyers street, some night and sit in judgment upon the merits of Fon Chong Mai. You may not take the same view of it as Luk Ling, for he is a manager, and managers, you know, sometimes look at art through gold rimmed glasses. But you must admit to yourself that Fon Chong Mai is a great actor.

Had you gone last week you might have seen the popular tragedy "Son Fong Quon"—that is, you might have seen it in its entirety if you had attended every performance, lasting from six o'clock in the evening until after midnight. This is a condensed version, for Luk Ling, who manages Chinatown's theater, has absorbed one quality of the American manager—a quality which permits him to take liberties with the works of the great masters to suit the exigencies of the hour.

"Son Fong Quon." If Augustin Daly may "adapt" Shakespeare and Restand, why should we frown upon Luk Ling when he cuts a thirty day play to fit in one week?

I had the pleasure of seeing a portion of "Son Fong Quon" one night last week, and carried away with me a vivid recollection of a gifted actor harassed by century old traditions; of an orchestra reminiscent of a hundred boiler factories rolled into one, and a headache which defied either analysis or cure.

You dive into the Chinese theatre, down in Doyers street. You don't walk in, or stroll in, or even drop in, although the latter means of ingress is quite possible. Dive is the only word that really fits. You go down a couple of steps off the narrow sidewalk, when you come to the box office. Here you exchange the coin of the realm for a bit of pasteboard bearing queer hieroglyphics, which you present at the door after going down another step.

The man who takes your ticket at the door is a white man. If you are so fortunate as to make his acquaintance he may make it

very pleasant for you. He will tell you that his name is Fred Delaca, that he is the assistant manager and the only white man employed in the establishment. He is a most amiable young man, and if you strike his fancy he may even arrange it so that you can meet the great actor, Fon Chong Mai.

The Chinese Superstition. This is an honor, however, that is not lightly conferred, and you must not expect too much. At any rate, you would have to wait until the end of the performance, for the Chinese actors are by no means free from the superstitions which the members of the profession are prone to.

I do not think Fon Chong Mai would hesitate to begin a tour on a Friday, even should it fall upon the thirteenth of the month. I believe he would even walk under a ladder if he were satisfied in his own mind that it wouldn't fall on him. But speak to any one during the course of a performance? Never. The thing is unheard of. It would bring him bad luck.

Fon Chong Mai is a tragedian and female impersonator. Did he have a press agent we should hear great stories of stolen jewels, of romantic love affairs, perhaps of milk baths. But they had no press agent, eighteen hundred years ago, when "Son Fong Quon" was written, and the play was given last week exactly as produced on its first night in Canton.

The great actor brings over with him an all star company, including two or three Chinese actresses. The amiable Mr. Delaca conducted me to a box in the rear of the house, from which I could see the stage through a cloud of smoke arising from a sea of black hats with serious, yellow faces under them. The box was quite large, and contained in addition to myself a white man and a Chinese woman, shooting her chatter of the intruders from up town became noticeably loud, they would glare back and say:—

"Too muchee talker!" It was for all the world like a box party at the Metropolitan; only it was all so different. But the elements of human nature were identical.

The play was being given "by request," and my friend, the communicative Chinaman, who had seen it many times, told me all about it. His version was corroborated by the versatile Mr. Delaca, who boasts, among his numerous accomplishments, the ability to understand Chinese.

In "Son Fong Quon" the great actor plays a female part, that of the young wife of a rich old warrior who has gone to fight a neighboring clan. At the time of my arrival he had been absent for two years. His son had also gone to the rescue of his fond father, who was held captive by the enemy. In the meantime the wife, forgetful of her liege lord, falls in love with a rich nobleman. A baby is born to her, and she is in despair of the return of her husband.



Fong Quon" is said to be based upon actual historical incidents.

A Master of Pantomime. Fon Chong Mai is undeniably an accomplished actor. His art is the most difficult art of the mime, the art of creating an illusion without the aid of stage environments.

His pantomime was superb. His impersonation of the false wife moved the audience deeply. His portrayal of the varying moods, even to one who had no idea of what it was all about, conveyed a feeling that here was primitive art.

Fancy an Irving or a Mansfield attempting to create an illusion on a perfectly bare stage, with no curtain, no scenery, no footlights, no callboys, and a maddening orchestra sprawled at the back, punctuating each sentence with the wall of weird string instruments or the deafening clash of great cymbals.

Could any English speaking actor interest his audience in a play when a placard, stuck up at the side of the stage, announces that ten years have flown without even the dropping of a curtain? Think you that by walking twice around the stage any actor of your knowledge could create the impression that he had gone on a two days' journey?

Like most of the Chinese dramas, "Son

I was fortunate in seeing both the attempts at suicide. The first time the unhappy woman personated by Fon Chong Mai attempted to drown herself in the well. Although it looked like a soap box covered with a silken scarf, you knew it was a well, for the old gardener with a horse's tail for a beard had just drawn a bucketful of water from it after much effort.

Fon Chong Mai jumped recklessly into the well, but was rescued by the faithful old servant to accompaniment of an outburst from the orchestra. This was a most thrilling moment. I have more than once sat in the top gallery of a Bowery theatre, during the course of some thrilling Western melodrama. In the old days before the gods had assumed the blasé air of the habitual theatre goer, but never have I seen such intensity of interest as was pictured on the faces of that throng of Chinamen.

Some had even mounted the very stage itself and stood grouped on the outer edges at either side, without a rebuke from either management or players.

Another Attempt. The second attempt at suicide was more elaborate. The preparations were made with due care. A chair was placed in the centre of the stage by an attendant. Propped against this was a long pole, surmounted by something that looked like a feather duster. My friend, the communicative Chinaman, said it was a tree.

Then Fon Chong Mai, with much elaborate explanation in pure Cantonese, proceeded to make another attempt to shuffle off this mortal coil. With a long scarf, and aided by his wonderful pantomime, the feather duster on the pole became a gibbet. But Woo Falk came to the rescue, and in the mêlée that followed I turned to my friend the Chinaman for an explanation.

"Him cuttee tee down," said that enthusiastic spectator. And I had to be satisfied. Finally the evening's entertainment came to an end, and the Chinamen all left their seats and filed solemnly out of the dingy little theatre to await the following evening, when the thread of the story would be resumed. Just how they knew it was over for the night was something of a puzzle, for as near as I could judge there was no denouement, and certainly there was no curtain to be rung down.

Fon Chong Mai at Close Range. Back of the little stage, in the large dressing room curtained off at one end for the comfort of the ladies of the company, I was much interested in studying the personality of the great tragedian and female impersonator. Despite the fact that my interpreter was rather uncertain of his lines, I fully realized that I was in the presence of an intellectual giant.

Fon Chong Mai has never seen a dramatic performance other than in Chinese. Nor has he any curiosity to visit our American playhouses and compare his own primitive methods with our modern achievements in stagecraft. He is perfectly content in the traditions of his fathers, nor does he realize that the rest of the world has left him far behind. I found him to be a young man of thirty, with a plastic face, keen, glittering eyes, and a wonderful voice, ranging from the guttural gruffness of the soldier to the purring staccato tones of the intriguing wife. Fon Chong Mai comes of a family of celebrated actors, and for three hundred years they have been at the head of their profession in Canton.

A Man of Learning. I found him to be a young man of much learning. Indeed, how could he be otherwise? His repertoire is large, and some of his plays fill a hundred volumes. Think of the man's memory! Think of the mental training and the intellectual force and energy necessary to interpret these dusty old plays! And yet Fon Chong Mai is an enthusiast.

He has made much money. He is rich. His salary at the Choy Ting Quoy in Doyers street is a record breaker, and he has a year's contract. His costumes are marvels of Oriental richness. Mr. Delaca is authority for the statement that some of them are valued at as much as \$1,500 apiece.

In the dressing room behind the scenes, where joss lamps throw their faint glow over a little altar, and where the air is heavy with incense, hung a mass of the most exquisite gowns. Embroidery in gold and silver adorned many of them, and all were of rich texture and bewildering tints. Some are heirlooms, passed down from other generations, and the entire collection represents the accumulation of several lifetimes.

Century Old Traditions. It was useless to ask many questions, for Fon Chong Mai was weary after his night's work. I wanted to ask him how he would like to appear on the American stage, with all its accessories, but it was a futile thought. He knew nothing of any stage save his own. That had sufficed for his ancestors, and it sufficed for him. The passing of the centuries has left no imprint upon the art of the Chinese actor.

And yet he has the personality and the magnetism without which no actor is great. He exercises a complete control over his Oriental auditors. His every gesture, his every trick of voice, is to them the height of art. The Chinese repudiate reforms, whether in the government of their country or in the traditions of their stage. And who shall say that Fon Chong Mai is not a wise man?

The Graphic Story of the Race War in North and South Carolina.—Concluded from the Preceding Page.

the Tolbert hunt having been abandoned. Wherever a negro was found he was shot down. It is doubtful if any of the men who had a hand in the shooting of Etheridge have been killed. Nearly all of those who were slain were not only innocent of participating in the earlier trouble and of firing on the whites at Piney Grove Church, but were unarmed. When a negro was found no questions were asked. He had merely to run and the mob riddled his back with buckshot and bullets. At one place by the roads there was a pile of five dead negroes as late as Thursday afternoon.

While the excitement was at its height a movement was started to burn the houses of the Tolberts. Wiser counsel prevailed, and this was not done. Early this week there was a mass meeting at Greenwood, at which the citizens of the county passed resolutions declaring that the Tolberts were entirely to blame, and that they ought not return to their county. At the same time the meeting pledged itself to see that the property of the Tolberts was protected.

The excitement caused by the election riots had very bad effect on the community throughout that section of the State. All sorts of stories were told, tending to inflame the minds of the democrats. It was said that R. L. Henderson told all the negroes the day before election to go to the polls armed. As a matter of fact, no white man ever goes unarmed in South Carolina. He always carries a pistol and usually a dirk knife or a dagger. On extra occasions—like a negro hunt or a hunt for white republicans—he adds a rifle or a shotgun to his armament.

Deaths of Violence. This excitement over the killing caused a number of deaths of violence. A party of whites rode past Piney Grove Church as late as Monday of this week and fired into the house of an old colored woman, Kennedy McCaslin, a through the head. Kennedy McCaslin, a through the head, and Charles Hall, a colored farmer, the same day got into an argument over the division of some cotton, and Hall shot McCaslin in the head. John Fell, white at a place near Abbeville, accused a negro of theft. The negro denied the charge and Fell shot him dead.

During all this reign of bloodshed Governor Ellerbe, of South Carolina, sat in the Executive Chamber at Columbia and never raised a hand to quell the disturbance. He told me in Columbia, after quiet had been restored, that the reason he did not send troops was that he had none to send. Everybody else in South Carolina says that the reason he did not send troops was because he was afraid of being scolded by Senator Tillman.

Both Governor Ellerbe and Senator Tillman are in favor of shooting colored men in order to keep them in subjection. Tillman himself participated in the great Hamburg riot in 1856. In speaking of the Governor's conduct, a Greenville paper said that the Governor on Tuesday, when there was rioting at the polls, remained calm, and that on Wednesday, when white men were hunting the colored men all over Greenwood county, he became calmer still. On Wednesday, when the rioting reached its climax, the Governor was as serene as a summer morning, and on Saturday, when the trouble was all over and most of the white men had put away their guns, the Governor sent an impassioned

despatch to Greenwood demanding that the rioting stop.

Governor Ellerbe's Position. Governor Ellerbe told me in Columbia on Monday following the massacre that the Sheriff of Greenwood county telegraphed him for two hundred rifles and a lot of ammunition, but that he did not send them because he feared the guns would be used in killing more negroes.

So if the Governor did not check the killing of negroes, he at least has the mournful satisfaction of not having accelerated it. There is just one good thing that the Governor has done. He probably prevented the lynching of John R. Tolbert and one of his sons when they arrived in Columbia several days after the killing. Several companies of the North Carolina Volunteers had just been disbanded and were threatening to take the lives of any Tolbert they could find, when John R. Tolbert and his son arrived at the State Capitol. Major Tolbert, although sorely wounded, was as cool as though an election had not been held in South Carolina. The

Governor suggested that he and his son go to the penitentiary, where they could have their wounds dressed and be protected against the mob.

"I am not afraid of any mob that ever was," said Major Tolbert. "I have taken care of myself without your help so far, and I reckon I can take care of myself to the end of the hunt." Finally the Governor persuaded Tolbert and his son to go to the penitentiary, and orders were issued to the guard to fire on any person who tried to break into the prison. Forty-six buckshot were taken out of Tolbert in prison.

And the Tolberts? Major Tolbert has returned to his post as Collector of the Port at Charleston. All the other Tolberts except those badly wounded, together with their relatives and associates, have gone to Washington to get satisfaction through federal interference. The burning question of the hour is what will become of the Tolberts. The white men's party around Greenwood declare that if they return to their homes they will be killed and

their houses will be burned over their dead bodies. This is evidently no joke. It has happened again and again to white republicans all over the South. It has happened as frequently in South Carolina as in any other State. What a South Carolina mob can do when aroused was shown at Lake City, where the colored Postmaster and his entire family were either murdered or burned to death. Apparently the average country white in South Carolina has made up his mind to use the shotgun and the torch as long as the negroes are appointed to office or are encouraged to be active in politics.

The best information I can get about the Tolbert character leads me to express the opinion that they will go back to Greenwood county. They own a large number of houses there, and, as already stated, about ten thousand acres of land. They all believe that they acted within their right on election day and they are all brave men. It takes a man of courage to be a republican in South Carolina. So I think the Tolberts will return to their homes whether they go backed up by federal troops or not.