

“C. S. A.”  
by George Arnold

Robert Bagley was one of those odd geniuses who seem to have no defined sphere or mission here on this lower earth. He was always engaging in a grand speculation of some sort, which was sure to make a fortune for him; and something was certain to frustrate his plans — some rare and almost impossible combination of circumstances, that nobody could have foreseen — just when the future smiled most brightly upon him.

He began life in a mercantile countinghouse; but found commerce slow in its remuneration, so he took to the stock exchange. — This soon exhausted the small capital he possessed, and a wealthy uncle purchased a share in a newspaper for the young man. Robert wrote the money articles, and used them with some success in his stockjobbing operations, but the newspaper shortly died, and my hero became agent for a patent connected with a printing press. The fortune he had confidently expected did not suddenly accrue to him; so he dropped this patent for another; and falling in with some political people, tried to get a fat berth in the Patent Office at Washington.

He failed, but made a little money out of a contract for illustrating Patent Reports, which he farmed out to some engravers of his acquaintance. The engraving business having been thus brought to his notice, he endeavored to perfect the zincographic process to supersede the use of boxwood, and, in time, made some very interesting discoveries. Among these was the fact that the new process was a total failure.

During one of his “flush” periods, he had lent three hundred dollars to a friend who was about to go to Cuba with a cargo of ice. This friend now returned with a shipload of cigars and oranges, and offered to pay Bagley in trade. He took the amount then in cigars, and opened a neat little store in Broadway for their sale. It was near a theatre, and in time, the actors and managers made it a sort of rendezvous. Robert sold his cigar store next winter, and undertook the management of the theatre.

It was during the season that the great diamond robbery was perpetrated, when Mad’lle de Bavarde lost the splendid jewels given her by Baron von Kowhingen, at Vienna.

The case was a very interesting one, involving much time and research, and Bagley followed it up with the delight of a man who has talent, hitherto undeveloped, for intrigue and diplomacy. He evinced so much skill and perseverance, and outdid even the shrewdest detective officer so cleverly, that his friends advised him to adhere to the business, and he did. The theatrical management was unsuccessful, but the ex-manager soon held a high position in the detective police.

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While Bagley was still the lessee and director of the theater, a little episode occurred which has a very material bearing upon this story.

It was just at dusk, and the manager was standing in front of his house, as managers love so, at about the time when the audience begin to gather around the still-closed apertures of the ticket office. He was lost in some dream of the future or some memory of the past, and paid little attention to the external world about him, until recalled by a sudden and unusual request.

A lady, closely veiled, approached him in a hurried manner and begged his protection against the attentions of two men who had been following her and persecuting her with various vulgar flatteries. She seemed in great trepidation and alarm, and had appealed to Bagley, she said, because she knew him by sight, and by name, and had always considered him a polite and worthy gentleman.

The manager placed her in safety in the vestibule of the theatre, and confronted the two persons whose escort she had found so distasteful. They made some show of impertinence at first, but in a threat of the police, and a few vigorous words of reproof, they shrank away.

This was not an emergency to bring forth any astounding degree of heroic chivalry; but the lady, terrified as she was, magnified her deliverance in proportion to her magnitude of alarm, and was disposed to look upon Bagley as the preserver of her life, at the very least.

Her excitement and fear made her quite ill for a brief time, and Robert invited her to sit down in the box office until he could procure a glass of wine and water to overcome her faintness. She accepted, and the half hour's chat that then ensued was as pleasant as possible.

Finally, the clerk entered to open the office and the lady arose to go. Bagley, charmed by her beauty and conversation, gallantly offered her the use of his carriage which stood at the cottage door, and offered to drive her to her home. She consented, with evident gratitude, to this arrangement, and the ride to her residence — a handsome house in Twenty-Third Street, on the East side — was as agreeable as that chat in the box office had been.

On parting from Bagley, his charge gave him a card, and invited him to call upon her when she could thank him in a more composed and tranquil manner for his kindness.

This, he promised both himself and her, he would speedily do; but when he arrived at the theatre again, and examined the card, he was mortified to find that it was blank. Undoubtedly she had given it to him by mistake.

After this, I must confess that the manager's mind was very much haunted by the memory of the bright eyes and pleasant smile of the *inconnue*. He met her, on Broadway, too, just often enough to keep those memories vivid, and always received a very friendly recognition: but did not have an opportunity to speak with her; so he could not learn her address.

He drove through Twenty-Third Street certainly not less than forty times, in the hope of recognizing the house, at the door of which he left her, but there were two consecutive blocks precisely alike, externally, and no sign of the bright eyes that haunted him at any window he passed.

The business of observing persons whose intentions are hostile to the Government of the United States, and of collecting facts which can assure their conviction and imprisonment, is much more widely pursued, just now, than many people imagine.

There are hosts of deputy marshals, secret agents and similar officials, quietly working away in our midst, unknown to any around them; and the man whose belief or practice is disloyal, must be wonderfully shrewd to escape the Argus eyes whose only care is to note his every word and deed.

The reputation that Robert Bagley had gained in connection with the detective service, attracted the attention of those in power, and resulted in his appointment as a deputy marshal entrusted with important secret service in this department. A tough and knotty case was given to him to unravel — as the marshal observed, “to cut his teeth upon”; and he devoted his entire energies to its “working up,” as it is technically termed.

The facts were these: A wealthy gentleman, residing in a small town in New York State, had early in the present troubles, hoisted a Confederate flag upon his house, and used very positive language concerning what he was pleased to call “an unjust, unholy, and villainous war of conquest.” A little later, he was known to be purchasing arms and ammunition, in considerable quantities; but no one could tell how he disposed of them. Then he bought a light draught, fast-sailing, screw steamer, and sent her off, ostensibly for a Cuban port, in ballast; and a merchant vessel, arriving a few days later, reported having spoken [to] such a steamer off Cape Hatteras under Confederate colors.

All this was very much against the wealthy gentleman aforesaid; and some trustworthy agents were sent to look into his proceedings. — They found, however, that a change had come over the spirit of his dream, apparently. His house now bore the biggest Federal flag in the county, and his conversation was as sound for the Union as that of General Scott himself could be. Not a sign or shadow of disloyalty could be found about him or his premises, and the detectives were sore puzzled.

Thus the case stood when it came to Bagley’s hands, and promised him all the work he could desire.

He employed several agents to keep track of everything that the suspected man did and said; of all his money investments and their results; of the letters he mailed and received; of the visitors he entertained; in a word his whole life, in public and private.

These researches and investigations were crowned with a discovery, at length. Three trunks, large, strongly made, and heavy, arrived at the railroad depot one night, by the late train. They were directed thus:

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“C.S.A.  
“GRANT, SHELBY, ESQ.,  
“R—, N.Y.”

Grant Shelby was the name of the suspected gentleman.

Bagley marveled much at the daring recklessness of a man who would openly receive packages marked with the initials of the “Confederate States of America.”

“Where are these trunks?” he asked of the agent who brought the intelligence to his hotel.

“At the depot.”

“What is in them?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

The order was well obeyed. One of the trunks contained jewelry, toilet articles, and a thick MS volume, marked with the Confederate initials — “C.S.A.” — the others contained ladies’ wearing apparel, money, books, music etc.

“Bring me the manuscript volume,” commanded Bagley.

It was brought to him unopened, and the trunks were locked again, to be left till Mr. Shelby should remove them. If the MS contained anything to criminate him, he was then to be arrested. If not the destination of the baggage was to be carefully watched, and further development awaited.

The MS was a diary, written in a feminine handwriting. The first entries were dated “New Orleans,” and Bagley made sure that he had found a prize, until he saw that the diary commenced in 1857. Turning over the leaves for a later date, he caught sight of his own name and eagerly perused the pages that referred to him.

I do not know that such a course is pardonable to delicate minds: but all governments are essentially Jesuitical in the practice of the theory that “Ends justify Means”; and if we have a government at all we must at times take liberties with private affairs.

The entries that referred to Bagley were not made in New Orleans, but in New York. — The writer of the diary was a woman of cultivation and intelligence, evidently, who had passed her childhood in the South, but had been educated in the North; and her sympathies were plainly Northern, though she had made frequent trips to her early home.

None lately, however. She had returned, according to the diary, from New Orleans to New York, about the first of January (1861) with the design of avoiding the whole of the revolutionary troubles that bid fair to wreck and ruin the entire country below Mason & Dixon’s line. Not long after her arrival in the Northern metropolis, she experienced an adventure that she glowingly described in two-and-a-half pages of her journal. It was the little episode I have related; and thus it was that Bagley found his own name mentioned in the volume that had so oddly fallen under

his eyes! In a word, the diary was none other than the unknown lady's to whom he had extended his protection that evening in front of the theatre.

I am ashamed to say that my hero read this portion with an absorbing interest, although he must have known that there was nothing whatever that could throw any light upon the treasonable proclivities of Mr. Shelby.

Perhaps he blushed — and perhaps not — to find himself spoken of as “a splendid fellow,” “handsome,” “chivalrous,” and “entertaining.” Perhaps he was pleased to learn that his *inconnue* had been “ridiculously anxious for him to call,” and “quite *desesperee*,” that he did not; how she met him in Broadway and how she exclaimed, mentally with Shakespeare:

“I would that Heaven had sent me such a man.”

“By Jove you shall have just such a man, my dear girl!” involuntarily exclaimed Bagley, somewhat excited by the vision that arose before him.

“Mr. Shelby has a visitor today, sir,” said one of the secret agents, who soon after entered. “A young lady, sir — very pretty. Came down in the eleven o'clock train today.”

“Baggage?”

“Only a guitar case and a little dog, sir.”

Bagley was prompt in having the diary returned to the trunk whence it had been taken — an easy proceeding enough, as the railroad baggage master was one of his secret corps.

It was done just in time, too; for Shelby came to the depot for the trunks that same afternoon.

With him came Bagley's friend, the writer of the diary. Of course, Robert was on the spot, and a happy recognition took place. In shaking hands the young lady — who seemed a little trepidated and blushed prettily, dropped her handkerchief. Bagley hastened to pick it up, and saw in one corner the initials, “C.S.A.,” neatly embroidered.

The truth flashed upon him. He had suspected before that these letters might represent a personal cognomen, as well as a rebellious government; and now he was sure of it.

He briefly related the fact of her having given him a blank card, and begged her for her name.

“Come here Uncle Grant!” she cried, and Mr. Shelby, who had been busying himself with the baggage, approached.

“This is my uncle, Mr. Shelby, Mr. Bagley,” she said, “who I am visiting.”

The gentlemen expressed themselves proud of each other's acquaintanceship.

“Now, uncle, introduce me to Mr. Bagley,” laughed the niece. “We are excellent friends, but he does not know my name.”

Mr. Shelby looked puzzled.

“Your niece tells the simple truth, sir” said Bagley. “The mystery can be easily explained, however.”

“Then, Mr. Bagley, I am happy to present to you my niece, Miss Arrowsmith,” replied Shelby. “And now, Caroline, what does all this mean?”

“Caroline? Is your first name Caroline? — Pardon me, but I have an object in knowing your entire name.”

“Caroline Shelby Arrowsmith, at your service.”

“C.S.A.”

“They are my initials, Mr. Bagley”

“Ha!”

Mr. Bagley was observed to be very thoughtful for some moments.

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Now I know very well that the present habit of romance writers is, to finish up their works as if the world were about coming to an end. The readers, for all I know, demand that every character in the story shall be satisfactorily accounted for and settled, so that no earthly interest can adhere to her or him hereafter. — Marriage and death are the means employed to destroy the vitality of our heroes and heroines, and keep the reader from ever inquiring further into their fortunes.

I do not see why this custom should have become so universal with the gentlemen of my cloth; but it has, till the conclusion of a modern novel is hardly more than a catalogue of quietness.

I mean to rebel against the fashion (as rebellion now is the order of the day, and my family name warrants me in such a course) and to refuse my readers any knowledge of the termination of the labors of Mr. Bagley. I am not wantonly cruel, so I will not withhold from you the fact that he married Miss Arrowsmith, but I positively decline to inform you whether Mr. Shelby was proven to be a good and patriotic citizen of the Union, or a dangerous and treasonable enemy, now confined within the gloomy casemented walls of Fort Lafayette.

And the best reason I have for not telling you of his fate is, that I know nothing about it myself.

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