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By **MARCUS B. CHRISTIAN**

## The Theory of the Poisoning of Oscar J. Dunn

THE death of Oscar J. Dunn, Negro Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana, on November 22, 1871, produced some of the most sensational charges contained in the history of a state long famous for its political melodrama. Many contemporaries seemed firmly convinced that he was poisoned; a few aging witnesses still voice similar convictions today.<sup>1</sup> There was—and still is—no absolute proof that such accusations are true, but chaotic political conditions of that day were so productive of rumor, misrepresentation, and libel that the shadow of suspicion has fallen upon the physicians who attended Dunn during his last illness, and even his intimate friends, associates, and the members of his household are not wholly free from it. His death could have been a perfectly natural one. On the other hand, it might also have been the result of a deeply laid homicide plot.

Many facts may be advanced to support the latter hypothesis. Dunn's political influence was a major threat to those who wished to manipulate the freedmen's vote for their personal advancement. He was the embodiment of political integrity,<sup>2</sup> and he, more than any other local Negro, represented the powerful, wise, and restraining influence necessary in leading the illiterate freedmen into that political Promised Land where they would have been removed from the blandishments of unscrupulous Republicans and Democrats. This portion of the Negro group needed the type of honest, calm, and sincere leadership as exemplified by Dunn's career, a broad outline of which not only disproves the "cornfield-to-Congress" theme of biased historians, but also reveals additional reasons why his death might have been a necessary factor in the political survival of others.

Dunn was born at New Orleans in 1826.<sup>3</sup> He was the son of a free woman of color, who kept a rooming-house for white actors and actresses. His father's identity is not known, but his step-father was a mulatto stage carpenter named Dunn, whose name young Oscar took as his own.<sup>4</sup> In his youth he was apprenticed to the large contracting firm of Wilson and Patterson to learn painting and plastering, but he disliked these trades, and developed such a strong aversion to them that he ran away from his employers in December, 1841. Shortly after his escape the firm published a notice in the *Daily Picayune*, offering a reward of \$5 for his capture.<sup>5</sup> The advertisement, embellished with the picture of a run-

ning Negro, later gave rise to the erroneous belief that Dunn had once been a slave.<sup>6</sup>

It was about this time that the actors and singers who lived at Dunn's home began to teach him the art of elocution, the means by which he acquired that facility of sound language which later distinguished him upon his entry into public life. They also gave him a rudimentary training as a musician—a calling for which he evinced a remarkable aptitude.<sup>7</sup> A few years later he began work as a barber upon Mississippi River steamboats.<sup>8</sup> Sometime during his early manhood he met John Parsons, a kindly Negro barber, whose business he is said to have acquired.<sup>9</sup> Parsons gave Dunn music lessons on the guitar and other instruments, and later joined hands with T. J. Martin, a free colored musician and composer of note, to further his protege's training. Their pupil proved such an apt one that his role as house-painter and steamboat barber was soon changed to that of music teacher.<sup>10</sup>

Although he was only 35 years old when the Civil War came, available records fail to show that Dunn served in any military capacity.<sup>11</sup> Towards the end of the struggle, he opened an "intelligence office," where "good servants and field hands" were hired out to persons in the city and surrounding parishes. As the owner of this employment agency, his activities became more closely identified with the laboring class of Negroes. In 1865 he began to take a prominent part in the struggle for Negro suffrage then being waged by the *New Orleans Tribune*, an extremely militant Negro daily published in English and French. Within a few months he became one of the founders of the Universal Suffrage Association, and treasurer of its State Central Committee.<sup>12</sup> By August, 1865, he was taking money from his own pockets to defray the expenses incurred in the registering of all Louisiana Negroes eligible to vote.<sup>13</sup> In the following months he and his associates conducted an independent election in which Henry Clay Warmoth, a white ex-army officer, was chosen as their "territorial delegate" to Congress, and given nearly a thousand dollars for his personal expenses.<sup>14</sup>

When the Freedmen's Bureau began in 1865, Dunn was made one of its investigating agents whose duty was to protect the rights of freedmen.<sup>15</sup> He later became secretary of the Advisory Committee of the Freedmen's Saving and Trust Company, of New Orleans—a branch of the national institution of the same name.<sup>16</sup> In 1866 he organized the People's Bakery, a concern owned and operated by the Louisiana Association of Workingmen, with a capital stock of \$10,000.<sup>17</sup> Because of their determined struggle for Negro suffrage, and their apparent willingness to sanction the re-convening of the rump Constitutional Convention of 1864, Dunn, the *Tribune*, and their white associates were directly blamed for the bloody Mechanic's Hall Riot of July 30, 1866, but he

continued his struggle for universal suffrage until the passage of the Reconstruction Acts of March 2, 1867. In August of that year, while still operating his employment agency, he was one of the six Negroes appointed to positions on the city's upper and lower boards of aldermen by Gen. P. H. Sheridan.<sup>18</sup> With the drawing up of the new state constitution, and the approach of the first state election to be conducted under manhood suffrage, he was nominated lieutenant governor in the Radical Republican Convention of February, 1868, after Francis E. Dumas, a highly educated and wealthy octroon, following the dictates of the *Tribune*, had refused that body's nomination to the same post. Firmly confident of his hold upon the Negro masses, Dunn turned from the wealthy, educated, and influential men of the former free colored class, and cast his lot with the white carpetbagger, Warmoth, who had already been befriended and disavowed by the *Tribune* because of his political treachery. This was a wise decision in one respect; he and Warmoth triumphed over their *Tribune*-sponsored rivals in the gubernatorial election of April, 1868.

Long before the end of their term of office, however, Dunn began to realize the truth contained in the *Tribune's* unequivocal declaration that political affinity with Warmoth was disrepute.<sup>20</sup> By 1871 the political perspectives of both men had become so divergent that another split was imminent in the ranks of the Conservative Republicans. The star of Warmoth's destiny had always set a middle course in nearly everything, but this middle course was that of an opportunist who was ready to turn at a moment's notice to the positive right or left, when the action was sure to serve his purpose and advance him politically, socially, or financially. His sudden moves to the right and left soon alienated many of his best friends and associates, and changed them into bitter, implacable enemies. Among these were the leaders of the Customhouse wing of the Republican party, Lieutenant Governor Dunn, Collector of Customs James F. Casey, brother-in-law of Mrs. Grant, Speaker of the House of Representatives George W. Carter, and U. S. Marshal Stephen F. Packard.<sup>21</sup> The *Daily Picayune's* delineation of the governor as a "war-moth," whose extermination was necessary in order to achieve decent politics, was essentially a sincere description of the man who influenced the course of Louisiana's destiny. It was he who sowed the dragon's teeth of political discord, producing thereby *de facto* and *de jure* governments, which finally ended with the "Hayes' Bargain" of 1876 and the triumph of the Democrats.

As the acknowledged head of the powerful Customhouse group, Dunn assayed the difficult task of "exterminating" Warmoth. Circumstances greatly favored him at the outset of the struggle, despite the fact that he was a Negro. His greatest asset was his proverbial

honesty. The first opportunity came when a severe food accident incapacitated Warmoth for several months and Dunn was called upon to serve as acting governor. While steadily assuming the offensive in his new position, he also executed his gubernatorial duties so well that a portion of the Democratic press frankly declared that it preferred a "nigger" governor to a white carpetbagger.<sup>22</sup> Seeing the party that he had helped to create rent by internecine strife, the Negro lieutenant governor began to marshal his forces.

In July, 1871, he wrote to John Simms, Negro member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, declaring that "An effort is being made to sell us out to the Democrats, by the Governor, and we must nip it in the bud." Calling attention to Warmoth's recent appointments of known Democrats to public offices, he declared: "We have remonstrated with him, but it is still continued, and it is said that he declares that if elected in 1872, no colored man shall hold any office."<sup>23</sup>

He also wrote to Horace Greeley, the influential publisher of the New York *Tribune*, complaining that "the young man who now occupies the executive chair of Louisiana, whose crimes against his party and his people you charitably ignore, and whose championship you so boldly assume, is pre-eminently the prototype and prince of the tribe of carpet-baggers who seem to be your pet aversion." He bluntly warned the great publisher and aspirant to the presidential chair that though his newspaper continued to champion Warmoth's cause, "we cannot and will not support him."<sup>24</sup> This threat was soon carried out in August, 1871, when the Republican State Convention was called and Dunn was elected president of the body. Warmoth, suddenly appearing on crutches before the assembly, was unsuccessful in his attempt to bolt it, and later set up a rival one in another building.<sup>25</sup>

During the period that the Dunn-Warmoth imbroglio lasted political morale was at a low ebb. Dishonesty and a desire for sudden wealth slashed across race and party lines, leaving but a precious few with untainted names and clean hands. Upon notable occasions white Democrats in the state legislature overcame their scruples against an odious measure, and voted for its enactment along with white and Negro Republicans, while the *Tribune*, Negro Radical Republican organ, excoriated all.<sup>26</sup> On another occasion, when several white Democrats became drunk in the senate chamber, it was this same Negro-owned and -edited newspaper that jibingly reminded them that it might have been better had they substituted pride of character for their boasted pride of race.<sup>27</sup> Despite similar instances of white Democratic shortcomings, there was a distinct racial bias in most of the graver political charges manufactured for white popular consumption. This stereotyped pro-Southern view was beautifully expressed by a New Orleans correspondent, who

wrote to the *New York World* at this time, declaring that

#### NEGRO BARBERS AND BOOTBLACKS

turned lawmakers, even though they cannot read or write their names, lord it over the intelligent and refined planters and merchants who were lately their masters, taxing them down to poverty, and aided by thieving carpet-baggers and soulless scalawags who have no thought that is not mercenary, and will do no act that does not promise to bring the money of other people into their own plunder stuffed pockets.<sup>28</sup>

As President of the Louisiana senate, Dunn was probably one of the ex-barbers referred to, but the fact was wholly ignored that he was the acknowledged leader of the growing reform movement, and that the general demand for reform had been voiced by constituents in all walks of life—white and black alike. In the autumn of 1871, while the New Orleans Citizens' Association was planning an inspection and auditing of the city's records, Dunn and his white carpetbag superior began to gird themselves for the final contest which would decide into whose hands would rest the supreme power of the major political party of the state. Supported by influential white and Negro leaders, Dunn raised the cry of reform. This cry was likewise raised by Warmoth and his associates, who, eschewing the policies of the so-called "Grant Republicans," gravitated more and more towards the Liberal Republican movement. Both factions began to court the favor of, and appeal to, a disgruntled Democratic minority as the probable balance of power between them.<sup>29</sup> Warmoth seems to have had some slight success in this direction, for when Dunn and Packard offered to abandon equal rights and mixed schools legislation in return for Democratic assistance in the defeat of Warmoth, their offer was rejected.<sup>30</sup>

In the latter part of November, when recriminations had become the order of the day between the leaders and their respective factions, and the reform controversy was being discussed in the columns of the daily press, Dunn began to complain of a slight illness. His ailment appeared to be only a slight cold at first, and, like most men of a robust constitution, he ignored it to some extent, believing that it would eventually disappear. When he became convinced that the cold was not "wearing off," he began to take Cherry Pectoral, a patent medicine commonly employed in cases of pulmonary complaints.<sup>31</sup> But the cold, which the attending physician afterwards described as "pulmonary catarrh," continued to harass him for a few weeks. Although he experienced some difficulty in breathing, and became affected with a slight hoarseness, he kept at work until a few days prior to his death. During this period his mental condition alternated between marked depression and high spirits. Speaking before a church audience upon one oc-

casian, he declared that he had not been feeling well for some time, and that this might be his last appearance before them.<sup>32</sup> The Saturday evening prior to his death, however, he appeared to be in excellent spirits when he attended a meeting of the Third Ward Radical Club and delivered an unusually humorous speech.<sup>33</sup> Sunday morning he ate a hearty breakfast; that afternoon he was in the company of Marshal Packard. He was still in high spirits when they parted at about 3:30, and he went home to dinner. A few hours after dinner, between five and six o'clock, he was attacked with a "violent vomiting and purging" which continued until the afternoon of the following day. On that evening Dr. E. D. Beach, the family physician, was called upon, but his skill could not relieve the ailing man. The weather, which had continued warm for several days, suddenly changed and grew colder on the second day that Dunn was confined to his bed. This might have aggravated his illness, the first reports of which were given as pneumonia. Doctor Beach made two more calls at the Dunn home during the night. Upon his second call he found the sick man's condition greatly altered, and his "brain evidently much affected." The winds rose higher, the weather grew colder, and Dunn's condition grew steadily worse. At two o'clock Tuesday morning he became unconscious. Several hours later, when the day had begun, Marshal Packard called, and seeing the serious condition of his friend, hurriedly summoned another physician named Dr. Scott. When the latter arrived, he declared that Dunn was suffering congestion of the brain and lungs—caused by excessive vomiting. Later in the day other physicians were called into consultation, among them Drs. Warren Stone, S. R. Hurd, L. C. Roudanez, and another named Gaudet. By this time the patient was beyond all hope.

At 10 o'clock that night Doctor Scott made his last call, and upon leaving, advised the members of the family that all further calls would be futile. He predicted that death would come within an hour. But the hour passed and the dying man was still clinging to life. At 1:30 A. M. Doctor Hurd called and said that death could be expected hourly, either from suffocation or asphyxia, as water had entered the patient's lungs. Although still unconscious, the once-powerful body was making its last desperate efforts to free itself from the coma that enveloped it and the numbness which crept steadily from limb to limb. In the early hours of the morning Dunn was still clinging to the slender thread of life. During those last hours the hush of the room was broken by "a regular gurgling sob, that occasionally changed to a harsh rattle." His nurse, "an intelligent quadroon woman," gently wiped the drops of blood and mucus from his lips, and murmured softly: "Jesus is coming—Jesus will soon be here to take you away." Only these words were uttered in the hushed stillness of the room, "and her soothing, pitying voice,

sounded like the voice of a mother lulling into quiet a suffering child." Several times Mrs. Dunn came to the bedside and stood looking down at the rapidly wasting figure of her husband. Then, with a noticeable shudder, she shrank back into an adjoining room. The gurgling sobs continued, "now strong, now weak, after convulsing as if in agony the form of the dying man." After an unusually severe paroxysm, the nurse again bent over him and whispered: "Jesus will soon be here; Jesus will soon bring relief." The dying man opened his eyes and gazed upon the woman's face as she bent over him and his blank stare mirrored the baffled confusion of his soul. His eyes were filled "almost with a look of wonder," but beyond this they gave no other sign of recognition. "Short as was his illness," wrote the reporter of the *Times*, "disease has shrunken his features, and the great cavities of his eyes give a weird expression most unnatural." At three o'clock, when the watchers imagined that they perceived favorable signs of recovery, Doctor Hurd was sent for, but when he arrived, he pronounced Dunn's condition as being much worse.

When five o'clock came, and with it the rattle of the market carts over the stony cobbles of the street, a friend placed his fingers to the dying man's pulse, and found it quite gone, although he still breathed. The women watchers, exhausted from their long vigil at the bedside, had thrown their shawls over their shoulders and lain down to await the end. The men, similarly spent, sat nodding before the large fire that still burned in the grate. From three o'clock to half-past five there had been only one everpresent sound beating upon their ears—the "heavy sob of the sufferer breaking at intervals on the hushed night." At 5:30 the sobbing grew heavier and the fierce rattle in his throat was resumed. Then the rattle changed to a gurgle and died away in a fainter sob. The watchers drew closer to the bedside, instinctively feeling that death was near. At 5:50 the sobbing became almost convulsive. Once or twice Dunn seemed to be struggling for breath and then grew so calm that he appeared to be peacefully sleeping. At six o'clock, when the morning fire alarm bell rang twice with a dull clang, a momentary quiver ran through the dying man's body. The body slowly relaxed. Oscar J. Dunn was dead.<sup>84</sup>

The fact that the two major Republican factions of the state were locked in a death-struggle for survival was in itself enough to cast a cloud of suspicion over Dunn's sudden death. The questionable character of many who opposed him, and the high stakes of party leadership naturally heightened this suspicion, and set tongues upon swivels even before it seemed certain that his death was imminent. Many members of the Customhouse faction, attempting to snatch victory from what was to them certain defeat, seemed eager to encourage the rumor

that their leader had been poisoned, and thus weaken the influence and prestige of the opposing group. In this they were unwittingly aided by the poorer and more ignorant classes of Negroes, who looked upon Dunn as their leader, and could think only in terms of partisan politics, motives of revenge, and the most inconspicuous and efficient means by which an undesirable rival could be eliminated.

The poisoning rumor was strong even in the Dunn household. While the lieutenant governor lay dying in the front of the house, accusations of guilt were being whispered in the rear. An old Negro nurse boldly declared that she had been nursing for thirty years, but had "Never seen newmonia like dat." Another, coming down the stairs, selected this vantage point to say to all within hearing: "They've giv' pison to the Gov'nor—They've pisoned the Gov'nor."<sup>35</sup> This rumor spread from the house to the knots of people waiting about on the front porch and at the front gate. The newspapers, apparently half-believing these whispers, gave them wider publicity by repeating them.

The charge of poison gained such a wide circulation and so much credence that Coroner Creagh of New Orleans—either at the instigation of others, or acting upon his own volition—visited the Dunn home on the evening of November 22 for the purpose of performing an autopsy upon the body. He had been preceded by Doctor Avilla, police physician, who, apparently had been refused the privilege of examining the body, and was retiring when Coroner Creagh came in. Avilla, armed with his surgical tools, and accompanied by Doctor Castellanos, was persuaded to return and make preparations for an autopsy.

The coroner entered the house and explained to the friends and members of the household that there was a belief that Dunn had been poisoned. Under such circumstances, he said, the law made it his duty to hold a post-mortem examination and an inquest over the body. With James Lewis, an extremely conservative Negro city official acting as spokesman, the family and friends of the deceased declared that they were quite satisfied that he had died a natural death, and voiced the belief that an autopsy was unnecessary.<sup>36</sup> As a trained practitioner, Creagh probably felt that the mere belief of laymen, ignorant of medical science and unaware of the vagaries of poisoning symptoms, offered no conclusive evidence. Only about a week past a Negro woman living in one of the many houses of ill repute then operating in the city, had been taken to the Charity Hospital, suffering from what was described as "breakbone fever." Still complaining of pains in her head, back, and side, the woman had died within a few days. Suspecting poison as the cause of her death, Creagh instituted a fruitless search of medicines taken during her illness. His next step, the performing of an autopsy, revealed large amounts of arsenic in her stomach and intestinal tract.<sup>37</sup>

Coroner Creagh was ready to proceed with the autopsy, but when the family and friends protested against this as an unnecessary imposition upon them in their hour of grief, he explained that he had called only as a matter of form. He added, however, that since the deceased had been attended by seven physicians, who must be competent enough to determine the true cause of his death, he would be satisfied with their certificate to that effect. But the long delay in awaiting the physicians' arrival created additional ugly rumors. It was whispered that Dr. Warren Stone, one of the leading white physicians of the state, was unwilling to certify to the accuracy of the diagnosis in the certificate as reported by Doctor Beach. This was misconstrued into meaning that Doctor Stone was unwilling to make any statement declaring that Dunn's death had been caused by congestion of the brain.<sup>38</sup> Whether or not this was true, his signature and those of three other attending physicians—presumably white—appeared on the signed statement to that effect as published in the various newspapers. Coroner Creagh accepted the certificate and departed.

The names of Drs. Scott, Gaudet, D'Aquin, and Roudanez were among those omitted from the signed statement. Surely, the most convincing signature that could have been affixed to the document would have been that of the Negro physician, Roudanez, the highly educated, extremely militant owner of the *Tribune*—the newspaper that helped to make possible Dunn's ascendancy. For many years this organ had outlined and endorsed programs in which Dunn had taken a leading part. Even when he turned towards Warmoth, who the *Tribune* had rejected as a leader, the newspaper still spoke kindly of him—although, indirectly, his action meant the failure of the *Tribune* at a cost of \$35,000. Roudanez, an honor graduate of Paris' Faculty of Medicine, was certainly competent enough to make a proper diagnosis. Why were his name and that of Doctor Scott omitted?

On the day of Dunn's death added impetus was given to the poison rumor by Speaker Carter, who declared shortly after midday that he was feeling "frightfully" unwell, "in a way that he had never before experienced." He complained of prolonged cramps in his stomach, accompanied by a feeling of nausea, and freely expressed the fear that he had been "dosed." He finally decided to go and lie down on a sofa in the office of the *National Republican*, a newspaper which had been founded by him, Dunn, and others of the Customhouse group. An hour later he made his way to his home in downtown New Orleans, and went to bed. There his condition grew steadily worse; a burning fever, violent vomiting and purging, and later, delirium set in. Late that night, when he was partly unconscious, his physician, Doctor Austen, was called in. One newspaper, learning of the colonel's illness, published the

statement that he was "dying at midnight." But the stricken man, plied with hot drinks and steaming poultices to his abdomen, failed to die. Upon his recovery, he maintained so strongly that he had been "foully dealt with," that his physician published a signed statement, declaring that while his patient had been "a very sick man," he had been at some pains to combat his belief that he had been poisoned, believing it not to be so.<sup>39</sup>

With Carter seriously ill on the day of Dunn's funeral, poison rumors multiplied enormously. One statement declared that Governor Warmoth and Senator Harris, a prominent Republican, were both seriously ill—although the former had called at the Dunn home three times in succession on the night of the 21st, and later attended the funeral, where he served as a pall-bearer. Two other prominent white men, J. G. R. Pitkin and Judge George H. Braughn, were said to have been attacked by a disease, "the symptoms of which were similar to those in cases of poisoning." These rumors were not immediately denied or verified.<sup>40</sup> By this time the Dunn poisoning story had spread to the adjoining parishes.

It is extremely difficult to make a judicious appraisal of the poisoning theory which grew out of an atmosphere filled with political rivalry and animosity, clouded with suspicion, and teeming with bald, unsubstantiated rumors. Still, even though each clue must be examined with a great degree of caution, a careful weighing of evidence does not negate the Dunn poisoning theory. The various accounts of his last illness are strongly symptomatic of arsenical poisoning, the ancient weapon of the ambitious Borgia family. During slavery it was sometimes resorted to by rebellious slaves who wished to free themselves of tyrannical masters. Among toxic agents it was classed as "the most vulgar of all" by Lafcadio Hearn, noted New Orleans author, who declared that it was occasionally employed by Voudou practitioners during the post-Civil War decades.<sup>41</sup> Used in the home as a rat poison, it was frequently mistaken for Seidelitz powders—with fatal results. The fact that it mixes easily with food, has little taste, and no color, also renders it an admirable agent for those planning homicide. While it is true that there are no absolute proof that Dunn died of arsenic poisoning, his continual sighing, hoarseness, vomiting, muscular spasms, shrunken and pallid face, small, feeble, frequent pulse, stupor, collapse, and coma, point strongly in that direction.<sup>42</sup> This suspicion is heightened by the fact that evidence adduced from newspaper accounts shown conclusively that there was a considerable lack of agreement among attending physicians as to the cause of death.

There were, of course, other ways in which Dunn might have received the "fatal dose" which his chief biographer, Archie E. Perkins,

firmly believes was administered to him. It could have been taken in his own home by mistake. Or else, having been a painter in his early manhood, it was possible that he suffered from chronic arsenic poisoning, a common complaint caused by the use of that chemical in the manufacture of paint pigments. Assuming this to be true, his system could have been already weakened to that point where it would react unfavorably to any amount of arsenic introduced into it.<sup>43</sup> Oddly enough, as far back as 1866, he had found it difficult to breathe freely under certain conditions, although he was a man of hardy physique. Was this the "insidious" manner in which arsenic is known to react in cases of chronic poisoning? Viewed in this light, even the Cherry Pectoral which he took in the first stages of his illness might have contained a considerable amount of this drug which was much used in certain medicines for its tonic effect upon the nervous system.

To forego conjectures of accidental or chronic poisoning, and assume that Dunn was secretly poisoned is to imply that there was a motive for the deed. The next step is to search carefully for those who would profit most by it. The one person above all others who stood to gain from Dunn's death was Warmoth, whose political leadership was challenged by his Negro running-mate, and whose gubernatorial position was becoming more untenable because of serious threats of impeachment proceedings. Another who stood to profit greatly was State Senator P. B. S. Pinchback, who not only succeeded Dunn, but later supplanted Warmoth when impeachment proceedings began against him. Speaker Carter, next to the lieutenant governor in line of descent to the gubernatorial chair, was also a prospective gainer from Dunn's death. Collectively speaking, both political parties were also in a position to reap rich rewards if charges could be manipulated to the advantage of each. This, however, was a two-edged sword in the hands of either Republicans or Democrats. The latter might publicize it as an example of what a "vicious Democracy" of ex-slaveholders would not hesitate to do in the removal of a Negro—and a Republican one, too—from the political scene. Once raised, however, the Democrats might show better powers of persuasion and succeed in proving that the death of the lieutenant governor was a "deep-dyed plot" of his treacherous associates, who would not hesitate to do anything which would create a *cause celebre* so that troops could be rushed to Louisiana to protect the lives and property of "truly loyal" Republicans, and thus perpetuate that party's threatened power.

The advancing of motives without offering any proofs of homicide is admittedly unconvincing. It is here, nevertheless, that the case must rest. Examination of the dead man's bodily waste or the holding of an autopsy was the only means by which poisoning charges could be sub-

stantiated. This was prevented by Lewis, the family spokesman. Still, the fact cannot be ignored that even though proofs were lacking, the newspapers most concerned in combating the poison theory, seemed within themselves contradictory. The *Commercial Bulletin* of November 25 declared that the Republicans at the State House, a Warmoth faction of the legislature, expressed themselves as being fully convinced that Dunn's sudden death was to be used for the purpose of arousing a mob spirit among the Negroes. "This conviction has led them to believe that there was at the bottom of these reports a desire to lash the peculiar element into such a fury as might lead to the assassination of Gov. Warmoth, and the proclamation of Carter as Acting Governor," it said. Yet, in the next column, at the foot of the page, it reprinted this sinister, small paragraph, which had first appeared in the *New Orleans Patriot*, the Saturday just prior to Dunn's illness:

#### PROPHECY

**STARTLING RUMOR.**—A rumor has reached us to the effect that threats have been indulged in against the life of a prominent State official, in consequence of the active part he has taken in ridding the Republican party of his Excellency Governor Warmoth. The name is omitted, because we consider the rumor too incredible to merit serious consideration. We cannot see that the governor would be the gainer by such a taking off, unless he desires to manufacture thereby grounds upon which to base a serious Ku-Klux charge against the Democracy. We know, however, that there is a secret organization of notorious thugs, and that they are in the interest of his Excellency.<sup>44</sup>

A similar example of inconsistency was exhibited by the *Daily Picayune*. This newspaper declared that the governor and his friends at the State House were by no means loath to express the belief that Dunn's sudden and unexpected death was used to manufacture political effect. "The colored people were to be frenzied with the idea of poison," it explained, "a mob was to be raised, the Governor killed, and Speaker Carter was to be made Governor. Certainly a very interesting programme, and one which, if it had been carried into effect, would have afforded the lovers of the marvelous with plenty of sensation."<sup>45</sup> Yet, on the day following Dunn's death the *Picayune* had published an unsigned poem, entitled "The Death Struggle," the third and last stanza of which might serve as an epitome of Dunn's life and enigmatic death:

"My back is to the wall  
 And my face is to my foes;  
 I've lived a life of combat,  
 And borne what no one knows.  
 But in this mortal struggle  
 I stand—poor speck of dust,

Defiant—self-reliant,  
To die—if die I must!"<sup>46</sup>

1. Archie E. Perkins, "Oscar James Dunn," *Phylon*, second quarter, 1945, p. 117, footnote 62.
2. It is said that on one occasion, when a white man, interested in a bill before the state legislature, attempted to bribe Dunn, he replied with withering scorn: "Sir, my conscience is not for sale." H. F. Kletzing and W. H. Crogman, *Progress of a Race*, Atlanta, 1901, p. 185. ". . . Of blameless life, he was an example of integrity. He was poor, but could not be bought or bribed. Duty with him was more than riches. A fortune was offered for his signature; but he spurned the temptation." *Equality before the Law*, Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, . . . Delivered in the Senate of the United States, January 15, 1872, Washington, 1872, p. 5.
3. *Report of the Select Committee on the New Orleans Riots*, Washington, 1867, pp. 68-70. Testimony of Oscar J. Dunn.
4. *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orleans*, November 23, 1871.
5. *The Daily Picayune*, December 10, 1841.
6. Cf. Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 105; the *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, November 3, 23, 1871.
7. *L'Abeille*, November 23, 1871.
8. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 23, 1871.
9. Dunn probably worked in Parson's shop. Parsons is consistently listed in *New Orleans directories* as a proprietor. In 1859, while still in possession of his shop, he received information from white patrons which enabled him to warn a Northern Negro school teacher of his impending arrest. Betty Porter, "The History of Negro Education in Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 25, p. 735.
10. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 23, 1871.
11. His name does not appear among those of the 164 officers and non-commissioned officers of the First, Second, and Third Louisiana Native Guards listed in Joseph T. Wilson's *The Black Phalanx*, Springfield, 1868, pp. 176-179.
12. *The New Orleans Tribune*, June 17, 1865; *Report of the Select Committee*, p. 69.
13. *The Tribune*, September 2, 1865.
14. *Ibid.*, November 3, 1865; Henry Clay Warmoth, *War, Politics and Reconstruction*, New York, 1930, p. x.
15. *Report of the Select Committee*, p. 69.
16. *The Tribune*, July 25, 1867.
17. *Ibid.*, March 7, 1866; July 19, 1866.
18. *The New Orleans Crescent*, August 2, 1867.
19. Warmoth, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-55.
20. *The Tribune*, February 28, 1869. "A man who accepted an office, without deference to popular will and from such a man as the Governor, political affinity with whom is disrepute, could not be one, who is jealous of his own good-fame and of the confidence of our people."
21. Warmoth, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-110.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 114-117.
26. *The Tribune* editorial, "The Printing Bill," January 26, 1869, and similarly captioned editorial of February 16, 1869.
27. *Ibid.*, editorial, "Pride of Race," February 27, 1869.
28. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 11, 1871, quoting from the *New York World*.
29. *The New Orleans Times*, editorial, "A Negro Party," November 21, 1871.
30. Ella Lonn, *History of Reconstruction in Louisiana (after 1863)*, New York, 1918, p. 75, footnote 7.
31. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 23, 1871.
32. *The New Orleans Republican*, November 24, 1871.
33. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 22, 1871.
34. *The Times*, November 23, 1871; also November 22, 1871, Double Sheet Supplement.
35. *Ibid.*, November 22, 1871, Double Sheet Supplement.
36. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 23, 1871.
37. *The Times*, November 21, 1871.
38. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 23, 1871; Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
39. *The Times*, November 23, the *Republican*, November 23; and the *Times*, Double Sheet and Supplement, November 25, 1871.
40. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 24, 1871; in its issue of the following day this newspaper declared that Braughn was suffering from a severe cold and affection of the throat. "The statement made yesterday . . . was intended in no manner to identify Judge Braughn, politically or otherwise, with the persons named."
41. Lafcadio Hearn, *An American Miscellany*, (Albert Mordell, ed.) New York, 1924, Vol. 2, p. 215. (In two volumes.)
42. *The Merck Manual of Therapeutics and Materia Medica*, Rahway, New Jersey, 1940, Seventh Edition, 1940, p. 1298, Part II; Jonathan Campbell Meakins, *The Practice of Medicine*, Second Edition, St. Louis, 1938, p. 1359.
43. Statement of Dr. F. D. Bowers, House Physician of Flint-Goodridge Hospital of New Orleans. Food for speculation concerning accidental poisoning is contained in the fantastic story of the storm-tossed steamer *Deruiter*, whose cargo of arsenic-impregnated herrings was shipped to various parts of the country. "Beware of Herrings," *Times*, Supplement, November 24, 1871.
44. *The Commercial Bulletin*, November 25, 1871, quoting from the *National Republican*, which in turn quoted from the *New Orleans Patriot* of November 18, 1871.
45. *The Daily Picayune*, November 25, 1871.
46. *Ibid.*, November 23, 1871.