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THE MURDER OF LINCOLN

New Light Thrown on the Terrible Tragedy of 1865.

Dr. G. W. Pope Contributes an Interesting Chapter to the History of a Famous Night — William Withers' Story.

[Special Washington Letter.]

Dr. G. W. Pope, long a well-known physician of this city, but whose name has never before been mentioned in connection with the tragedy at Ford's theater on Good Friday night, 1865, has recently been induced to make a contribution to the history of that awful night. He says:

"On that night I was hastily summoned to the residence of Hon. Ira Harris, senator from Albany, N. Y. (situated on the corner of Fifteenth and H streets, the present site of Columbia college and opposite the old Saint Matthew's church). The senator and family, including Col. Rathbone, were old friends and patients of mine. The family and servants were in great excitement and distress, Miss Clara Harris, whom Col. Rathbone subsequently married, being the only one who retained sufficient calmness to render assistance and keep order on this occasion.

"Clara Harris was a young lady of remarkable courage and presence of mind in many emergencies, as I had known. She had personally conducted or planned the removal of the dying president to the house opposite the theater, in company with Col. Rathbone and others; but the colonel, having received a dangerous wound from the assassin's dagger, fainted from loss of blood and was taken home in a carriage, Clara herself having wrapped a handkerchief tightly over the wound, after the manner of a tourniquet, which partially stanched the blood. I greatly doubt whether any of our modern society women would have been equal to such an emergency, and not have occupied the time in screaming and fainting and hampering the efforts of others.

"The colonel was lying on his bed, dress-coat, vest, and undergarment being removed, disclosing the wound. It was a deep, narrow dagger thrust, clean through the inner part of the left upper arm, close to the armpit, penetrating the biceps muscle and grazing the bone. It came within about one-third of an inch of what is called, in surgical language, the brachial artery and deep basilic vein, which lie close together at that part. Had the blade of the dagger severed those vessels, the colonel would have bled to death in about five minutes.

"Col. Rathbone was as pale as a corpse, almost exsanguined, smaller blood vessels having been severed. He was also in a high state of nervous excitement, almost amounting to delirium, and frequently exclaiming: 'The president is shot—assassinated! He will die! God in Heaven save him! What will become of our country! O, poor, poor, dear Lincoln, our beloved president! This awful crisis!' and similar ejaculations. (All the Harris family and the president were warm friends.)

"Miss Clara Harris was the only one who showed presence of mind. She supplied the water, bandages, towels, etc., and an army surgeon, who had also been summoned, assisted in sewing up the wound, and it was dressed in the usual manner. I visited the house daily, and in a short time the colonel, having recovered his strength and calmness of mind, related the following, which is still fresh in my memory as if told but yesterday.

"I was seated on the left as you front the stage, near the balustrade. Mrs. Lincoln was seated at the opposite side; the president was seated a little to my right, near the center of the box, and Clara near him. We were interested in the play: "Our American Cousin," Laura Keene being the principal actress. We did not see Booth enter the box. Suddenly came the pistol shot. The president did not fall from his chair, but sat unmoved, with his head bowed down on his breast.

"'Immediately after, Booth stepped swiftly out from the smoke of the explosion, which nearly filled the box, strode right between Mrs. Lincoln and myself, and placing one foot on the balustrade was about to spring out on the stage. We were all confounded and dazed for a moment by the sound of the shot and suddenness of the tragedy, but the next instant I sprang up from behind, and, clasping my arms around Booth's body, I dragged him back.'"

Col. Rathbone was a man of medium stature and rather slender build, but was possessed of great nerve power and remarkable physical strength. Booth was slightly taller, of equally slender build, but more muscular than the colonel.

"'I grasped him with all my strength, which was doubly increased by the horror of the scene, but I might as well have attempted to hold a giant. He seemed endowed with sinews of steel. The struggle continued several seconds. "Let me go or I will kill you!" gasped Booth. "No, I will not," I replied, nearly out of breath. Booth squirmed his body around, still clasped in my arms, and faced me. His countenance was like that of a demon, his hair on end,



BOOTH IN THE BOX.

and his eyes blazed like lurid fire. Jerking his right arm free, he raised it over his head with a muttered curse. I saw the gleam of the dagger aimed at my heart. Loosing my left arm, I threw it up to fend off the blow. It descended on the arm, and the weapon, diverted from its fatal aim, struck me as you see. With a desperate effort Booth shook me off, for I still held on to him with my right hand. Then placing his foot on the balustrade, he leaped over. One of his spurs caught in the folds of the American flag that had been festooned in front of the box. Losing his balance he fell to the stage floor, breaking his leg. Springing up instantly, he hobbled to the middle of the stage, paused for a moment in front of the terror-stricken audience, and brandishing his blood-reeking dagger high over his head, shouted at the top of his voice: "Sic semper tyrannis!" Then limping rapidly toward the rear and brandishing his dagger in the faces of those who sought to oppose him, and who shrank back from his demon-like aspect, passed out, mounted his horse, and escaped.'

"The two most extraordinary incidents connected with the dreadful tragedy were the wonderful physical endurance and nerve power manifested by Booth, in walking over the stage and to the alley with both bones of his leg broken; and the almost hair-breadth escape of Col. Rathbone from death.

"Furthermore, had not Col. Rathbone grappled the assassin and hampered his movements, the spurs would not have caught in the flag, Booth would have leaped to the stage with safety, for he was quick, nimble, and accustomed to athletics, escaped uninjured, reached the heart of the confederacy on relays of horses, completely disguised, and probably never have been captured. No mind can foresee what might have been the result to the exasperated country in its subsequent dealings with those who fostered the rebellion.

"All through that awful night the streets resounded with the galloping of horses, beating of drums, and clamor of cavalry bugles. Such universal excitement and terror finds a fit description in Byron's magnificent 'Night Before the Battle of Waterloo.'"

SMITH D. FRY.