Lincoln Scrap Book P 94-95

HIS CRIME PREMEDITATED.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE INTENDED ACT.

From the Philadelphia Inquirer.

The following verbation copy of a letter, in writing which is the hand-writing of John Wilkes Booth, the murderer of President Lincoln, has been furnished us by the Hon. Wm. Millward, United States Marshal of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. It was handed over to the officer by John S. Clarke, who is a brother-in-law of Mr. Booth. The history connected with it is somewhat peculiar. In November, 1864, the paper was deposited with Mr. Clarke by Booth, in a sealed envelope, "for safe keeping," Mr. Clarke being ignorant of the contents. In January last Booth called at Mr. Clarke's house, asked for the package, and it was given up to him. It is now supposed that at that time he took out the paper and added to it his signature, which appears to be in a different ink from that used in the body of the letter, and also, from the language employed, could not have been put to it originally. Afterwards he returned the package to Mr. Clarke again for safe keeping, sealed and bearing the superscription "J. Wilkes Booth."

The enclosure was preserved by the family without suspicion of the nature. After the afflicting information of the assassination of the President, which came upon the family of Mr. Clarke with crushing force, it was considered proper to open the envelope. There were found in it the following paper, with some seven-thirty United States bonds, and certificates of shares in oil companies. Mr. clarke promptly handed over the paper to Marshal Millward, in whose custody it now remains. From a perusal of this paper it seems to have been prepared by Booth as a vindication of some desperate act which he had in contemplation; and from the language used it is probable that it was a plot to abduct the President and carry him off to Virginia. If this was meditated it failed, and from making a prisoner of the President to his assassination was an easy step for a man of perverted principles. It also appears that Booth was one of the party who was engaged in the capture and execution of John Brown of Ossawattomie, at

which time he doubtless imbibed from Wise and his associates those detestable sentiments of cruelty which have culminated in an infamous crime. The letter is as follows:

_____ _, _____, 1864

MY DEAR SIR: You may use this as you think best. But as some may wish to know when, who, and why, and as I know not how to direct, I give it (in the words of your master)- " To whom it may concern:"

Right or wrong, God judge me, not man. For be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure, the lasting condemnation of the North.

I love peace more than life. Have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years have I waited, hoped, and prayed for the dark clouds to break, and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer would be a crime. All hope for peace is dead. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. God's will be done. I go to see and share the bitter end.

I have ever held the South were right. The very nomination of Abraham Lincoln, four years ago, spoke plainly, war - war upon Southern rights and institutions. His election proved it. "Await an overt act." Yes, till you are bound and plundered. What folly! The South was wise. Who thinks of argument or patience when the finger of his enemy presses on the trigger? In a foreign war I, too, could say, "country, right or wrong." But in a struggle such as ours, (where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart) for God's sake, choose the right. When a country like this spurns justice from her side, she forfeits the allegiance of every honest freeman, and should leave him, untrammeled by any fealty soever, to act as his conscience may approve.

People of the North, to hate tyranny, to love liberty and justice, to strike at wrong and oppression, was the teaching of our fathers. The study of our early history will not let me forget it, and may it never.

This country was formed for the white, not for the black man. And looking upon African slavery from the same standpoint held by the noble framers of our Constitution I, for one, have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings (both for themselves and us) that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation. Witness heretofore our wealth and power; witness their elevation and enlightenment above their race elsewhere, I have

lived among it most of my life, and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld in the North from father to son. Yet, Heaven knows, no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I but see a way to still better their condition.

But Lincoln's policy is only preparing the way for their total annihilation. The South are not, nor have they been fighting for the continuance of slavery. The first battle of Bull Run did away with that idea. Their causes since for war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on. Even should we allow they were wrong at the beginning of this contest, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now (before the wonder and admiration of the world) as a noble band of patriotic heroes. Hereafter reading of their deeds, Thermopylae will be forgotten.

When I aided in the capture and execution of John Brown (who was a murderer on our Western border, and who was fairly tried and convicted, before an impartial judge and jury, of treason, and who, by the way, has since been made a god,) I was proud of my little share in the transaction, for I deemed it my duty, and that I was helping our common country to perform an act of justice. But what was a crime in poor John Brown is now considered (by themselves) as the greatest and only virtue of the whole Republican party. Strange transmigration! vice to become a virtue, simply because more indulged in.

I thought then, as now, that the Abolitionists were the only traitors in the land, and that the entire party deserved the same fate of poor old Brown, not because they wish to abolish slavery, but on account of the means they have ever endeavored to use to effect that abolition. If Brown were living, I doubt whether he himself would set slavery against the Union. Most or many in the North do, and openly curse the Union, if the South are to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every tie which we once revered as sacred. The South can make no choice; it is either extermination or slavery for themselves (worse than death) to draw from. I know my choice.

I have also studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a state to secede has been denied, when our very name, United States, and the Declaration of Independence,

both provide for secession. But there is no time for words. I write in haste. I know how foolish I shall shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where, on the one side, I have many friends and everything to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income of more than twenty thousand dollars a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field for labor. On the other hand, the South have never bestowed upon me one kind word; a place now where I have no friends, except beneath the sod; a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar. To give up all of the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters, whom I love so dearly, (although they so widely differ with me in opinion,) seams insame; but God is my judge. I love justice more than I do a country that disownes it; more than fame and wealth; more (heaven pardon me if wrong) more than a happy home. I have never been upon a battle-field; but O my countrymen! could you all but see the reality or effects of this horrid war, as I have seen them, (in every State, save Virginia,) I know you would think like me, and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of right and justice, (even should it possess no seasoning of mercy,) and that He would dry up this sea of blood between us, which is daily growing wider. Alas! poor country. Is she to meet her threatened doom? Four years ago I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain (as I had always known her) powerful and unbroken. And even now I would hold my life as naught to see her what she was. O, my friends if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been but a frightful dream, from which we could now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for his continued favor. How I have loved the old flag can never now be known. A few years since and the entire world could boast of none so pure and spotless. But I have of late been seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem, and would shudder to think how changed she had grown. O how I have longed to see her break from the mist of blood and death that circles round her folds, spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor. But no, day by day has she been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of Heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories

as a dream. My love (as things stand today) is for the South alone. Nor do I deem it a dishonor in attempting to make for her a prisoner of this man to whom she owes so much of misery. If success attends me, I go penniless to her side. They say she has found that "last ditch" which the North have so long derided, and been endeavoring to force her in, forgetting they are our brothers, and that it's impolitic to goad an enemy to madness. Should I reach her in safety and find it true, I will proudly beg permsission to triumph or die in that same "ditch" by her side.

A Confederate doing duty upon his own responsibility.

J. Wilkes Booth.

x to x

x Clipping in Lincoln Scrap Book P 94-95 from National Intelligencer, Washington D.C.

THE BOOTH LETTER

The following communication has been sent to us by Mr. John Matthews, the only person who is able to give any information in regard to the letter written by J. Wilkes Booth, and addressed to the editor of the NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER. Mr. Matthews was a witness in the Surratt trial, but was not permitted by the Court to testify in regard to the letter alluded to. As statements have been publicly made in reference to Mr. Matthews' connection with this letter, he asks the publication of this communication in justifica- of himself and truth:

WASHINGTON, July 17, 1867.

Editors Intelligeneer:

GENTLEMEN: Much has been said in the public prints in regard to the missing letter of John Wilkes Booth. As I am the person to whom this letter was entrusted, I know its contents and the circumstances attending its delivery into my hands better than any person now living.

It was on the afternoon of Good Friday, April 14, 1865, at about 4 o'clock, that I met John Wilkes Booth (on horseback) on Pennsylvania avenue, at the triangular enclosure between Thirteenth and Fourteenth streets. We met, shook hands, and passed the compliments of the day. It so happened that the officers of General Lee's army had just passed up in a body. I asked Booth: "Johnny, have you seen Lee's officers, just