# AN INTERESTING LETTER

ABOUT

# THE DEATH OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH

WRITTEN BY

THE REVEREND R. B. GARRETT

OF

PORTSMOUTH, VIRGINIA

TO

GENERAL A. R. TAYLOR

OF

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Designed and Printed
at Peoria, Illinois,
in 1934

Portsmouth, Va.,

Oct. 24, 1907.

Mr. A. R. Taylor.

Dear Sir.

Replying to your letter of October 21 — I would say that I have had some correspondence with Mr. Bates in regard to the matter mentioned. He asked me to furnish something for his book but I am very sure that he has not published what I wrote. If he had taken the trouble to verify the statements made by me, which he could have easily done, there would have been no use in publishing the book, and I told him so. There never was the slightest doubt about the death of J. Wilkes Booth on April 26, 1865. There never was a missing link

in the chain which led from the theatre in Washington to my father's barn.

Mr. Bates' letters to me indicate clearly that he had never taken the trouble to study the real history of the flight and death of Booth, even superficially. Like many men possessed with a theory, he makes every fact bend to his theory. He was so eager to fit the facts to his theory that he clutched at straws. For instance, it is a fact that on the second day of his stay at my father's home, Booth became alarmed at the passing of some soldiers in sight of the house and hobbled on his crutches to some woods back of the house where he remained for an hour or two. Mr. Bates in his letter to me alludes to this fact and asks "How

do you know that the same man came back from the woods that went into the woods?" Did he think us a set of fools that we should not know a man in broad daylight that we had been entertaining for two days? Again in his letter he says that Booth was not identified after his death. But I saw it done, and our whole family, and the officers, many of whom knew him personally, saw it done. Remember that he was a strikingly handsome man with a face one could scarcely forget. The detectives had a printed description of him which they proceeded to verify after his death. 'It agreed in every particular, height, color of hair, eyes, size of hand, foot, etc. It said "He has his initials in India ink on his

forearm just below the elbow.' I saw the officers roll back his sleeve and saw the initials J. W. B. just where they were said to be. I saw the detective place the cabinet photograph of John Wilkes Booth,' the well known actor, beside the dead face of the man we had known for two days, and all the books in the world could not persuade me that God ever made two men so exactly alike. I read his diary, found on his body, and preserved yet in Washington, in which he referred to what he had done. I heard him say "Tell my mother I died for my country. I did what I thought was best." It was through another dying utterance of his, that my father and brothers escaped the penalty of harboring an assassin

when he said, "It is hard for this man to suffer for what I have done. He does not know who I am." I know by contemporary history that many who knew him personally saw the body in Washington, and that in order that no possible mistake might be made, a surgeon who had removed a tumor from his neck came and pointed out the scar of the operation.

I know that his family never had any doubts on the subject. In my library are valuable books bearing the autograph of Edwin Booth, and in one of them a letter which says "Your family will always have our warmest thanks for your kindness to him whose madness wrought so much ill to us." I know that they sought and secured the body of the dead

man and buried it in the family lot in Greenmount Cemetery in Baltimore, and over it placed a stone on which is carved his name, "John Wilkes". I have seen it myself. I know that Mr. Bates' story is only one of many such, utterly improbable and impossible. To ask people to believe that the U. S. Government and his own family, and his many friends, should be deceived by a chance resemblance into believing that Wilkes Booth was dead while he was still alive is too great a strain on faith.

Many books were written to account for the lost Dauphin of France, and many people believed that Napoleon's Marshal Ney escaped the bullets of the firing squad and died

of old age in North Carolina, but nobody who takes the trouble to acquaint himself with the facts, will ever have any doubt but that John Wilkes Booth died at my father's house on April 26, 1865.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) R. B. GARRETT.

P. S.: I have not seen Mr. Bates' book but am acquainted with his theory through his letters to me.

To My Fellow Members
of the Oakwood Lincoln Club:

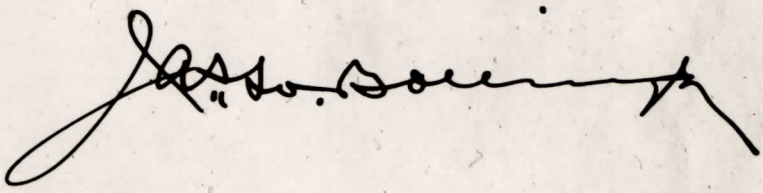
The hoax which this Garrett letter controverts will not live. It has few adherents left in spite of the frequent references to it in the press. Like most sensations, a little thought and a little study of the basic facts bring the end.

Because the purport of this letter is what lawyers call competent, relevant, material — and hence admissible — evidence; because it speaks so persuasively, coming from such a reliable source; and because it is eye-witness testimony, I am taking the liberty of preserving it in facsimile form for the Lincoln shelves of our members.

This is being done with the permission of General A. R. Taylor of Memphis, Tennessee, who owns the original. We are most grateful to him. We are also indebted to my friend Mr. A. J. Walsmith of Oskaloosa, Iowa, an ardent and veteran Lincoln student, for learning of the letter and securing this permission.

JAMES W. BOLLINGER.

Davenport, Iowa,
February 12, 1934.



STATE OF TENNESSEE, }
COUNTY OF SHELBY. } ss:

I, A. R. Taylor, being first duly sworn, depose and say:

That I am a resident of Memphis, Tennessee;

That the foregoing is an original letter written by the Reverend R. B. Garrett, and received by me shortly after the date it bears;

I further say that this letter is a part of the correspondence between us arising on account of Mr. Finis L. Bates' book on the date of the death of John Wilkes Booth.

(Signed) A. R. TAYLOR.

Subscribed and sworn to before me by A. R. Taylor this 15th day of May, 1933.

(Signed) ALICE GREGORY,

Notary Public in and for
Shelby County, Tennessee.

My com exp
4-21-35

STATE OF TENNESSEE, )
) SS:
COUNTY OF SHELBY. )

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Alice Gregory
Notary public in and for
Shelby County, Tennessee.

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