THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE
August, 1920

I Saw Lincoln Shot!

And here is my story—told now for the first time

By William J. Ferguson

THIS is the fourteenth of April, 1920. It is exactly fifty-five years since I stood in the wings of Ford's Theatre—waiting for my cue to go on the stage—and saw the murder of Abraham Lincoln and the flight of John Wilkes Booth, his assassin.

No other person witnessed the whole of that tragic event. From the moment he fired the death-dealing shot until he had leaped to the back of his horse in the alley behind the theatre, Booth was never out of my sight.

I was standing in the first entrance at the time, just off stage to the left of the audience. The President and Mrs. Lincoln, together with a young woman and an army officer whom I did not recognize, were sitting in the balcony box on the right, which was almost directly opposite me and about thirty feet away. At my side was Miss Laura Keene, star of "Our American Cousin"—the comedy that had reached the second scene of its third act when the assassination took place. It was a few minutes before ten o'clock.

Miss Keene had been rehearsing with me the lines I was about to speak. Harry Hawk, the "Asa Trenchard" of the piece, had just finished a soliloquy and had turned toward the rear to make his exit.

Suddenly a shot rang out close to where the President was sitting in a rocking chair, hidden from the audience by a draped lace curtain and the wooden wall that shut off his box from the balcony. I saw a puff of smoke. Mr. Lincoln's head sagged forward. At the same instant a man sprang to the front of the box. He grasped the rail with his right hand. His left hand held a bowie knife. I recognized him as John Wilkes Booth, an actor whom I had seen frequently in the course of my season's work as call boy, amanuensis, and filler of utility parts.

From the balcony box to the stage was a direct drop of twelve feet. As Booth was about to spring over the rail, the army officer, who, I learned later, was Major H. R. Rathbone, rushed forward and grabbed him by his coat tails. The assassin lunged back viciously with his knife. The weapon entered Major Rathbone's left upper arm and broke his hold.

As Booth vaulted over the rail one of his spurs caught in the folds of an American flag, with which the box had been draped to celebrate the fall of Richmond and the reoccupation of Fort Sumter. He whirled around in the air and fell to the stage heavily on his right knee.

Almost instantly, however, the assassin was on his feet, and rushing across the front of the stage directly toward the entrance where Miss Keene and I were standing. Dimly I realized that Mr. Lincoln had been shot—for I had seen his head, the face still lit by a tender half smile, sink forward to his chest. And I knew that Booth—a man with whom I had been talking that very afternoon—must have committed the deed. But the whole thing was too monstrous, too incredible!

I shall never forget the assassin's appearance as he leaped toward us. The usual olive complexion of his handsome oval face was blanched to a deathly white. His black eyes were blazing. His lips were drawn against his teeth and he was panting in pain, for the fall had fractured his leg. How he was able, with a broken leg, to make those swift five-foot strides, I shall never be able to understand.

In another moment Booth had run between Miss Keene and myself, pushing us apart and back against the two walls of the entrance. I felt his hot breath upon my face. As he shoved me with his left hand, the knife flashed before my eyes.

Back of the wings was a narrow passage which led to a door in the rear wall opening into an alley. Miss Jenny Gourlay, one of the players, and William Withers, leader of the orchestra, were talking together in the passage. They had been so intent in the conversation that they knew nothing about the crime. Unconsciously, however, they blocked the path of Booth's escape.

As the assassin rushed down this

An Eyewitness of Lincoln's Assassination and Booth's Escape

THROUGH the kindness of a personal friend, Roscoe Peacock, I heard that a very fine actor, named Ferguson, who is still living, was in the theatrical company that was playing in Ford's Theatre the night Lincoln was assassinated.

This turned out to be true. It seems incredible, but we found Mr. Ferguson playing an important rôle in a musical comedy on Broadway—and busy in the movies besides! He told us that he never had given out this story for publication.

So here is Mr. Ferguson's own account of the greatest murder in modern history. He saw it—saw everything that happened. After the shooting he was in Lincoln's box and stood beside the President. A half-hour later he was in the room across the street where the President was undressed and laid on a bed. He was with Booth in the afternoon before the assassination, and only by a lucky chance escaped holding Booth's horse while the assassin went to the President's box and committed the crime. During the two years that preceded the assassination Ferguson saw Lincoln a number of times. More than once the President went behind the scenes and left his son Tad with Ferguson.

THE EDITOR.

passage, Withers turned around in surprise at the commotion. Booth struck at him with the knife and slashed the cloth up his coat for ten or twelve inches.

By this time I had partly recovered from my daze. Following after Booth, I had got as far as the angle of the wall when he dashed through the rear door, leaving it open behind him.

Little John Burroughs, who was bundle boy for the actors at the theatre, was holding by the bridle the bay mare which Booth had left in the alley a little earlier in the evening. Booth shoved the boy to the ground, vaulted on his mount, and dug his left spur in her flank. The mare leaped forward, her hoofs striking sparks from the cobblestones into the murky April night. An instant later they were galloping madly down the alley to the angle of another small alley which led into F Street.

All these events had passed with incredible swiftness. I suppose not more than forty seconds had elapsed between the firing of the shot and Booth's disappearance. (*Continued on page 82*)

Ferguson—Who Saw the Greatest Murder in Modern History

Still an important actor on Broadway, where he has been playing for forty-seven years

By Merle Crowell

IT WAS HARD to believe that William J. Ferguson—one of the actors at Ford's Theatre on the night of Lincoln's assassination—was still playing on Broadway.

"There must be some mistake," I protested. "Where is he?"

"Up at the Casino. Drop around and see for yourself?"

I did see for myself—and rubbed my eyes to look at the program again. For in the rôle of Oliver Butts, a sentimental butler, Ferguson was leading several of the funniest numbers in "The Little Whopper," a girl-and-music comedy. His work included bits of eccentric dancing and snatches of song. To me it was the comedy hit of the whole performance.

Between acts I went back-stage.

"You'd like to have a chat with me?" repeated Ferguson. "Well, I'm pretty busy these days, but—"

"Oh, any time will do, Mr. Ferguson," I hastened to assure him. "Forenoon, afternoon, or evening."

A smile came into Ferguson's deep blue eyes and broke out a moment later on his lips.

"Suppose you listen to my daily program, young man," he remarked. "My home is out in the other end of Brooklyn. I get up every morning before seven o'clock, ride for half an hour on the trolley to the nearest subway station, travel about ten miles in the tube, cross the Hudson River on a ferry, and then take another trolley to the studio in Jersey where I am kept busy at the 'movies' all day. I arrive back here at the theatre in time for the evening performance, and when I get home again it is one o'clock in the morning. Really, the only spare time I seem to have"—and the smile grew broader—"are the six hours that I waste in sleep."

"How long have you been keeping this up?"

"Oh, for three months," he replied—and dodged back onto the stage.

Ferguson has been playing before Broadway audiences for half a century. All the stage folk look on him as a sort of "miracle man;" and they were not at all surprised, two years ago, when he decided to break into motion pictures—where he scored an immediate success.

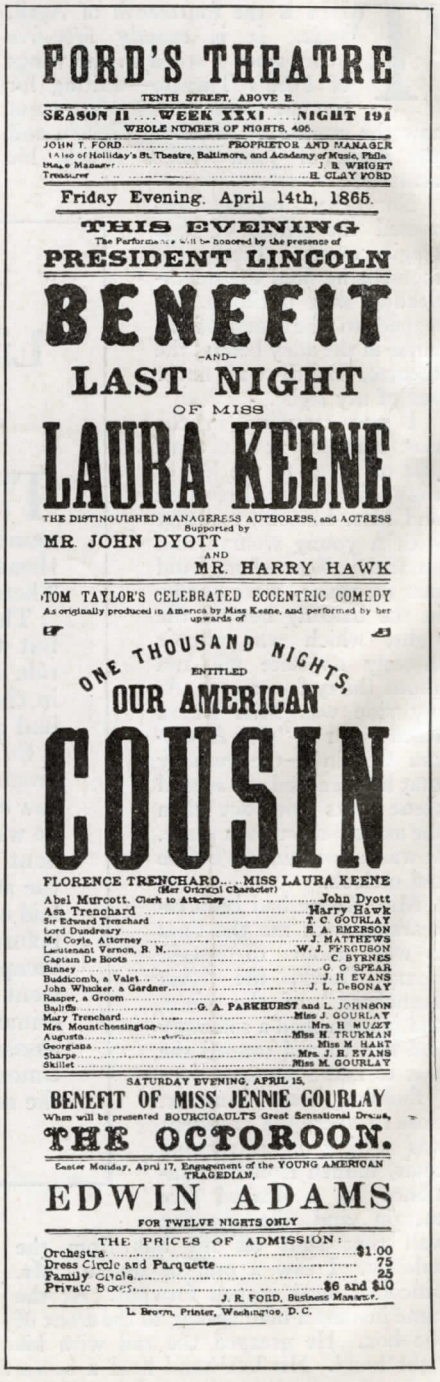
"I wasn't going to let a lot of youngsters get the jump on me in an entirely new field," he declared.

Grant's guns were still hammering the walls of Vicksburg when Ferguson first faced an audience across the footlights. Since then he has appeared before millions of people in hundreds of characters. He has taken all the male rôles in every one of Shakespeare's popularly acted dramas. With the adaptability of the true craftsman, he has played leading, comedy, heavy and juvenile parts at will. He has trod the boards with practically every great figure in American dramatic history since the Civil War. And to-day—with the Psalmist's three score years and ten well behind him—he is actually busier than ever before. Richard Mansfield, Edwin Booth, Joe Jefferson, Mary Anderson, Madame Modjeska, and Clara Morris are among the great actors and actresses with whom his name has at times been billed.

FERGUSON was born in Baltimore, Maryland. At the age of eleven he became a printer's devil on the Baltimore "Clipper." Although he soon learned how to arrange and set type he found little fascination in newspaper work. Already the theatre was beginning to beckon.

An opening came when he was sixteen years old. John T. Ford—a fellow elder with Ferguson's father in the Third Presbyterian Church of Baltimore—needed a call boy in his Washington theatre. Young Ferguson was offered the job at five dollars a week, plus what money he could pick up by serving as amanuensis to the actors. This latter work consisted in copying individual parts from manuscripts at the rate of eight cents for forty-two handwritten lines.

The double duties kept the youth occupied from nine in the morning until eleven in the evening. During every performance he watched (*Continued on page 86*)



FORD'S THEATRE

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SEASON II ....WEEK XXXI ....NIGHT 191

WHOLE NUMBER OF NIGHTS, 406.

JOHN T. FORD ..... PROPRIETOR AND MANAGER
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THE DISTINGUISHED MANAGERESS AUTHORESS, and ACTRESS

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AND

MR. HARRY HAWK

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Lord Dundreary	E. A. EMERSON
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Lieutenant Vernon, R. N.	W. J. FERGUSON
Captain De Boots	C. BYRNES
Binney	G. G. SPEAR
Buddicomb, a Valet	J. H. EVANS
John Whacker, a Gardner	L. DeBONAY
Reaper, a Groom	
Bailiffs	G. A. PARKHURST and L. JOHNSON
Mary Trenchard	Miss J. GOURLAY
Mrs. Mountchessington	Mrs. H. MUSGY
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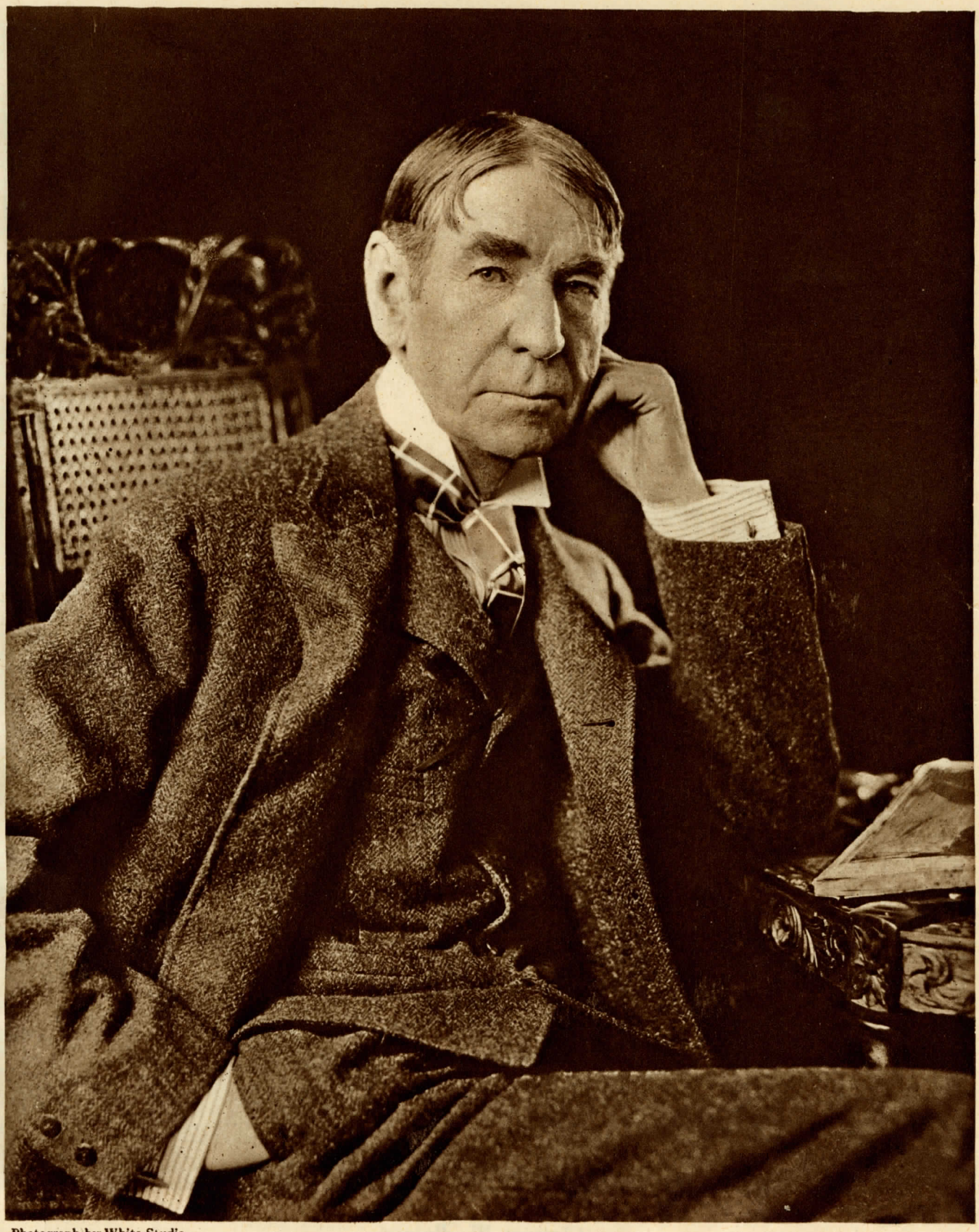
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Orchestra	$1.00
Dress Circle and Parquette	75
Family Circle	25
Private Boxes	$6 and $10

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From the collection of Judd Stewart. Facsimile of the program used in Ford's Theatre the night of the assassination



Photograph by White Studio

William J. Ferguson

WHO saw the murder of Abraham Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre, Washington, on the night of April 14th, 1865. He was one of the actors in "Our American Cousin," the comedy that was in progress when the assassination occurred. Mr. Ferguson has been on the stage continuously since the close of the Civil War. During the past theatrical season he had an important rôle in "The Little Whopper," a musical comedy that had a long run on Broadway. Although nearly seventy-five years old, Mr. Ferguson is not only still active on the stage but in the motion picture field as well. The photograph above is an excellent likeness of him. It was taken expressly for this magazine to accompany the foregoing article.



Photograph by Garo

Clarence W. Barron

MR. BARRON'S position among financial writers and experts is unique. He either owns or controls three of the leading financial dailies: the "Wall Street Journal," the "Boston News Bureau," and the "Philadelphia News Bureau." He is the man behind the famous "ticker"—or at least he put his organization behind it. He sends out by messengers hundreds of financial bulletins from each of his offices every day. He is on the job even at home, for he has eighteen telephones in his house (including one in his bathroom), so that he can be reached at any moment. For years he has been a keen student of business. Probably no man in America is better qualified to talk on the subjects with which he deals in the accompanying article.

Among the thousands of men whom the Institute has helped, are many others who have saved from one year to five years or more on their progress to success.

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Leaders like these are safe to follow

ANY man—no matter who or what he is—can safely follow the leadership of men like these; they constitute the Institute's Council:

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I Saw Lincoln Shot!

(*Continued from page 16*)

As soon as Booth was out of sight, I rushed back to the first entrance. Looking across to the President's box, I saw Mrs. Lincoln standing up. She was wringing her hands and crying hysterically. Major Rathbone was leaning over the rail of the box, the sleeve of his blue dress uniform now red with blood, and shouting, "Stop him! Stop that man!" The President was in the same position in which I had last seen him.

Many people in the audience had supposed at first that the shot and Booth's dash across the stage were part of the play. By this time, however, those folk in the front of the house seemed generally aware of what had happened. For the most part they were standing in a hushed horror, broken only by a low undertone of nervous murmuring. A few men, however, were climbing over the footlights onto the stage.

"I'm going up to the President's box," Miss Keene said to me.

I helped her down from the stage and walked behind her up the center aisle to the rear, whence we passed up the stairs to the balcony and followed along the right wall of the theatre over the same course that the assassin had taken a few minutes earlier.

As we entered the box through a narrow hallway leading from the balcony to the blank wall beyond, I noticed that three or four men had been allowed to come in. One of them, I believe, was a doctor, who had already made a hasty examination of Mr. Lincoln and realized the deadly danger of the wound.

MRS. LINCOLN had sunk back in her chair and was sobbing brokenly. The President was unconscious, his position unchanged. I could see the wound, a small blue spot, in the back of his head behind the right ear. It was not bleeding. His face, which was normally of a parchment-like hue, was now dead white. I noticed how sharply it was set off by the crimson flowered wall paper with which the box was lined.

Mr. Lincoln was not moaning, nor was he even breathing heavily. Indeed, he could hardly have been more still if death had already claimed him.

The rocking chair in which the President was sitting was made of dark wood, its back, seat, and arms upholstered with a rather flamboyant flower design.

Lying on the floor was the pistol which the assassin had used. It was a single-barreled Derringer with a rather large bore—a type frequently used by duelists. It had a hair trigger and was small enough to be inconspicuously carried in one's overcoat pocket.

Miss Keene bent over Mrs. Lincoln and attempted to quiet her. The gowns of both the President's wife and Miss Clara Harris, the fourth member of the party, were bespattered with blood from Major Rathbone's wound. Miss Keene also got a number of blood stains on her gown while she was in the box.

Shortly afterward, four men tenderly lifted the unconscious President from his chair and carried him back through the balcony and down the stairs to the main floor of the theatre and thence out of doors.

JUST across Tenth Street stood a plain three-storied brick house in which actors at the theatre frequently lodged. It was owned by a family named Peterson. The President was borne across the street into this house. I followed. Just outside I met the Peterson boy, who had often come to the theatre and gone about with me while I was making my "prompt calls." We had become good friends.

Young Peterson and I went through the basement door. Two or three minutes later, after I had hurriedly told him what had happened, we climbed the basement stairs to the first floor, and then passed up another flight to the second floor rear and entered the chamber to which Mr. Lincoln had been taken.

The President's clothes had been removed. He was lying in the bed, which was of three-quarters size with a frame of dark wood. He had been stretched out diagonally from corner to corner, for the bed was hardly long enough for his tall body to lie straight in it.

There were several men in the room, including the physicians. I found here the same brooding horror that had stricken the crowd in the theatre. Everyone was speaking in whispers, or hushed tones.

Except for the President, the only person I recognized was Secretary Stanton, who entered before I left the room. His flowing beard, once seen, could never be forgotten. Mrs. Lincoln, as I remember it, was not in the room at any time.

Presently I left and went back across the street to the theatre. A considerable crowd had collected outside, and someone had started the rumor that actors in the play had been implicated in the murder plot. There was an ominous note to the mob voices, quite unlike anything I had heard inside the theatre.

I found the stage filled with people. Actors who had come out of the green-room with make-up still on their faces could be seen here and there in the crowd, which was still searching the theatre, apparently led by a feeble hope that somewhere the assassin might be found in concealment. Bewilderment seemed struggling with horror.

"Was it Booth?" . . . "It looked like Booth." . . . "Could it have been Booth?" they were asking one another.

Now, John Wilkes Booth, with his lithe, graceful body and handsome head, was a familiar figure to Washington theatregoers. That no one seemed positively to have recognized him was due, I suppose, to the speed with which he strode across the stage after his leap from the box.

Incidentally, among all the incoherent stories that gained currency in the wake of the assassination, the one that seemed to take deepest hold on public imagination was that the assassin, after leaping to the stage, faced the audience, brandished his dagger, and cried "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" Many a sober historian has so recorded.

As a matter of fact, nothing of the kind happened. As soon as he had fired the shot Booth appeared intent only on making his escape. From the moment he crashed to the stage, his leg broken beneath him, he was in physical agony. I could see this in his white face and drawn lips. It seems rather absurd even to imagine a man, under these conditions, hesitating for the dramatic act with which the murderer has been credited. If I remember correctly, Major Rathbone testified later that "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" was uttered by Booth while in the box at about the time he fired the shot. . . .

THE crowd lingered about the stage for perhaps half an hour after my return. Little by little it thinned down to a mere handful. Presently I rang down for the last time the curtain of Ford's Theatre—in which no other production was destined to be staged. After the assassination, government authorities purchased the theatre for $100,000 and turned it into a national museum.

An incident that had happened early in the evening now recurred to me vividly—an incident through which I had nearly become an innocent coadjutor of Booth. But before I go into this further, let us take a general survey of the events that preceded and furnished the setting for the assassination.

Only a fair-sized audience had turned out for the performance, and it was an audience that seemed singularly unresponsive. Lines which usually brought out hearty laughs were falling flat. This had a rather depressing tendency on those of us in the cast.

The comedy had been under way for some little time when there came a louder burst of hand-clapping than any before.

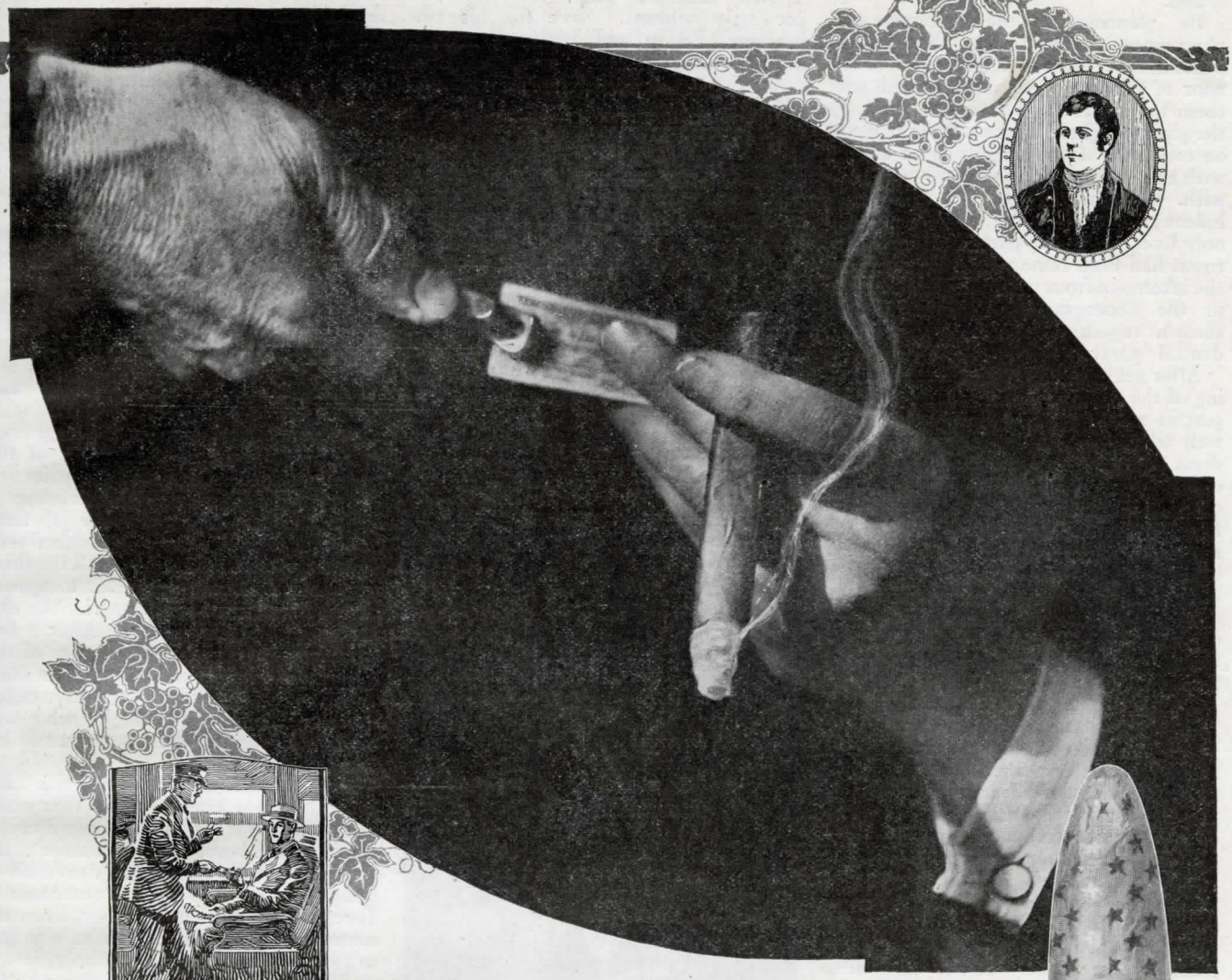
"That line, at least, seems to have made a hit," one of the actors remarked to Miss Keene, who was off stage at the moment.

"The line wasn't responsible for the applause," Miss Keene replied. "The President has just entered his box."

In acknowledgment of the applause, Mr. Lincoln walked to the front of the box and bowed. The orchestra struck up "Hail to the Chief," and the players stood silent until the selection was finished. The President had attended several other performances in the course of the season, but this was the first time that I had known the orchestra to herald his arrival in any way. Indeed, he frequently slipped in so quietly that few of the audience knew he was present.

Mr. Lincoln was wearing his usual costume, the identifying features of which were a black frock coat and a simple white collar turned over sufficiently at the top partly to conceal the loose black tie knotted in a bow at the front.

Mrs. Lincoln was dressed in a gown of some dark flower-figured material, with a hoop skirt. It was topped by a simple collar of white lace. Upon entering the box she took off her bonnet. Her hair was



En Route with Robt. Burns

As the conductor works his way on down the aisle, a-punching tickets and inhaling the aroma of *full Havana filler*, he begins to think the whole "braw" clan of Robt. Burns is off for mountain, woods or seashore, as the case may be.

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parted in the middle and brought down across her ears, which were partly concealed.

By glancing at the accompanying photograph you will notice that theatre boxes in those days were built up from the floor of the stage, which extended past them for about ten feet before reaching the gas footlights. There were four boxes on each side of the stage, two on a level with the balcony circle and two on a level with the stage itself. The adjoining balcony boxes, however, were separated only by a removable partition. This partition had been removed in the course of the afternoon from the upper boxes shown in the photograph, which were thus thrown together to receive the Presidential party.

After acknowledging the friendly greeting of the audience, Mr. Lincoln took his seat in a rocking chair close to the solid wall which separated the box from the dress circle. This wall and the lace curtain draped down in front entirely concealed him from the audience. Mrs. Lincoln drew up her rocker close to the rail and a little farther toward the center of the box. Miss Harris and Major Rathbone sat down together on a sofa, one end of which rested against the wall opposite Mr. Lincoln. The Major was wearing a full-dress uniform of blue, with brass buttons.

AS "prompt boy," I had to spend much of the time during the evening at a stand located in the first entrance, left, which was directly adjacent to the boxes across the stage from the President. These boxes were not occupied. Intermittently I went back to the green-room—a lounging place provided for the players in theatres of that period—to notify some of the actors off stage that it was their turn to appear. While at my post, I looked up frequently at Mr. Lincoln to note the impression made on him by various lines. He was always an appreciative spectator, but it struck me that this evening his genial, tender smile was more in evidence than usual.

In the course of the second act I was standing in the wings when John Wilkes Booth suddenly appeared in the doorway opening into the alley back of the theatre. He had ridden up on a beautiful bay mare, which was pawing the cobblestones outside.

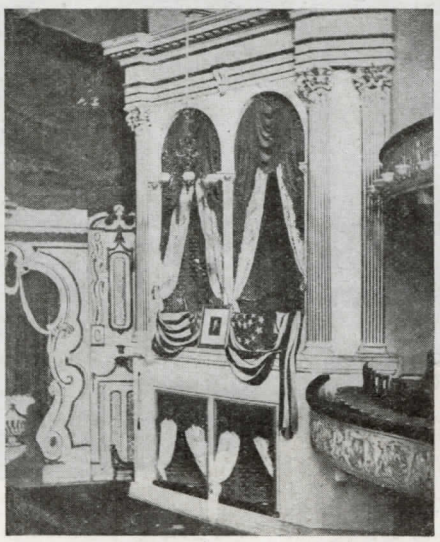
Booth had played a star engagement at Ford's the previous season, but at its close he had retired from the stage temporarily on account of bronchial trouble. About three months before, however, he had returned for one night to play the part of Pescara in "The Apostate," a performance given for the benefit of John McCullough.

During most of the winter and spring Booth had been living in Washington. He was a frequent visitor to our theatre. His magnetic personality and winning manners made him on good terms with both the management and the actors, and he had the run of the place at all times. Frequently, while rehearsals were being held, I would see him in the back of the auditorium, leaning against the wall and watching the stage intently. He always wore an unmistakable gray Inverness overcoat, with chinchilla collar, deep sleeves and a loose-hanging cape.

Booth was a strikingly attractive man, tall, sinewy, and athletic. His voice had a rich cadence, deep, sonorous and peculiarly vibrant. Save for his two brothers, Edwin and Junius Brutus, I have never listened to any man with an intonation at all similar. They undoubtedly inherited it from their father, himself a great and gifted actor.

BOOTH'S appearance at the theatre that evening was at least the second time he had been there in the course of the day. We had just reached the conclusion of the afternoon rehearsal when he suddenly appeared on the stage. For several minutes he chatted with members of the company. I noticed nothing unusual in his looks or demeanor.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon I had just finished copying the "gas plots" (instructions telling the gas man how to handle the lighting effects for the various scenes), and was about to leave the theatre when I noticed Booth just



Photograph of the box in which President Lincoln was sitting when he was assassinated

ahead of me. He was accompanied by Maddox, the property man. I fell in with them.

Next door to the theatre, on the street front, stood a saloon run by a man named George Harry. At Maddox's suggestion the three of us stopped in there.

"Will you have a whisky?" Maddox asked Booth.

"Not this afternoon," Booth replied. "I have pleurisy in my side. A drink won't help it any." But a moment later he added, "Well, I'll recant, and take a glass of ale."

Maddox joined him. The two men chatted together over the drink, mostly about inconsequential things. The only remark I remember was Booth's statement that he had lost six thousand dollars in investments by the recent floods in Oil City. When the glasses had been drained we went out, separating at the door. I saw Booth cross the street diagonally and walk rapidly away.

It was repeatedly stated after the assassination that Booth was crazily intoxicated with brandy at the time. I can only say that if Booth was drunk on that afternoon he concealed his condition better than any human being I have ever seen. Probably the story arose from the fact that ordinarily he was quite a heavy drinker, although not so inordinately so as his father, Junius Brutus Booth. Indeed, the elder Booth sometimes disappointed audiences by failing to appear. On one occasion, it was said, when his funds had been exhausted, he "pawned" himself to a tap-room keeper for more liquor, and had to be redeemed by the manager before the performance could start.

Among the stories that later gained currency and, indeed, became history, was one to the effect that Booth and his fellow conspirators, all much the worse for drink, held a conference in Harry's saloon on the afternoon of April 14th. I suppose that this "conference" was the brief and casual chat of Booth and Maddox over their ale.

When Booth appeared at the stage door in the course of the second act of the evening performance, he called out for one of the boys to come and hold his horse. I was about to volunteer for the job until I could be relieved, when I remembered that it would soon be time to call the third act, in which I was scheduled to appear on the stage. Edward Spangler, the carpenter, offered his services. After a few minutes Spangler turned the care of the horse over to the bundle boy, John Burroughs—"Peanut John" we always called him—and it was Burroughs who was holding the bridle when Booth made his dash from the theatre.

Later I had occasion to thank God heartily for the circumstances that made it impossible for me to follow my first impulse. In the burst of public horror at the assassination, Spangler was convicted of complicity in the crime and sentenced to Tortugas prison. Months later, when the commission that convicted him was able to review the crime more calmly, it was realized that Spangler was innocent. He was released from prison, but the confinement had so undermined his health that he died shortly afterward.

After Booth turned his horse over to Spangler I did not see him again until he had committed his terrible deed. He went around to the front door at the theatre, where the gate keeper passed him in, and then climbed the stairs to the balcony and followed along the right wall until he came to the blind hallway outside the President's box.

The box had two doors opening into this hallway, which was about ten feet long and three feet wide. The hallway, in turn, was shut off from the balcony by another door.

IT APPEARED later that Booth carried with him into the hallway a piece of scantling about three feet long and one and one-half inches square. Once in the dark passageway he made an incision with his knife in the plastering of the solid side wall of the theatre, and placed one end of the scantling in this incision and the other against the panel of the door opening in from the balcony. This was an effectual prevention against anyone's entering the hallway to interfere with his plans before their culmination. I saw this bar lying on the floor when I went to the President's box with Miss Keene. Major Rathbone had removed it

ONE of the things which makes the Hupmobile essentially a family car, is its very marked economy.

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in order to open the door after the crime. It was stained with his blood. Booth might have carried it, I believe, entirely concealed beneath his overcoat, as he passed along the balcony wall.

After propping the door shut, the assassin's next move was to bore a hole with a gimlet in the door of the box nearest to the balcony door. By peering through this hole he was then able to determine the exact position of the President, who was only four or five feet away. With these precautions taken, he entered the unguarded box and fired the shot.

At the moment of the assassination the stage was set for a front scene—the interior of a drawing-room in an English country house, with double doors at the center. No one was on the stage except Harry Hawk, who was one of the two players that Miss Keene, owner of and star in "Our American Cousin," had brought to Washington with her the week before. All the remaining members of the cast belonged to the stock company that had been playing at Ford's for the entire season.

Just as Hawk had finished his soliloquy and had turned to make his exit through the double doors at the center, Booth's shot shattered the silence.

"I turned around in astonishment as Booth jumped to the stage, knife in hand," Hawk told me later. "Instantly, there flashed through my mind the memory of a violent argument we had engaged in a few days previous. Booth was as ardent an advocate of the South as I was of the North. Feeling had run high and our words had become bitter. When I saw his white face and glaring eyes I believed that he had gone mad and was about to follow up our verbal altercation by attacking me. I rushed from the stage into the green-room. Later I learned that the President had been murdered."

SAVE for the occupants of the President's box, only two persons in the theatre—Miss Keene and myself—were in a position to see exactly what followed the firing of the shot.

As I have explained before, we were standing in the first entrance, left, just across the stage from the President.

My own part in the play had come about through chance: At the opening of the previous season John T. Ford, who was a close friend of my father, had engaged me as amanuensis and call boy. A full-grown youth in my teens, I had brought to the theatre a determination to become an actor. For several months my only steps toward that goal had been to share in mob scenes, and to supply the off-stage noises, such as the barking of dogs, the ringing of bells, and the clattering of horses' hoofs. Gradually, however, I was allowed to fill in with speaking parts of from one to ten lines.

When rehearsal was called on the afternoon before the assassination there were two absences from the cast—Miss Keene and Courtland V. Hess, who was scheduled to play the rôle of Lieutenant Vernon, R. N.

"It looks as if you would have to take the midshipman's part to-night, Ferguson," the prompter said to me, after learning that Hess was ill. "Get busy on the lines at once."

This was the first time I had been called on to take more than a ten-line part. I set to work earnestly, and soon knew my lines forward and backward.

My only speech of any length was due in a scene with Miss Keene, which was to come immediately after the close of Hawk's soliloquy. Since I was new to the part, Miss Keene decided it would be safer to rehearse it with me just before we were to go on. She came back to the prompt box, and we had just finished going over the lines together when the assassination occurred.

MR. LINCOLN'S death was to me a profound shock. I had seen him frequently and had come to regard him with a feeling akin to reverence. His son, "Tad," I knew well. He often accompanied the President to the theatre. "Tad" was much more interested in what was going on behind the scenes than in the play itself, and on these occasions the President used to bring him back to the "prompt stand" where I would be stationed, and turn him over to me. "Now enjoy yourself, boy," Mr. Lincoln would remark before returning to his box, where "Tad" would join him later.

I remember distinctly the impression made on me by the rare beauty of Mr. Lincoln's eyes. They glowed with tenderness and sympathy. His very soul seemed to shine through them. There was not a regular feature to his face, and his skin was sallow. Yet the complete effect of it was one of marvelous benignity and inner strength.

To me, his three outstanding traits were kindliness, simplicity, and power. They were accompanied with a total lack of self-consciousness. When he was not smiling, he usually had the attitude of a deep thinker.

Mr. Lincoln knew his Shakespeare from cover to cover, and he loved the stage. An actor was always sure of getting an audience with the President if he were not too occupied with affairs of State. And yet it was an actor who murdered him!

Political sentiment among stage folk during the war was sharply divided. Most actors favored the North, but there were a few, like Booth, who were devout believers in the cause of the South.

Among those who strongly disapproved of the President's war policy was Edwin Forrest, the great tragedian. On one occasion, Mr. Lincoln was in attendance when Forrest was playing Bulwer-Lytton's "Richelieu." I was standing at the "prompt stand" following the manuscript, when Forrest came to the line:

"Take away the sword. States may be saved without it."

Turning to look directly at the President, he declaimed intensely:

"Take away the sword. States *must* be saved without it."

By the alteration of a single word the tragedian was able to give voice to the bitterness of his own feelings.

If he expected his pronouncement to discomfit the President, Forrest was doomed to disappointment. With a soft, patient smile, such as one would direct at a petulant child, Mr. Lincoln looked at the glaring tragedian—and it was Forrest whose eyes fell.

John Wilkes Booth was perhaps the most ardent of all those actors whose sympathies were with the South. He had been born in Maryland, twenty-seven years before, and his heart was with the rebellion from the start. I think he fully believed he was doing right in murdering Mr. Lincoln—that he was freeing "his country" from the rule of a tyrant. . . .

OF SEVERAL remarkable coincidences connected with the assassination there is one that remains particularly vivid in my mind: During the month of January, 1865, two members of our company occupied a room in the Peterson house, across the street from the theatre. It was necessary occasionally for me to go to this room to deliver parts of a play to them for study.

On one of these trips I found half a dozen actors in the room, chatting together in high good humor. Lying lazily on the bed, a pipe in his mouth, his handsome hair disheveled, was John Wilkes Booth.

Three months later I entered that room again. It was the night of April 14th. I turned to the bed where I had seen Booth stretched out in gay nonchalance. On it lay the unconscious body of Abraham Lincoln. It was there he died.

Ferguson—Who Saw the Greatest Murder in Modern History

(*Continued from page 16*)

the actors and followed their lines as best he could, for he was determined to master the details of their art. Soon he was entrusted with small parts—in which he made good from the start.

Shortly after the assassination of Lincoln, Ferguson went out in repertoire. For several years he was on the road, playing one-, two-, and three-night stands in Pennsylvania and New York. At one time he had seventy-five rôles in which he was able to take part on a day's notice.

There is no element of chance in the fact that Ferguson has been on Broadway almost continuously since he landed at Wallack's in 1873. Such was the program of life he deliberately chose.

"I had seen so many good actors ruin

their health in barnstorming tall-grass towns that I decided to stick right here in New York," Ferguson explained to me. "As soon as I was married I bought a home in Brooklyn, where I have lived for the last forty years. Rather than give up home life, I have turned down bigger salaries and bigger parts on the road.

"Some folks seem surprised that I'm still as active as ever. But why not? I've taken care of myself and lived a quiet, normal life. The only Broadway glare that has meant anything to me has been the glare of the footlights behind which I have worked. I've always been busy, and I have made it a point to keep cheerful and optimistic. If there is any better recipe for retaining vigor, I don't know what it is.

"I have little sympathy with those people who eternally croak about the stage going to the 'demnition bow-wows.' The theatre has merely changed with the times. Actors used to be more versatile, it is true. During my early work at Wallack's, our company had more than thirty old comedies and other standard plays ready to produce at a moment's notice. In those days we all knew Shakespeare so well that when one of his dramas was announced we welcomed the relief.

"Wallack's was a great school. I remember when Sir Charles Wyndham came there, at the start of his career, he was so awkward that he knocked over everything he touched. He couldn't even shut a stage door without slamming it. Under Lester Wallack's tutelage, however, he soon gained grace and ease. Eventually he developed into London's greatest light comedian.

MODERN audiences are easier to play to. A crowd of to-day comes to the theatre to be amused, and hoping hard that it will be. First-nighters, however, are a critical lot. Their attitude takes me back thirty or forty years.

"Of course there is no comparison between lighting and scenic effects, then and now. Instead of electric spotlights and colored footlights and borders, we used to have only gas and kerosene lamps. The lamps gave out more heat than light, and often in warm weather we would find the grease paint streaming down our faces.

"Joe Jefferson knew more about lighting effects than almost any man I have ever met. I believe he could give some good pointers to the electricians of the modern motion picture studios if he were alive to-day. When he was on tour, Jefferson carried with him a number of pieces of gas pipe, each equipped with a dozen burners. He got really fine lighting effects by hanging these up near the first entrance on both sides of the proscenium arch.

"Jefferson had a theory that dogs and other animals should not be brought onto the stage—that they could not be trained to respond to cues. Once, however, he was persuaded to use in "Rip Van Winkle" the dog that appears in Irving's story. On the second night the dog got hungry and chewed up the hose connecting the gas pipes. The company had to play that night with Jefferson's lighting plant *hors de combat*.

"'There, I told you so!' Jefferson declared, and the canine rôle ended then and there.

"Once when I was playing in 'Jack Sheppard' with Ben de Bar at Montreal,



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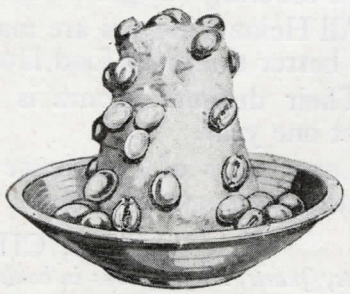
They will take the place of pastries, sweets, etc., if you serve them all day long. And at mealtime they will make whole-grain foods tempting.

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every light in the theatre suddenly went out. But we kept right on with the play. Each actor came onto the stage with two lighted candles. He held one to show up himself and set the other down as a footlight. By the time the play was over the candles had all burned out and the audience had to find the exits in the dark."

FERGUSON'S most successful rôles have been self-selected from the manuscript. Mansfield tossed him the script of "Beau Brummel," and Ferguson chose the rôle of Mortimer, which was one of the features of that successful comedy.

Incidentally, "Beau Brummel" gave Ferguson the opportunity to win a twenty-five-dollar bet from Mansfield. He was sitting in his dressing-room one night just after the comedy opened, when Mansfield paused at the door and commented on the attractiveness of a wig that Ferguson had just bought.

"It ought to look good," replied Ferguson. "It cost me twenty-five dollars."

"That's too bad," remarked Mansfield. "This play won't last. We'd better start rehearsals at once on something else."

"Do you think so?" challenged Ferguson. "Well, I'll bet you the price of the wig that the play is a big success."

Mansfield took the wager, and Ferguson's judgment was more than justified. The comedy ran three years in New York, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco.

When Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Florence were preparing to stage "The Mighty Dollar" at the Park Theatre in '75, Ferguson was scheduled to play the part of an eccentric English lord who carried a white umbrella. One day at rehearsal Ferguson opened the umbrella above his head. Thereupon, Mrs. Florence promptly fainted. Upon being revived she declared that the play was now doomed for certain failure. Stage folk are naturally superstitious, and the feeling spread through the company.

One of the actors was speaking dolefully of the prospects, when Ferguson wagered him a box of cigars that the play would run one hundred nights. He seemed destined to lose his bet, for the production drew poor houses from the start. At the end of the fourth week, just before the evening performance, a van backed up to the door and took away the furniture, which had not been paid for. Mrs. Florence succeeded in raising the money to redeem it and the play resumed the following night. Shortly afterward it became immensely popular and was the success of two seasons.

His ability in the art of facial expression—an early tutelage which he got from Joe Jefferson—has made Ferguson a particularly good subject for the movie camera. Among the silent dramas in which he has played since the spring of 1918 are: "Kittie Mackaye," "Little Miss Brown," "Old Dutch," and "The Deep Purple." In another motion picture, a revival of the melodrama, "The Fatal Card," he took the identical part that he played at Wallack's several decades ago.

"Dozens of actors have 'lined their pockets' from watching 'Billy' Ferguson's face and hands," remarked Andrew Mack recently. "He can do more with a look or a gesture than some folks can get across in a two-minute speech."