The Slayer of Lincoln

Booth's "Mash Notes" from Admiring Women

A GRAPHIC description of the death of John Wilkes Booth, slayer of Abraham Lincoln, was recently furnished by William A. McDonald, who was a member of the cavalry troop which cornered the assassin. His statement should finally disprove the extraordinary rumours which have been circulated to the effect that Booth was wounded but not killed by the cavalrymen, and that another man was buried under his name.



Lincoln

A mysterious resident of the city of Charleston, South Carolina, was alleged to be the slayer, on the grounds that he had the manners of an actor and wore a high black stock.

The circumstances surrounding the murder of Lincoln are well known. What is little known is that Booth had a personal grievance against the President apart from his feelings as a Southerner. The ironical part of it is that this grievance was imaginary. "Booth's cousin, John Bates Bell," said Mr. McDonald, "was a dashing Confederate officer, and had been captured as a spy. He was condemned to die..

"Booth, with the aid of Wash McLean, of the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, and Senator John P. Hale, attempted to secure a reprieve. The three called upon Lincoln, and Booth made a stirring appeal in behalf of Bell. Lincoln's kindly heart was moved, and he wrote the order, staying the execution.

"This order was transmitted to Seward, Secretary of War, but he held it up, resenting the interference of the President. When Booth learned that his relative had been hanged he became half crazed, and not knowing that Lincoln had kept his word, resolved to assassinate him."

After shooting Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, Mr. McDonald's narrative continues, Booth rode to the home of Dr. Mudd, a Southern sympathizer, where the fracture of the leg he sustained in escaping was reduced. He then pressed on to Port Royal, Virginia, and applied for shelter at the Garrett farm, explaining his injury by asserting that his horse had fallen on him. Booth was accompanied by a friend, David Herold. When news of the assassination was received, the neighbours surmised that the guests of the Garretts were the men sought by the pursuing cavalrymen.

The Garretts advised the two men to hide in the tobacco warehouse, and they did so. The building was surrounded by the soldiers, and the occupants ordered to surrender. Herold obeyed and was handcuffed and led away. Booth, however, began to argue with the soldiers, and the colonel in command, wearying of the delay, ordered a fire started against the building. "Through the cracks of the warehouse our soldiers could see the form of Booth, the light of the flames revealing him. One of them, Sergeant Boston Corbett, thrust his gun through an opening and shot Booth, disregarding orders to take him alive. Booth was mortally wounded, and died one hour later."

Mr. McDonald confirmed the legends of Booth's social attractions, stating that he was something of a lion in the national capital, and had entrée to the most exclusive circles. The writer, when sojourning in the States, was informed that Booth, though not enjoying a reputation comparable to that of his brother Edwin, had a considerable vogue as an actor. Impressionable young women fell victims to his comeliness and grace, and he received innumerable admiring missives of the variety known as "mash notes."

Witnesses at the autopsy held on board the gunboat *Montauk* identified the body as Booth's by his diary, compass, knife, carbine and pistols, by his initials tattooed on the right hand, by a scar on his neck resulting from a surgical operation, and by dental work. Controversy as to what ultimately became of the body was encouraged by varying stories told by General Baker. This officer at a subsequent investigation said that he was ordered to take the body from the gunboat and turn it over to the colonel in charge of the arsenal grounds. Asked whether he had ever represented that he or some of his assistants had taken the body out into the ocean, tied stones to it, and sunk it, he replied that he might have done so indirectly, as the Secretary of War "did not want anybody to know," and he (General Baker) was constantly being worried by reporters.

George L. Porter, assistant surgeon of the U.S. army, testified that, in the presence of himself and four soldiers, the body was carried to a large room used for general storage quarters, buried under the floor, and the door locked.