Garrett, Mrs. Charles

Lincoln in the Eyes of the Little Girl Across the Street

Tad's Playmate, Now Mrs. Charles Garrett of Richmond, Cal., Gives Her Recollections of Great Emancipator

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A WOMAN who played with Tad Lincoln when both were children, Mrs. Charles Garrett, lives today in Richmond, Cal. When asked about her memories of Lincoln, not long ago, she said:

"Yes, I was just a little girl. Tad and I were playmates. My family moved to Washington at the beginning of the war and lived there for about 11 years in the big house on LaFayette and Washington streets. Across LaFayette Square, kitty-cornered from our house, was the White House. I have played in most of its rooms, on the lawn, and of course on the street between. That was the common battleground of the children."

Mrs. Garrett laughed as she recalled the "battles." During those stirring times the city itself was full of conflict; it was the meeting place of the North and South. Children of Northern parents stood stanchly by their country and taunted those who favored the Confederacy. Children whose parents were from the South as loudly proclaimed their loyalty. Clashes were inevitable. It got to be a game. Groups of Southern children took long sticks and chased groups of Northern children, and pitched battles, half in fun, half in earnest, were frequent.

"I saw many of those battles from my window," said Mrs. Garrett, "and once I had the joy of escaping from my mammy and joining the fray. Tad Lincoln was in many of them. His 'sympathy' was with the North, but oftentimes, if a chum was fighting with the Seceders, he would decide to stand by his intimate friend and join the "south." The battle would continue until one side put the other to route, and, after the derisive cries of the victors had faded away, friendly overtures were made and another pitched battle would follow.

Tad's Love for His Father

"Tad was about my own age—there were a few months' difference, that was all. He was a quiet boy, intensely fond of his father. Many times when in the same room Tad would steal up to his father's chair and stand there quietly until his father observed him. Then Lincoln would pat the lad on the head, without seeming to interrupt his work, then finally draw him and hold him close. When Tad was released he seemed to know he was dismissed, and we would race off to play again.

"I recall Lincoln as a very tall man with a frock coat which, although double-breasted, was always unbuttoned. He wore a black, loosely flowing tie, baggy trousers and boots—somehow I always seem to carry the picture of him with boots. And his tall hat! Why, I could draw it right now—it had a queer little way of going up in front. It was not uncommon to see President Lincoln about the grounds alone, and I have a clear picture of him, as I have seen him so many times, come out of the house, walk down the steps to his carriage, enter, and, surrounded by his aids on horseback, drive away.

"The President drove often to the barracks. Once he took Tad and me with him for the ride. The footman was sitting in front with the groom, Tad and I on the front seat, facing backward, and the rear seat facing the front was occupied by Mr. Lincoln and another gentleman. I do not remember who he was. The two men talked earnestly all during the drive, while Tad and I flounced around on the seat allotted to us in the way children usually do."

At the Theater

Mrs. Garrett was at the theater the night Abraham Lincoln was shot. Many things she heard afterward, but as nearly as possible she has related what she actually saw with her own eyes on that night.

It was the first play she had ever attended. She was about 10 years old. There were many people all about her, everyone was dressed up, there was music and there was a brilliant illumination; there were people on the stage walking about and doing things, talking in a way quite unintelligible to her. After the people on the stage had been talking and acting for a little while, everyone got up from his seat. Handkerchiefs were waved, there was the sound of cheering and clapping of hands. Then everyone sat down again and the people on the stage began once more. The little girl looked toward the box on the right hand side of the stage and saw that President and Mrs. Lincoln were there. They were her neighbors and she knew them well, so again directed her gaze toward the stage and was in the land of "Make Believe" until something happened.

A Shot

There was a shot. She heard it clearly and distinctly. Evidently everyone else heard it, yet no one moved—it seemed for a moment to be a part of the play. Then some one shouted. All eyes were directed toward the President's box. She saw a man scramble across the box; next he was on the stage; he was turning to look back at the box, then he swept the audience with his eyes—they seemed to look directly into the little girl's own; and they were wild, piercing eyes. There was another shout. "The President has been shot!"

"Pandemonium broke loose. The stage was full of men who had leapt from the audience. I looked toward the President's box, but the curtain had been drawn. All was din and confusion. The people crowded against me and pushed me about. I could see nothing that was going on for I was so small. I remember nothing more until my mammy pulled me out from under the chintz curtain of my own four-poster. She told me they had all been searching hours for me. How I had got lost, how I had found my way home alone in the dark; how I had gone to my room and hidden under the bed, I do not remember. All I could think of was the tumult and the uproar, and the cry, 'The President has been shot!'"

"My mammy put me to bed. I went to sleep but remember waking several times while it was yet dark. I heard people hurrying past in the street below; I heard them stop and talk in groups under my window; then I would hear crying and would hide my head under the covers."