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BREAKS A SILENCE OF OVER THIRTY YEARS.



J. WILKES BOOTH.
(From a photograph taken one month before he murdered Abraham Lincoln.)

John H. Surratt's Story of His Life.



JOHN H. SURRATT IN THE UNIFORM OF THE PAPAL GUARDS.

His Connection With Lincoln's Assassin.



MRS. MARY E. SURRATT, HANGED JULY 7, '65, AS AN ACCOMPLICE OF WILKES BOOTH.

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BALTIMORE, April 2.—Thirty-three Easter Sundays have come and gone since Abraham Lincoln was shot to death by John Wilkes Booth in the old Ford's Theatre, Washington, and of the eleven individuals who were connected, directly or indirectly, with that tragic and unhappy event, but two are yet living.

One of these is Lewis J. Weichmann, now a resident of Philadelphia, whose testimony was the foundation stone on which the government rested its hopes of convicting Mrs. Mary Surratt and her son, John H. Surratt, and on which history and the light of subsequent events have since cast a grave shadow.

The other living actor in that famous tragedy is John Harrison Surratt, a resident of this city, a trusted and honored official in the Old Bay line of Chesapeake steamers, whose life story from the time he ran away from school as a mere lad of 16 and joined the secret service bureau of the Confederacy, until the last day of his lengthy and highly sensational trial, reads like a fairy tale, and is but another evidence of the oft-proven adage that "Truth is stranger than fiction!"

For a third of a century, prominent writers for newspapers and magazines in every section of the Union have realized that, could John H. Surratt be indueed to tell his story, freely, unreservedly and fully, it would rival in romantic interest and dramatic detail anything hitherto published concerning the landmarks of the war between the States. Countless efforts—over a thousand, in fact—have been made to get him to tell his story and make a statement of his true relations with Wilkes Booth, Weichmann, Dr. Mudd and the other actors who figured in that long train of stirring events which culminated in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the execution of his mother, but, prior to the three interviews granted me for the Sunday Post, in which he told me every detail of his life, he has returned but one answer to all: The wound was too deep and rankling to tear open at this late day and expose to the critical gaze of an unsympathetic public.

He feels now, however, that after a lapse of a third of a century, the bitterness of feeling, rancor and hate engendered by four long years of internecine strife has passed away, and given place to a more fair and liberal feeling concerning his reputed connection with an event which shocked the world and thrust a nation into mourning. "I feel that I owe it to those who have passed away, as well as to myself, to make a statement concerning what I know of that event," he said. His statement places him in a very different light before the people of the country. Captain Surratt is very different from the ignorant and bloodthirsty Southerner pictured by an angry press during his trial. On the contrary, he is refined, highly educated and polished. His manners are stately and dignified.

IS A BRILLIANT TALKER.

He is a brilliant talker, and every word he utters conveys the exact meaning he intended. He is above the medium height, straight and slender, and has iron gray hair and mustache and two piercing gray eyes set deep in his head, beneath heavy eye brows. He talks in a low tone of voice, never hesitates for a word, and only twice during my talks with him did he become excited, although dwelling for the first time in over 30 years on matters which must have stirred his feelings to their core. Once was when he spoke of Wilkes Booth, and the other time was during his terrible arraignment of Weichmann. He is only 55 years old, although he looks 70. He told me he lived fifty years from the time he entered the Southern army until he was liberated on bail after his two months' trial. As the substance of this interview is of considerable historical importance in that it is the first purely voluntary statement of anyone who had aught to do with Wilkes Booth. I will give his statement, word for word, as they left his mouth, merely preserving historical sequence.

"When the war broke out I was a small boy of 16, studying at St. Charles College in Carroll county, Maryland, and like all Southern boys at that time, I was a red hot rebel and dearly loved my native State. At the college it was strictly against the rules to discuss even in the most casual manner any of the political questions then agitating the country. I remember one afternoon we were all on the campus, which directly faced Charles Carroll of Carrollton's beautiful estate, Dourehegan manor,

when there issued from the main driveway opposite a troop of Confederate cavalry, on their way to join the army of northern Virginia. The troop had been recruited and was led by young Charles Carroll. They were a magnificent set of young men, full of fire, dash and vim, and presented a splendid appearance. I was fired with martial ardor at the sight, and tossing my cap into the air, I cheered and cheered again. In fact I cheered myself hoarse. When the troop had disappeared behind a cloud of dust my comrades assured me that I would certainly be expelled, and taking the bull by the horns, as it were, I went direct to the principal and told him what I had done. He was very angry at first, but finally softening, said it might prove a good thing after all, adding: 'We may have use for those young men yet.'

It was at this college that I first met Lewis J. Weichmann, my nemesis, a man who has done more than any one living or dead to bring disgrace on me and my family. He is a living proof that the child is father to the man.

FOUGHT IN CONFEDERATE ARMY.

"After staying at the college a few months I became convinced that my place was in the ranks of the Southern Confederacy, and suiting the action to the thought, I went direct to Richmond and entered the secret service bureau under General Wilder, one of the finest Americans that ever lived. It would take every column of space in the paper you represent to detail all my experiences while travelling the 'underground route' between Richmond, Washington, Baltimore and Montreal. I had innumerable hairbreadth escapes. When I look back on the risks I ran and the desperate chances I took I fail to see how I could have been so foolhardy. I walked in and out of the lines of the two armies, entered and left Washington, went from Richmond to New York, to London, returned to Washington and elbowed the Union generals, all the while gathering valuable information for the service. I knew every cross road, bye path and hiding place in northern Virginia and southern Maryland."

"Captain Surratt, it has been stated in one of the principal magazines that Booth was anxious to get your co-operation on that very account, and that when you were introduced to him in Washington by Dr. Mudd you thought at first that he was a Union spy. It is stated that you were with Weichmann."

"Ah! Wilkes Booth. I loath him. In the first place, Wilkes Booth was never introduced to me by Dr. Mudd on the street or anywhere else. Booth came to me with a letter of introduction from a valued and trusted friend. In the second place, Weichmann was nowhere near when Booth presented his letter. I looked upon Booth from the start as a hot-headed, visionary man, and the moment he broached his wild scheme to me of abducting Lincoln I simply laughed at him.

"It is utterly impracticable, I said to him. In the first place, I know northern Virginia and southern Maryland by heart.

" 'It is on that very account that I have come to you for your assistance, co-operation and advice,' said Booth.

" 'And it's on that very account that I tell you that the idea is not feasible, I replied. 'In the second place, you do not realize the danger.'

" 'I don't consider that for a moment,' said Booth."

" 'Nor I, I replied, 'but it must be considered. After leaving Washington, provided we are able to leave with President Lincoln—which I doubt, we will have to drive over 100 miles before we can cross the Potomac. After having crossed that in safety, we will have to drive from one end of midland Virginia to the other. Don't you know that section is simply swarming with Yankees? I do, because I have just come through there. Granted that we do get through all right, we reach the Rapahannock and cross it, we will be reasonably safe. But we stand about one chance in five hundred of surmounting all those obstacles. Inside of an hour, or at most two hours from the time we get possession of Mr. Lincoln's person, the entire country will be in a furore. The President of the United States cannot be spirited away like an ordinary citizen.' Booth said he was willing to take any chance.

BOOTH A MONOMANIAC.

"I believe he was a monomaniac on the subject. He had brooded over the South's wrongs so much that his mind was unsettled on the subject. He talked a good deal of ridding the country of an arch tyrant, of helping the South and of dying for his country. He was unquestionably insane when he shot Lincoln. No man in his right mind would have done that. The South lost its best friend when it lost Lincoln. He understood its condition and the character of its people as no man did before or since. Booth was the South's worst enemy, although he was sincere in wanting to aid her.

"After engaging in this conversation with Booth I dismissed the matter from my mind, and supposed Booth had done the same. Going direct to Richmond, I reported to General Wilder, and was directed by him to go at once to Elmira, N. Y., and learn the plans of the fortifications, prison, etc., at that point, with the number of prisoners. I was in Elmira for several weeks, and as my pockets were full of Uncle Sam's gold, furnished me by my government, I made hosts of friends, and I may add that it was a blessed good thing for me that I did, for it saved my life at my trial.

"Among the people I met at that point was a Union colonel, who was connected with the fortifications. He seemed to be suffering from a chronic state of 'dead broke,' and finding that I had plenty of money, and was not averse to accommodating a friend, he soon began to borrow. That was exactly what I wanted. At first it was $10 and $20 at a time. Then it was $100 and $200. I finally had him completely in my power. One day we were walking along the street, and he said to me: 'Look here. Let me ask you a question. What are you doing around here, and what do you want?' I told him that I was in Elmira because I liked the place, and I added that I was anxious to get inside of the prison to see what it looked like. He promised to get me inside, and on the following day was as good as his word. He took me all through the place and finally left me on the tower, where I made careful plans of the place. I repeated my visit on the following day, and having gained what I wanted, I determined to go back to Richmond. It was on my journey from Elmira to Albany that I first learned of Lincoln's assassination. I was shocked, and my conversation with Booth immediately recurred to my mind. The next day en route from Albany to New York I bought a New York paper and read in it that it was supposed that I was with Booth in his flight, and that a reward of $25,000 was offered for my capture, dead or alive. When I read that startling intelligence I immediately left the train and took the first one north bound that came along. Late that night I crossed into Canada, and that was the last time I saw the United States until brought back on a man-of-war two years later. I went to Montreal and then to Quebec. In the latter city I was secreted in a monastery, and there remained for five months. Thinking it wiser to be out of the country, on account of the angry feeling of the people, I boarded a steamer and went to London. I was in London some time, and also visited Liverpool and Birmingham. I then went to Paris, and from Paris went to Rome and enlisted in the Papal Zouaves under the name of Watson. My life while in the Papal Guards was very pleasant, but I continually longed for my native land. I eventually became a sergeant, and in the war between the Papal States and the Garibaldians I was in my element. It was while in the service of Pius IX. that I wrote to one of the most prominent Union statesmen in this country, telling him who and where I was, and asking him if it would be safe for me to return to the United States, and if I could get a jury trial and not undergo a drum head court martial. He wrote back saying that in his opinion I could not get a jury trial, and advising me to remain away from America at least three years. The judge at my trial refused to admit those letters as evidence of my intention to return to this country voluntarily. I determined, however, to return, and to take my chances of a court martial, and was on the point of doing so when I was arrested at the instance of Pope Pius IX. and cast into prison."

"How did he learn who you were?"

TREACHERY OF A FRIEND.

"Through the contemptible treachery of a friend, so-called, a Canadian. I had shared my bread and butter, my blanket and even my shirts with that man, and had any one told me he was going to prove as false as he did I would have scouted the bare suggestion. I have long since learned that no man in this world can be trusted. This man went to Cardinal Antonelli and told him my story. Antonelli went with the information to the Pope, who immediately ordered my arrest and strict confinement. I was stationed at one of the outposts between Rome and Naples, in the Italian Mountains. It was a beautiful spot, and we were quartered in an old monastery. The papal secretary of state at once communicated with the United States Secretary of State that they had me, and our government ordered a man-of-war, then cruising in the Indian Ocean, to report to Porto Vecohio and take me aboard.

"Now, as a matter of fact, our government did not want me in the United States. They were willing and anxious for me to remain abroad, and hoped I would continue to do so. While I was in London, Liverpool and in Birmingham our consuls at those ports knew who I was, and advised our State Department of my whereabouts, but nothing was done. Of course, when the matter was brought to the attention of the government in such an official manner and from such a source there was nothing to do but to express thanks and take measures for having me returned to this country for trial.

"In the meantime I was confined in a cell in the old monastery. The second day after my arrest, or rather the second night, a messenger arrived from Antonelli directing the officer in command of the post, the Baron De Serappo, who you will remember married Miss Polk of North Carolina, to have me sent to Rome under heavy guard the moment the summons was received. I was awakened at 4 a. m. by the rusty key grating in the lock of my cell, and by the light of a flickering lantern I saw that my untimely visitors were an officer and six soldiers, all heavily armed. At once I knew what it meant, and when the lieutenant in command ordered me to dress at once in order to go to Rome I at once made up my mind that, let the consequences be what they may, I would not go to the Eternal City. While dressing I mentally arranged a plan of escape. This old monastery was built on the side of the moun-

tain, nestling on one side, and the west side was directly over a precipice over a hundred feet high. A wall four feet high guarded the court yard. I determined to break away from my captors and go over that precipice. When I was finished dressing I was placed in the centre of this guard and we slowly ascended the stone steps of the old building, worn smooth by countless feet of many generations of monks. We reached the court yard and turned towards the left. Just as we reached the point I had selected for my attempt I made a break for liberty, and running quickly across the court yard jumped on the wall. Gathering myself for the attempt I took a long breath and jumped into space, doubling my legs slightly under me as I did so. About thirty-five feet from the top of the precipice there was a bare ledge of rock jutting out from the face of the mountain and about four feet broad. By great good fortune I landed safely on that ledge.

"Captain, it has been stated that when you broke away from your captors you made a wild jump over this precipice and landed purely by accident on that ledge. As a matter of fact, didn't you know of the existence of that ledge of rock?"

"Know of it? Why of course I knew of it. Do you think I would have been such an idiot as to jump over a 100-foot precipice to certain death in that manner. Many and many a time my comrades and myself, in hours of idleness, would lean over that precipice and wonder how many feet it was from the wall of the court yard to the ledge, and it was an open question as to whether a man could jump from the wall and land safely on the ledge. While dressing I determined to make the attempt. It makes my blood run cold to think of it now, though. However, I managed to land on it safely and my legs doubling up under me, my head struck the bare rock with fearful force. I was knocked completely senseless.

TRYING TO ESCAPE.

"In the meantime what a scene of confusion and what a babel of voices there was above me. The lieutenant in command wrung his hands in anguish and swore in choice musical Italian. My break had been so sudden that every man was taken completely by surprise. They had plenty of time to shoot me down, if they had had the presence of mind. Running to the side of the precipice they looked over the wall. They must have seen me lying there unconscious, for they immediately began firing down on me. They may have done so on a venture, however. I was brought back to my senses by the reports of their rifles from above and the bullets flattening themselves on the bare rocks unpleasantly near my head. Dizzy and sick and shaken I managed to gather myself together and crawl out of danger and gradually make my way down the side of the mountain to the little town which nestled at its base. Running along the main street of the town I ran directly into the arms of a detail of Zouaves. They were as much surprised as I, but I had the advantage of being on the alert. With me it was almost a matter of life and death. Doubling quickly on my tracks and expecting every moment to be hit by some of the bullets which were flying around my head, I ran like a frightened deer; through alleys, down dark streets and across lots I sped, and managed to elude my pursuers. In the meantime the entire town was in an uproar. Everyone had the alarm, and all the gates were guarded. Selecting a good point I managed to get over the wall and headed down the white Italian road toward the coast. I should have said at the beginning that all this took place during the early hours of the morning. It was 4 a. m. when I was aroused and told to dress. By the time I had left the town a few miles in the road, the sun was high in the heavens and I was congratulating myself on my three escapes when I was suddenly startled by the sharp command:

"'Halt! Who goes there?'

"'Friend,' I answered in my best Italian, recognizing that I had run into a Garibaldian camp. Glancing at my papal uniform, the outpost was by no means reassured. In the meantime I had raised my hands above my head. Bringing his rifle to his shoulder he was pressing the trigger unpleasantly hard. Raising my hands even higher in the air I sang out to him: 'Lower your rifle, man; can't you see my hands are up?' Still covering me with his rifle he ordered me to advance within a few paces of him and called out lustily for the corporal of the guard. That officer came on the run, and seeing my rig called for the sergeant of the guard. He no sooner caught a glimpse of my dress than he called for the officer of the guard. To make a long story short, I was soon surrounded by a mob of Garibaldians of all ranks and sizes. When I told them that I was an American, a deserter from the Papilo Guardo and wanted to get to the coast, they treated me with the greatest kindness. Brothers could not have been kinder. I shall remember these honest, red-coated men with deepest gratitude as long as I live. They entertained me for a week, and when I decided to go to Naples, they made it possible for me to do so with safety. As I was travelling under English passports, I went direct to the English consul and told him who I was. Glancing with unmingled surprise at my red fez, baggy trousers and leggings of the Papal Zouaves, he said to me:

"'Do you realize for a moment, man, the risk you run? Don't you know that Naples is in the hands of the Garibaldi, and that you might have a knife run in your back at any moment?'

WITH THE GARIBALDI.

"I told him that the Garibaldi were the very best friends I had—the only friends, in fact—and that the money I had in my pocket was given to me by them. I remained in Naples several days, and the entire time I was there I was shadowed by two detectives. They never lost sight of me."

"That must have been cheerful. Who did they represent?"

"I don't know, and as a matter of fact I did not care. Coming face to face with them on one occasion, I said to them:

"'You stick to me nobly, brothers. I feel deeply moved at your kind attention.' They made no reply, but they did not dare to arrest me in Naples in the presence of my Garibaldian friends. It became known that I was going to Alexandria, and by a singular coincidence the very ship which took me there also carried despatches to Consul Hale at that point to arrest me and keep me in close confinement until the arrival of Commodore Jeffrey. When we were a few days out from Naples it became known on the vessel who I was, or was supposed to be. It was reported that I had killed the President of the United States. When this became noised around the ship there was the greatest excitement at once. The captain of the vessel came to me and said:

"'Your presence is kicking up a great fuss on this ship. Who are you, anyway?' I told him frankly the truth, and while he was most kind, he refused to land me anywhere else than Alexandria. I was by this time completely tired of being a man without a country, and determined that on reaching Alexandria I would place no more obstacles in the way of my capture and return to the United States. Accordingly when I reached that city I went to a hotel, signed my correct name and sat quietly on the porch smoking a cigar, waiting for some one to come and arrest me. On the afternoon of the day after my arrival, glancing down the street I saw coming up towards the hotel an open carriage, containing one man and followed by a squad of cavalry. I knew at once who they were. The cavalcade stopped in front of the hotel, and the gentleman got out—he was Consul Hale, and coming up to me asked me if I was John H. Surratt? I told that such was the case. He said he had orders for my arrest. When the carriage drove off there were two in it and I was the second occupant. I was placed in the city prison, awaiting the arrival of the man-of-war, and was visited daily by Mr. Hale. He treated me as a son. While he gave me plenty of reading matter, he would never tell me when and how I was to be taken back to the United States. One day I heard a great fuss in the yard of the prison where the common prisoners were kept. Someone was swearing like a trooper in English. I went into the yard and found a United States man-of-warsman. On my asking him what the trouble was, between his oaths he stated that he belonged to a United States war vessel, which had arrived the night before, and getting drunk he had been 'jugged.' Said he: 'Here we have been chasing all over Europe for a fellow named Surratt, and blankety blanked if he hasn't given us the slip three times. We have come here to get him now, and blankety blank if I believe we will ever see him.' I smiled grimly. He said the vessel was in command of Commodore Jeffrey. When Consul Hale called that day I asked him when I was to be delivered to Commodore Jeffrey. To say he was surprised was putting it mildly. He never learned how I found out. I was placed on board the vessel, heavily chained and handcuffed, and taken to Marseilles, where a United States fleet was lying in command of Admiral Goldsborough. When we entered the harbor, and I saw that fleet of splendid vessels, with the Stars and Stripes flying from every ship, I could have cheered. I was proud of my country. The bands were playing "Star Spangled Banner,' 'Hail Columbia,' 'Maryland, My Maryland' and 'Dixie.' I was taken aboard the admiral's flagship, and when he saw me, he said:

THOUGHT HIM A BOY.

"'So you are the desperate fellow we have been chasing around the world. Why, you are only a beardless boy.' Turning to Commodore Jeffrey he said: 'Surely, commodore, there is no occasion to iron Surratt; it is certainly unnecessary.' The commodore stated that they were his orders, and there was nothing left but to obey. I was placed in a stateroom, and a marine with drawn cutlass and loaded revolver placed on guard. The marine was given orders that if I attempted to escape to cut me down or shoot me down, if necessary. The whole thing struck me as being a perfect farce, and I laughed in the face of the officer who gave the command. He scowled at me. As I had a whole stateroom to myself, and as the marine had to march three paces forward and three paces back, I think I had the best of the bargain. The voyage was uneventful, and we landed in New York in the spring of 1867, and I was taken direct to Washington. During my trial, which lasted sixty-two days, over 200 witnesses were

examined. As you may know, the jury disagreed, standing eight for acquittal and four for conviction; and after being kept in the Old Capitol Prison for some months I was liberated on $25,000 bail. The case was never called again, and I presume the bail has expired by limitation. My counsel were General Merrick and John G. Carlisle. After that trial my nervous system was a wreck. I have never gotten over it."

"How about the testimony of Lewis J. Weichmann, captain?"

"That man's testimony from beginning to end was outrageously false. He lied, lied, lied, from the time he took the witness stand until he left it. During the three days he was on the stand he did not dare to look me in the face. I never took my eyes off him for a moment. General Merrick told me that the newspapers were commenting on the fact. I believe that if I could have caught his eye it would have ended his perjury. As I said to you at the beginning of our talk, that man has done more to bring disgrace and ruin on me and my family than anyone and everyone else, living or dead. I am convinced that if he was on his deathbed he would send for me and ask my forgiveness for the ruin and trouble he has caused me.

"Do I think that his testimony was actuated by malice? No, I do not. Moral cowardice was at the bottom of it. The morning after Lincoln's assassination a great many people were arrested. Weichmann was one of these. It became known that he was a friend of Booth. In order to get a confession from him a rope was placed around his neck, the other end of it thrown over a beam, and he was ordered to tell what he knew. He was lifted off his feet. Under such circumstances a man will tell or say anything to get a rope from around his neck. Weichmann made up his story out of the whole cloth, and when he was in safety he did not have the moral courage to contradict it, as any honest man would. He was a moral coward. He was that way as a school boy. At school it was forbidden to have novels. I had one in my desk, and Weichmann opened the desk and took it out. Through some chance it fell into a teacher's hands. When I accused Weichmann of having taken it out, he swore by all that was holy that he did not do so, although I confronted him with three boys who saw him. As I said, the child is father to the man. The boys at school would not have anything to do with him. He was continually hanging around the teachers and running to them with tales.

FRIGHTENED INTO FALSE CONFESSION.

"It would have been an easy matter for Weichmann to have confessed that he was frightened into a false confession in the Capitol Prison. Many men have done the same thing. I remember on one occasion I was travelling the 'underground route' in Southern Maryland, in company with a number of Confederates. One of the party, a nephew of Judge Roger A. Pryor, was arrested by a squad of Union troops. They put a rope around his neck, threw it over a limb of a tree and jerked him off his feet. He confessed everything to them; told the officer in charge exactly who we were, and as a consequence we were all arrested. The evidence against us was without a flaw. After being liberated, this young man, realizing what he had done, went to the judge and told him that he had lied in his so-called confession, that he was so frightened that he would have said anything. He said that he did not even remember what he had confessed. The next day we were all liberated. Look at the difference between Weichmann and this young man. The latter confessed the truth and took it back, Weichmann confessed a lie and stuck to it. When he was giving that false testimony against me he was enjoying a position as teacher which I got him. I met him on Pennsylvania avenue one day during the war, and he told me he was in a bad way, and asked me to help him.

"The cost of my trial about impoverished me, and I could not have paid for it had not two friends in Baltimore sent me money. I received from them checks for from $1000 to $5000 at a time. My detectives had to follow the government detectives all through the North. The latter tore the leaf out of an Albany hotel register, where I had signed the day before Lincoln was murdered. But I was able to secure other registers where I had signed on dates which made my presence in Washington during those exciting times impossible. I also summoned many prominent citizens of Elmira, all strong Union men, whom I had met there, and they testified to my being in that city on the dates I claimed. My counsel demanded that I give them the name of the Union colonel who let me into the prison, but I refused. It would have ruined him, although it would have caused my acquittal. My lawyers threatened to throw up the case unless I revealed his name, but I declined. During the trial General Merrick pointed out to me a group of men in one corner of the room and asked me if I ever saw them before. I said I had not. He told me that they were going to swear that they drove me into Maryland the morning after Lincoln's death. They were employed by the government to swear that way. General Merrick went to the National Intelligencer of Washington and exposed the entire plot. The next morning that paper came out and stated all the facts, and the men mysteriously disappeared. The government has taken good care of Weichmann. He has held a public office in Philadelphia from the day of the first trial until now."

Booth lies buried in beautiful Greenmount cemetery, in this city, and is in the same grave with his father, mother, two sisters and a brother. His famous brother never entered Washington after Lincoln's death.

No one questions in this city, where the facts of the great conspiracy are better known than anywhere else, but that Mrs. Surratt was officially murdered. It is generally believed that John H. Surratt had nothing to do with the crime, but it is believed that he was in the conspiracy to abduct. Of the eleven who were tried, four were hanged, five died natural deaths and two are yet alive.

HANSON HISS.