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LINCOLN AND BOOTH

A LATE DISCOVERY

WE have recently had the opportunity of examining a remarkably interesting relic of 1861, in the form of two small 12mo. paper-covered theatrical "prompt-books," formerly owned by Junius Brutus Booth, Jr., and full of annotations in his writing. They are "Brother and Sister, A Petit Opera in Two Acts, by William Dimond," N. Y. 1822; and "Bombastes Furioso, by Thomas B. Rhodes" (published about the same time), both having extreme interest and raising a question of considerable importance concerning the sentiment entertained toward Abraham Lincoln by another member of the Booth family than John Wilkes Booth, the assassin.

Both prompt-books contain the autograph of J. B. Booth (junior), one of them bearing also the autograph signature of Miss C. De Bar, who became his wife. Miss Catherine De Bar was the daughter of Ben De Bar, distinguished for his performance of the character of Falstaff, and also for many years the leading theatrical manager in St. Louis. These little books were sold at auction when his estate was dispersed in St. Louis, but their important nature was unsuspected and they rested in obscurity until a comparatively recent date.

On the lower blank portion of the last page of "Brother and Sister" are written in Booth's autograph the names of the Dramatis Personæ of "Bombastes Furioso," and opposite these names are written substitutes to adapt the burlesque to the time and place in which it was to be performed, the evident purpose being to hold up to ridicule the living characters which were substituted for fictitious ones. The startling significance of this proposed change is manifest when we read this cast, written by Booth:

"Artaxomines ..... Lincoln
Fusbos ..... Seward
Bombastes ..... Gen. Scott
Distaffina ..... Mad. Fremont."

When " Bombastes Furioso " is examined closely, we find that it has been interlined and a pen drawn through the original names, other names being substituted according to the cast given above, all the writing being in the autograph of the original owner, J. B. Booth, Jr. Here was a purpose and a plan to hold up to public ridicule on the stage Lincoln, Seward, Scott and Mrs. Fremont. Did that purpose and plan originate with J. B. Booth, Jr., the son of Junius Brutus Booth, and the elder brother of John Wilkes Booth?

The indignity to President Lincoln and others proposed could not have been presented on the stage more scurrilously than by the adaptation of " Bombastes Furioso," no other play or opera of the time lending itself so well to an enemy of Lincoln. The representation of Lincoln and the language put into his mouth by the changes in the burlesque are particularly offensive throughout, the President and General Scott being represented as rivals in intrigue for the affections of Mrs. Fremont, who encourages them in their infatuation, but is especially anxious to capture Lincoln, crowd out Mrs. Lincoln, and make her way to the White House. Of course an insult is intended to Lincoln, Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Fremont, Scott, and Secretary Seward, and the language put into the mouths of the characters is offensive in the extreme.

It may be well asked if J. B. Booth, Jr., invented this alteration of " Bombastes," and did he entertain feelings toward Lincoln, his family, and his Cabinet, which would have suggested this insult? Or was the alteration invented by some other person—that person being his brother, the assassin—and proposed to J. B. Booth, Jr., as a manager and then copied by him as we find it in these little books? If performed, as this opera seems to have been, the performance must have taken place in Richmond, Va., as two localities in that city are mentioned in Booth's changes in the text: " The Pillar high in Sackville Street " being changed to " The lamp-post in eleventh street," and again in the line, " In Werburg Street, near Derby Square " is altered to read " In a street near the Capitol Square." If put on the stage in Richmond, it must have been during the first year of the Civil War and before Gen'l Scott had resigned.

EDITOR.