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# RECOLLECTIONS OF LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION.

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THE following simple narrative of events and incidents connected with the assassination of President Lincoln is intended to be confined to the knowledge and personal experience of the writer. As he has never, at home or abroad, encountered any opinion suggesting extenuation of the terrible crime, comment thereon is unnecessary, and will find no place in these reminiscences.

On the evening of the 14th of April, 1865, a few minutes after 10 o'clock, I was in company with a friend walking on Pennsylvania Avenue, when a man running down 10th Street approached us, wildly exclaiming: "My God, the President is killed at Ford's Theatre!" Calling to my friend to follow me I ran to the theatre, two blocks away, perceiving as I neared it increasing evidences of the wildest excitement, which reached its climax in the auditorium. How it was that I worked my way through the shouting crowd that filled the house, and found myself over the footlights and on the stage, I am unable to describe.

The first person to whom I addressed a rational word was a detective, now one of the oldest in the city. I asked him who had done the shooting. When he mentioned the name of Wilkes Booth I scouted the idea; but others insisted that Booth had been recognized in the man who had leaped from the President's box and rushed across the stage. Excited crowds during the war were nothing new to me, but I had never witnessed such a scene as was now presented. The seats, aisles, galleries, and stage were filled with shouting, frenzied men and women, many running aimlessly over one another; a chaos of disorder beyond control, had any visible authority attempted its exercise. The spot upon which the eyes of all would turn was the fatal upper stage box,

opposite to which I now stood. Access to it was guarded, but presently a man in the uniform of an army surgeon was assisted by numerous arms and shoulders to climb into the box to join the medical men already there.

I was told that Laura Keene, immediately after the shot was fired, had left the stage and gone to the assistance of Mrs. Lincoln, and I soon caught a glimpse of that unhappy lady who had apparently arisen from her husband's side. She stood in view for a moment, when throwing up her arms, with a mournful cry, she disappeared from sight of the stage.

I now made my way towards the box exit to await the descent of Miss Keene, hoping to learn from her the President's condition. I met her at the foot of the staircase leading from the box, and alone. Making a motion to arrest her progress, I begged her to tell me if Mr. Lincoln was still alive. "God only knows!" she gasped, stopping for a moment's rest. The memory of that apparition will never leave me. Attired, as I had so often seen her, in the costume of her part in "Our American Cousin," her hair and dress were in disorder, and not only was her gown soaked in Lincoln's blood, but her hands, and even her cheeks where her fingers had strayed, were bedaubed with the sorry stains! But lately the central figure in the scene of comedy, she now appeared the incarnation of tragedy. Preparations were now being made to remove the President to the neighboring house where he breathed his last about seven o'clock the next morning, and the theatre was soon cleared and left in possession of the troops which had arrived.

By this time, the fact of the murderous attack on Mr. Seward had become generally known, and the rumors grew as to similar attacks on the lives of other high officials. The streets were filled with people, and the hotels were centres of surging crowds. Beyond the chief actor, the President's assassin, whose identity was still a mooted question, there was none to whom suspicion as yet pointed. All trace of Booth was lost and the direction of his flight a mystery. Had the then unknown and unconceived telephone been in existence, could the headlong ride of the assassin and his companion have been for so long unarrested? With Alexandria, the "Long" and "Chain" bridges, Tennallytown, Brightwood, Benning, and Anacostia—all in vocal communication, what changes in the drama might not its swift agency have

wrought! Although the military telegraph was being worked to its full capacity, the galloping Booth and Herold had outstripped its operation, and with slackened speed had leisurely crossed the Navy Yard bridge, only delayed by a few commonplace questions by the unsuspecting sentries. They were now free from immediate pursuit, and were riding through a country with which Herold was thoroughly familiar. The story has oft been told of their twelve days' journey, broken by rests of hiding, their crossing the Potomac, and their discovery and capture in Caroline County, Virginia.

During that eventful night, urgent was the need of the "Old Capitol Prison" for its strong garrison. On that very afternoon, as the maddened crowds well knew, a hundred or more Confederate officers had arrived in the city as prisoners of war, *en route* for Fort Warren, and were quartered in that dilapidated old crib on Capitol Hill. Fierce threats of burning the building and slaughtering the prisoners were freely made; but the city was under arms, and the Provost Marshal on the alert. Indeed, some of the resident population suspected of secession or Southern sympathies were far from safe. In one yelling crowd that started from Willard's Hotel up Fourteenth Street towards the Ebbitt House, I managed to edge my way in with the leaders, and to dissuade them, I scarce remember how, from violence against the residence of a well-known physician.

I did not consider it necessary on that night to confide to any one the fact that I was an acquaintance of Booth; but I often thought before the morning of two army friends of mine whose reflections could scarcely have been comfortable. They were loyal and devoted Union soldiers, but chance alone had saved them from a serious and embarrassing predicament in connection with the assassin.

Booth had several months previously made their acquaintance, and knowing that among their duties as officers on the staff of the Commanding General were periodical visits by day and night to the chain of fortifications surrounding the city, he had proposed to accompany one or both of them when their turns should arrive. He was a fine horseman, and it had seemed but natural that the solitary rides of their civilian friend might be pleasantly diversified by this new experience. But changes in their detail and other circumstances had, happily for them, interfered with their

appointments with Booth, and rescued them from the company of so compromising a volunteer aid. I may mention here that the companion who was with me when we first heard of the assassination, and who was an intimate friend of some high officials, was arrested on the street the next day owing to a fancied resemblance to Booth.

It was through these officers that I had made the acquaintance of Booth. Being domiciled at the National Hotel, he had during the winter invited them to attend a dance or "hop" to be given there, and to extend the invitation to any friend. They asked me to go, as they wished me to meet their friend the actor. I duly attended the function, and on entering the ball-room (the large dining hall) was met by one of my military friends, who conducted me through a glass door to a private nook where Booth was entertaining his friends with champagne. The host received me most cordially, and I was soon hobnobbing with the popular actor. His handsome presence and engaging manner at once captivated me, and during the hour I remained I had several chats with him, the beginning of a pleasant association of many weeks. During this period he seemed to have been occasionally absent from town, but we frequently met and strolled on the Avenue, usually dropping into Hancock's. The old man, "Uncle Andrew," was then in the prime of his genial old age, and his mulatto assistant, "Dick," was justly celebrated for his ministrations to the convivial frequenters of this unique old curiosity shop. Booth and I occasionally drifted into subjects theatrical, and I, but two or three years out of Harvard, had Warren, Davenport, Setchell, McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, the Mestayers, Westerns, and Fanny Clarke at my tongue's end. I had known all of the men, most of them as stock actors. All of them were then becoming famous, none of them, alas! now living. Booth never spoke to me of the war or of national affairs with more than a passing word, and while it was plain to be seen that he was Southern in his feelings, I did not class him as a Secessionist. It was almost as difficult afterwards to realize, as then to dream, that the mind and heart clothed in such engaging presence was harboring a treasonable and murderous conspiracy; or that the hand lifting the friendly glass was to direct the fatal shot that awoke two hemispheres in horror! And strange, too, were these chance meetings in the quaint little museum which his impend-

ing fate was soon to furnish with the other sensational objects upon which we may gaze to-day.

But returning to that memorable night, there was, until nearly dawn, a gathering of notable persons in the old "Metropolitan Club," then situate on the corner now occupied by Wormley's Hotel. Upon the Club register, now in possession of its social namesake, was entered, in a few impressive lines, a brief account of the night's tragic happenings. As the club-house was on the same block as the Seward (now the Blaine) residence, I tarried there until satisfied that Mr. Seward was in no imminent danger, and then went home to sleep as best I might.

Before breakfast the next morning the expected intelligence of the President's death had spread throughout the city, although in many households it was the first intimation of the night's tragedy. Early in the forenoon my own was one of the hundreds of houses already draped in the emblems of mourning.

Before noon I was at the Navy Yard, where my brother, a captain of marines, had, during the night, in obedience to orders from the Navy Department, occupied with a guard of one hundred men the monitors "Montauk" and "Saugus," lying out in the stream. They had been designated for service as a prison for the reception and safekeeping of such prisoners as might be sent on board. Entering one of her boats, I was soon on the deck of the "Montauk," and in conversation with the captain, who recounted to me his experiences of the preceding night.

Among others who had been sent on board were Atzerodt, who had been arrested for intent to kill Vice-President Johnson, and Spangler, the stage carpenter, for assisting Booth to escape from the building. The captain told me that Atzerodt had sent for him and made a partial confession, to the effect that he had entered into a conspiracy with Booth and others to abduct the President and other prominent officers of the government, but when he found that plan abandoned, and the plot changed to one of murder, he had faltered. But such was his fear of Booth, personally, that he had not dared risk the detection of his intended desertion, and so he had been seen lurking around the "Kirkwood House," where Mr. Johnson lived. This confession was of no avail. It was not admitted on the trial, and he met his deserved fate as a conspirator and accessory in treason and assassination.

On revisiting the Navy Yard on the next day, I found that

Payne was a prisoner, having been captured at Mrs. Surratt's house in the city, and identified as the assailant of Mr. Seward. It will be remembered by those familiar with the events of the trial, that Payne's counsel, Colonel Doster, made no formal argument for the defence, but read and submitted to the Court a most eloquent plea for mercy, containing the story of his client's parentage, and short though eventful career. It appeared that his true name was Powell. He had entered the Confederate service from his native State of Florida, served in the army of Virginia, and, in the early part of 1861, after seeing Booth at the theatre in Richmond, had met him personally, and become infatuated with him. He had subsequently been captured, had escaped, and found his way to Baltimore, where in the winter of 1864–5 he had again encountered Booth. Three years had passed with their experience of adventure and bloodshed. He was now poor and needy, hopeless for his cause and embittered in his devotion to it; and he but little required the eloquence of his former idol to become his slave, and to find in him a leader in any enterprise, however desperate. He was older in character at twenty years of age than the boyish and silly Herold, several years his senior, or than the degraded Atzerodt, whose maturer years had brought no experiences more heroic than those gained in river blockade-running and stable lounging.

Of the truth of the so-called Payne's statements regarding his name and origin, I had abundant evidence to satisfy me within two months after his execution. There is at present residing in Washington a well-known and successful lawyer, a native and Confederate soldier of Florida, who in the early autumn of 1865 became an inmate of my home on his first visit to the North. During one of our strolls about the city, and without disclosing my object, I took him into Gardner's gallery on Seventh Street, where were to be seen photographs of the conspirators. We examined them all casually, and I then called his attention to that of Payne, asking if he perceived in it a likeness to any one. He gave it a closer scrutiny, and then said it "looked like a youngster named Powell." He said that the boy was the son of a minister in Florida. He had not belonged to Powell's company, and had not known him well; but making allowance for the changes that five years might have wrought in his face and form, he felt confident in the recognition of

the individual he had known. These and other items I gleaned from my friend, who had never read Colonel Doster's plea, with which, on comparison, I found his statements to coincide.

But another question touching the man's identity had previously impressed itself on my mind, and its solution had been most decisively settled. There was an attempt made, and by some persons vehemently persisted in, to make it appear that the so called Payne was actually the son of Captain Sydney Smith Lee, late of the United States Navy, the brother of Robert E. Lee, and therefore a nephew of the Confederate leader, and a brother of General Fitzhugh Lee. To explain how such an idea might have been temporarily entertained, I will mention a startling conversation I had with my brother on the morning after Payne had been brought on board.

The Captain took me aside and told me that he had a half suspicion that the man called Payne might be his old friend, Dan Lee, his schoolmate at Dr. Arnold's Rugby Academy, near Baltimore, and of whom I had often heard him speak. He thus explained his apprehension. He had followed the guard to the cell provided for the prisoner's reception, and which had been extemporized in a coal bunker. In pursuance of special instructions, given in view of the man's extraordinary strength and desperate nature, he had caused the cell to be prepared, and proceeded to superintend the disposition of the prisoner to prevent self injury. The man was seated, and his head somewhat bowed, so that his position did not allow the dim light of the ship's lantern to disclose more than a partial view of his features. No conversation passed between them, the officer's duty only having in view such precautions for the prisoner's safe keeping as were necessary and not inconsistent with humanity. He left the door of the cell haunted by this shadow of recognition, but spoke to no one until he saw me in the morning.

The prisoners were now brought on deck to be photographed, and the opportunity was presented for the settlement of this unwelcome doubt. During the sitting I was rejoiced to see an expression of relief appear upon the Captain's countenance, and when he rejoined me he fervently said: "Thank God, there's nothing in it. Dan Lee never could have grown to this fellow's stature: he had dark eyes and fine teeth, while this one's eyes are blue and his teeth very bad." Yet ignoring these essential

points of difference, there were several persons present at the trial, who doggedly clung to this sensational belief. I first met Dan Lee several years afterward, and he then laughingly spoke of my brother's account of the affair.

On the 28th of April, on my way to the Navy Yard, I learned that Booth and Herold had been captured, and that the latter, with Booth's body, had been brought up the river, and were on board the "Monitor." At the gate I found that no one at this time was allowed to visit the ships. The officer of the day, an old friend, invited me into his quarters, and explained that this restriction had come from the Navy Department, because of the numbers of people that the good nature of the Commandant of the Yard had permitted to overcrowd the vessels. He thought, however, that he could manage to put me on board; so, sending for a corporal, he instructed him to "take this man on board the "Saugus," and deliver him to the captain in command." I cannot say that there was aught exchanged between the officer and man beyond these words, but within ten minutes I was "delivered," and received by the captain, somewhat to his surprise.

I soon found myself mingling with the groups of official people on board, with some of whom I was acquainted. One of them was General Eckert, an Assistant Secretary of War, who asked me if I wished to see Booth's body, and pointed to a gathering of people on the after deck. I was soon gazing at the remains, which needed no long inspection to enable me to recognize them. The handsome countenance was unmarred by the agony of his lingering death, which I was soon to hear described. There were missing the moustache and the curling lock upon his forehead, which during the flight had been removed at the house of Dr. Mudd. There his broken leg had been set, and its foot was now covered by an old shoe, replacing the riding boot which it was found necessary to cut off. The body was resting upon a rough carpenter's bench, where it had lain since early morning, and it was now awaiting, before a kind of military coroner's jury, an official identification, in which I little thought I was soon to bear a part.

But presently the scene shifted forward, for Herold was brought on deck to be photographed. As I stood near the hatchway, I had my first look at him as he slowly ascended and moved forward with the sentries. He was not only handcuffed, but to

his leg irons were attached, a chain, and a 32-pound shot, the latter being carried by the sentry in the rear. As they approached the turret the gangway narrowed, and their footsteps along the iron deck were but a few feet from the water. The idea instantly seized me that at this moment had come to the unhappy wretch the first, last and only opportunity of escape from the gallows. A sudden dash to the right, and his impetus would have dragged the shot, if not the sentry, after him over the unrailed side of the "Monitor"; and in two minutes thereafter his parting breath would have bubbled to the surface from where he lay anchored, three fathoms below, on the muddy bottom of the river. But had the thought occurred to him, it was not to be; and he remained among the living a few weeks longer, to complete the doomed quartette upon the scaffold.

I then returned to Booth's body, accompanied by General Eckert, when conversation ensued regarding my knowledge of the man and my recognition of the remains. Having been on board for over an hour, I was about to take my leave, when General Eckert informed me that a military commission was about to convene, and the presiding officer desired me to remain as a witness. Shortly afterwards I was summoned to the cabin where the Commission was in session, and among the members of it I recall General Holt, the Judge Advocate General of the Army, Judge Bingham, of Ohio, and the well-known Col. Lafayette C. Baker. My examination was short, the questions relating to the length of my personal acquaintance with Booth, and to the positiveness of my recognition of his body, and after my dismissal from the stand I was allowed to remain in court.

The examination of the next witness was more interesting in detail, being that of Dawson, a clerk in the National Hotel, who it appeared had known Booth for some years. When asked whether the man had possessed any physical peculiarity by which he could recognize the remains, he replied in the affirmative. He had often seen on Booth's right hand, at the junction of the thumb and forefinger, the initials, "J. W. B." in india ink. This mark had sometimes come under his notice when the actor was writing his name on the hotel register, and he had more than once made the remark: "Booth, what a fool you were to disfigure that pretty white hand in such a way."

Another witness presently appeared in the person of Dr. J.

Frederick May. It having been ascertained that Booth had been his patient, the Doctor was sent for, and brought directly from his residence to the cabin of the ship, without seeing the remains on deck. He answered the questions as to his relations with Booth, by saying that, after the actor had become his patient, a mutual liking had ensued, and that he had occasionally attended the theatre with tickets sent by him. As a means of identification he mentioned a tumor on the neck about which he had been consulted. Booth had come to him with an angry swelling on the left side of his neck, which he had found to be a tumor, and removed with the knife. After dressing it, he advised the patient to be very careful in his movements; that the place would heal by "first intention," and have a small seam-like scar that would be but little noticeable. Booth departed much relieved from apprehension of disfigurement.

Some days afterward he had returned, and said that all had gone well up to the time of an unforeseen accident. In Baltimore he had been playing some part with Charlotte Cushman, where some stage business in the scene required her grasp upon his shoulder. But the vehemence of action, for which this celebrated actress was proverbial, had caused her to miss her aim, and she struck him on the neck with such violence as to reopen the wound, then not quite healed. Further treatment and redressing was resorted to, and the wound had finally healed by "granulation," the scar being enlarged, and resembling that caused by vaccination. This exact condition was apparent when the body was examined in the presence of members of the Commission, thus setting at rest the question of identity.

Then followed the testimony of the officer who had commanded the pursuing party; and most intensely interesting was this narrative from the lips of one of the chief actors in that tragic retribution.

During this time, on the deck above was being performed the autopsy, the ghastly results of which met my sight when I ascended. It was the first "post mortem" I had ever seen, and the only one of which a personal acquaintance has been the subject. And what a shocking change was before me, to find life, health, manly beauty, and brave attire replaced by death, mutilated bone and viscera, and travel-worn blood-stained rags! Even then I could fancy the relic hunter plying his vocation, and im-

bruing his ready handkerchief in the clotted blood, that he might preserve, exhibit, and mayhap peddle his gruesome trophy! I have lately seen in print an account of the preservation and partition of the blood-stained dress of Laura Keene, of which I have made previous mention of seeing in the theatre.

So many stories were shortly after this time published concerning the final disposition of Booth's remains, that I must state, in conclusion, what I saw and knew about it. Some accounts treated the subject as a mystery the Government was determined to maintain, while others insisted that the body was carried down the river and bay by night, and thence out to sea, where it was sunk forever out of the sight and knowledge of men. Nine years afterward I met in Europe an Englishman, who declared and offered to wager that Booth was then alive and in India. He "knew all about it," of course; but he eventually decided not to lose the considerable number of pounds sterling he had offered to risk when I engaged to produce an authenticated extract of the proceedings of the Commission.

The facts, with which I was well acquainted, are these: After the adjournment of the Commission, the remains were, in my sight, sewn up in a navy blanket and passed over the side of the vessel into a small boat, manned by two persons, one of whom was rowing, and who had been detailed by Colonel Baker, with instructions which they kept to themselves. The boat proceeded down the Anacostia and disappeared around the point in the direction of the United States Arsenal, now the Artillery Barracks. In these grounds was the old Penitentiary, within the walls of which the conspirators were subsequently confined, tried, and four of them executed. The officers on duty at the Arsenal were well known to me, two of them being my relatives. A short time subsequently one of these told me of the receipt by him of the body, and its interment in a cellar under the Penitentiary building on the day I saw the last of it.

Several years afterward, as is now well known, the Government turned it over to the family, and it is now resting in their cemetery plot in Baltimore.

SEATON MUNROE.