

BOOTH'S MADNESS DESCRIBED ANEW

French Dean's Diary Says Lincoln's Assassin Expressed Admiration for Brutus and Showed Insanity in Paris.

ACTOR RAVED NIGHTS AND HOBNOBBED WITH GHOSTS

A new and extremely interesting contribution to the history of the Booth conspiracy is made in the diary of the late Edmond Got, for many years the dean of the Comedie Francaise in Paris, now published there in two volumes by Plon-Nourrit & Co.

In many of the accounts of Lincoln's assassination it is mentioned casually that John Wilkes Booth spent a few weeks in Paris at the beginning of 1865. The historical gap is now filled in. M. Got was Booth's host in Paris, and his account of Booth's conversation shows that at that time, whatever Booth may have told the Surratts and Arnold and Harrold, he was already planning to play the part of Brutus. The kidnapping conspiracy, if he ever seriously considered it, had given way to one of assassination.

Says M. Got:

"April 30, 1865—The assassination of President Lincoln—a few days after the taking of Richmond, which probably ended, with a victory for the northern states, the interminable war of secession—and I knew the principal actor.

"Actor, that is the word, for three months ago Fechter sent me an urgent letter introducing Booth, a celebrated New York tragedian, who desired to pass some time in Paris. He was a fine appearing fellow, full of energy, with distinguished manners, and well informed, but hardly speaking French.

"I courteously offered him my hospitality until he could take an apartment and a carriage by the month, for he wanted to live like a gentleman.

"He stayed three days at my house and through me tried to inform himself as to art and other affairs going on here. Oftentimes, while smoking, I remember, he spoke to me of Julius Caesar, of Shakespeare, and of Brutus, especially of Brutus.

"What do you think of Brutus in France?"

"We admired him at college, according to Plutarch's idea, in his Greek version; but what was Brutus at bottom but an ungrateful and sinister dreamer, a sophist in every drop of blood? Is he not judged by himself, according to his role, by his last cry: 'Virtue, thou art but a name?'"

"And Booth, thus questioned, nervously changed the conversation. I remember that now.

"When he left my house I saw him quite often. He ran about the theatres and the city and made rapid progress in Parisian customs, even to such an extent that, on his request, I introduced him to a beautiful young lady, one of my friends, whom he had noticed in 'Les Fillibustiers de la Sonora,' at the Porte-Saint-Martin.

Booth Seems Insane.

"But one morning, much to my surprise, this young person told me, quite out of breath, but with a certain timidity, that he was a madman—that he got up in the night and went about in his sleep hobnobbing with ghosts, and that she had been afraid and had gone off to Nice without even saying good-by.

"Shortly after that Booth came to take leave of me, quite out of his head, at least in appearance, and went back to America.

"I must go back!" he exclaimed.

"And it was he who, during a performance at Washington, fired on President Lincoln and without being immediately arrested.

"They will never take that rascal alive, I answer for it. I understand; he had his mind made up—the fixed idea—even in France. He fought against it in vain—he succumbed to it on his return."

Here are three political entries which, while containing a touch of prophecy, indicate the attitude of the actor toward the imperial government. The date of the first will be a surprise to historians.

"Jan. 12, 1862—They are talking much, but under their breath, at the Austrian embassy, of Maximilian as the future Emperor of Mexico. And we, of course, shall have to pay the expenses of the exploitation! The Bonapartists are saying that it is a clever stroke (coup de jarnac) against the United States, for at the Tuileries they are all secessionists at heart. But I, who am French before all, I say that it is a supreme stroke of madness. I wonder whether the Emperor consults sleepwalkers?"

"July 1, 1867—A terrible blow for the empire! During the solemn distribution of prizes at the Palais de l'Industrie this morning the news transpired of the death of Maximilian of Austria at Queretaro—executed for us! Isn't that a worthy end of those three mad years in Mexico!"

"Dec. 4, 1868—Day before yesterday was the 17th anniversary of the imperial coup d'etat—from 15 to 18 years is the period that has usually been

allotted since '89 by the French people to their successive governments. Already one begins to feel that there is something in the air."

Got Goes to London.

It was in the spring of 1871 that M. Got gathered together a remnant of the company of the Comedie Francaise and went to London, where he opened a little theatre on the Strand. "May 20, 1871—At 10 o'clock this morning, during my breakfast, I received a letter from my friend, Dadesnes, the manager of the theatre at Paris and my neighbor at Bouloinville. He believed that it was his duty, in spite of the prayers of my mother, not to leave me in ignorance of the fact that my aged and dear parents were in real danger at Passy; that a shell day before yesterday had penetrated the roof of the dwelling and that he had deserted his own house, which had also been struck; but he could not succeed, in spite of his solicitation, in taking away my sick father with him."

So M. Got rushes back to Paris, which he finds in a state of siege. After a series of adventures, which are indicated rather than described in his "Journal," he rescues his parents from their home in Passy, installs them in a dwelling in the Quay du Louvre, and, after being arrested several times, wakes up one morning to find the district of Louvre in the hands of the loyal army. And so he writes:

"Dear little gray seats, dear red trousers, I salute you! You may have been beaten at Sedan, but now you have saved the world!"

With a safe-conduct from the army of Versailles, he makes his way without further adventures back to London. He sleeps nearly all the way and arrives on a Sunday morning. He purchases a copy of the Observer, "the only Sunday paper," and sees with joy that the little theatre in the Strand is still progressing. Then he turns to the news from Paris and reads in big headlines:

"M. Got Shot!"

"How the devil could that news have reached here before me?" he asks himself.

Got's Rare Qualities.

M. Got had at least two rare qualities—possibly a third. He could disguise himself as only a detective in a dime novel can; he never criticised a play, and his words were very often prophetic.

In entries made from Dec. 5 to Dec. 14, 1865, the reader learns the dominance of the "claque" or paid band of applauders or hissers at the Paris theatres. The play was "Henriette Marechal," in three acts, by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt. In this case the clique of hissers actually killed the play by preventing the audiences from listening.

"But," observes M. Got, "authors and actors have, at least, the right to be heard in order to be judged—oh, these curious Athenians of modern Paris, and so very young! That is a bad sign." And he adds:

"Dec. 14, 1865—Nothing ever equalled it—five performances of 'Henriette Marechal'—five tornadoes—two or three minutes of piercing cries for every scene—a minority of f.300 impudently deafening the f.4000 of receipts which would have let the play go on. And we, the actors, run through the piece during the tumult—another insolence that has no limit. People say that the remonstrance is only against the piece, but how are we to know."

"Dec. 18, 1865—After six performances the management has withdrawn 'Henriette Marechal.' Has it been wise in thus surrendering? Whence comes this animosity? No one knows."

His Trip to London.

A charming glance at provincial managers is given during M. Got's trip to Toulon.

"July 7, 1866—On our arrival the deputy mayor, as courteous and correct as possible, came to take our trunks, offered us luncheon, and made us visit the jail. He was all sweetness—why? In the evening we played before a fine public, glistening in toilettes and uniforms, and with receipts of more than f.2000. We played in a new and superb auditorium, the finest that we had seen in provinces after that of Bordeaux—and all for nothing! But—there is always a but—why is it that generosity should be more rampant here than at Marseilles? And the theatre for nothing—but—the inevitable but—

"At the end of the play they brought me a bill for gas amounting to f.300.

"'There is a mistake,' I said, smiling; 'I shall speak presently with the deputy mayor.'

"'It is he who is the owner of the gas company.'

"'Ah, that explains everything. Here are the f.300.'

"'Ah, that incurable drain on resources! When it is not on one side it is on another.'"

A Mine of Chronology.

M. Got's "Journal" is a perfect mine of detached chronology. Here is a curious letter written 33 years ago by a youthful dramatist, who later on was to hold the destinies of French foreign affairs within his grasp:

"Paris, July 23, 1877—Monsieur: Allow me to recall your promise of six months ago. * * * I told you my comedy was to be in four acts. I have written the first three and am at work on the fourth. Now is the time, therefore, when I shall need your advice. If you do not mind I will bring you my manuscript, and if it be worthy to be revised by you I will accept your corrections with equal gratitude and respect."

The interest of the letter is its signature, Theophile Delcasse. The former foreign secretary, having been appealed to, had to make a clean breast of his youthful indiscretion.

M. Clemenceau was more ambitious and had a short play produced, "Le Voile ud Bonheur," and is even said to be at work now on a drama. Will any manager induce M. Delcasse to extract his comedy from the drawer where it has lain for 33 years?