

THE BOOTH HOMESTEAD.

From Our Special Correspondent.

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A description of the "Booth Farm" and its surroundings may not prove uninteresting. As seen by the writer some few days ago, it impressed him simply and singly with this idea - "neglect."

Nearly one mile from Belair, on the Belair and Havre de Grace road, a rude lane leads off to what was the habitation of one of the most gifted and erratic men that ever lived; down this lane, nearly a fourth of a mile from the main road, on the left side after leaving Belair for Havre de Grace, you come in view of a modern tin-roofed cottage house, two stories high, facing the main road, with a background of forest landscape. At right angles with the new house, and to the right, is the old house in which the assassin John Wilkes Booth was born, a rude structure, built of logs and plastered, with the chimnies outside of the house, in the Old Dominion style, a barn again to the right, a few steps from the gable end of the old house, situated down in a hollow. As far as I saw of the new house (which was begun by the old gentleman and finished by the sons) it was plainly and neatly furnished, but of the old house, which I am told contains the wardrobe, furniture, and books of the elder Booth, what can I say but the truth? It leaks badly, and I was told has ruined the treasures deposited in the right wing thereof. The grounds and whole place wear that Virginian look of desolation and unthrift that would lead you to suppose an army had passed over it. I had some conversation with an intelligent, pretty young girl, a rose in the wilderness, who gave me the following information: As long as she has been there, the Booths have not lived on the farm, the place being leased to a Mr. Heisler, whose son-in-law, Mr. King

and family, occupy the premises. She remembers John on three occasions, once when he was boarding in Belair and came over to the farm; another time when he rushed into the new house, saying that he had been fired on by the soldiers, and meant to defend himself. After which, he went into the old house, got his rifle, and went off in the direction of the "big woods." Another time she saw him in company with a brother, who came to the house with John. The brother was highly incensed at the soldiers having cut down or taken his wood, but John was very quiet; in fact, as the young girl naively said, "I always liked John the best; he was so quiet and nice looking." It seems the soldiers here alluded to were a party of Unionists looking after a local Confederate company, who eluded pursuit by hiding in the "big woods" before spoken of, a tract of forest nearly five square miles in extent - in fact a wilderness. The Rebel "Home Guard" concealed in the wood, and the Secession assassin, John Booth, rushing into the old house, and with his rifle going to the forest, also raises a doubt whether Mr. Lincoln was the first man murdered by him. After taking leave of the young girl, I bent my steps toward "a hickory" road some rods to the rear of the old home and barn, and coming to the road found that in order to gain it I should have to cross a "small branch." I noticed an extension of the fence over this "branch", so climbing carefully, I was just quitting the fence to go up the "hickory" to the main road, when I noticed that some trees by the side of the "branch" were covered with initials. I was not long in deciphering the following letters: W.L.B., 1843; J.W.B., '49; T.B.G. The name "Booth" plainly cut on the largest of the three trees, and the initials S.S.H. and L.D. lately cut on the smallest tree, as if while leaving the feet in the brook the engraver had carved his name. I fell into contemplation of the letters in juxtaposition. Who was W.L.B. in 1843? Some member of the Booth family perhaps. J.W.B., '49, rudely cut, no doubt by the hand of the assassin when but a child. T.B.G. might stand for Thomas Goff, a neighbor's son. But whose the later initials,

evidently cut within the year, S.S.H. and L.D.? Could the first have been cut by one of the Hanna family who live in that locality, or was it executed by Harrold, one of Booth's accomplices. L.D. also? While in this train of thought I was startled by a scampering in the leaves on the other side of the forest road, and looking around saw squirrels playing, and noticed for the first time how wild the country seemed not fifty rods from the farm-house. Walking but a few steps down the stream, birds of every hue were tamely flitting about me, turtles of the snapping breed were there, and rabbits darted merrily through the brush. Said I, "What could have induced the great Lucius Junius to purchase this wild spot, wilder thirty years ago than now?" It must have been for a solitude and study. I am taking my notes as I go; I have passed to the other side of the house, where I am told that near the new plowed field the graves of some of the family lie. I see a broken iron fence or railing, a small broken tombstone, and that is all. I am told that two children and the elder Booth's father sleep here - 'tis well I am told so, for I should not have known it otherwise.

A white man, with an immense sore on his lip, thinking me of the detective school perhaps, volunteers the assertion that all the people about here are loyal, and that it is no wonder that "this John Booth done it, for none of the neighbors ever liked the family, who were the devil's own play-acting people, and would do anything bad." I despair of giving any idea of the brogue of this specimen of "white trash," who I imagined first was "a Far Down Irishman," until he told me that he came from Holland. I defy the subtlest imitator to speak his patois, which was harder to understand than the most guttural tones of Africa. This man's constant asseveration that all the people of that section of country were thoroughly loyal, led me to make further inquiries, when I found, to my astonishment, that the contrary actually was the case - that today there are probably as many bitter white-washed Rebel sympathizers in Eastern Maryland as in any of the Rebellious States, which is accounted for by the fact that these people have thriven

better since the Rebellion than ever before, and that no rude army of either side has foraged o'er their broad estates. Mr. King, who occupies the place, is no doubt a Union man.

For what follows I am indebted to the neighbors about the farm. The Booth family were always highly thought of by their neighbors. John was considered cruel and vindictive, in proof of which the following is told: A poor colored man who lives near the farm owned a very nice dog, which, as my informant said, "Poor Stephen Hooper would not have taken twenty-five dollars for, poor as Stephen was." John Wilkes Booth, the hero of sensation novelists, who write accounts of his dramatic death, this low-minded fellow sat at the gable window of the new house, and with his rifle or pistol, for no earthly reason, shot the dog dead. Another: A sow going near the barn on the Booth property, John fired three loads of shot in the animal, only defending his conduct by saying that he would not have strange animals come on his ground destroying things, which was not the truth, as the hog was destroying nothing of value.

Many strange stories are current of the elder Booth. It is said that in one of his crazy freaks he bought a piece of land near his farm that is entirely surrounded by property owned by other parties, making it an inconvenience, if not a matter of impossibility, to properly care for the land thus purchased. At another time a favorite horse was dying, and he had the feather beds taken out of the house for the horse to lie on, and made his wife show her affection for the horse by kissing it. When the horse died he had it buried with as much solemnity as if a human being; a colored man named Hall, who, with a dog, were his constant comrades during his "spells," were called on to do service, the man Hall playing the parson, Booth the clerk, and the dog the chief mourner. I am told that John Wilkes Booth was born about the time the father was most affected.

As proof of what I have written of the Secession proclivities of the section of Maryland that I have lately visited, I would state, that although the black people know they are free, they are terribly afraid of being seen talking to a stranger on any subject. When I have interrogated them as to the reason why they have exhibited reluctance to be seen answering questions, the reply has been that there are a few, but mighty few, real Union men in that section, and that were they, the colored people, suspected of giving information as to the disloyalty of many of the resident whites, their lives would not be worth "shucks."