

THE LIFE, CRIME, AND CAPTURE
OF
JOHN WILKES BOOTH
WITH A FULL SKETCH OF THE
CONSPIRACY OF WHICH HE WAS THE LEADER
AND THE
PURSUIT, TRIAL AND EXECUTION OF HIS ACCOMPLICES
BY GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND.
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The box in which the President sat consisted of two boxes turned into one, the middle partition being removed, as on all occasions when a state party visited the theater. The box was on a level with the dress circle; about twelve feet above the stage. There were two entrances - the door nearest to the wall having been closed and locked; the door nearest the balustrades of the dress circle; and at right angles with it, being open and left open after the visitors had entered. The interior was carpeted, lined with crimson paper, and furnished with a sofa covered with crimson velvet, three arm chairs similarly covered, and six cane-bottomed chairs. Festoons of flags hung before the front of the box against a background of lace.

President Lincoln took one of the arm-chairs and seated himself in the front of the box, in the angle nearest the audience, where, partially screened from observation, he had the best view of what was transpiring on the stage. Mrs. Lincoln sat next to him, and Miss Harris in the opposite angle nearest the stage. Major Rathbone sat just behind Mrs. Lincoln and Miss Harris. These four were the only persons in the box.

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In the meanwhile the news spread through the capital, as if

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is full of wild and baseless rumors; much that is said is stirring, little is reliable. I tell it to you as I get it, but fancy is more prolific than truth; be patient!

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It may not be a digression here to ask what has become of the children of the weird genius I have sketched above. Mrs. Booth, against whom calumny has had no word to say, now resides with her daughters in Nineteenth Street, New York. John S. Clarke dwells in princely style in Philadelphia, with the daughter whom he married; he is the business partner of Edwin Booth, and they are likely to become as powerful managers as they have been successful "stars." Edwin Booth, who is said to have the most perfect physical head in America, and whom the ladies call the beau ideal of the melancholy Dane, dwells also on Nineteenth street. He has acquired a fortune, and is, without doubt, a frankly loyal gentleman. He could not well be otherwise from his membership in the Century Club where literature and loyalty, are never dissolved. Correct and pleasing without being powerful or brilliant, he has led a plain and appreciated career, and latterly, to his honor, has been awakening among dramatic authors some emulation by offering handsome compensations for original plays. Junius Brutus Booth, the oldest of them all, most resembles in feature his wild and wayward father; he is not as good an actor as was Wilkes, and kept in the West, that border civilization of the drama; he now lies, on a serious charge of complicity, in Capitol Hill jail. Joseph Booth tried the stage as an utility actor and promptly failed. The best part he ever had to play was Orson in the "Iron Chest," and his discomfiture was signal; then he studied medicine but grew discouraged, and is now in California in an office of some sort. A son of Booth by his first wife became a first-class lawyer in Boston. He never recognized the rest of the family.

In Montgomery, if I do not mistake, Booth met the woman from whom he received a stab which he carried all the rest of his days. She was an actress, and he visited her. They assumed a relation creditable only in La Boheme, and were as tender as love without esteem can ever be. But, after a time, Booth wearied of her and offered to say "good by." She refused - he treated her coldly; she pleaded - he passed her by.

Then with a jealous woman's frenzy, she drew a knife upon him and stabbed him in the neck, with the intent to kill him. Being muscular, he quickly disarmed her, though he afterward suffered from the wound poignantly.

His last permanent acquaintance was one Ella Turner, of Richmond, who loved him with all the impetuosity of that love which does not think, and strove to die at the tidings of his crime and fight. Happy that even such a woman did not die associated with John Wilkes Booth. Such devotion to any other murderer would have earned some poet's tear. But the daisies will not grow a whole rod from his grave.

Once he was playing with John McCullough in the last act of "Richard." They were fighting desperately. Suddenly the cross-piece on the hilt of McCullough's sword flew off and cut the owner deeply in the forehead. Blood ran down McCullough's face, though they continued to struggle, and while, ostensibly, Booth was imitating a demon, he said in a half whisper: "Good God, John, did I hurt you?"

And when they went off the stage, Booth was white with fear that he had gashed his friend.

On the morning of the murder, Booth breakfasted with Miss Carrie Bean, the daughter of a merchant, and a very respectable young lady, at the National Hall. He arose from the table at, say eleven o'clock.

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During the breakfast, those who watched him say that he was lively, piquant and self-possessed as ever in his life.

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As they crossed the Eastern branch at Uniontown, Booth gave his proper name to the officer at the bridge. This, which would seem to have been foolish, was, in reality, very shrewd. The officers believed that one of Booth's accomplices had given this name in order to put them out of the real Booth's track. So they made efforts elsewhere, and so Booth got a start. At midnight, precisely, the two horsemen stopped at Surrattsville, Booth remaining on his nag while Harold descended and knocked lustily at the door. Lloyd, the landlord, came down at once, when Harold pushed past him into the bar, and obtained a bottle of whiskey, some of which he gave to Booth immediately. While Booth was drinking, Harold went up stairs and brought down one of the carbines. Lloyd started to get the other, but Harold said:

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The first party to take the South Maryland road was dispatched by Major O'Bierne, and commanded by Lieutenant Lovett, of the Veteran Reserves. It consisted of twenty-five cavalry men, with detectives Cottingham, Lloyd, and Gavigan; these latter, with the lieutenant, kept well in advance. They made inquiries of a soothing and cautious character, but saw nothing suspicious until they arrived at Piscataway, where an unknown man, some distance ahead, observed them, and took to the woods. This was on Sunday night, forty hours after the murder.

Guided by Officer Lloyd, the little band dashed on, arriving at Bryantown on Tuesday. Here they arrested John Lloyd, of the hotel at Surrattsville, of whom they had previously inquired for the murderers, and he had said

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positively that he neither knew them nor had seen anybody whatever on the night of the crime. He was returning in a wagon, with his wife, whom he had ordered the day before to go on a visit to Allen's Fresh. The Monday afterward he started to bring her back. This woman, frightened at the arrest, acknowledged at once that in her husband's conduct there was some inexplicable mystery. He was taciturn and defiant as before, until confronted by some of his old Union neighbors.

The few Unionists of Prince George's and Charles counties, long persecuted and intimidated, now came forward and gave important testimony. Among these was one Roby, a very fat and very zealous old gentleman, whose professions were as ample as his perspiration. He told the officers of the secret meetings for conspiracy's sake at Lloyd's Hotel, and although a very John Gilpin on horseback, rode here and there to his great loss of wind and repose, fastening fire-coals upon the guilty or suspected.

Lloyd was turned over to Mr. Cottingham, who had established a jail at Robytown; that night his house was searched, and Booth's carbine found hidden in the wall. Three days afterward, Lloyd himself confessed - and his neck is quite nervous at this writing.

This little party, under the untiring Lovett, examined all the farm-houses below Washington, resorting to many shrewd expedients, and taking note of the great swamps to the east of Port Tobacco; they reached Newport at last and fastened tacit guilt upon many residents.

Beyond Bryantown they overhauled the residence of Doctor Mudd and found Booth's boot. This was before Lloyd confessed, and was the first positive trace the officers had that they were really close upon the assassins.

I do not recall anything more wild and startling than this vague and dangerous exploration of a dimly known, hostile, and ignorant country. To these few detectives we owe much of the subsequent successful prosecution of the pursuit. They were the Hebrew spies.

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By this time the country was filling up with soldiers, but previously a second memorable detective party went out under the personal command of Major O'Bierne. It consisted, besides that officer, of Lee, D'Angellis, Callahan, Hoey, Bostwick, Hanover, Bevins, and McHenry, and embarked at Washington on a steam-tug for Chappell's Point. Here a military station had long been established for the prevention of blockade and mail-running across the Potomac. It was commanded by Lieutenant Lavery, and garrisoned by sixty-five men. On Tuesday night, Major O'Bierne's party reached this place, and soon afterwards, a telegraph station was established here by an invaluable man to the expedition, Captain Beckwith, General Grant's chief cypher operator, who tapped the Point Lockout wire, and placed the War Department within a moment's reach of the theater of events.

Major O'Bierne's party started at once over the worst road in the world for Port Tobacco.

If any place in the world is utterly given over to depravity, it is Port Tobacco. From this town, by a sinuous creek, there is flat boat navigation to the Potomac, and across that river to Mattox's creek. Before the war Port Tobacco was the seat of a tobacco aristocracy and a haunt of negro traders. It passed very naturally into a rebel post for blockade-runners and a rebel post-office general. Gambling, corner fighting, and shooting matches were its lyceum education. Violence and ignorance had every suffrage in the town. Its people were smugglers, to all intents, and there was neither Bible nor geography to the whole region adjacent. Assassination was never very unpopular at Port Tobacco, and when its victim was a northern President it became quite heroic. A month before the murder a provost-marshal near by was slain in his bed-chamber. For such a town and district the detective police were the only effective missionaries. The hotel here is called the Brawner House; it has a bar in the nethermost

cellar, and its patrons, carousing in that imperfect light, look like the denizens of some burglar's crib, talking robbery between their cups; its dining-room is dark and tumble-down, and the cuisine bears traces of Caffir origin; a barbecue is nothing to a dinner there. The Court House of Port Tobacco is the most superfluous house in the place, except the church. It stands in the center of the town in a square, and the dwellings lie about it closely, as if to throttle justice. Five hundred people exist in Port Tobacco; life there reminds me, in connection with the slimy river and the adjacent swamps, of the great reptile period of the world, when iguanadons and pterodactyls and pleosauri ate each other.

Into this abstract of Gomorrah the few detectives went like angels who visited Lot. They pretended to be inquiring for friends, or to have business designs, and the first people they heard of were Harold and Atzerott. The latter had visited Port Tobacco three weeks before the murder, and intimated at that time his design of fleeing the country. But everybody denied having seen him subsequent to the crime.

Atzerott had been in town just prior to the crime. He had been living with a widow woman named Mrs. Wheeler, by whom he had several children, and she was immediately called upon by Major O'Bierne. He did not tell her what Atzerott had done, but vaguely hinted that he had committed some terrible crime, and that since he had done her wrong, she could vindicate both herself and justice by telling his whereabouts. The woman admitted that Atzerott had been her bane, but she loved him, and refused to betray him.

His trunk was found in her garret, and in it the key to his paint shop in Port Tobacco. The latter was fruitlessly searched, but the probable whereabouts of Atzerott in Montgomery county obtained, and Major O'Bierne telegraphing there immediately, the desperate fellow was found and locked up.

Fate

intermediate country undiscovered.

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One Mills, a rebel mail-carrier, also arrested, saw Booth and Harold lurking along the river bank on Friday; he referred Major O'Bierne to one Claggert, a rebel, as having seen them also; but Claggert held his tongue, and went to jail. On Saturday night, Major O'Bierne, thus assured, also crossed the Potomac with his detectives to Boon's farm, where the fugitives had landed. While collecting information here a gunboat swung up the stream, and threatened to fire on the party.

It was now night, and all the party worn to the ground with long travel and want of sleep. Lieutenant Laverty's men went a short distance down the country and gave up, but Major O'Bierne, with a single man, pushed all night to King George's court-house, and next day, Sunday, re-embarked for Chappell's Point. Hence he telegraphed his information, and asked permission to pursue, promising to catch the assassins before they reached Port Royal.

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This the department refused. Colonel Baker's men were delegated to make the pursuit with the able Lieutenant Doherty, and O'Bierne, who was the most active and successful spirit in the chase, returned to Washington, cheerful and contented.

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Next to the officer is a shabby-looking boy, whose seat is by the right jamb of the jail door. Of all boys just old enough to feel their oats, this boy is the most commonplace. His parents would be likely to have no sanguine hopes of his reaching the presidency; for his head indicates latent dementia, and a slice or two from it would recommend him, without examination, to the school for the feeble-minded. Better dressed, and washed, and shaved, he might make a tolerable adornment to a hotel door, or even reach the dignity of a bar-keeper or an usher at a theatre. But that this fellow should occupy a leaf in history and be

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confounded with a tragedy entering into the literature of the world, reverses manifest destiny, and leaves neither phrenology nor physiognomy a place to stand upon.

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But on the soldier's other hand is a figure which makes the center and cynosure of this thrilling scene. Taller by a whole head than either his companions or the sentries, Payne, the assassin, sits erect, and flings his barbarian eye to and fro, radiating the tremendous energy of his colossal physique.

He is the only man worthy to have murdered Mr. Seward. When against the delicate organization, the fine, subtle, nervous mind of the Secretary of State, this giant, knife in hand, precipitated himself, two forms of civilization met as distinctly as when the savage Gauls invaded the Roman senate.

His complexion is bloodless, yet so healthy that a passing observer would afterward speak of it as ruddy. His face is broad, with a character nose, sensual lips, and very high cheek bones; the cranium is full and the brow speaking, while the head runs back to an abnormal apex at the tip of the cerebellum. His straight, lusterless black hair, duly parted, is at the summit so disturbed that tufts of it rise up like Red Jacket's or Tecumseh's; but the head is kept well up, and rests upon a wonderfully broad throat, muscular as one's thigh, and without any trace, as he sits, of the protuberance called Adam's apple.

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A beam running overhead divides the court lengthwise in half, and as the prisoners sit at the end of the court, the German Atzerott, or Adzeroth, has a place just beneath the beam. This is very ominous for Atzerott. The filthiness of this man denies him sympathy. He is a disgusting little groveler, of dry, sandy hair, oval head, ears set so close to the chin that one would think his sense of hearing limited to his jaws, and a complexion so yellow that the uncropped brownness of his beard does not materially darken it.

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Payne, the strangest criminal in our history, was alone dignified and self-possessed. He wore a closely-fitting knit shirt, a sailor's straw hat tied with a ribbon, and dark pantaloons, but no shoes. His collar, cut very low, showed the tremendous muscularity of his neck, and the breadth of his breast was more conspicuous by the manner in which the pinioned arms thrust it forward. His height, his vigor, his glare made him the strong central figure of this inter-elementary tableaux. He said no word; his eyes were red as with the penitential weeping of a courageous man, and the smooth hardness of his skin seemed like a polished muscle. He did not look abroad inquisitively, nor within intuitively. He had no accusation, no despair, no dreaminess. He was only looking at death as for one long expected, and not a tremor nor a shock stirred his long stately limbs; withal, his blue eye was milder than when I saw him last, as if some bitterness, or stolidness, or obstinate pride had been exorcised, perhaps by the candor of confession. Now and then he looked half-pityingly at the woman, and only once moved his lips, as if in supplication. Few who looked at him, forgetful of his crime, did not respect him. He seemed to feel that no man was more than his peer, and one of his last commands was a word of regret to Mr. Seward.

I have a doubt that this man is entirely a member of our nervous race. I believe that a fiber of the aboriginal runs through his tough sinews. At times he looked entirely an Indian. His hair is tufted, and will not lie smoothly. His cheek-bones are large and high set. There is a tint in his

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complexion. Perhaps the Seminole blood of his swampy state left a trace of its combative nature there.

Payne was a preacher's son, and not the worst graduate of his class. His real name is Lewis Thornton Powell.

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During the morning a female friend of Atzerott, from Port Tobacco, had an interview with him--she leaving him about eleven o'clock. He made the following statement:

He took a room at the Kirkwood House on Thursday, in order to get a pass from Vice-President Johnson to go to Richmond. Booth was to lease the Richmond theater and the President was to be invited to attend it when visiting Richmond, and captured there. Harold brought the pistol and knife to the room about half-past two o'clock on Friday. He (Atzerott) said he would have nothing to do with the murder of Johnson, when Booth said that Harold had more courage than Atzerott, and he wanted Atzerott to be with Harold to urge him to do it. There was a meeting at a restaurant about the middle of March, at which John Surrat, O'Laughlin, Booth, Arnold, Payne, Harold and himself were present, when a plan to capture the President was discussed. They had heard the President was to visit a camp, and they proposed to capture him, coach and all, drive through long old fields to "T.B.," where the coach was to be left and fresh horses were to be got, and the party would proceed to the river to take a boat. Harold took a buggy to "T.B." in anticipation that Mr. Lincoln would be captured, and he was to go with the party to the river. Slavery had put him on the side of the South. He had heard it preached in church that the curse of God was upon the slaves, for they were turned black. He always hated the nigger and felt that they should be kept in ignorance. He had not received any money from Booth, although he had been promised that if they were successful they should never want, that they would be honored throughout the South, and that they could secure an exchange of prisoners and the recognition of the confederacy.

Townsend

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The misery of the pretty and heart-broken daughter of Mrs. Surrat is the talk of the city. This girl appears to have loved her mother with all the petulant passion of a child. She visited her constantly, and to-day made so stirring an effort to obtain her life that her devotion takes half the disgrace from the mother. She got the priests to speak in her behalf. Early to-day she knelt in the cell at her mother's feet, and sobbed, with now and then a pitiful scream till the gloomy corridors rang. She endeavored to win from Payne a statement that her mother was not accessory, and, as a last resort, flung herself upon the steps of the White-House, and made that portal memorable by her filial tears. About half-past 8 o'clock this morning, Miss Surratt, accompanied by a female friend, again visited the White-House, for the purpose of obtaining an interview with the President. The latter having given orders that he would receive no one to-day, the doorkeeper stopped Miss Surratt at the foot of the steps leading up to the President's office, and would not permit her to proceed farther. She then asked permission to see General Muzzy, the president's military secretary, who promptly answered the summons, and came down stairs where Miss Surratt was standing. As soon as the general made his appearance, Miss Surratt threw herself upon her knees before him, and catching him by the coat, with loud sobs and streaming eyes, implored him to assist her in obtaining a hearing with the President. General Muzzy, in as tender a manner as possible, informed Miss Surratt that he could not comply with her request, as President Johnson's orders were imperative, and he would receive no one. Upon General Muzzy returning to his office, Miss Surratt threw herself upon the stair steps, where she remained a considerable length of time, sobbing aloud in the greatest anguish, protesting her mother's innocence, and imploring every one who came near her to intercede in her mother's behalf.

While thus weeping she declared her mother was too good and kind to be guilty of the enormous crime of which she was convicted, and asserted that if her mother was put to death she wished to die also. She was finally allowed to sit in

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the east room, where she lay in wait for all who entered, hoping to make them efficacious in her behalf, all the while uttering her weary heart in a woman's touching cries: but at last, certain of disappointment, she drove again to the jail and lay in her mother's cell, with the heavy face of one who brings ill-news. The parting will consecrate those gloomy walls. The daughter saw the mother pinioned and kissed her wet face as she went shuddering to the scaffold. The last words of Mrs. Surratt, as she went out of the jail, were addressed to a gentleman whom she had known.

"Good-bye, take care of Annie."

To-night there is crape on the door of the Surratt's, and a lonely lamp shines at a single window, where the sad orphan is thinking of her bereavement.

The bodies of the dead have been applied for but at present will not be given up.

Judge Holt was petitioned all last night for the lives and liberties of the condemned, but he was inexorable.