

THE STORY OF A MUMMY WITH A HISTORY

Wonderful Experience of an Undertaker In the Southwest Who Embalmed and Now Has the Body of a Man Who Claimed That he was John Wilkes Booth, Assassin of President Abraham Lincoln

(Continued from our last issue.)

In the fall of 1866 Mr. Thraillkill was in the employ of the United States government in the capacity of freighter, his duties being to haul government freight overland from Nebraska City, Neb., to Salt Lake City, Utah. In that year, and while waiting for a load at Nebraska City, he employed a Jesse Smith as a driver, but says that while he could sit on the seat and drive any number of horses or mules, he could not harness them nor hitch them to the wagons after they were harnessed for him. But he was the life of the camp at night and rendered himself so agreeable that he never thought of discharging him for his ignorance in this respect. The other drivers were always willing to do this for him and Mr. Thraillkill said he would rather do it himself than give him up. At night he would recite Shakespeare's plays and other poems in a very eloquent manner, as well as talk of his travels, which seemed to have been extensive. The day before the caravan reached Salt Lake City, at which point was located the army post to which the freight was to be delivered, Jesse Smith disappeared without notice to his employer or request for compensation.

From this point it is the opinion of Mr. Bates, and that of Mr. Thraillkill, that he proceeded on his way to San Francisco to meet his mother and his brother.

However this may have been, it is certain that he visited San Francisco shortly after his disappearance, for he wrote to one of the boys in the gang and in the letter told him who he was. The recipient of this affectionate missive showed it to Mr. Thraillkill, and among other things it contained the query: "I wonder if the old son of a — will know me when he meets me in hell?" This latter, of course, referred to Mr. Thraillkill. Forgetful of the insult, Mr. Thraillkill visits

him often in the Penniman establishment and reiterates the conviction that he is the real and only Booth. About him being Jesse Smith he is positive.

And so we have Booth, or St. Helen meeting his oldest brother, Junius Brutus Booth, at San Francisco in 1866 or 1867. Again we locate him in Lexington, Ky., in company with Col. Levin, in 1868 or 1869, and seen by Dr. Gay in Tate county, Mississippi, in 1869. In 1872 he becomes intimately acquainted with Mr. Bates, at Glen Rose Mills, Tex., and to him makes the confession herein set out. In 1883 Mr. Connolly saw him at Village Mills, Tex., and again in 1884 or 1885 at Fort Worth, Tex., where he is recognized by Albert Pike. From that time until the year 1896 there is no trace of him, but he appears at that time in Hennessey, Okla., under the name of George D. Ryan, a gentleman of leisure.

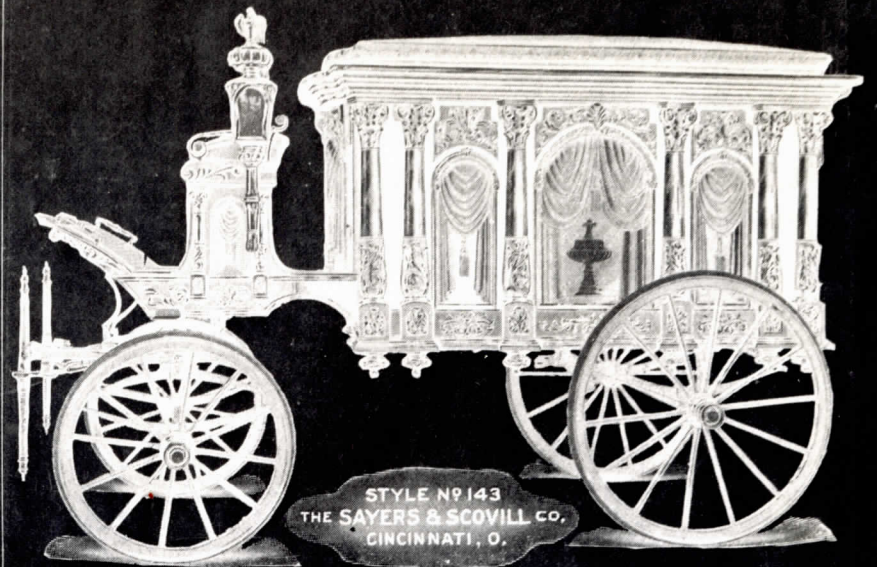
He went well dressed and lived at the hotel, and while in the little town of Hennessey made many friends, who refer to him in an affectionate way as "Dad Ryan." Hennessey is only eighteen miles south of Enid and there are many from that place who call regularly to see their old friend and fellow townsman. Eugene McKonkay, who made the photograph of the mummy that appeared in the first installment of this article was well acquainted with him in Hennessey, having lived in that place at the same time, and he delights to tell of his eccentricities and wonderful oratorical powers.

Under all of his various aliases he had not in any of the many places where he lived engaged in any active business since he left Glen Rose Mills. As stated above, he had no visible means of support while at Hennessey. As near as could be learned he had no resources.

Sometimes he had money and sometimes he had none. His clothing was always of the best and was always supplied with an abundance of it. He drank but never played cards. When he had money he had plenty. He spent it as easily as it came. The biggest part of the time he was broke and his friends say it was a pleasure to lend him money. Borrowing became a habit and those who made the loans considered themselves especially complimented for it showed them to be in "Dad Ryan's" confidence. And "Dad Ryan" never forgot. When his ship came in he always paid back. During one of the political campaigns he became suddenly possessed of a large amount of money, with which he made numerous large and small bets on the outcome of the campaign, and when asked about the money he said he was betting it for a friend. His income was always from a mysterious source, but whether in temporary affluence or entirely destitute his attitude was that of a man accustomed to plenty even unto luxury.

At the time of his death, as has already been stated, he was without money, but it was learned that shortly before his death he received, by telegraph, the sum of twenty-five dollars from a man who signed himself as George F. Smith. The money came from Decorah, Ia. With this money he paid several small bills, but at the time of his death his watch was pawned to a saloon keeper for ten dollars.

It took some time to locate Mr. Smith, of Decorah, Ia., and when he came to Enid he panned out a very obtuse and immaterial witness. He acknowledged sending the twenty-five dollars, but said he was in no way obligated to do so and was in no way related to the deceased, and had sent the money because he had known George at El Reno and had permitted him to play on his sympathies. It is possible, of course, that George F. Smith, of Decorah, Ia., was under the influence of George, the same as Eugene McKonkay and others were under the influence of "Dad Ryan" of Hennessey, and considered it an honor to lend him money. But "Dad Ryan" borrowed in amount of fifty cents and David E. George it seems, borrowed in amounts of twenty-five dollars. However, since "Dad



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R. CONSOLATO D'ITALIA
LEGAL BUREAU

218 So. 7th St., Philadelphia, Pa.

I beg to notify you that in the course of my official duties many undertakers' bills for the funerals of Italian immigrants are brought to my attention for examination. In many of the bills presented to my notice some of the items were, in my opinion, unnecessary; while in others the articles were, to judge by the prices charged, not in keeping with the size of the estate left by these poor people. The relatives in Italy generally are in very poor circumstances and in many instances rendered destitute as the result of the death of the relative in America, upon whom they were dependent for support.

I believe that many of the bills have been rendered in ignorance of these conditions, and I trust that hereafter with a knowledge of the facts undertakers will not furnish any unnecessary articles, nor any of a very high grade, and that if such quality of articles, carriages, etc., are suggested by the friends in this country of the deceased, undertakers will look for payment to the persons ordering same or the difference between the charge for a most modest funeral and a more expensive one, as I cannot approve the payment of the same from the effects of the deceased.

I believe that hereafter it will be my duty to contest all extravagant bills and exert every effort to the end that the small amounts left by the deceased may be preserved to the poor relatives in Italy. On the other hand, I will recommend the prompt payment of all bills that are within a reasonable amount.

From my investigation into the subject of burials, I conclude that a respectable funeral for these men may be given at a cost of not more than Fifty Dollars.

I trust that all undertakers will co-operate with me in minimizing the bills, thereby avoiding the time and expense necessarily incident to court proceedings.

I have communicated my views on this subject to many of the large corporations employing this class of laborers and am gratified to know they not only fully concur in the same, but have expressed their intention of co-operating with this Royal Consulate and of not approving extravagant bills hereafter.

Yours very truly,

Luigi Aldrovandi,
Royal Consul of Italy.

Ryan" and David E. George were the same individual, there is nothing left for the reader to believe except that there was something in the way he asked for money that made people give it for he had no other way of getting a living and his demands were apparently always honored and all the pleasure was on the part of the giver.

What could be more natural than that Mr. Penniman should think Mr. Smith, of Decorah, Ia., came for the purpose of seeing the body of his friend decently interred? To the best of the writer's recollection Mr. Smith arrived in the morning, but during the balance of the day said nothing about a funeral. Mr. Smith was a very pleasant fellow and the time passed very agreeably in his company. His clothes, his manner and especially his complexion did not indicate that he belonged in Iowa, nor, in fact, in any other prairie country. He had the sophistication of a city bred chap if indeed he was not a college man and seemed well acquainted in many of the principal eastern cities. He was as keen as a fox and acted as if he had time to burn. It was between eight and nine in the evening before he appeared to realize that affairs were at a standstill for want of someone to take the initiative and he was made to understand that this individual was himself by Mr. Penniman, who, taking him unawares, to a certain extent, and taking advantage of the conversation, which had wandered off into other channels said to him: "Did you know that the body now lying in the morgue was the body of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln?" His natural answer was "No." A simple but significant monosyllable. He afterward expressed surprise that such a suspicion should exist, but he expressed himself as one who feels that the audience expects something from him and the occasion demands that he express himself. And after parting for the night he disappeared from the city. He had made an appointment for the next day, but on the next day he was far away and his whereabouts at this time are not known so far as the author of this article is concerned. Before parting for the night we had indulged in a good deal of speculation as to how much money could be made exhibiting the body and Mr. Smith made an effort to grow enthusiastic over the scheme, but his enthusiasm must have subsided during the night for he took an early train for pastures new and has not since been heard from.

An effort has been made in the preceding paragraphs to show that Booth's income was from a mysterious source. Without any resources of his own whatsoever, he lived like a gentleman and at his death a stranger appears who has furnished him with money. Suspicion had always existed that Edwin Booth believed, or in fact knew positively that John Wilkes Booth was not killed, and that he established the Player's Club, in his residence in Gramercy Park, New York, for the purpose of joining together the actors of the old school in order to create a fund out of which to support his brother. Joe Jefferson, Lawrence Barrett, McCullough and their compeers were enrolled as members and it was the understanding that the building was to be the home of the club during the life of Edwin Booth. And if these statements are facts, could it not also be a fact that Mr. Smith was the agent of the club? It is nevertheless a fact well known to his friends, that the income of George, or Booth, had dwindled to practically nothing. In the prosperous days of the club he lived in affluence, so to speak, but after the death of Edwin and the other members of the club, remittances became fewer and living became such a burden to the subject that he preferred death and so ended his life in what might be termed abject poverty.

Deserted and forsaken by friends who had remained true and loyal while the money lasted, he is now the object of the curious and the morbid. The sudden disappearance of Mr. Smith is significant of only one conclusion, that he either had no money at his disposal with which to see the body buried, or he did not care whether it was buried or not. The most natural supposition is that the fountain from which the money issued was dried—depleted through death and diminution of the thinning ranks of the famous Players' Club.

WILLIAM B. PENNIMAN.

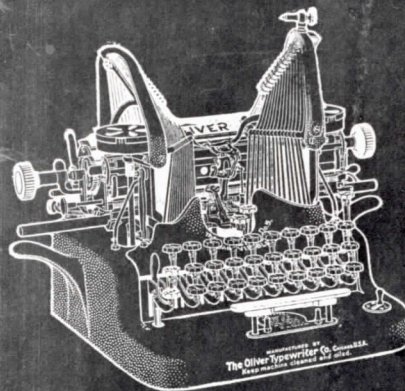
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