

WITH WILKES BOOTH IN MARYLAND

By EVERETT C. BUMPUS.

Washington, upon April 14, 1865, was seething with sensations and excitement, from the early salutes of the many thousand guns in the forts, in the Navy Yard, and elsewhere, until an enthusiastic crowd gathered at the White House to hear the President's last words before he went to Ford's Theatre to receive the greeting awaiting him there.

I had hoped to find a place at the theatre, but being one of the crowd turned away, rode off to my quarters upon Maryland Heights, stopping on the way at the Eastern branch bridge, by the Navy Yard, to speak to my sergeant having charge of the guard there, and then passed on. Within a few minutes after Booth and Harold crossed over the bridge, fleeing into the country. I had a slight acquaintance with both, and if they had overtaken me upon the road, I should have doubtless accosted them. And what an interview that would have been with a desperate man, half crazed by liquor, and the added danger of a broken leg, expecting every minute to hear the hue and cry of the town clamoring after him. This, however, belongs to the might have been. Instead of being waylaid, I reached my fort and was recounting to another officer the day's doings while the assassins were passing near my quarters, having no concern in them until a squad of cavalry dashed by the yard and an officer flung open the door, shouting, "Wake up and get your men to quarters, for a part of Lee's army has broken into Washington and taken it, killing the President and all of his cabinet."

"I guess you have been celebrating the day and think to play a joke upon us," he was laughingly answered.

"No, no, no," clamored the officer. "It is God's truth. I was passing Ford's Theatre when they brought the President out, and every one said he was dying. I have been sent over to have every precaution taken."

The scene was so startling I have never forgotten it, and it remains as vivid as if it occurred yesterday.

"Then the war must be fought all over again," bemoaned an officer whose empty sleeve testified what it meant to him. "And poor Lincoln! Think of poor Lincoln! How can we get along without him? O, well, well, it is fate. Meantime we have got a job on our hands, and I reckon that is the best way to work it off."

So we buckled on our swords, turned out the men and aided in establishing a cordon of sentinels to encircle the city, and did not know until the next day the extent of the calamity. It is said that Payne, after his desperate encounter at Secretary

Seward's house, made his way through the fields near where we were stationed, and, seeing our sentinels, turned back to appear a day or two afterward at the house of Mrs. Surratt, where he was arrested.

The day after the assassination there began the keenest hunt through this country after every one in the slightest degree suspected. One would meet every little while some citizen being hurried off to the Old Capitol. Among them was a lawyer whom I knew intimately. He lived in the old family residence near my quarters, and he and his sisters were hospitality itself. His brother was a high official in the state department. His sisters solicited my aid to see if possible Mr. Brent could not be released. With that in view, I appeared at the Old Capitol, having every confidence in the success of the mission. The building was a three-story, rough looking affair, better fitted, for a jail than its earlier use. Its many barred windows were filled with unhappy prisoners. It was guarded with the utmost care. The colonel in command soon appeared. I told him my story and appealed to his friendship for my father to induce kindly action.

"Lieutenant," he answered, "what might have you, a Union officer, to be questioning the action of the authorities in dealing with people they think should be investigated? You had better take yourself off and be thankful that your conduct is not inquired into for taking such action."

Muttering to myself something about the old bastille, I marched away, and my friend, after a month's incarceration, was discharged, and never knew the cause of his arrest.

Picking up not long since, in Washington, a printed copy of the record of the assassination trial, and having had the opportunity of hearing a small part of the evidence, I naturally reviewed it with much interest.

The military court was composed of Gen. Hunter, one of our unfortunate officers in the war, an intense partisan, and there were others upon the board who were strongly biased no doubt, but Gen. Lew Wallace, the eminent lawyer, general and author, was a conservative force thereon, and through his influence the tribunal was as fair as could be expected under the exciting conditions which obtained at Washington at that time. Let me illustrate, however, the attitude of some of its members, giving an instance or two.

Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, who acted for Mrs. Surratt, must have been very much surprised at the objection raised to his appearing as counsel by Gen. Harris of the court, because it was claimed at one time he had advised his Maryland constituents to oppose certain action taken in the prosecution of the war. He hotly denied any intimation of disloyalty and during the discussion this colloquy took place:

Maj.-Gen. Hunter—Mr. Johnson has made an intimation as to holding members of the court personally responsible.

Mr. Johnson—I made no such intimation nor intended it.

Maj.-Gen. Hunter—I shall say no more than I was going to say. The time has passed when freemen from the North were to be bullied and insulted by the humbug chivalry of the South."

The court having reopened, Gen. Harris stated he desired to withdraw his objection, as he considered Mr. Johnson's explanation a satisfactory removal of the grounds on which the objection was founded. Later the record states that "the rebel Maj.-Gen. Edward Johnston was here called to the stand." Thereupon Gen. Howe felt called upon to make a speech, in which he denounced the general as being a graduate of West Point, saying he had forfeited his oath to the government, and "he comes here as a witness with his hands red with the blood of his loyal countrymen shot by him or by his associates."

This proposition Gen. Ekin enthusiastically seconded, to be met by Gen. Wallace, speaking more after the manner of today, saying, "I hope for the sake of the character of this investigation and for the sake of public justice, not for that of the person introduced as a witness, but that of the prisoners at the bar now on trial, the officer making the motion will withdraw it." And Judge Advocate-General Holt, who has been unduly criticised for his conduct on the board and afterward, taking the view of Gen. Wallace, the objection was withdrawn and the witness testified.

Through the kindness of an official, I caught a glimpse of the court and heard a little of the evidence. It was held in a room in the old arsenal, long since destroyed. The surroundings were gloomy and sombre and well fitted for the recital of the tragedy. The officers comprising the court, glittering in their uniforms, and the many distinguished counsel, made a vivid contrast with the wretched prisoners, who were lined up, heavily ironed, against the wall of the room, with a guard upon each side of them.

I can only touch upon some of the salient features of the record. There was no question but that the assassination of the President had been discussed, particularly by some of the agents of the confederacy located in Canada, and constantly engaged in schemes to create alarm and disturbances in the northern states. Booth himself had visited there, and after his death there was found upon him a draft for a considerable amount upon one of the Canadian banks. One of our detectives, however, testified that he conducted himself in such a reckless way in Canada his opinion was regarded as of but little value. So far as he was concerned, judging from the speech of people living in Prince George's county, some of whom knew a great deal more than they would admit, and the evidence in the record, I am satisfied that, until after Lee's army had surrendered, his purpose was abduction and not assassination.

One Samuel Knapp Chester, an actor upon intimate terms with Booth, was solicited by him as late as February, 1865, to enter into the conspiracy, in which Booth said there were 50 to 100 men engaged, to capture the heads of the government, including the President, and take them off to Richmond. Booth stating that if he,

Chester, would do so he should receive from \$2000 to \$3000 for his family, which was in needy circumstances. Upon declining, Booth asserted that his party was sworn together, and that "if I attempted to betray them I would be hunted down through life." He testified that in the course of the conversation Booth said: "If I acted I was to open the back door of Ford's Theatre, where they expected to capture the President attending a play, which must be done by some one as familiar as myself with that theatre. He insisted that the thing was sure to succeed." Later he wrote to Chester, sending remittances of \$50 at a time. "Booth afterward stated he had tried another man for the place he wanted me to take, who had become frightened, and would not join him. He would not have cared if he had sacrificed him. I told him I did not think it was right to speak in that manner. He said the man was a coward and not fit to live; urged me again to join; said I would not want for money as long as I lived. He stated he was near the President upon inauguration day, adding: 'What an excellent chance I had to kill the President if I wished then.'"

When, however, the war had virtually ended, Booth, seeing that the opportunity of taking the President and holding him as a prisoner at Richmond, and, perhaps, by this means enforce peace, had passed, had reached such a point in his desperate enterprise, he would not stay his hand, and went forward and consummated the fatal act.

No question has ever been raised as to the conviction of six of the prisoners, but so far as Mrs. Surratt and Dr. Mudd are concerned, it is claimed there was not sufficient evidence upon which to base a death sentence for the former and one of life imprisonment for the latter. Reading over the evidence after the lapse of 40 years, and seeking to eliminate any prejudice acquired by reason of being so close to the scene of action, I think an impartial jury would have pronounced Mrs. Surratt guilty, with the probability they would have acted otherwise in the case of Dr. Mudd.

The evidence against Mrs. Surratt, a large part of which at least appears to be reliable, was that her lodging house on H street was frequented by three of the principal conspirators, Booth, who called upon her on the afternoon of the day of the assassination, Payne, who had lived there for several days and whom she had met and knew, and Atzeroth, who was very familiar in the household: that her son John was also intimate with these parties; that she drove down to her tavern at Surrattville after seeing Booth upon the day of the assassination, and left a package

containing a field glass at the tavern in the custody of one Floyd, her tenant, who testified she requested him to have the shooting irons which had been brought to the tavern some six weeks before by Surratt, Harold and Atzeroth ready, for they would be called for at midnight. Though Floyd's evidence was impeached to some extent from the fact that he was under the influence of liquor at the time, and there was qualifying testimony as to what took place, yet there is no question but that there was a conversation between him and Mrs. Surratt, not contradicted, in which Floyd claimed she gave him these directions; that Booth and Harold called and took away the weapons at the time indicated; and later, when Payne came to the Surratt house in the evening disguised as a workman, and was accosted by the officers, he claimed that he was simply a workman and did not know Mrs. Surratt. When she was called by the officers she swore she had never seen him before. While the defence claimed he was disguised in a measure, and that she was very nearsighted and incapable at times of distinguishing people, there was evidence going to show that her vision was better than claimed.

Some years afterwards, when her son was arrested and tried, he was acquitted or the jury disagreed. The evidence in the record against him is that he was on intimate terms with the conspirators, one of the party carrying the carbines to the tavern some weeks before, and fled upon the night of the assassination. That certainly would have been insufficient evidence to convict. If the President had seen fit to commute Mrs. Surratt's sentence, it is probable that much of the criticism bestowed upon the court would not have been forthcoming.

So far as Dr. Mudd is concerned, he knew Booth, not in an intimate way so far as it appeared, for several months before the assassination. There was no evidence of his being concerned in the conspiracy. Booth's broken leg carried him to the doctor's, where he remained the day after the murder. During this time Booth cut off his mustache, and although the doctor disclaimed at one time he knew the man was Booth, he could hardly have been under his charge as a patient for several hours without making the identification clear. If Dr. Mudd had stated freely to the officers when they called upon him that Booth and Harold had been there, there was no more evidence to connect him with the affair than Floyd, the tavern keeper, who was told by Harold, when he went there to get the weapons, they had assassinated the President. But the doctor was laboring under great difficulties. He was evidently a strong sympathizer with the South, and I have been told by people who knew him he was an extremely kind-hearted, self-sacrificing man. Booth may have so affected him that he felt justified, as a physician or for any reason, in concealing the knowledge from the authorities. It is true he evaded and falsified, but his action was limit-

ed to his medical duties and giving cover to the men for a day. Unless Booth confessed the murder to him, and it did not appear whether he did or not, the doctor could not have known, before the assassins left him, of the great crime. After he was sent to Dry Tortugas, another investigation took place, and in consequence he was released, but he had lost his health meantime, and died soon after.

Shortly after the tragedy I dined at a friend's house upon Maryland Heights with Capt. Jebb, who met Booth and Harold after they had been wandering about in the country below for a week or so. He told us the story, which follows his evidence given before the tribunal. He came upon them unexpectedly while crossing the river to return home, Harold claiming they belonged to the confederate army and he was taking care of his companion, who had been wounded. While crossing the river, Harold confessed the crime, and, as the captain states, "I was so shocked that I didn't know what to say and made no reply." Being joined by other confederates, they finally furnished Booth, who said he wanted to pass under the name of Boyd, a horse, and in that way he finally reached Mr. Garrett's house in Virginia, and was captured in his barn. I recall with what intense interest Gen. Ewing of Ohio, who was present at the dinner, listened to this story, the last I ever heard from any of the participants in this tragedy.

Whether Sergt. Boston Corbett, who was a member of the party which surprised Booth, shot him or he committed suicide is a debatable question. The general impression among us, however, at the time, gathered from soldiers who were present, was that he was killed by Corbett.

Although the record covers the evidence of hundreds of witnesses, from Gen. Grant down to "Lemon," a colored boy about Ford's Theatre, and opens up a multitude of questions, there is but little said as to any apprehension of the President as to being so taken off. Charles A. Dana, assistant secretary of war, testified he carried some suspicious letters to the President, whose only notice of them was to file them with others endorsed "Assassination." One Welckman, a clerk in the war department, who boarded with Mrs. Surratt and whose evidence was vital to her case, stated that he had observed the secret conferences at the house and had spoken to his chief as to what was intended by the same, but could come to no conclusion. The confederate records, also submitted to the court, contained offers of people to kill or capture the President, but they were filed in common with other papers and no action taken. Last act of all Col. Congers, who had command of the party capturing Booth, testified the last words the dying man uttered were, "Tell my mother that I died for my country," a pitiful ending to this frightful tragedy.

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