

SOUGHT, SEEN, HEARD

Story of the Welfare Island Derelict Who Insisted He Was "Mr. Proctor," in Whose "Bed Lincoln Died"

THOMAS PROCTOR told his story bit by bit before he died, a week or so ago, pathetically peering into the haze that many years had thrown over that morning in April sixty years ago when Abraham Lincoln died in a boarding house on Tenth street in Washington.

"He died in my bed," the old man insisted. "He died in my arms, for several times in that long night following the shooting I had aided him and his head had rested against my shoulder."

But there were many who disputed the story of the hazy memory. Thomas Proctor, after many years, had been found again by friends at the City Home on Welfare Island, a pauper. When he told his story some said it was just the fancy of a wandering mind. Others insisted that it was in the room and on the bed of William T. Clark that Lincoln died.

PIECE by piece, however, Chaplain Sydney R. Ussher of the City Mission Society, who for nine years has ministered to the derelicts who find their way to the home, drew incidents of the day from Proctor. There were days when the old man could remember little; there were others when he told much.

"I am convinced that the story is true," says Chaplain Ussher. "It is too detailed to be otherwise. Since his death I have talked to Mr. Proctor's brother, who now lives in Brooklyn. He assures me he heard the same story in his youth in his own home—he was fifteen years younger than Thomas. But soon I hope to have the complete proof. There is a man in California, I believe, who instructed the stretcher-bearers who carried Lincoln from Ford's Theatre across the street to the Peterson boarding house. He will know whether he took the dying President to Clark's room or to Proctor's. I am going to find him."

PROCTOR died in Gibsonia, Pa., where he was taken a short time ago after spending more than seven years in the City Home. He was eighty-seven years old. Once he had been a prominent lawyer. His health and his nerves had crashed with his wife's death and he had vanished, as far as his friends were concerned.

One day four years ago a former associate was visiting another inmate at the City Home. He passed Proctor in one of the wards. He believed he recognized him and approached him. Proctor confirmed the identity.

It was then that Chaplain Ussher began to piece together his story. The chaplain is a confidant of many. Broken men and women, wards of the city, bare to him the stories of "better days." There has always been "better days."

PROCTOR, searching his mind from time to time, told of his life in Washington when he was in his twenties. He had met Lincoln when employed in the War Department. The two had become friends. When Proctor was assigned to the Bureau of Returns the friendship was continued, with the young man executing many of the secret missions of the President personally.

"We understood each other somehow," Proctor told Chaplain Ussher. "And the President would often steal away from the White House and come down to my room and talk with me. They were days when he was troubled and wanted to get away from official surroundings."

The old man said that the night of April 14 he had attended an entertainment. When he returned home he found a crowd gathered in the street. He got to the house just as stretcher-bearers were carrying the wounded President in. He directed them to his room.

"I remember distinctly that when they put him in my bed they had to place him in a diagonal position," said the old man. "He was too tall to lie in the normal position."

THE President died at 7:22 in the morning. In a drawing which appeared later in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper the group at the bedside is shown. Standing in the center is a figure identified in the print as "Mr. Proctor."

The old man seldom spoke of the controversy his story caused—the dispute in which it was claimed that it was in Clark's bed that Lincoln died. When it was pointed out that Clark had sent home the President's shoes and a blood-stained pillow case the thin, gray man commented:

"Do you think that any man who really knew and loved the President would have done that? Would he have preserved such ghastly reminders of such a scene?"

From day to day the hazy mind would clear for further details. All of these Chaplain Ussher listed in a notebook. One is the name of the director of the stretcher-bearers, the man in California whom the minister hopes to find in a final effort to set history straight.

IT was the Lincoln story that called Proctor to the attention of Gouverneur Hance, on whose estate at Gibsonia the old man died. Hance was penniless himself once and he received aid in New York. So when he went to Pittsburgh and got a new start he began providing for derelicts in rooms he rented for them. Later he bought the property in Pennsylvania where he now cares for many.

The day Proctor was to be taken to Gibsonia he was given a breakfast of bacon and eggs.

"Bacon!" he echoed when he saw it. "I haven't tasted bacon for ten years."

On the train he saw several coins in Chaplain Ussher's hand. He had been a penniless ward for so long that he had forgotten there was such a thing as money and stared at it curiously.

However, in his day he had known not only Lincoln but John Burroughs, the naturalist, as well. He and Burroughs had frequently studied together and had gone off on trips in the interest of science.

"John had one falling," he once told Mr. Ussher of Burroughs. "I never told him about it, but it was true. When he made food for the birds sometimes they wouldn't eat it. When I did they always ate it. But that was because I tasted it first and knew it was right. Burroughs didn't."

MANN HATTON.

UNION

Springfield, Mass
March 25, 1925

J. Wilkes Booth's Grave.

The records of Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore, Md., show that John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Lincoln, was buried in the Booth family plot there June 6, 1869.

According to the records of the Maryland Historical Society, Booth's body was brought here from Washington, Feb. 18, of the same year and was kept in a vault at Greenmount until final interment.

"The family fully identified the body as that of John Wilkes Booth, all statements to the contrary notwithstanding," a statement taken from the records of the historical society declares.—[Kansas City Star.]