

NOTES

Note 416.

The Ford Theater Story

Some interesting sidelights upon the assassination of Lincoln are given by George Ford, producer of "Dearest Enemy" now at the Tremont Theater. Being the son of H. Clay Ford, who with his elder brother, John T. Ford, was manager of Ford's Theater, where the tragedy occurred, he is cognizant of many interesting facts that have never been published.

The assassination of Lincoln, according to Mr. Ford, is the one point where our national history is touched by a theatrical performance. On April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth entered Ford's Theater in Washington, opened the door to the presidential box, shot Lincoln, leaped over the rail onto the stage, breaking his leg, and made off through the rear entrance. That very day President Lincoln was full of life and hope. For the first time during his entire administration he was free from the dark cloud of rebellion. The President had returned from Richmond on the 4th of April, the day after its evacuation; then came, on the ninth, the surrender of the Napoleon of the Southern Army and the breeze from the Southland wafted to the North the first breath of returning peace, which brought great rejoicing.

General Grant arrived at Washington on the thirteenth for the purpose of making arrangement for the disbanding of a portion of the immense army in the field. Through a desire to see General Grant, who was advertised in the Evening Star to attend the theater with the President, many persons purchased tickets for that occasion. The President was a familiar figure, consequently his presence did not create the desire to see him as did the presence of the man who had caused the curtain to drop upon the closing scene of the great Civil War. General and Mrs. Grant, however, left Washington for Burlington, N. J., at six o'clock on the evening of the fourteenth to visit their children. His sudden departure from the Capital undoubtedly defeated one of the plans of the conspirators and spared the country the horror of a double tragedy.

When the President entered the theater there was nothing to indicate that he was not as secure as any of the audience around him. The brilliant lights shone upon the happy face of Mr. Lincoln and the ringing cheers of the audience were the joyous evidence of a preserved Union and a new national life. Followed by the huzzas of the whole audience, which rose as he entered, the President stopped in the door of the fatal box and responded to the acclamations with his benignant bow and smile.

The play on the boards that night was "Our American Cousin," with Laura Keane as the star. The assassin was a member of a family of famous actors. At 10.10 on the night of the performance he walked into the theater and over to the ticket window. There was no trace of nervousness in his manner. Leaving the stump of a cigar on the sill, he quoted lines from an old burlesque:

"Who'er this stump doth displace  
Shall meet John Wilkes Booth  
face to face."

He then entered the main door and mounted into the balcony.

There is a story that there was a secret-service man guarding the President that night, but that he had become interested in the play and had taken a seat down in the front of the balcony. At all events, Booth had no trouble in entering the box and accomplishing the terrible deed. The leap from the box to the stage was not difficult for an actor, as he had introduced one similar to it into his performance of Macbeth. The distance from the box to the stage was only nine feet, but he caught his spur in the frame of a picture of Washington, with which the box was decorated, and in the fall fractured his left leg. Later he made his way through the eastern peninsula of Maryland into Virginia, hiding in ditches as soldiers crossed and recrossed his trail. He was finally cornered in a flimsy tobacco house at 11 P. M., ten days after the assassination. Although there were twenty-six Union cavalymen in the capturing party, it appears that it took them until day-break to burn out a half-starved cripple and kill him.

There are many people who are possessed with the idea that Booth escaped, and several times the story has been revived by the press that he lived for many years afterwards, but Mr. Ford scouts this theory. The body of Booth was buried in the old Capitol Prison by the Government. Several years afterward, Edwin Booth gained the permission of the Government to remove the remains to Baltimore. Mr. Ford was one of the party who identified the body, and he has today a lock of hair cut from the head at that time. So the ghost of such a story can be laid forever.

Mr. Ford asserts that Booth was a nervous, temperamental, brooding personality, honest in his belief that he was doing a noble thing in assassinating the greatest man our history has produced. Personally he was a lovable, gentle man, as was every member of the Booth family.

Immediately after the assassination everybody that could possibly be arrested in connection with the crime was put into confinement. Mr. Ford, Jr., did not escape, and it was only after a long siege of confinement that he was able to prove his innocence. The man whom Booth knocked away from the horse was also arrested and held for some time. John Surratt, one of the plotters who in all probability was assigned to kill a Cabinet officer, did not go through with the deed, but instead escaped to Canada. His mother, while having nothing whatever to do with the President's death, was executed, so strong was the feeling at that time. Surratt was later tracked to Rome, and so great an adventurer was he that to escape detection he became a Papal guard at the Vatican. Here some years later he was recognized and captured, but escaped to Egypt. Later he was recaptured, but subsequently was acquitted, as by this time the feeling had died down somewhat.

Mr. Ford's father said that Payne, the man who made a futile attempt on Secretary Seward's life, was one of the bravest men he ever saw. When he was brought out to die he never flinched, and without a person around him went to his death with even a touch of the comic. He was a big, brawny fellow and had served as a bounty jumper in both armies, fighting a battle in either army as it came his way, and deserting at a convenient time, to act as a mercenary substitute for the other side. Adventurer and free lance as he was, he was completely fascinated by the dominant personality of Booth, and this finally led him to the gallows.

The appended program while having no relation to the tragedy, is of especial interest because the many famous names in the cast make it practically an all-star company of that era. T. T. B.

# HOLLIDAY ST. THEATRE

New Year's Night, Tuesday, Jan. 1, 1856

Will be performed SHERIDAN'S Comedy of The

# SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL

Sir Peter Teazle	.....	Mr. HENRY PLACIDE
Sir Oliver Surface	.....	Mr. GEO. H. ANDREWS
Joseph Surface	.....	Mr. JAMES W. WALLACK, Jr.
Charles Surface	.....	Mr. JAMES E. MURDOCH
Crabtree	.....	Mr. THOMAS PLACIDE
Careless	.....	Mr. A. H. DAVENPORT
Moses	.....	Mr. J. JEFFERSON
Sir Benjamin Backbite	.....	Mr. J. M. DAWSON
Rowley	.....	Mr. W. ELLIS
Trip	.....	Mr. J. B. HOWE
Snake	.....	Mr. EDWIN ADAMS
Sir Harry Bumper	.....	Mr. R. P. JONES
Lady Teazle	.....	Miss LIZZIE WESTON
Mrs. Candour	.....	Mrs. K. BUCKLAND
Lady Sneerwell	.....	Mrs. G. C. GERMON
Maria	.....	Miss MARY DEVLIN

Mr. Bass not being able to appear, the Management is happy to announce that he has secured the services of that Popular and well known Comedian, GEORGE H. ANDREWS, Esq., formerly of the Old Park, New York, and Tremont Theatre, Boston, who will appear in his favorite character of Sir Oliver Surface.

To-Morrow, Wednesday Evening, January 2d, 1856,

Will be revived at this Establishment, with Increased Effectiveness, the Celebrated Moral Drama, termed the

# 6 DEGREES OF CRIME

With its admirable Cast of Characters. The salutary influence which the Drama exercises over the minds, and its power to sway and control the heart, has seldom been more forcibly illustrated than in the history of this Thrilling Play; the varied and finely wrought details of which has more than once been acknowledged in the sincere repentance of an erring one.

TO-MORROW, Wednesday Evening, Jan. 2d, will be presented at the

# BALTIMORE MUSEUM!

The Grand American Historical Play, in 5 Acts and 6 Tableaux, written by GEO. H. MILES, Esq., expressly for Mr. JAS. E. MURDOCH, entitled

# De Soto!

THE HERO OF THE MISSISSIPPI!

DE SOTO, ..... Mr. MURDOCH

(Commander of the Expedition against the Floridas.)

The Piece will be produced with New Scenery by Getz; Characteristic Dresses and Appointments—together with all the Original Music, Choruses, Anthems, Chants, &c., that rendered it so popular at this establishment on its former representation.