Wilkes Booth as an Actor.

A GRAPHIC REMINISCENCE—BOOTH'S MAGNETISM AND GOOD GRACES—HIS OPINION OF EDWIN M. STANTON, AND HIS CONDUCT AT REHEARSAL.

"You appear to be a great admirer of the Booth family," said the writer to a well known actor.

"I have known them all," he answered. "It is now more than a score of years since I accepted an engagement, to play for a short season at Wallack's old theatre, Broadway, near Broome, then under the direction of J. Lewis Baker and George Ryan, and known as 'Mary Prevost's Theatre. The house was opened more for the purpose of introducing several stars who had made a reputation throughout the West and South, but were entirely unknown to a metropolitan audience, and were unable to obtain a hearing at the older and so-called legitimate houses of that day. Mary Prevost herself was one of those who were tabooed, and a better actress did not tread the boards at that time, and, with the exception of Miss Clara Morris, none have since. After playing a few of her favorite characters, such as Julia, Parthenia, Juliet, Widow Cheerly, and some others, her brilliant engagement was suddenly brought to a close by the arrival of the arch enemy consumption, and she was forced to retire to private life. But what has this to do with Wilkes Booth? Much; for it was this sudden retirement of Miss Prevost that brought Wilkes first before a New York audience. The management, in 'the alarm of fear,' began to ponder the situation, and from a 'coigne of vantage' descried in the distance a young man, barely passed his teens, whose fame had already reached the cities of the East, and deeming him a strong card to play, lost no time in seeking him out, and offering him an opening at a New York House. He readily snapped at the opportunity. The piece to open on the following Monday was Richard III. Monday morning came for rehearsal with the star, and the company had all assembled awaiting him. Many were the stories told of his wonderful gifts and eccentricities. One old member of the company, who had played with him through Georgia, prophesied he would make a terrific hit. Said he 'I am an old man at the business and have seen and played with some of the greatest tragedians the world has ever seen. I've played second to Macready. I've divided the applause with Charles Kean. I've acted often with Forrest, but in all my long years of professional experience this young man Wilkes Booth (I might call him a boy), this boy, is the first actor that ever (to use a professional term) knocked me off my pins, upset, and completely left me without a word to say! Yes, sir, an old actor like me that you would suppose an earthquake could not move, was tongue-tied—unable to speak his lines.'

"'Perhaps you never knew them,' said our saucy soubrette. The old man smiled and then glaring at her said: 'Not know Shakspere?' He turned from her with a contemptuous smile. 'Why, then,' said Jim Collier, 'were you so much at sea if you were so well up in the lines? 'Wait till you see him yourself, then ask. I tell you gentlemen, there is more magnetism in Wilkes Booth's eye than in any human being's I ever saw.' I listened to the old actor with pleasure, and set him down as an enthusiast—a not uncommon thing amongst some veterans of the stage, although as a rule they are apt to carp at the present and deplore the downfall of the past. 'What do you think,' said Ed. Tilton to me. 'You know the young man's brother, Edwin, and played with the father of the boys. So have I; but don't you think our friend exaggerates a bit?' 'No, I do not,' said I, 'for I know the genius that runs in the blood of the Booth family, and have seen it crop up at times in just such a manner as he describes. The last engagement that the great Junius Brutus Booth played in San Francisco only a few weeks before his death, I was cast for Parson Welldo in a New Way to Pay Old Debts. And when Sir Giles, hemmed in on all sides, is unable to break the combination against him, sees the parson approaching, the lion immediately becomes a lamb. His look of heavenly sweetness when I told him of the marriage of his daughter was a study; but when he learned she was wedded to his bitterest enemy, only a Doré's pencil could depict the diabolic malignity of the man. The marks of his fingers I carried upon my throat for days after, and when he shrieked in my ear with his hot breath, and the foam dropping from his lip—'tell me, devil, are they married?' I had but to reply 'they are, but was unable to do so. So you see I am prepared for anything this wonderful young man may turn out to be.

"At that moment a commotion was heard at the back of the stage, and Baker's voice was heard to say. 'Oh! not waiting long; you are on time!' And striding down the centre of the stage came the young man himself who was destined to play such an unfortunate part in the history of our country afterwards. The stage being dark at his entrance the foot and border lights were suddenly turned up and revealed a face and form not easily described or forgotten. You have seen a high-mettled racer with his sleek skin and eye of unusual brilliancy, chafing under a restless impatience to be doing something. It is the only living thing I could liken him to. After the usual introductions were over, with a sharp, jerky manner he commenced the rehearsal. I watched him closely and perceived the encomiums passed upon him by the old actor were not in the least exaggerated. Reading entirely new to us, he gave; business never thought of by the oldest stager, he introduced; and, when the rehearsal was over, one and all admitted a great actor was amongst us. Knowing his own powers, he was very particular in telling those around him not to be affrighted at night, as he might (he said, with a smile) throw a little more fire into the part than at rehearsal. Lady Anne (Miss Gray) was gently admonished; Richmond, who was Jim Collier, was bluntly told to look out in the combat scene. Jim, who was (and probably is now) something of an athlete, smiled a sickly smile at the idea of anybody getting the best of him in a combat scene, and in a sotto voce said to Jim Ward, 'Keep your eye on me to-night.'

"The evening arrived, the house was fair only, and his reception was not as warm as his merits deserved. The soliloquy over, then came the scene with King Henry, and breaking loose from all the old orthodox, tie-wig business of the Richards since the days of Garrick down to Joannes, he gave such a rendition of the crook-back tyrant as was never seen before, and perhaps never will again. Whether it was in the gentle wooing of the Lady Anne, the hypocrisy of the king, or the malignant joy at Buckingham's capture down to the fight and death of the tyrant, originality was stamped all over and through the performance. It was a terrible picture, but it had a humorous side one night. At the commencement of the combat, when Richard, covered with blood and the dust of the battle-field, crosses swords with Richmond, Collier looked defiant and almost seemed to say: "Now, Mr. Wilkes Booth, you have been frightening everybody to-night, try it on me?" And at the lines where Richard says, "A dreadful lay; here's to decide it." The shower of blows came furious from Richard's sword upon the devoted earl's head. Now was Collier's turn, and bravely did he return them; with renewed strength Richard rained blows upon blows so fast that the athletic Jim began to wince—as much as to say, "How long is this going to last?" Nothing daunted, Collier with both hands clenched his powerful weapon, but it was only a feather upon Booth's sword. Jim was the first to show evidence of exhaustion, and no wonder, nothing could withstand the trip-hammer blows of that Richard. Watching for his head's protection, he was too unmindful of his heels, and before

he was aware of it, the doughty Jim for once was discomfited—beaten; and lay upon his back in the orchestra, where the maddened Booth had driven him.

"The fight over, the curtain descended, but Booth could not rise. Many believed him dead, but no! there was the hard breathing and the glazed open eye. Could it be possible this was the man who only a few moments before nobody could withstand in his fury; now a limp mass of exhausted nature, his nerves all unstrung, and whom a child might conquer?

"Well, the piece, as may be imagined, was a success—a positive and an unqualified success, so much so that it was kept on the balance of the week. The Robbers was called for rehearsal next, and as usual the war (then in progress) was the sole topic of conversation. The company was pretty evenly divided on the question, a majority of them having played throughout the South, and had the same sympathy that the merchant had who saw his trade diverted through other channels. Not a word of politics was ever heard from Booth during the first week of his engagement, although he was an attentive listener to the angry discussions pro. and con., till one morning somebody (I forget whom) read aloud from a newspaper of the arrest of Marshal George P. Kane in Baltimore, and his incarceration in Fort McHenry by order of Stanton. One of the company (now dead) who shall be nameless, approved heartily of the act, and denounced the entire city of Baltimore as a hot-bed o Rebels, and should be razed to the ground His opponent took an entirely different view of the question, and thought the levelling to the earth should be done to one Edwin Stanton by the aid of a pistol shot. The unfortunate Lincoln's name was never mentioned. At the suggestion of shooting Stanton, a voice, tremulous with emotion, at the back of the stage was heard to exclaim, 'Yes, sir, you are right!' It was Booth's. '*I know* George P. Kane well, he is my friend, and the man who could drag him from the bosom of his family for no crime whatever, but a mere suspicion that he *may* commit one some time, deserves a dog's death!'

"It was not the matter of what he said, it was the manner and general appearance of the speaker, that awed us. It would remind you of Lucifer's defiance at the council. He stood there the embodiment of evil. But it was for a moment only, for in the next breath with his sharp, ringing voice, he exclaimed, 'Go on with the rehearsal!'

"That day and its events passed from memories of the majority of us, but I never could forget the scene, the stauesque figure of the young man uttering those few words in the centre of the old stage of Wallack's can never be forgotten.

"Some months after I was awakened one morning from a sound sleep and told that President Lincoln had been shot. Half dazed I inquired when, and where, and being told, asked who was the assassin? Wilkes Booth is thought to be, but it is only a supposition that he is the guilty one. I felt it was but too true, for I could see him in my mind's eye as upon that day in the old theatre when he would have undertaken any task, however bold. A few hours after proved the rumor to be true. The last act of the tragedy all are familiar with, and one day standing at the grave outside of Baltimore where all that is mortal of father and son lie, I could not stifle memories of the past, and felt like dropping a tear of pity over the sudden and early downfall of one so promising, that had he lived might now be delighting nightly thousands with his powerful acting."

JOHN WILKES BOOTH.

A Touching Letter from His Widow in Reply to an Inquiry.

Several weeks ago an item appeared in the HERALD relative to some person in Birmingham, Ala., who had written a book, in which he attempted to show that John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln, was still alive. It is not generally known that Booth, at the time of his death, left a widow and two children, yet such appears to be the fact. A gentleman in this city who is well acquainted with the widow of Booth recently addressed her a letter, inclosing the HERALD paragraph, and suggesting that anything she might write in relation to it might prove interesting to the public. Subsequently the gentleman received a reply from the widow, in which she makes the following statement:

"An item in the BOSTON HERALD has just come to my notice of some man, unknown, in Birmingham, Ala., who has a desire to resurrect John Wilkes Booth. Whoever this man may be, let me warn the public that his only motive must be to make money, for, as sure as the sun shines in the heavens, so sure is John Wilkes Booth dead. I, myself, saw him buried; saw and, examined his body before it was laid in its final resting place. He carried marks upon his body known only to his family and intimate friends, and these marks were identified by his family. We all know that the last act of his life was wrong; we also know that we should not judge. We know not the why or wherefore, but it is my opinion that those of us who live long enough will yet learn that, although it was John Wilkes Booth's hands that struck the fatal blow—that ended a good man's life—yet it was those in high authority who were the head of a diabolical conspiracy (Andrew Johnson, leader,) the result of which steeped several families in the deepest of woe and left a nation to mourn. Although not generally known, J. W. Booth left a family, a wife and two children—a daughter and a son, now grown to womanhood and manhood. This family has lived in seclusion and under a false name for 20 years. For these innocent ones' sakes let their dead alone and let them sorrow in peace. I beg for the sake of the Booth family, now mourning over the death of the mother of J. Wilkes Booth, that the public will show some little charity, and leave the wrongs that some one has done in the hands of a higher power, who, in his own good time, will make all things right. Let the dead rest for the sake of the living and the innocent."

W. S., Findlay.—John Wilkes Booth made his first appearance on the stage in 1855 as Richmond in "Richard III." for the benefit of J. S. Clarke, at the St. Charles Theatre, Baltimore, Md. He first appeared in Philadelphia, Pa., under the name of Wilkes, at the Arch Street Theatre, Aug. 15, 1857, as second mask in "The Belle's Stratagem."

THE DEATH OF BOOTH.

George Alfred Townsend's Graphic Account of the Tragedy.

[From "Katy of Catoctin."]

At the suggestion of John Brown, his wandering powers took coherence and example, and he remembered the manner in which old Brown had met his fate, and Booth tried to be his pupil.

"Captain," called Booth, assuming a hollow, theatrical voice, "give me a living chance: withdraw your men 100 paces from the barn, and I'll come out and fight you!"

This had been John Brown's request, when entrapped in his engine house, and Booth aspired to die like Brown.

He repeated the request, and thought it quite unmerciful that he was not accorded a little stage space to die effectively in.

"We'll waste no more time," the civil officer, without, spoke in a tone of disgust.

The katydid or cricket never ceased to call its resounding beads, and "Pray, pray, pray."

Booth searched the heavens and the world for some intercessor, and fetched from weakness his mother's name. By that saint he asked for 50 yards and for a little more time.

Everything was refused.

"Now, then, my brave boys," he declaimed, in the tones of the stage again, "prepare a stretcher for me!"

"Stretchers" were the canvas biers to carry out of battle wounded men. Booth—assuming to the end—would appear to be a veteran entitled to the honors of war.

He raised his carbine, feebly resolving to kill some one, or to fire it off, at least, and as he stepped, on foot and crutch, toward the centre of the barn, to be farthest from men's aiming, a friction-match was scratched behind him as if his broken bones had rasped each other, and sent a cold chill up his spine.

He turned, and saw the barn on fire!

A lighted wisp of straw, twisted by some one without, had fallen into loose hay, and some brush, piled against the outside of the barn, was also afire. The warm flame for a single instant carried the odor and crackle of his father's log-cabin to his heart, and he shouted, as his crutch fell from under his arm and left him helpless:—

"Captain, do it quick! Now shoot me through the heart!"

The cricket ceased to sing, though everything beside came forth in the bright light, till what had been the throne of gloom stood revealed in the blessed implements and yield of husbandry, and there were wasps flying around their nests in the roof, scenting flame, and in the litter of the floor ran rats in single file, all slyly, as from a sinking ship, and one squealed as it crossed his shadow like an old witch in an incantation scene.

The plough and harrow-teeth took a ruddy gleam; some swallows in the timbers flew round and round, blinded by the fire, and the regs for tobacco and the burning tobacco leaves grew to be ferns and scallops of gold, as they hung, like gilded scenes in spectacles, around the desperate man.

He had seen fires upon the stage and helped to stamp them out, and he limped toward the greater flame near a corner; but suddenly a great tongue of fire licked him and singed him as if Cerberus at hell's door had fondled on him with a furnace-tongue!

Fear seized him, and he ran toward the door on misfitting bones—the door held open as by some invisible angel—and, as he ran, the ponderous beams and trees in the structure seemed to fall upon his skull and smash it like an egg.

Booth next felt water in his face, and two men were holding him up and searching his body and putting their fingers in his brain.

"It's here," said one, "right where he shot the President, behind the ear, and on the same side, and here it's come through!"

In gasping torments he discerned before him two men in Confederate dress, all shown by the light of the burning barn, which was reflected in the homestead porch he lay upon.

"Did—he—betray—me?" sighed Booth, pointing to one of these, the officer who had brought him to the house.

He did not hear the answer, but he made it himself:—

"Tell—mother—I thought—I did—best—rights—a country—till—I died. Kill me! Kill me!"

Herold fled to the trees in the little flat lawn.