

HOTEL PATTEN
CHATTANOOGA TENN

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Gentlemen: Attention W. E. Blanchard.

Replying to your letter of May 20th, paragraph 2, relative to John Wilkes Booth.

The writer made inquiries of Mr. D. S. Ethridge as to what effort had been made to secure information wanted by Mr. Black as per his letter April 21st, and Mr. Ethridge states he was under the impression this letter had been answered but later learned it had not been owing to the fact that he was unable to see the party he was sure he could obtain information from.

In making inquiries as to whom may have some information along this subject learned that Mr. Thomas C. Thompson, 715 Hamilton Bank Bldg., Ex-Mayor of this city, was a close friend of the Rev. William M. Pettis, so went to interview this gentleman at above address and learned from him that the Rev. Dr. Pettis had died about one year ago in Florida.

Mr. Thompson advised that Rev. Pettis had a written story containing such information as we want and advised that a Mr. Sadd who is President of the Chattanooga Savings Bank could undoubtedly furnish information as to whereabouts of Rev. Pettis daughter, so called on this gentleman and learned the last address he had was Miss E. Semple Pettis, 1724 Corcoran Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. and then to verify same called on Mr. Ethridge and had him call personal friends of Miss Pettis' who advised that she is at present located at 120 America Street, Orlanda, Fla., but will be in this city Friday or Saturday of this week, so will make arrangements

for Mr. Ethridge to get if possible a copy of story referred to from her and forward same to Mr. Black.

Mr. Thompson seemed well versed in connection with the history of Booth and stated he was a member of St. Philipps Church in Atlanta when Dr. Armstrong (supposedly Booth) came from the Monumental Church at Richmond, Va., and claims he heard a great many of the proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Court appointed by Bishop Beckwith to hold trial on the charge of immorality which if found guilty would suspend Dr. Armstrong from ministry. He states that Dr. Armstrong done everything in his power to lend color to the suspicion that he was John Wilkes Booth which he thought was a very shrewd move on his part as he was very largely drawing attention from the main points in history of the old Booth story.

Mr. Thompson recalled a very dramatic and intense moment at which the Rev. Dr. Strong of Savannah, Ga., (the presiding Judge of the Ecclesiastical Court) asked Dr. Armstrong the direct question "Are you John Wilkes Booth?" he replied "I am not being tried for that sir."

He states the case was ably tried except that there was much evidence that was mere hearsay, although he recalled the fact that Dr. Armstrong always very carefully evaded any question involving his life between the years 1862 and 1866, for example: He denied that he had ever been a Presbyterian Minister in charge of a church at Peoria, Ill. In 1862 that he was deposed from the Presbyterian Ministry for drunkenness. Witnesses from Peoria, however, identified him as the same man. He denied being able to recall when and in what year his daughter Marian was born, her birth was afterwards known to have been in 1862.

Mr. Thompson further stated that friends of Bishop Beckwith gathered much data to prove that Armstrong was Booth and said he had the privilege of seeing much of this and having Bishop Beckwith point out to him the weak links

in the chain, some of this data, he states was most conclusive but there was always one link weak enough to prevent the whole story holding together.

Mr. Thompson said Rev. Pettis of whom mention is made, became fully convinced that Armstrong and Booth were one, and that he had a story from an Episcopal Minister who died at Jackson, Tennessee some years ago and whose name he did not know of a meeting with Booth in 1859 on the way from Norfolk, Va., to N. Y. and in 1866 or 1867 meeting the same man as Armstrong a Candidate for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church in the state of Mo. It was probably on this evidence that the Rev. Pettis based his strong opinion that Booth and Armstrong were one.

Mr. Thompson further states that Ex. Gov. Rufas Bullock was one of Dr. Armstrong's loyal friends, and that on one occasion when Edwin Booth was visiting Atlanta, Dr. Armstrong asked for the use of Gov. Bullock's parlor to entertain a guest whom he did not care to carry to his small apartment, then in the Baltimore Block, in Atlanta, and Mr. Thompson says Gov. Bullock stated most positively that on this particular occasion Dr. Armstrong and Edwin Booth came into his home about 12:00 o'clock, and remained in the front parlor with the doors closed until after daylight next morning.

If Mr. Ethridge can get a copy of Rev. Pettis's works on the Booth case he will forward same immediately.

Trusting this information obtained from Mr. Thompson will be of some value as he states these are facts he positively knows by being in Atlanta while this took place.

Very truly yours,

James T. Russell.