

New York, N. Y.

AMONG the grimmest romances that arose in the wake of the great civil war was one that had its origin in the greatest tragedy of our history. It ran that John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln, had escaped the frantic clutch of justice at the hands of the anger maddened people of the North; had escaped the myriad nets spread for him and was living perdu somewhere, his identity concealed or known only to a few.

The world had read and read of the hunt for the assassin, of his capture in a barn on a lonely Virginia farm, at night, nearly a fortnight after his crime, of his being shot to death when the barn was fired, of the return of the body to Washington, of its secret burial.

When, therefore, years after the terrible days of 1865 it began to be whispered about that it was not Booth who had been captured at Garrett's Farm; that the real Booth had baffled his pursuers and had been carried in safety to France, to Canada, to England, to South America or wherever the latest whisperer fancied, people who heard the whispers asked first of all who, then, had died and been buried in the place and stead of John Wilkes Booth. Others asked, Was not the body of the assassin properly identified?

Amazing as was the story, it was found by all who made investigation that the identification of the dead man seemed curiously incomplete. Not one of his captors had seen Booth in life. He did not explicitly admit his identity in the short time between receiving his death wound and his death. His captured companion, Haroll, was understood to deny that it was Booth. Finally the legal identification was made when the face was unrecognizable, and depended on the character of an old scar on his neck.

The whisperers said boldly that the dead man was one of the conspirators, but not Booth.

If, then, one admitted the possibility of Booth's survival, where was he? Under what mask was he dragging out his existence? Where on the habitable globe was so great a miscreant screened by those about him?

The answer came at last in the shape of the assertion that he had lived for years at Atlanta, Ga., not as a recluse, not as a skulking wretch stealing out at night in the shadow of a nation's curse, but as a clergyman of the Episcopal Church, and in the open light of day!

He who was known in life at Atlanta, Ga., as the Rev. James Armstrong was, the whisperers said, undoubtedly John Wilkes Booth!

Dumfounding and incredible as the assertion seemed, it demanded investigation, when lo! a wonder of another kind was revealed. Not indeed the assassin, but a man so marvellously like John Wilkes Booth in body and mental traits that twelve years after his sudden death the belief is still firmly held in a hundred quarters that he was Booth.

Aud, stranger still, the Rev. Mr. Armstrong well knew of this resemblance, and in many ways, without overtly saying so, allowed the belief to live that he indeed was the man they thought he was. Once at a crisis of his life, which was stormy for a minister, when asked by his bishop before an ecclesiastical trial court, "Are you John Wilkes Booth?" he replied, "I am on trial as James Armstrong, not as John Wilkes Booth." Pressed further, he refused to affirm or deny.

To account for this attitude on the part of a minister of the Gospel one must search in the strange byways of the human mind. The love of mystery is one clew. Beside it there was something, too, of the love of notoriety that would rather be marked apart as the reverend hero of Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter" was marked than pass as a common man; the state of mind in which Dante permitted the Italian peasants to say uncontradicted as he passed with the faraway look in his eyes:—"Do not touch him, children; he is the man who has been in hell."

Other and less excusable but equally human reason there was. Back of the dreadful time when the clergyman's double, John Wilkes Booth, leaped into an accursed prominence the Rev. Dr. Armstrong had been making a personal history that he would not care to see unveiled. He was in the South. Those who might suspect that he was Booth would be less likely to delve into that past if they thought that such delving would uncover the man who, however madly and fatally for the South itself, had risked his life in what he thought her cause. Policy, therefore, and the curious bent of an unusual mind conjoined to let the story keep on its way.

How it grew, how its survival was so long possible, upon what meat of rumor, circumstance, innuendo and assumption it fed make a remarkable story. Above all is the extraordinary likeness down to minute details between the two men—the actor-as-

sassin and the clergyman-actor—for Dr. Armstrong's tastes lay not toward the pulpit, but toward the stage. His voice was remarkable and his personal magnetism great. He organized amateur theatricals among the young folk of the parish, and his favorite plays were Shakespearian. Before he died he went on the lecture platform, and his most remarkable lectures were "Richard III." and "Hamlet."

Circumstantial evidence going to prove that he was Booth cropped up on all sides during his life in Atlanta. Years after the dreadful event of April 14, 1865, when Edwin Booth, the actor, ventured to play again through the South, the Rev. Dr. Armstrong occupied a stage box in the opera house at Atlanta, Ga.

When these two men looked into each other's eyes across the footlights the Atlantans who were in the audience will tell you that they felt the play pause. Edwin Booth stood staring from the centre of the stage at the likeness of his brother, and that night he visited the Rev. Dr. Armstrong in a close carriage at one o'clock in the morning.

Every time he came to the town he sought out the Doctor. They were fast friends. Everything he could do to further the belief in Southern minds Dr. Armstrong did. He openly visited Edwin Booth at the Kimball Hotel, enjoying the significant glances which were cast upon him.

To take the story up in its natural order, then, it is necessary before passing to the Atlanta legend and its solution by the HERALD to glance first at the appalling crime which put the red seal of assassination on the last page of the civil war.

THE PLOT AND ASSASSINATION

How the Great Crime Was Planned and Carried Out and the Flight of the Conspirators.

ON the night of April 14, 1865, President Lincoln attended the production of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre, in Washington. General Grant, who was to attend the theatre with the President, left Washington suddenly at six o'clock on the evening of the 14th "to visit his children" at Burlington, N. J. The "great conspiracy," which, according to the evidence afterward submitted to the military commission, which hung four of the conspirators and imprisoned others for life, had been hatched in Canada, included in its terrible scope the killing of all the heads of the government at Washington—President Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, Secretaries Seward and Stanton, General Grant, and others.

An assassin had been appointed for each man, and to Booth fell the lot of killing Lincoln. Booth had free access to the theatre by all the entrances, having played at the theatre frequently. On the night that he shot Lincoln, booted and spurred, he rode to the stage entrance and called for Edward Spangler, the stage carpenter, and one of his confederates, to hold his horse. For an hour he walked about the theatre and visited an adjoining saloon on the south side, calling for brandy to steady his nerves and to make him feel like a hero ready to rid the country of a tyrant. At ten minutes after ten he reached the doorway of the passage leading to the President's box. Here he stopped, and to avoid attracting attention leisurely surveyed the house.

Entering the passageway, he secured the door by placing a bar of wood against it and the wall, making it impossible for any one to enter from without. There were two doors leading into the box from the passage, and the box was divided by a partition, one door entering each compartment. The screws had been carefully removed from the locks of both doors so that they could not be fastened by any member of the President's party. The only man with the doomed President was Major Rathbone.

Booth, like a typical stage villain, which was the rôle he was imitating, knife and pistol in hand, turned the knob and pushed the door slowly and silently open. The noble head of the President rose before him, a dark silhouette, framed in the glow of the footlights beyond. The President, unsuspecting of danger, believing in his great and kindly heart that the rumors which had reached his ears of the plot to assassinate him were only idle rumors, was absorbed in the play. Booth stepped swiftly forward, pressed his murderous pistol against the curling ringlets of the noble leader and fired. Dropping his pistol, he sprang to the railing, crying:—"The South is avenged!"

The stage, in its glimmering light, lay nine feet below him. The white faces of the audience were upturned toward him as he hovered on the edge gathering himself for the leap. Many believed that the short, bitter crack of the revolver was a part of the play. Booth leaped into the air. His spur caught in the folds of the American