

Lecture
on the
Capture of John Wilkes Booth
Delivered by
Luther Byron Baker

Luther Byron Baker

Luther Byron Baker was born February 20, 1830, on his father's farm located a few miles north of Stafford, Genesee County, New York. He was educated in the local schools and spent a year as a student at Oberlin College.

He first enlisted for the Civil War in October 1862 in a company of Cavalry which was intended to form a part of the Sixth Iowa. However, in November, at the invitation of his cousin, Lafayette C. Baker, Chief of the Secret Service in Washington, he resigned and reported to Washington, becoming a part of the Secret Service. In June 1863 he became Quartermaster of the First District of Columbia Cavalry with the rank of Lieutenant. In February 1864 the First District of Columbia Cavalry became a part of the Army of the James in the Department of Virginia and North Carolina under General B. F. Butler, and at this time Lieutenant Baker assumed the additional responsibilities of the ordnance and commissary departments. During the ensuing summer and autumn Lieutenant Baker served as an aide on the staff of Colonel S. P. Spear, during which time he was drawn into some very hot engagements, the most serious one being the first Deep Bottom movement to the north of the James River. In another action, on September 30, 1864, designed to capture Richmond, his horse was shot out from under him and he nearly lost his life.

He was mustered out of service about April 1, 1865 and again entered the Secret Service as a civilian. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on the evening of April 14 of that year and Lieutenant Baker tells the story of his participation in the capture of the assassin, John Wilkes Booth, in the accompanying document.

He visited Lansing during the latter part of 1865 and on October 15 of that year he purchased 100 acres of land located just within the southern limits of the city. In March 1866 he moved his goods and farm implements to the newly acquired farm, on which he lived for the ensuing 16 years when he sold the farm and moved into town, where he lived for the rest of his life.

On September 1, 1868 he married Helen Davis.

He died May 24, 1896 at the age of 66.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen:-

The story you are to hear this evening is not to be embellished with flowers of rhetoric or gems of poetry. It is to be a plain story of a plain man, who chanced to be an actor in one of the most thrilling tragedies that has ever been enacted upon the stage of our national history.

It seems almost a crime to ask this happy-hearted audience to roll back the scroll of time and stand again amidst the storms and the darkness that beat upon and shadowed our great country a little more than a quarter of a century ago. Those of you who are older need no rehearsal of the perils that beset our Ship of State and threatened to engulf it in eternal ruin.

Fresh in your memory are those distant murmurings of discontent that came stealing, rolling, thundering northward from a rebellious South. Tonight we can almost hear again the booming of that first gun upon the walls of Sumter, the first call for troops, the confused mutterings of dissension all along the border. Tonight we see again Kentucky under Governor McGoffin swinging pendulum like between "Secession and Union;" Tennessee coquetting with treason, sister states parting hands and ranging themselves upon opposing sides; senators hurling their official crowns at the feet of a treacherous president and hastening hence to come again at the head of an armed rebellion; the deepening conflict, the crash and roar and roll of battle.

One hundred and ninety thousand slave owners, nearly an equal number of slave brokers, a mock government and a mock president, felon rights founded on the wrongs of a race, intimidation, treason, treachery;

Note. This lecture was delivered in many places in Michigan and Ohio in 1886. (Over)

all were to be met and conquered in order that we might reach the supreme heaven-ordained result,- the making of an American nation.

And amidst that wonderful constellation of names that shone, starlike, upon this night of our national hope, the one glorious light around which all others seemed to cluster and revolve was the immortal name of Abraham Lincoln. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln today are separated in our country's history by three-quarters of a century, but before another century rolls around their monuments will stand side by side in the glorious temple of our country's history,- Washington, the father and defender of his country; Lincoln its martyred savior and liberator of a race.

It is a striking fact that the greatest benefactors of the human race have had their birth and childhood amidst lowly surroundings. So Lincoln's earlier years were passed in humble life, in quietude and retirement, but there was nourished that grand simplicity, that gentle firmness, that unswerving integrity and unselfish devotion to humanity and country that so signally characterized his maturer years and at the last crowned his life with greatness and with glory.

He made no mistakes in policy, always working in harmony with the common sense and patriotism of "the great people," never crowding public sentiment; always leading it. Educating and inspiring until Union and Freedom were a single word, he swung the nation round the critical point of its whole history, and saw it like a glorious planet sweep grandly forward to take its predestined place in the political heavens.

Europe had said "America is an experiment, a child in nonage;" the slave was proclaimed a free man; the old world resounded with the conflict of opinion, the new with the tramp of "Liberty's legions." The hands upon the face of "time's old dial" pointed to the high hour

of noon, and the hour of America's manhood was struck. The days of struggle were over; the jubilee had come. The nation was filled with rejoicing; the liberator of 4,000,000 slaves had been re-elected President; the centers of commerce and trade were centers of gladness for the financial clouds were drifting by; the sunlight of prosperity had appeared.

From ten thousand churches arose prayers of thanksgiving. The national capitol was a scene of gaiety. Stars and stripes waved high on tower and dome; the air vibrated with the songs of liberty. Concert halls and theater were crowded and to one of these, as a brief respite from labor and care, the "nation's chief" resorted. Received with reverence and honor, he was ushered into the private box prepared for him. A great orchestra is before the footlights; music floats on the perfumed air, rises and falls like the waves of the sea, winds in and out among the chords of the soul. Suddenly hundreds of gas jets redouble their brilliancy, flooding with light the vast auditorium, crowded now with the grace, elegance, wealth and beauty of Washington. The music ceases and the curtain rises on the first act.

But all happiness has its counterpart of misery; all joy its possible corollary of despair. The spirit of the rebellion was overcome, not conquered. The phantom nationality of the South had vanished, but treason at bay, was still resolved to turn from no foe, to reject no weapon. All was lost but it would not yield. It could still ally itself with the torch, the dagger, the hissing, murderous bullet, and it would, though gibbets should creak with its reputation, and hemp be heavy with its honor. And so within view of the shimmering lights of that theater, so near that the rippling waves of its music floated to the ear, a band of desperadoes was assembled. Glasses rung upon the counter. Soon half-intoxicated men retired for consultation

to a more secluded den behind this "glittering hell;" then stole out into the darkness upon their various missions of murder. One, the master spirit of the gang, hastens to the flower-decked hall where it is known the president is listening, resting. He threads his way along the crowded aisle almost to the footlights; then pauses to cast upward a glance of affected carelessness at the face of the man whose life he seeks, sitting now calm, dignified, unfearing, as becomes the ruler of a great nation.

Who would have guessed that this individual had murder in his heart? A gentleman in appearance, of fine physique, a face of unusual manly beauty. For a moment he leans against the wall at the end of the dress circle, hat in hand, taking in at one view the vast audience, the stage with paraphernalia, the lights, the musicians at his feet, the whole splendid scene of pleasure and beauty. For a moment only he stands thus. Then pushing open the door at his side, he passes through and closes it behind him, feels for a bar of wood left there for his use, places one end of it in the niche in the wall made by an accomplice to receive it, the other end against the door panel, bracing it firmly against help for his intended victim.

Now on tiptoe along the little hall behind the president's box, he reaches the door that opens directly into it. A beam of light shines through it, through a gimlet hole smoothed and whittled larger with his own pocket knife, as a provided means of ascertaining the exact position of the man he is to kill. Crouching like a tiger preparing for his spring, he places his eye over the aperture and can scarcely repress a tigerlike growl of satisfaction at the evident sense of security, the utter helplessness of his prey. Now, one hand to a hip pocket for the carefully loaded weapon, the other to his belt to draw a gleaming dagger. Is the door bolted inside? What if it is? The

screws that hold the fastenings were loosened with the other preparations for this accursed business. He could throw a bullet through the little opening and do his work in a moment, but that would necessitate a retreat through the audience, ensuring his capture, and no deliberate murderer ever forgets to provide for his own escape. No, he will enter the box stealthily, and standing behind the president, discharge his weapon at the shortest possible range and leap to the stage in front. The people will suppose the report of a pistol simply a prelude to the rise of the curtain on the second act of the play, and before they comprehend the situation, he will have time to cross the stage, gain the outside actors' door, which is being guarded by his accomplice and tool. A fleet horse is pawing the earth in the alley back of the theater, the bridle is being held by a man ready to assist him in his flight, and on his own heels are firmly clasped the ready spurs to goad the animal to his utmost speed.

Suddenly a loud report! A startled cry from the wife of the president! The assassin is leaping over the railing to the stage nine feet below. But the front of the box is draped with the stars and stripes, the spurs are tangled in the national colors, that seem instinct with life and which, clinging to him, cast him headlong on the stage and into the orchestra below. There is a fractured limb that will lead to his capture. The old flag has done its work!

But the man is an athlete and it is life or death. He springs to the stage with the agility of a panther, darts across it, flourishing the dagger still in his hand, but pauses at the further end with the actor's instinct for "effective tragedy," to utter the motto of the state of Virginia-"Death to all tyrants." Then he is gone, out into the darkness, to the alley, is quickly mounted, sinks the spurs deep into the sides of the astonished animal, which leaps forward at the

unusual bidding, and the wild race for life begins.

He is out of the city before any measures can be taken for his capture, but he is not alone. A young man, David E. Harold, almost a boy, his tool for months, was of a respectable family but, like many other boys, ruined by his own will and refusal to heed advice from parents or friends. This youth is the murderer's tool and companion, and side by side they dash along the country road, ten, twenty, thirty miles. It is not yet daylight and hours of darkness are precious. But the fractured limb requires attention, and at last they have reached the residence of a surgeon, a friend and accomplice. Dr. Mudd is aroused from sleep to set the broken bone. It is splinted with pieces of a cigar box, tightly bandaged, an old army shoe is substituted for the boot that is now too small for the swollen foot, and which when cut therefrom has been thrown over the garden fence to be found days afterward and finally used in court as damning evidence against the garden owner, for the full name of the murderer is inside of it. Again the two are mounted, again they are speeding southward in search of friends and safety; on and on, to see the sun rise and set, to lie for days in the jungles of the marsh, to be driven out by hunger and thirst, to cross the Potomac after seven days and nights of hiding, but under cover of impenetrable darkness, to beg of a poor woman for breakfast, and to be sent by her to the still poorer "white trash" they so much despised; to approach the Rebel Colonel Stewart, expecting entertainment and friendship, but to be "turned like dogs from his door" to seek the wretched hut of one of the poorest, blackest of the despised race. To be met at last by friends upon the Rappahannock and placed in supposed safety, but even then not daring to reveal their identity to those upon whose hospitality they have imposed. Suspected even there, they are denied the sheltering roof of the Garrett brothers,

and are glad to rest in a barn, an old tobacco house, even though locked in and closely watched lest they should steal the horses as a means of conveyance further into rebeldom. And there we will leave them while we go back to Washington, and to those employed in their capture.

And now, my good friends, if I tell you this part of my story as it actually occurred and enter into particulars as you have been led to suppose I would do, I must speak more directly of myself than would ordinarily be considered in good taste.

I had been a Lieutenant in the First District of Columbia cavalry, but the war was over and I had been mustered out of the service. E. J. Conger had also been an officer in the same regiment, - a lieutenant colonel - but having been wounded early in the war, had been compelled to forego very active service and, at the time of which we speak, he too had been mustered out, and both he and I, not as soldiers now, but as private citizens, were in the employment of the Government under General L. C. Baker. This Baker was a cousin of mine, he at this time being at the head of what was known in Washington as the "Detective Bureau of the War Department" and reporting directly to Secretary Stanton. On the day previous to the assassination General Baker was ordered to New York City to look after a scheme he had there set on foot for capturing "bounty jumpers." On this expedition I accompanied him as an assistant. We had reached the city and were quartered at the Astor House. At half past eleven o'clock on the same evening came a telegram from Secretary Stanton, saying the president had been murdered and he wished us to return to Washington at once.

At six o'clock next morning I draped the whole front of our office on Vesey Street in mourning, and I had the honor of being the first to hang crape in New York, as an expression of grief because of the Na-

tion's great bereavement. Then speeding back to Washington, we began the search for the men who had not only murdered Lincoln, but half murdered Secretary Seward and plotted for the murder of the whole cabinet, including General Grant and Vice President Johnson.

I was set about procuring the photographs, not only of Booth and Harold, but of the entire Confederate cabinet as well, for it was suspected of having instigated the whole murderous business. With a half dozen active men to help me, I was sent into lower Maryland to scatter all over that region these pictures and also descriptions of Booth and Harold together, with flaming handbills advertising large rewards offered for their capture, and if possible gain some clue as to the direction the fugitives had taken. We returned to Washington, having accomplished nothing apparently, and all this time the men we wanted were hiding in the swamps of that very locality. General Baker felt certain that this must be the case. The large reward offered (\$100,000) filled the whole country between Washington and Port Tobacco with detectives. They would not work with us or give us any information they may have obtained. They preferred rather to throw us off from the trail, hoping to follow it successfully themselves. And so over ten days had gone by and the murderers were still at large.

We said to General Baker, "The assassin has not gone south. He has taken another direction." But the General held firmly to his original theory. "There is no place of safety for them on earth" said he, "except among their friends of the still rebellious South, Booth knows it and will try to reach them for his life depends upon it." The old detective was right in his theory, even in general detail as I realized most completely when it was all over and I had been sent (as I was) over their entire route to gather information for use upon the trial of Booth's accomplices.

But now one of our detectives was ordered to take with him a telegraph operator with instruments and go into lower Maryland, attach the instrument to the wires at any convenient point, and act as a reliable medium of communication with the capitol. These men discovered a voluble negro who told them that two men answering to the description of Booth and Harold had crossed the Potomac the Saturday night before in a fishing boat. This colored man was taken to Washington without delay and questioned. He was shown a number of likenesses together and at once pointed out the pictures of Booth and Harold and said "These are the men." It was believed the trail was found, and now for action!

An order was immediately sent General Hancock by the secretary of war, directing him to furnish twenty-five mounted men to serve as an escort and guard to whomsoever General Baker might see fit to send upon the expedition. I was sent to the Quartermaster's department to arrange for transportation down the Potomac. On my return to the office I was informed by General Baker that I was to have charge of the party, and now the General explained to me fully his theory as to the whereabouts of the men we wanted, and instructed me up to a certain point, beyond which he said I must use my own judgment.

As I hurried out of the office to make some hasty preparations for the trip, I met Colonel Conger. "What is up," said he. "After Booth again" said I, "We have a clue." "Get me on the party, can't you?" "Are you strong enough to stand the ride," I asked. "I think so and I want to go." I returned to the office to request that Col. Conger go with me and the chief said "All right."

A half hour later Lieutenant Dougherty of the 16th New York Cavalry had reported to General Baker for orders and was directed

by him to go with us wherever we should order and protect us to the extent of his power should protection be needed. Conger and I, now mounted our trusty horses, ordered the guard to follow, and we were soon at the Sixth Street dock and all aboard the Government Tug "John S. Ide." The whistle blew and we were steaming down the Potomac. It must have been about three o'clock in the afternoon when we started. At ten in the evening we were at Belle Plain landing. There is a sharp bend in the river here, and our chief had advised us to leave the tug at this landing, take to our horses and scour the country. Lieut. Dougherty and his men remained in the rear, but were ordered to keep us in sight. Conger and I commenced the work of the night by calling at the residences of the more prominent rebels. Assuming names of some well-known rebel blockade runners and mail carriers, and with little regard for the truth, we said we were being pursued by the Yanks, and in crossing the river had become separated from two of our comrades, one of them being lame; had they seen them, etc. etc. All night at this kind of work, and no clue.

At daylight we threw off our disguise, halted for an hour for rest and refreshment; then again in our saddles. We had decided to change our course and strike across the country in the direction of Port Conway, a little town on the Rappahannock, southwesterly from Belle Plain. Between two and three o'clock p.m. were near there and stopped at a planter's house half a mile out, arranged for dinner and feed for our horses.

Conger was nearly exhausted and lay down for a rest, as did also all the command with the exception of one man whom I took with me to the ferry, as I wished to "steal the march" before it became known that a searching party was in the neighborhood.

I found a fisherman sitting at the door of his hut, whose name was Rollins. I asked him if a lame man had crossed the river there within a few days. "Yes," he replied, "and there was another man with him." I showed him my photographs. He at once pointed to the pictures of Booth and Harold and said "These are the men, but this one," referring to Booth's, "had no mustache."

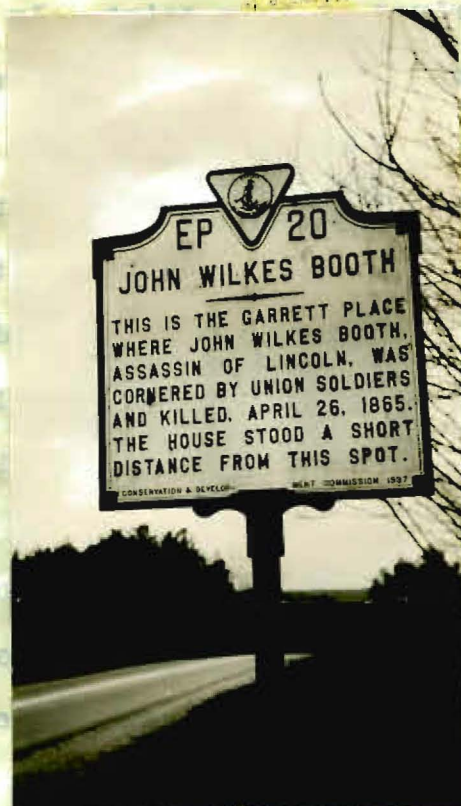
I cannot describe to you the thrill of intense satisfaction that came over me when I heard this statement. I was positive I had struck the trail; that I was the fortunate one among all the eager thousands engaged in the search. But not a moment was to be lost! My corporal was sent back to the farm house with orders for Conger and Dougherty to come with the command to the ferry without delay. Then alone with the fisherman, I plied him with questions. "When did you see these men?" "Yesterday." "Where did they go?" "I do not know certainly," he said. "They had hired me to take them across the river, but two men came up who seemed to know them and they four went across the river together." "Who were these men who came up?" "One of them said he was Cap. Jett and the other Lieut. Bainbridge. They had just been mustered out of 'Mosby's Confederate Cavalry'." "Do you know where they went?" "Well," drawled the fisherman, "this Capt. Jett has a ladylove over at Bowling Green and I reckon they might have gone there. Bowling Green is about fifteen miles south and west from here. It is a watering place, a big hotel there and not much of anything else. It would be a good place for the lame man to stay." "Well, Rollins," I said, "you must go with us to Bowling Green and show us the way." He said he did not wish to go, as but few people around there favored the Union cause, and it would not be very pleasant for him if they thought he was willing to help the Yanks. "But," said he, "you might put me under arrest and then I should go because I had to."

Of course Rollins was put under arrest. Conger now came down to the ferry with the command. After a short consultation it was decided to follow this lead at once. We could not now be far from the object of our search; and if they escaped us, it should be no fault of ours.

Booth was now fairly in rebeldom and among his friends. He had managed to evade all pursuers, crossed the Potomac and not less than 40 miles of country between it and the Rappahannock, and had been taken across the river at this point only yesterday.

The ferry boat was hailed and all were now impatient to be going. The boat was old and shaky, and it took three trips to get us across. The people there were very curious to know who we were and what we wanted. We told them we belonged to the 16th New York Cavalry and wanted to join our regiment at Fredericksburg.

It was nearly sundown before we were really on our way to Bowling Green. Winding up the road from the river we saw two mounted men on the brow of the hill. They seemed to be watching us. Who could they be? Why were they so much interested in our movements? Booth's friends without doubt! We must have them if possible. We signalled to the men to slow up and Conger and I gave them chase, and it was a lively one, but as we were about overhauling them, they dashed into the pine woods and we did not think it best to follow them farther, but to get to Bowling Green as soon as possible or they might be there first. These men we afterward found were Bainbridge and Harold, and Booth was at that moment only half a mile from us at the farm house of the Garrett brothers. We passed the place a few moments later and he saw us, as we learned afterward; but we believed him to be at Bowling Green, fifteen miles away, and so we pushed on, leaving behind us the man we so much desired to capture.



3 miles from Port Conway, Virginia

Near the Bowling Green hotel we stopped and dismounted. It was near midnight, dark and cloudy, but no rain. In the yielding sand we approached the place undiscovered, until the building was surrounded and thoroughly guarded, front and rear. I was at the front door. Conger somewhere in the rear had aroused a dog, which by his growls awakened a darkey, who came to a back door and opened it, letting Conger in, and at the same time a frightened woman came down stairs and to the front door, where I was pounding for admission, and opened it. Conger, coming through the house, met me in the hall. We told the woman it would be necessary for us to see the two men who were her guests. "There is but one man here," said she. "He is upstairs with my son." "Show us the room." She did so. We found the son, and the man with him was Capt. Jett. "What do you want," he demanded. "We want you. We know you. You took Booth across the river and know where he is. You must tell us everything you know." "You are mistaken in your man," said he. "You lie," said Conger, with a revolver close to his head. "We know what we are talking about. We are going to have Booth. You can tell us where he is and you must do it or prepare to die". The man quailed. The men were crowding into the room. He saw they were Union soldiers. He said "Upon honor as a gentleman I will tell you all I know if you will shield me from complicity in the whole matter." "Yes, if we get Booth." "Well," said Jett, "Booth is at the Garrett brothers' three miles this side of Port Conway. If you came that way you may have frightened him off, for you must have passed the place." He was ordered to get up and dress and go back with us and was told that his life would be the forfeit if he misled us in the search.

In thirty minutes we were doubling back over the road. No moon, no stars; half choked by the dust it was too dark to see. The

sand was deep over much of the road and made it hard for our jaded horses, but they were urged forward. Jett had a splendid animal, stronger and faster than ours, and fresh from the stall. We feared he might make a break from the party and try to escape, and perhaps dash on in advance of our weary horses and give the alarm to Booth and Harold, so he was ordered to ride in the center and the men were directed to shoot him without halting if he made one move to escape. At half past three a.m. we were back to the Garrett place. The house stood back from the road about twenty rods, with the usual gate and lane. Here we halted long enough to put Jett and Rollins under guard and to stimulate our men with the promise that if they could hold out a short time longer, we would have our man. I opened the gate, was quickly mounted and we made a dash for the house, which was immediately surrounded. I leaped from my horse to the piazza and was at the door in a moment rapping vigorously.

A window near the door and opening into the porch was thrown up and an old man's voice asked what was wanted. I stepped to the window, seized the man's arm and said "Open the door and get a light and be quick about it." He opened the door, I went in and shut it. A moment more and the old gentleman appeared with a lighted tallow candle in his hand. I took the candle from him before he could think of objecting and said, "Where are the men who have been staying here for the last day or two?" "Gone to the woods," said he. "Don't you tell me that, they are here," my pistol in his face. A door at the side of the hall now opened and a woman said, "Here, father, are your clothes; dress yourself." Conger now came in, followed by young Garrett.

"Don't injure father," said the young man. "I will tell you all about it. The men did go to the woods last even when some cavalry went by, but they came back and wanted us to take them over to Louisa court house. We could not take them before morning if at all. Besides

we had become suspicious of them and would not let them stay in the house. Then they wanted to stay in the barn until morning and we consented, but were afraid they would steal our horses to get away with in the night, and my brother is now in the corn crib watching them. We have locked them in the barn." Evidently the Garretts did not know who the men were, who had been imposing upon their hospitality.

Conger lost no time in stationing the men around the barn, and I said to Young Garrett, "Show me the barn." He led the way. I followed, candle in one hand, revolver in the other. About half way he stopped and said, "My brother in the corn crib has the key, I will go and get it." "No, you do not leave me for a moment; I will go with you." But now the brother came up and gave me the key.

On reaching the barn, I said to young Garrett, "We find these men in your custody, and you must go into the barn and induce them to come out and give themselves up. We want them and will have them, dead or alive, but we do not wish to injure them if we can avoid it." The young man did not like this proposition and said so. "They are desperate fellows," said he, "and are armed to the teeth." But I kept him well under my revolver, which fact he seemed fully to appreciate, and lost no time in obeying my orders.

Conger, who had just been mustered out of the service and was therefore but a citizen in authority over soldiers, seemed to have overlooked the fact, in his excitement and earnestness, and ordered the men in regard to their positions around the barn, which assumption of authority Lieut. Dougherty resented and made us feel it by keeping himself in the background afterward. But there was no time now to consider wounded official dignity.

We could hear voices in low conversation in the barn, and a rustling among the corn leaves. This barn was simply an old tobacco house, and had quite a quantity of corn fodder or corn blades, as they called them,

stored at one side.

I now unlocked the door and told young Garrett to go in and get the men to surrender if he could, but at all events, bring out their arms. He thought it best to go in, though not without a protest. I closed the door after him. There was a low conversation and we heard Booth say, "Damn you! You have betrayed me; get out of here or I will shoot you."

I now called to the men in the barn and said, "We send this young man, in whose custody we find you. Give him your arms and surrender or we shall burn the barn and have a bonfire and a shooting match." Soon Garrett came to the door and said, "Captain, let me out. I will do anything I can for you, but I can't risk my life in here. Let me out." I opened the door; he came out with a bound.

All this time I had been holding in my hand the candle brought from the house. Garrett said "put that out or he will shoot you by its light." I set the candle down at a little distance from the door, but so that it would still light all the space in front of the barn. All the men had their stations back in the shadows, for men who will fight like demons in an open field do not like to stand as targets. But duty kept me by the door in the circle of light, as now if I should "go down" the rest would not be left in darkness that would favor the assassin in a dash for life and liberty.

Now again I called to those inside to surrender. In a clear, full, ringing voice Booth replied, "There is a man here who wishes very much to surrender." And soon we heard him say to Harold, "Leave me will you? Go! I do not want you to stay." Harold was now rapping at the door, saying "Let me out. I know nothing of this man in here." I said, "Bring out the arms and you can come." "I have no arms," he answered. "You have," said I, "you brought a carbine and a pistol across the river. Hand them out." Booth then said, "He has no arms. They are mine and I

shall keep them." Harold was evidently afraid of being shot by Booth. He fairly prayed to be let out. I opened the door a little and told him to put out his hands. I grasped them, pulled him out, and turned him over to the soldiers. The poor fellow was badly frightened, and he kept protesting his innocence and ignorance of who Booth was until Conger told him to stop his noise or he would tie and gag him.

I now said to Booth, "You had better come out too and surrender." He answered, "Tell me who you are and what you want of me. It may be I am being taken by my friends." I said "It makes no difference who we are. We know you and want you. We have fifty well armed men around this barn. You cannot escape, and we do not wish to kill you." There was a little pause, and then Booth said, "Captain, this is a hard case, I swear. I am lame. Give me a chance. Draw up your men twenty yards from the door and I will fight your whole command." "We are not here to fight," I said, "but to take you. You are now free to come out and surrender." "Give me a little time to consider." "Very well, you can have two minutes." Presently he said, "Captain, I believe you to be a brave and honorable man. I have had half a dozen chances to shoot you. I have a bead drawn on you now, but I do not wish to do it. Withdraw your men from the door and I will come out. Give me this chance for my life, Captain, for I will not be taken alive." "Your time is up," said I; "we shall wait no longer; we shall fire the barn." "Well then, my brave boys, you may prepare a stretcher for me," And after a slight pause, he added, "One more stain on the glorious old banner!"

Col. Conger then came up and said, "Are you ready?" "Yes" said I. He stepped around the corner of the barn, struck a match and drew some of the dry corn blades through a crevice. In an instant it was light inside. I was at the door and the moment the light appeared I partly opened it and peered in and could see Booth distinctly. He seemed to

be leaning against the mow, but in the act of springing forward with crutches under his arms and carbine in hand, toward the fire, as though he would shoot the man who lighted it, but the sudden light must have blinded him so that he couldn't see into the darkness outside. He hesitated, then started forward as if to extinguish the fire. An old table was near by. He caught hold of it as though he would cast it, top down, on the fire to extinguish it, but the fire was too quick for him and he saw that this would not do.

He now turned, dropped one crutch, and with the aid of the other came toward the door. About the center of the barn he stopped, drew himself up to his full height and seemed to take in the entire situation. I wish I could make you see J. Wilkes Booth as I saw him now. He forgot that he was lame; he stood erect and defiant, though one crutch was by his side. His hat was gone, his dark hair was pushed back from a high, white forehead; his lips were firmly compressed and if he was pale, the ruddy firelight concealed the fact. There was a carbine on one hand, a revolver in the other, a belt held another revolver and a bowie knife. I can give you no idea of the expression of the features. It was the ferocity of the tiger. It was the defiance of the lion, hunted to his lair. The full, dark, expressive eyes that had been the admiration of lovers of the theater, were glittering now and rolling wildly with hatred, mingled with terror. Booth, as an actor, had been said to have the "form of an Apollo." Now it was the picture of an Apollo in a frame of fire. The little flame Conger had kindled had swept upward to the roof, widening as it rose, driving a cloud of smoke and burning corn leaves before it, now rolled like a billow across the roof to the opposite side and to the floor below. Booth was standing under and within an arch of fire, curling, leaping, roaring, hissing as in mockery of his misery. Ah! This was not the brilliant lighting of the theater;

the roaring of the flames was not like the swelling music of the orchestra.

But for once in his life Booth was a great actor. The curtain had risen for the last time; the play of his life had rounded up into one great moral lesson,- that selfishness and crime can end only in disaster, despair and death.

He had been denied even his passionate prayer for one last chance for his life by being permitted to fight us all. Only one thing more could be done,- make a dash for the door, shoot whoever barred his exit, run the gauntlet of he knew not how many bullets, and in the darkness beyond hide himself from our pursuit. Suddenly he dropped his remaining crutch, threw down his carbine, raised his revolver and made a spring for the door. In an instant there was a crack of a pistol. Booth fell forward upon his face.

I was upon him in a moment and caught his arms to prevent his use of weapons, if he should be only stunned. Another moment and Conger was there. I then turned up the face of the quivering form before us and said to Conger, "It is Booth sure." "He must have shot himself," said Conger. "No," said I, "I had my eye upon him every moment, but the man who did do the shooting goes back to Washington under arrest for disobedience of orders."

Sergeant Boston Corbitt afterward admitted that he fired the fatal shot. This Boston Corbitt was a very eccentric character. He was not considered to be quite up the normal standard in intellectual capacity, but was unique in his religious development.

He was born in London, England, in 1832, and came to this country when he was seven years of age. He was a hat finisher by trade and wandered about the country from city to city, not having a permanent home. While in Boston he joined the Methodist Episcopal

church and when he was baptized, took the name of "Boston" in honor of the place of his conversion. He was well known in New York City and while there was a constant attendant on the famous Fulton Street meetings, and was the terror of those having charge of the meetings because of what was considered his fanaticism. When anything pleased him, he would shout in a sharp, shrill voice, "Amen! Glory to God! " All remonstrance was in vain and Corbitt would shout to the last.

He enlisted in the 12th Regiment of the New York State Militia, but was perpetually in hot water because he persisted in following the dictates of his conscience rather than military orders. He was often seen in the guardhouse with his knapsack filled with brick, working out the penalty of his disobedience and with his Testament in hand preaching temperance, lifting up his voice against swearing, and calling upon his wild comrades to seek the Lord.

One day at dress parade in Franklin Square, Col. Butterfield cursed and damned the regiment for something that displeased him. Corbitt stepped from the ranks and, with a salute, said "Colonel, do you know you are breaking God's law?" Of course he was put under arrest and duly punished, but "for righteousness' sake," as he viewed it. On another occasion he made up his mind that the time for which he enlisted expired at 12 o'clock at night on a certain day. He gave due notice that he should leave at that time. But he was put on picket and as the hour of midnight was sounded, he laid his gun down upon his beat and marched off to his tent to make preparations for an early start in the morning. He was arrested, put in irons and charges preferred. He was tried by court martial for deserting his post in the face of the enemy and sentenced to be shot until he was dead. But the sentence was not executed, as timely application was made by his Colonel to the great-hearted Abraham Lincoln, who after a patient

hearing of the case and inquiring into Corbitt's general character, put his "A. Lincoln" to a pardon, thereby sparing the life of the man who was to slay his own assassin. But poor Corbitt was drummed out of his regiment, and the next we know of him he is in Company L of the 16th New York Cavalry, and one of the detail composing our escort.

After Corbitt shot Booth from the rear of the barn and just as day was breaking, he was crossing the lawn just in front of the Garrett place. He was pointed out to Conger as the man who did the shooting. Conger hailed him with some profanity and demanded why he shot against orders. Corbitt took the position of a soldier and saluting the Colonel, pointed heavenward and said, "Colonel, God Almighty directed me." "Well," said Conger, turning on his heel, "I guess He did or you couldn't have hit him through that crack in the barn."

From this brief sketch of his character, you will see that in times of excitement and great emergencies he was not to be trusted.

And still later he said that from his position in the rear of the barn he could see very distinctly every movement of Booth after the fire sprang up; and when he dropped his carbine, raised his revolver and sprang for the door, he felt certain that the first man met would be shot; that Lieut. Baker was in full sight and would certainly have been killed but for his pistol shot from the rear.

Some of the men rushed into the barn. Young Garrett came with them, shouting, "Save my property. Help put out the fire." Some feeble effort was made to do so but we caught up the body and carried it from the barn, which now was a mass of flames, and laid it by an apple tree, and no effort was spared to bring Booth back to life. Water was dashed into his face and we tried to make him drink, but he seemed unable to swallow. Presently he opened his eyes and seemed to understand it all. His lips moved, and in a whisper he said "Tell mother, tell mother."

Then he was unconscious. Again the heat from the fire made it necessary to move and we carried him to the piazza and laid him on a straw mattress provided by the ladies of the house. A cloth wet in water and brandy was applied to his lips. He revived under it a little; opened his eyes and said with bitterness, "Oh, kill me. Kill me quick." "No, Booth," I said, "we do not want you to die; you were shot against orders." Then he was unconscious for several minutes and we scarcely thought he would speak again.

But again his breast heaved. He looked up and put out his tongue. I thought he wanted to know if there was blood in his mouth. I told him there was none. But almost immediately he said, "Tell mother I died for my country. I did what I thought was best." And then I knew that he wanted it understood that the last words his tongue could speak were coined into a "dying message" to the mother he was to meet no more.

Ah! Friends, shall I lose your respect for me as a soldier when I acknowledge that tears rushed to my eyes when I heard these words of the dying Booth?

I thought of a mother's sacred love, of a mother's despairing sorrow, and I knew that Booth was thinking of it too, with Eternity's wide gate before him; "invisible hands rolling back the massive portals;" a just God to be met and answered. The gentle, loving face of the mother of his innocent childhood had come to him as in a blessed vision and even in the moment of struggle with Terror's King, he knew what that mother would suffer and sought to leave behind him a message that might serve in some slight degree to mitigate her anguish.

(I see a beautiful child as pure as a snowflake that drops from the winter sky. I see a youth sound in body and mind, bright, fair, happy, the pride of his mother, the boast of his family. I

see a young man in all the glory of his developing manhood, talented, cultured, brilliant, refined in manners and fair to look upon, a rising star in the theatrical heavens. I look again. He has gone down. The turbid waters of dissipation and crime have closed over him. He is stranded on the dark shores of "oblivion's sea," a wreck; covered all over with the blood of a great crime. Dead and buried beneath an avalanche of the disgust and pity of a nation, a world.)

I think it was in pity for that mother's love and bitter sorrow that I lifted his hand with a touch as gentle as could have been her own, but it fell again as if dead by his side. He said, "Useless, useless!" gasped a few times, and Booth was dead.

When his collar was removed to find the wound, it was found that the bullet had struck him in almost the exact locality that his own bullet had struck the president. The great nerve of the spinal column had been nearly severed. Paralysis of the entire body below the wound must have been the instant result, and probably accounted for his last words, "Useless, useless."

About twenty minutes before the final scene Conger had started for Washington, taking with him Booth's arms, diary and whatever else was found upon his person. The neighborhood physician had said the end was very near. I would wait with the guard and bring the body. The Garretts were preparing breakfast for the hungry men. The body was quickly wrapped in a blanket that had been folded and used as a saddle cloth and strongly sewed together. Then it was placed in an old market wagon, with an aged colored man to drive. I took my lunch in my hand and only a corporal with me. I told the darky to drive on and we started for Belle Plain landing, leaving the men to breakfast and then follow and overtake us.

We crossed the river at the ferry and drove on at as good

speed as the old horse before the wagon could make, for Belle Plain was nearly thirty miles away. The river was soon two or three miles behind us.

I frequently looked back expecting to see the guard come up, but no cavalry appeared. The road did not seem well traveled. I began to be anxious and questioned the negro. He said, "Massa, dis is all right. I hab been ober dis road many and many a time before de war and I am sure it is the shortest road to de Belle Plain." But I sent my corporal back toward the ferry to inform Lieut. Dougherty what road I had taken, and instructed him to come on at once. I also told the corporal to return to me after delivering his message. He did not come. No cavalry came in sight. I met few teams. The road grew more and more forbidding. I began to meet straggling squads of men in Confederate uniform. But what had become of Lieut. Dougherty? He had Harold in charge. Had the party been surprised and overpowered? Would not I be followed? Was the darky in league with the enemy? I knew I was going toward Belle Plain, but was satisfied I was not on the proper road. The day was grown hot and sultry. I was constantly meeting men in gray, who often looked at the wagon curiously. Some would ask, "What have you there? A dead Yank?" "Yes," I would reply cheerily, and they believed me and passed on, laughing and joking.

I had been in the saddle for two days and nights. I was hungry and exhausted, but too anxious to be sleepy. I threatened the negro with instant death if he betrayed me. The road wound up and down, in and out among the hills and was badly gullied. I was constantly on the alert. I half expected an attack from every ravine. Should I ever get this body to Washington?

The old horse was tired and began to flag. It was hard work to get him up the hills. I had nothing to feed him, the darky or myself.

I dared not stop anywhere for rest or food. Now the king bolt of the old wagon gave out and the front end of the box dropped down. The body slid forward. It emitted a sickening odor. Blood had flowed from the wound and trickled down over axle and reach. The old darky had to go under the wagon to help repair the break. Blood dropped on his hand and he cried out in terror. "Stop your noise," I said. "That will not harm you; it will wash off." "Oh," groaned he, "it will neber wash off. It is de blood of a murderer." And he looked all the horror he expressed.

But now we were off again, winding up more hills, threading more ravines, meeting more Confederates. I was painfully conscious that I was in an enemy's country with a most important charge on my hands, and that somehow a mistake had been made, separating me from my guard furnished for just such an emergency.

Looking over all the days of my life, I find no other day so full of anxiety, so exhaustive of physical strength and mental endurance. I was glad indeed when it grew cooler and the shades of night were falling to conceal my charge.

But my troubles were not to end with the daylight. We reached the Potomac at last, but we found no dock, no boat. Sometime during the war the Government had changed the landing from this point to Aquia Creek, three quarters of a mile farther down. I could see the "John S. Ide." lying at that dock, but I had no boat by which I could reach the tug. I might shout and make them hear, but to do so might bring me enemies sooner than friends. A great bluff reared its mountainous head between me and the boat. There was no road over it near the river. I must ride around it and get to the boat and row up the river for the body, for the old horse before the wagon could go no farther.

With the help of the negro I carried the body down to the river and hid it under a clump of willows; then told the negro to stay there and guard it. He promised to be faithful and discreet, and I started back nearly two miles over the road I had just traveled. I struck a road that would lead me around the spur of the mountain; then, not sparing my poor, jaded horse, I was soon at the boat. All the men were there. I asked the orderly why he did not return to me. He said Lieut. Dougherty would not allow him to do so and had said that if I would go off on the wrong road I must take the consequences.

A small boat from the tug was lowered for me, and with two of the crew to row, we pulled for the upper landing. I found my negro just where I had left him, faithful to his trust. I paid him for his services and discharged him with thanks. The body was put into the boat and a few moments later was hoisted up the side and swung upon the deck of the "John S. Ide." I saw it properly under guard, and then the next two or three hours are a blank to me. I sunk exhausted on the deck and lay there in the shadow of the smokestack, unobserved, until we had steamed up the river half way to Washington, when we were met by another boat, having on board Gen. L. C. Baker, Gen. Eckard, assistant secretary of war, Surgeon General Barnes, and others. As my cousin came upon the deck he almost stumbled over me, still lying in a sound and blessed sleep. He got me up and into a better place to rest. The morning found us at the dock of the Navy Yard at Washington.

The body was at once removed from the tug to a gunboat which lay near by, while I went with Genl. Baker to the office of the secretary of war. Gen. Stanton then wished me to give him a complete and detailed account of the entire matter and I did so. He had Booth's carbine, which had been brought by Col. Conger, and Stanton said to me, "Are you

accustomed to handling a carbine, and if so, what is the matter with this? It cannot be discharged." I examined the weapon and found that the cartridge had gotten out of position, turned partly around, so that when the lever was worked, the cartridge was not thrown into position to be exploded. It was marked in several places, showing that a number of unsuccessful efforts had been made to use the piece; and perhaps it was because it could not be discharged that Booth threw it down in the barn as he did.

Late in the afternoon of the second day after reaching Washington, Gen. Baker came from the war office and said to me, "The secretary of war wishes me to dispose of Booth's body. He says he don't want the Rebs to get it and make an ado over it. He does not care where it is put, only let it be where it won't be found until Gabriel blows his last trumpet."

"I want you to go with me," said Gen. Baker. We started for the navy yard. On the way we would pass the old penitentiary which, during the war had been used as an arsenal. Here we stopped and I waited outside while my cousin went in and had a brief interview with the officer in charge; then on to the navy yard. Booth's body was placed in a row boat. We put in a heavy ball and chain and did not try to conceal it from the many watching eyes. One trusty man was in the boat to help us row.

Gen. Baker stepped in; I followed. A few touches of the oars and we had parted company with the gun boat and were half rowing, half drifting down the river. Crowds of people were all along the shore. It went from lip to lip that we had with us a heavy ball and chain and that of course we were going to sink the body. Many followed as far as they could, but East Branch on one side and the marshy ground on the other prevented their going far. Darkness came on quickly and completely, for it was a moonless and starless night. A couple of

miles down the river was a place known as Geeseborough Point. The stream here suddenly widens and is full of rushes and river weeds. We quietly ran our boat into a cove in the river bank and rested our oars.

Old, condemned Government horses were being brought here and killed. We did not think any boat that might be following us would come to this dismal slaughter ground. All was still on the river. Yes, all was very "quiet on the Potomac" just then. No sounds came to our sensitive ears but the hoarse croak of the bullfrog and the quick, heavy breathing of our frightened boatman. Presently we began pulling slowly back. Soon against the clouded sky we could discern the grim old penitentiary walls. A few more strokes of the oar and we were before a door, seemingly let into the solid wall and almost at the water's edge. The officer in charge was there waiting for us. The body was lifted from the boat and carried through the little door to a convict's cell. The stone slab which covered the floor had been lifted and a grave dug under it, and down into that black, dismal hole; into that unhonored grave we lowered the once proud, aristocratic, but now despised and hated J. Wilkes Booth. The stone was replaced and we turned shudderingly from a sepulchre on which no tear of sympathy could ever fall.

It was believed we had sunk the body in the Potomac and for days the river was dragged in hope of finding it, and "Frank Leslie's" paper had a very accurate, full page cut of Booth's body sliding out of the boat into the water. But the half dozen men who alone knew the real place of burial kept the secret well. After a time it was rumored that Booth's body had been taken up and given to his friends, though I have no positive knowledge in regard to it. I have reason to believe that it was removed from the prison cell after the execution of his

accomplice, and buried in the jail yard of the old penitentiary^{you}, with his companions in crime^{you}; and still later I have reason to believe that, by consent of President Johnson, it was given to his friends and again removed, and now rests in the family plot of the cemetery at Baltimore. ^{you} But I always think of him with the much hated U. S. blanket for a winding sheet and under the stone floor of that dark, lonely prison cell.

Ladies and gentlemen, my story is told. I might take your time longer by a recital of incidents connected with the arrest and trial and final execution of the accomplices of Booth. I might tell you of that unfortunate woman, Mrs. Surratt, who you all know was hanged as one of Booth's accomplices, while her son, John H., who was also one of Booth's most trusted confederates, sneaked out of the country to Canada, leaving his mother to her fate. In regard to the policy of our Government in hanging a woman under the circumstances, I have nothing to say, but as regards her guilt, there was not a shadow of doubt.

John H. Surratt, after making a most ridiculous effort to disguise himself by dyeing his hair, eyebrows and mustache, staining his face and putting on glasses, and being carefully concealed for over four months at Three Rivers, Canada, by a Roman Catholic priest, was finally smuggled aboard a Liverpool vessel and landed in that city. But fear of detection on account of the magnitude of his crime, and the large reward offered for his arrest seemed to have haunted him, and we next find him under another name in the Italian army, and still later among the Pyramids of Egypt. But he was finally chased down and returned to this country in irons and immediately put on trial for his great crime, and while there was no lack of evidence to prove his complicity with Booth in the assassination plot, on some technicality of the law he went scott free, and still lives

to enjoy his infamous notoriety and to curse the U.S. Government for hanging his mother, whose life he might have saved by offering his own instead, and saved the historian the disagreeable necessity of adding cowardice to crime as a legacy to his family.

I might tell you of that brute in human form, Lewis Pain^a, whose real name was Powell, the would-be assassin of the sick and enfeebled secretary of state, Wm. H. Seward, but that is a part of the country's history and you have read it over and over.

I am sure, however, you will pardon me if I hold you yet a moment, to call the attention of the young men present to the great moral lesson to be drawn from the life and death of Booth. It never pays to do wrong. Here was a young man blessed with almost unparalleled opportunities for a career of usefulness and honor, but he failed miserably; failed because he lacked moral principle. Misled in opinion by false political teachers, his final crowning iniquity was but the natural ending of his career.

"Evil cannot be long triumphant." "Ever the right comes uppermost and ever justice is done." God rules. Nations lie in his hand, and because it is so, secession has been overcome; treason is conquered; the stars and bars that Booth so much loved (if he loved anything) are today without significance except as a symbol of sectional folly. The very name of J. Wilkes Booth is odious the world over. While the Union is established; loyalty is triumphant; the banner of the republic is planted over mountain top and sweeping plain, and the memory of the murdered Lincoln is sacredly cherished in the hearts of the people he served so unselfishly and so well. And so I say again "Ever the right comes uppermost; ever justice is done."