EDWIN BOOTH AND LINCOLN

(Enclosed piece given me by J. S. P. His version of Richard Lloyd Jones story)

AN EXPERIENCE OF RICHARD LLOYD JONES

As told by

John S. Phillips
I had even as a boy a hankering for the stage. So strong was it that when I came to New York I was a super in the Empire Theatre nights for a year and wrote editorials by day. Both Edwin Booth and Lawrence Barrett were friends of my father, Jankins Lloyd Jones, and when playing in Chicago I saw them time and again at dinner on Sundays.

Booth and Barrett played together in Chicago in 1888. I supported them as a super during the two or three-weeks of the engagement, though neither ever saw me at the theatre. This was in April or May.

The previous year St. Gauden's statue of Lincoln had been unveiled. It was a great occasion for me. The son of Robert Lincoln, young Abraham (who died in Italy a year or two later) was a class mate of mine at school and sat just across the aisle from me. He was Abraham, the second, who pulled the cord that unveiled the statue of his grandfather, the great Abraham Lincoln. The statue made a great impression; the papers even months after had references to it and the visitors there daily went to see it.

So it was in my mind that last night of the Booth performance, when after the theatre I went home to the North side with another boy who was a fellow super.
The next morning I awoke about six o'clock. It was a beautiful spring morning - Lincoln Park was near - so I slipped out of bed, dressed quickly and without disturbing my friend went out into the quiet street and on to the Park. I had it in mind to look again at the Lincoln statue. The Park was absolutely deserted. I walked around the statue stopping now and then to see it from different standpoints. Then I took a path leading further into the park. It was very quiet, sunny and beautiful.

As I turned into the path I heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the entering roadway. It must have been about half past six. I stopped and looked back. A coupe halted near the statue and a man got out. He had on a silk hat and wore a cloak with one end thrown over his shoulder. There was a flower on the collar or lapel. With a kind of solemn dignity he took off his hat and slowly walked toward the statue, stopped at a favorable distance and gazed at it a long time. Then still slowly with hat at arms length by his side he strode to the steps and up as close as he could go. He looked upward into the face of Lincoln some minutes. Then, with touching gravity, took the flower from his cloak and reaching up laid it on the pedestal at Lincoln's feet. The time, the place, the figure so definitely indicated the desire for secrecy that I had drawn back behind some bushes but could see clearly through the foliage.
The man, after making his offering, bowed his head a moment as if in prayer. Then he turned and walked back towards the carriage. He stopped once more, however, and bowed with bared head—bowed quite deeply—to the bronze figure. In another instant he stepped into the carriage; the door slammed; soon the sound of horses' hoofs died away.

Of course almost from the first I knew who it was. When he had gone I felt a thrill I shall never forget—the lovely morning—perfect silence and Edwin Booth's flower lying there at the imaged feet of the great man, whom his brother had shot.

I did not tell of this episode 'till after Booth's death.