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Franklin Pa.,
Friday
Oct. 21, 1938

Miss Helen Alexander,
Franklin Pa.

Dear Miss Alexander:-

The first bridge across the Allegheney River, at Franklin, was destroyed by fire on May 13, 1863. Shortly thereafter my father, Oliver B. Steele, began the operation of a ferry across the river, at this point, which he continued until a new bridge had been built. It was during this period that John Wilkes Booth was in Franklin and, as he was drilling for oil on the east bank of the river, opposite the lower end of Franklin, my father frequently ferried him across the river, and thus became quite well acquainted with him. Booth's well, or wells for some say there were three, was located about two-thirds of a mile south (down the river) of the Eighth street bridge and must have been nearly opposite Third St. This well, or wells, located very near the river, must have been on the right-of-way afterward acquired by the Allegheney Valley R.R. and all trace of them would have been obliterated when the rail-road was built.

As I was born in January 1865 the Civil War, and everything concerning it, was still a frequent topic of conversation when I was a child and I can remember that Booth's photograph, which he had given to my father, was an interesting object to visitors to our house, and that Booth, himself, was often discussed. My father always held the opinion that he was "crazy" not, I think, because he had ever suspected his sanity while he was here, but because the colossal crime he committed was so unlike, and so inconsistent with, the character of the man as he knew him. In other words, my father liked him and admired

*Hubert
Crisie*

him, and could explain his hideous act only by the theory of insanity. If there is anything in heredity my father's opinion could be supported by the behavior of Junius Brutus Booth, whose son John Wilkes was, who, although he never committed a crime, was very temperamental. Indeed excitability and lack of control seems to have marked the Booth family, although Edwin was entirely free from it.

And here is something which, while "off the record", may throw an indirect light on the question of John Wilke's sanity. I was, for three years, the manager of Wilfred Clarke, a fine comedian playing the old English comedies. His father was that John Sleeper Clarke, in his day a very famous comedian, who originated the role of "Marks the Lawyer" in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN. His mother was Asia Booth, a sister of Edwin and John Wilkes, hence Wilfred Clarke is a grand-son of Junius Brutus Booth and a nephew of John Wilkes. He, too, was temperamental inasmuch as he was given to brief fits of rage over trivial matters, although a gentleman, a scholar, and a pleasant companion. Furthermore, he played almost entirely in the South. This could have been because he was well-known and popular in that section and almost unknown in the North, but his sympathies were plainly with the South although he was born in England and educated in France. Interesting to me, but of no significance in this connection, is the fact that, during one of the years I was his manager, he had, as his leading woman, Martha Ford, a daughter of John T. Ford in whose theatre Lincoln was killed.

I am aware that there is very little of this that will be of value to Miss Tarbell but you have stirred up some memories that I can't refrain from reciting - when I have a chance.

As Ever

Chas A Steele