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WHY WAS LINCOLN MURDERED?
By - Otto Eisenschiml
With Illustrations
Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1937

Here is a book on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the pursuit and trial of the conspirators which surpasses in wealth of materials examined, as well as in originality of treatment, ~~than~~ anything yet done on this subject.

The author's purpose sticks out from the start. It is to convince the reader that Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, wanted Lincoln out of the way, ~~In order that he might~~ ^{to} defeat Lincoln's merciful plans for a re-construction of the South, ~~substitute~~ his own vindictive plans, he was willing that the plot to assassinate the president ^{of which he knew} should be carried out.

Mr. Eisenschiml develops the points of his hypothesis clearly:-

Stanton knew that there was a plot on foot to capture or murder Lincoln. He believed that Lee's surrender had excited the conspirators to immediate action.

Knowing this he persuaded General Grant, just returned from Appomattox, not to accept an invitation of the President to go with him and Mrs. Lincoln to the theatre the

night of the fourteenth.

Believing that an attack on the president would be made he did not send an extra guard to the theatre ~~and particularly to the box.~~ ¶ He did not announce to the country that John Wilkes Booth was the guilty man until four hours after the assassination.

He did not at once send a searching party on what Mr. Eisenschiml claims was the only route of escape.

He suppressed and mutilated evidence in the trial of the conspirators. He insisted that he had proof that the conspiracy was the work of Jefferson Davis and his advisors.

He clinches his arguments with the fact that Lincoln was hardly dead when Stanton joined the extreme radicals of the country who had been opposing Lincoln's policies towards the South and who now that he was finally out of the way were exulting over his death as a Godsend.

Examining his points one by one how do they stand up?

Certainly it was no secret that Stanton, the War Department and the White House knew and had known that particularly for the last year of Lincoln's life plots for his kidnapping or assassination were under way. The military and municipal police, the secret service men, the special guards, had been following clues, rumors, suspects, for months all over

the country. Stanton who naturally was suspicious, as well as a good deal of a coward, had always been afraid that Lincoln might be assassinated and late that afternoon had begged him not to go to the theatre that night, but if he did to take along a sufficient guard. But Lincoln had laughed it off. His unwillingness to be guarded had been the despair of the authorities from the beginning. He had insisted on going out unattended at any moment of the day or night. He knew, of course, of the threats on his life, had come to believe that they would probably succeed. Only that day he had said,

"If it is to be done it is impossible to prevent it."

Mr. Eisenschmidt seems to feel that while Stanton was willing Mr. Lincoln should be a victim he still had use for Grant and persuaded him to decline the invitation. *more private* The public reason he declined was that Mrs. Grant did not want to risk being a guest of Mrs. Lincoln in a public place where she and her husband would certainly be the center of attention - this being their first public appearance since Lee's surrender.

A few days before this Mrs. Grant had seen the unhappy Mary Lincoln make shocking scenes born of jealousy and envy. She had thrown taunts at Mrs. Grant at this time that any woman would remember and resent. Mrs. Grant might very well have felt that if she sat that night in the box with the Lincolns

she would be exposing herself to some kind of public insult.

Mr. Stanton's handling of the situation from the time he reached the house on Ninth Street where the President was dying until his death at twenty two minutes after seven in the morning comes in for the severest criticism. No allowance is made for the terror, uncertainty and confusion into which the town and the authorities were thrown by the killing of Lincoln - the murderous attack on the Secretary of State Seward and his sons - the rumor that Grant, Johnson and Stanton were marked for death. Of course if Stanton knew that Lincoln was to be murdered his plan of action would have been prepared. The authority that he at once assumed in reaching Lincoln's bedside to Mr. Eisenschiml is a proof of *his purpose* ^{adw} dictatorial ambition - ~~the~~ sinister usurpation.

But who was to take charge if not the head of the War Department? It was his job and a terrible job it was. Who was the assassin? It could not be announced on hearsay - it must be by a Court of Inquiry. One was set up at once and witnesses were examined. Four hours and a half after the assassination Stanton who had already sent ^{out} to the country an official report of the deed announced that "Investigation strongly indicates J. Wilkes Booth as the assassin of the President." And added that evidence was still being taken. *Lincoln's work*

The pursuit of the conspirator was immediately organized by the War Department. Mr. Eisenschiml insists that

there was ~~the~~ one and only way Booth could have gone was — the way that he did go. But, ^{why} might he not have gone in any direction? Who could tell what had been planned? Any route was a possible route. There were those who believed and it was not impossible that Booth and his fellow conspirator might be concealed by Southern sympathizers in Washington. There were many of them. But Mr. Elsenheim will not have it so. Stanton neglected the "only way he could have gone" because he wants him to get away.

As a matter of fact, however, by four o'clock in the morning, Saturday, a squad was on the road Booth had taken and close to his hiding place. By Monday morning the country into which he had escaped was encircled and already filled up with searching parties sent by rival authorities — the War Department, the Municipal police of Washington, the Secret Service, reporters for the newspapers, the self-appointed sleuths with a theory who always haunt the vicinity of man-hunts.

Mr. Elsenheim's unwillingness to allow Mr. Stanton a vestige of honor in this terrible night impels him to discredit the great phrase with which the Secretary of War announced that the President was dead — "Now he belongs to the ages." "What a pity," he sneers, "that it probably never was spoken."

The chief but not only authority for the words is the man best able of all present to recognize a great phrase - John Hay - Mr. Lincoln's Secretary - a man with an ear tuned to noble expressions but he was not the only one present to set down the words. Mr. Eisenschimi basis his suspicion on the fact that there were those who did not report them.

Throughout the development of his thesis Mr. Eisenschimi makes mountains out of mole hills. Mr. Stanton's door bell was broken and Mr. Eisenschimi thinks that Mr. Stanton must have had some dark purpose in not having it promptly mended. He cannot accept the explanation that the matter had been over-looked.

The commercial telegraph wires were off for two hours the night of the assassination - the military telegraph was not interrupted. On investigation the manager of the telephone ^{room} said that it was "crossed wires in the battery." But Mr. Eisenschimi is not satisfied. It should have been officially and immediately investigated - natural explanations are not sufficient.

There were plenty of loose ends left that tragic night and through the tragic days that followed but there is no recognition here to the multitude of ends followed to the source - tied and worked into the pattern.

Stanton's character lends itself admirably to Mr. Elsenchimi's purpose. Able, energetic, a tremendous driving force in the conduct to the War, hotly patriotic, deeply religious, Stanton was at the same time suspicious, ambitious, vindictive. He sought to rule Lincoln and the Cabinet. He particularly resented Mr. Lincoln's stories and laughter. While Lincoln found his release from the terrible strain they both were under in merriment, Stanton found his in the pursuit of the wicked. He was more thoroughly versed in the Bible than Lincoln but his God was one of wrath who ^{surpassed} hated and fought - Lincoln's ^{God} of mercy. Those who dealt with Stanton closely in the War, some of the best men like Secretary Wells, fine Congressmen like John Kasson, complained of his evasions, called him willful, arbitrary, ruthless, deceitful.

On the assassination of Lincoln Stanton was seized with a deadly fear that there was some kind of powerful conspiracy on the part of the South which might snatch victory from them at the last moment. He became ruthless and revengeful to the last degree and joined the band of radicals as bitter as himself determined to reduce, not restore the South as Mr. Lincoln had planned.

The radical group had believed that President Johnson would follow them and when Johnson adopted Lincoln's plan of reconstruction they turned on him venomously and cruelly.

There is no more humiliating story in the history of this country than that of these two ghastly brutal years.

Stanton's part in this radical policy of revenge has no connection with the assassination of Lincoln. After writing four hundred and thirty four pages building up Stanton as the man higher up Mr. Eisenschimi, himself, topples over his structure by confessing that as plausible as his indictment may seem^{it} stands no chance of surviving a legal attack. Not a point in his case, he says, can be proven - it is all hypothesis. Circumstantial evidence, he admits, is a dangerous foundation on which to build. "An indictment against Stanton cannot be sustained for lack of material evidence."

This is a provocative book - a real contribution to the history of the case, but it should be classed as a mystery story rather than history. It is an unparalleled example, too, of what can be done by insinuation where proof is wanting.

Mr. Eisenschnul makes out a bad case for the guard who was supposed to look after the door into the passage leading up to the box and his material here is entirely new. He seems to have been a unreliable person. But he was not appointed by Stanton on Stanton's recommendation. It was Mary Lincoln, herself, who only ten days earlier for no reason that Mr. A has unearthed had ordered the man detailed for service at the Ex-mansion. Just at the critical moment ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ he went down to get a drink. Booth passed in while he was gone that night. It was a wicked neglect of duty. and he was never but Stanton's is a weak insinuation.

~~ambitions.~~ The War Department saw this, the Municipal police of Washington, the Secret Service, reporters for the newspapers.

Up to the time when Booth and his companion the tobacco barn of one took refuge on April 25th in ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Garret near Fort Royal in Virginia it was Booth that was being pursued. At once the barn was surrounded it was companion.

"The man in the tobacco barn - a crippled visitor at the Garret house."

That is, in the last scene doubt is thrown upon the identity of the man killed which seems to show that Mr. Eisenschnul has another book in view to go with this. It certainly is to be desired and will make a better story ~~XXXXXXXX~~ than has yet been made of the escape of Booth from death, and his subsequent life.

*Is the self appointed sleuth with a thing who always haunts the memory of man
to punish*

Stanton's letter

notifying the Ambassador to England ^{in a} are masterpieces of convinced clear statements. And in both cases he ~~pays~~ a warm tribute to Abraham Lincoln. (that of a man stirred to the bottom of his serious nature with horror and regret.) *Take away words for S. great phrase -*

Mr. O. criticizes strongly the handling of the trial, and certainly it was handled ^{in a} in a confused and almost irrational fashion. *The treatment of the person brutal unjust help.*

The state of mind of the administration and of the whole country - North and South - must be considered. ^{it is} Gideon Wells says/with bitterness, anger, fear, exasperation in all of the circumstances/which men of responsibility, particularly men of Stanton's type do violence and irrational things, inhuman things. Gideon Wells, the Secretary of the Navy, was no friend of Stanton's and through all his period had ~~as~~ much to say about the type of the man's mind. Says of the whole situation about the way they were acting.

Quote

O. L. basis his argument by insinuation on the fact that Mr. Stanton and Mr. Lincoln had so deeply disagreed in many points of policy and as the war ended and Lincoln's merciful plans for reconstruction came out it was certain that ~~these two men~~ ⁱⁿ the two men would see/utterly ~~in~~ different ways.

Lincoln was all for (quote Wells getting the states back into the Union as quickly as possible, letting them set up their own government. He wanted no

Stanton, Wm

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made in his diary a record after the assassination; then
reflecting on this subject & thinking he had permitted
himself a great excitement & stirring
event to be carried into unjust & ingenious ex-
pression by the erroneous slaying of the Secretary of
War & Surgeon General & the belief that
Jefferson Davis & his cabinet were responsible
for the assassination. Stanton's responsibility for the
murder of Lincoln & the trial of the conspirators
the idea of hanging them was all that Stanton
wanted to do. Stanton & his associates were
letting them set up their own Government. He wanted no

1890-1895

Notes to be inserted:

inventions

That Stanton was responsible both for many of the unfair and brutal ~~preachers~~ of the trial, as well as for the general acceptance by public and Congress, that the Confederate leaders were ~~responsible~~ back of the conspiracy. Wells hints in his diary only a week after ~~at~~ the assassination "On reflecting on this subject I think we have permitted ourselves amid great excitement in stirring events to be hurried into unjust and ungenerous suspicion by the erroneous statement of the Secretary of War." Suspicions of course included those of Sherman as well as those of Davis and his Cabinet.

Thaddeus Stevens when all of the testimony ^{as} was in in regard to the conspiracy - certainly nobody/bitter ~~as~~ Stevens lived at that time - "I know these men," he said, "they are gentlemen and incapable of being assassins."