

HENRY S. SAFFORD'S REMINISCENCE.

He Opened the Petersons' House for the Dying President and Witnessed His Death.

It will be remembered that on the night of Lincoln's assassination he was carried from the theater into a house nearly opposite the theater on Tenth street. That night many of the most famous men in the country passed in and out of the small chamber in which Lincoln lay dying. Graphic pictures have been drawn of the dying moments of Lincoln, with famous men standing around the death-bed of the beloved president. In fact, however, there were few prominent men at his bedside at the moment of his death, which took place early in the morning after he was shot. Among those present was Henry S. Safford of Dartmouth street, who was at the time a lodger in the house where Lincoln was taken. Mr Safford relates the experiences of that dread night in the following language:—

I was not only living in Washington at the time of President Lincoln's assassination, but roomed in the house where he was taken and died. I might, in fact, say that I saw him die. He passed away so slowly, however, that the exact moment he breathed his last was probably not known. Several times during the last few hours that he was living he seemed to have expired, and the awe-struck spectators of the dramatic ending of his devoted life held their breath, expecting to hear the attendant surgeon announce his death. Only once was it observed that he showed the slightest sign of being conscious, and that was when he made an effort to move, but it was only for a second. How strange it seems to me now when I think of the excitement of that night! I could not realize at the time what a tremendously historic and important scene I was witnessing. What the whole country was shocked to hear the next morning was then taking place in my presence and before my very eyes.

I must not omit telling you that it was I who offered the house to those who were bringing the president across the street from the theater, which was nearly opposite. But let me here refer to how my chum, Mr Proctor, who with myself, hired the second floor of our apartments and I happened to be there at the time. We had come to our rooms immediately after our supper, intending to remain there. We had been out quite late the night before, doing our part with the rest of the multitude in the celebration of Lee's surrender. Therefore, on this memorable evening, we were quite tired, and so planned to spend the evening at home. About 10 o'clock we heard quite an unusual commotion outside, and my friend remarked that it was too early for the theater to be out yet. I said "yes," and went to the window, and saw the provost guard running about as though looking for some one, and the audience rushing out of the building. They hesitated and acted so panic stricken, that I sang out to those, under the window which I had raised, asking what the matter was, and was answered that the president had been shot.

We were soon down at the door, and when the bearers of the president's body were half-way across the street, one of the leaders asked, "Where can we take him?" and as there was no response from any other house, I cried out, "Bring him in here." On either side of our house the residents were either secessionists, or not very loyal. Otherwise they might have carried him into one of the houses more directly opposite, because the family, whose name was Peterson, worthy Germans, with whom I lived, were away, and I should not perhaps have felt free to offer them the use of the house had others opened their doors promptly. It was a two-story brick house, with two parlors on one side of the hall and a stairway on the other. The two parlor doors were locked, and Lincoln was carried through the hall to a light airy bedroom at the rear, as it would have been inconvenient to carry him upstairs. Besides, time was precious. The first thing the doctors did was to apply hot water bottles to his feet, and mustard plasters were freely used to keep up the warmth and circulation.

The statement has been made that on account of the extreme height of Lincoln the bed was not long enough to hold him, and that he was accordingly laid upon a mattress upon the floor, but this is not true. He was laid upon the bed, which belonged to a plain bedroom set, and had barely room to lie stretched out. There were two or three incidents which took place during that long night of suspense, which I will relate to you. Here is a piece of white lace which was torn from a long lace scarf worn loosely by Mrs Lincoln around her head. She was detained at the theater for an hour after her husband was taken out, on account of her nervous condition, and when she did arrive at the house she rushed in with such great haste that somehow the end of her scarf caught in the doorway and was torn off, and as the piece was discarded I took possession of it. Gradually I have presented women with little pieces so that I have now but this one small piece left. I happened to be in the hallway when she entered and I heard her cry, frantically, "Where is my dear husband? Where is he,—where is he?" Before they would allow Mrs Lincoln to see her husband they made her promise that she should be calm while in the room, but before she had reached his bedside she manifested such grief and anguish that she gave way. Whoever said anything reflecting upon Mrs Lincoln's love for her husband could not have done so had he witnessed what I did that night. She was dragged away from the president by main force, and was so delirious that a physician had to render her assistance.

It was then that spirits of camphor was called for, and as there was no one in the house who knew where it was, I started on a run down the street to a drug store to buy some. On reaching the first street I was stopped by soldiers, who had taken up positions on each street running at right angles to Tenth street. I had little difficulty in going out through the line, but upon returning two guards were sent back to the house with me to satisfy the officer in charge that I was entitled to pass in. While looking out of my back window at times during the night I noticed, an unusual glistening against the sky, which turned out to be the bayonets of some of our soldiers, who had been posted on the roofs of some of the houses surrounding ours.

After the president had been in the house about an hour I inquired of Maj Rathbone, who had, with his fiancée, Miss Harris, accompanied Mr and Mrs Lincoln to the theater, and had taken charge of the arrangements of the house after the murder, where the blood was coming from, pointing to his hand, when he suddenly exclaimed, "I believe that fellow pricked me," and sure enough, upon removing his coat, he found that he had been stabbed just above his elbow. He was a brave and plucky man, for all of the time since the fatal shot was fired he had given his whole attention to the relief and care of the president, without once thinking of himself, and he was so faint from the loss of blood that after dressing the wound the doctor had to take him home.

The president died at about 7 o'clock the following morning. There were not nearly all of the distinguished men present that have been reported as being there. Of the prominent men there were Schuyler Colfax, Secretary Stanton, Charles Sumner, Postmaster-General Denison and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. The rest of those present besides the surgeons were people rooming in the house. I have here a copy of Frank Leslie's Illustrated of April 20, 1865, and a large double-page picture is the most accurate of those gotten out. Not all of the noted men pictured were present at the

time, but had been within a few hours of the death of Lincoln. The accuracy of the picture is vouched for by a certificate signed by those present at the house, among them myself.

The body was wrapped in a shawl and blanket and deposited in a box, and taken to the quartermaster-general's office, where it was prepared for removal to the White House. Here is a lock of the president's hair, which was cut from around the wound, so as not to interfere with the probe. Here is a piece of linen which was cut from the pillow-case. These linen and clo's are blood and brains. This feather came out of pillow upon which the president's head last rested, when alive. Here is one of the two cuff pieces that were placed upon his eyes to close them. Gold and silver in those days were not found plentifully in people's pockets, and copper was used. I have many other relics equally interesting.

Another most remarkable coincidence I must tell you. There was an actor named Mathews, who a few weeks before the assassination had occupied this same back bedroom into which Lincoln was taken, and in this room Booth, the assassin, had visited him, and it is thought that here he had endeavored to prevail on him to take part in the murderous plots he was then arranging. At the time of the president's death the room was occupied by a Mr Clark, now dead.

It was a singular thing, too, that the first vote I ever cast was for Abraham Lincoln. It was in New York city. I was employed in a wholesale house, whose trade was wholly in the South, and they naturally expected every man connected with the establishment to vote for a democrat, and we all felt afraid to vote any other way. I hesitated till the time came to vote, and then I decided that I would do as I thought right, and so voted for Lincoln. I little thought then that I should ever shake him by the hand or see him upon his deathbed, but fate arranged that I should do both. About a year after he was elected I met Lincoln two or three times at receptions. Through Gen Ripley, formerly commandant of the Springfield armory, who was then chief of ordnance in Washington, I had been placed in charge of the property returns division, where the accounts for all the ordnance supplies of the officers of the whole army were kept.

The morning after the assassination there was alarm on every face I met. The greatest consternation prevailed. For some weeks before Lee's surrender paroled rebels had been coming in to Washington in great numbers, and there were many serious comments made to the effect that a general uprising was planned. And this and the other attempted murder the same night brought about a feeling that these startling reports were to be carried out. Detectives by the dozen arrived from the largest cities, and everyone we met looked like one, there was such a feeling of terror existing. But it gradually wore away, and in 24 hours a feeling of comparative safety prevailed. Of course, everyone who came to Washington and many who were living there were curious to see the room where the president died, so much so in fact, that they became troublesome. Some were so anxious to have a souvenir of the event that they actually cut out pieces of the carpet and furniture. At this the proprietor of the house objected, and decided that if any one was interested enough to see the room he ought to be willing to pay an admittance fee.

Mr Safford remained in Washington some three months after these events, and then, anxious to re-enter mercantile life, returned to New York, where he resided for about 20 years. He came to this city from New York, and since that time has resided here.