Diary of John Henry Stevenson
alias of Michael O’Laughlin

Introductory Remarks

Diary Transcription

as dictated to
Lottie Eaton

The following document contains a title page with source statement, a brief introduction, and 24 pages of text telling of the life of Michael O’Laughlin, before and after assuming the false identity of John Henry Stevenson. The introduction is dated February 9, 1891, over seven months after Stevenson’s death on June 23, 1890. How the document came into the possession of Gladys Thurston in Yardley, Pennsylvania has not been documented. She, in turn, passed the document on to Ray Neff, who was assisting her with repairs on her New Jersey oceanside home after a hurricane.

The typewritten text contains many typographical errors and misspelled words. Nothing has been done to correct or document these errors.

It is known through official government documents obtained in photostat and held in the Neff-Guttridge Collection that O’Laughlin was reported as having died on September 27, 1867. Yet, according to this diary, he survived and had numerous adventures.
Diary of JOHN HENRY STEVENSON

Source: Mrs. Gladys Thurston

Yardley, Pennsylvania
When I was ten years old there was a man who came to the home of my benefactor, Miss Clara Barndt, in Muscatine County, Iowa. The year was 1882 and my parents had died in the Flu epidemic of 1878. I had gone to live with neighbors until 1880, when the Brandt sisters took me in and I became the legal ward of Miss Clara. Mr. John B. Stevenson came to the Brandt home in the fall of 1882 and lived out the rest of his life there. When he died in 1890 they laid him to rest in a plot of ground overlooking the mighty Mississippi River, awaiting that day when all the faithful will arise and be with their Christ in the realm of Glory.

The narrative which is here presented is an exact duplication of the story that he told me in order that I might record it. I gave him my solemn promise that during his lifetime I would not reveal it. With his passing, I am relieved of that promise. I am therefore telling the story in his exact words knowing full well that there are many who will say I made the whole thing up. It truly does sound fantastic but I believe it to be true since I learned to know and love the man who told it to me, and know him to be a man of God and of truth. However, the reader will have to take it as it is or reject it as he chooses. I have no proof of its truth, other than the word of a gentleman.

Lottie Eaton
Davenport, Iowa

February 9, 1891
The Story of John B. Stevenson:
Each man has something to be proud of and something to be ashamed of. With some, the things to be proud of far outweigh the things of which he is ashamed. When I look back over the years of my life, I find few things of which I am proud and so very many things of which I am so very much ashamed. My life has not been so very long for I have lived less than 50 years on this earth and am not bound to live many more but even now I feel a terrible sense of guilt and remorse for the life which I have led.

At a very early age I learned to gamble and found it to practically obsess my every waking hour. I always carried playing cards with me and I most often found someone with which to play for money. I became very adept at card tricks and was very skilled in gambling. I soon found that my closest friends would not play cards with me and I had to look for others to take money from. It was a more difficult task with strangers for I seldom had enough money to interest them. I also became much impressed with the taste as well as the effects of strong drink. I was fair game for lewd and licentious women and while I was still a young man I contracted a disease which was to make me unable to father a child. I spent much time with the harlots of the Baltimore waterfront and reaped the rewards of worldly living; a life of misery and remorse.

My greatest sin came when I became involved in that terrible scheme which turned into the assassination plot and indeed the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It was not to be a plot to kill but as is often the case, those who planned it did not reckon with the irrationality of Mr. John Wilkes Booth. The plan was to abduct and hold the president, vice-president, and the secretary of state, and to intimidate the others in the cabinet into cooperation. But this is not the way it happened as the world well knows.

The story of the plot really began in 1858 although it was not recognized by its participants at that time. I was in the City of Baltimore and was without money or proper possessions. I was without a job and had very poor prospects. I went into a tavern and spent the last money I had for a drink. As I was prone to do on every occasion which presented itself, I took my cards from my pocket and
began to shuffle them. I was soon approached by a total stranger who offered to buy me a drink. I readily accepted and soon found myself in conversation with him. He offered to play me at cards and even loaned me a dollar for a stake. I very shortly had won over a hundred dollars from him. He then made me a proposition. He was looking for a partner who could strip an old man of his money. It seems that a family named "Martin" had driven a herd of cattle into Baltimore from Berkly County, Virginia, and had sold them. The three sons went off to get drunk as they were wont to do on every occasion which presented itself. The father, who was holding the money, went off looking for a card game. My new partner had come in with them and he was looking, and had found someone who could take the father's money. I was promised half of the winnings. He had gambled with me to find out if I was good with cards.

Within one hour I was playing cards with Father Martin. By midnight I had won over five hundred dollars and by the time the sun came up I had taken over $2100 from him, his entire supply of cash. He made out a bill of sale for a 31-acre farm in Virginia and slid it across the table to me. He told me that he would give me the farm for the $2100. I told him that I would not do it since I had not seen the farm. He then insisted at the point of a gun. I gave him the money and took the bill of sale. We began to gamble again and within a few minutes I had won another $300 from him. He became very angry and accused me of cheating him, which I was not, and left to find his sons, stating that he would come back and get his bill of sale back as well as his money. I believed that he would and told my partner so.

My partner took the $300 and left me with the bill of sale. I left the area and saw no more of the partner or the father or the sons, which made me not sad at all. I had about $20 that I had won from my short-time partner and which I had secreted in my boot, as well as the bill of sale, the value of which I did not know.

About a month later I happened to be in the "Lady's Slipper" when John Wilkes Booth came in. I had owed him about $100 for many months and when we met he bought me a drink, as he was wont to do. While we talked I thought of the Bill of sale
and withdrew it from my pocket. I told him that I had a fine farm for sale and told him that I would make him a bargain of it. He took the bill of sale and after examining it, asked me to come to a lawyers with it. We want to see a lawyer and within an hour had made a deal. He gave me $1000 and cancelled my debt to him in exchange for the bill of sale. It turned out to be a very fine farm. I did not go there until almost ten years later and then under the most changed conditions which I will presently describe.

I did not see Wilkes again until about six months after his marriage. He sent me a note asking me to meet him at the railroad station. We had some oysters together and he was looking for one of his lady friends who he had not seen since before he was married. He had kept the marriage a complete secret due to his being on the stage and depended on his image as a debonnaire bachelor, even though he was only 20 years old. He had a way with the ladies and it was not long before he found the lady he was seeking and they soon left arm in arm. I was not to see him for three days. Then we had more oysters and brandy together. He did not speak of what had happened, for he never did, but was full of praises of the food and drink. We were together for hours talking and drinking. Just before he had to catch his train, he leaned forward and said to me that his wife was going to have a child. Thinking that he would be happy, I grasped his hand and congratulated him but he became very angry, and said that he did not want any child, nor did he want a wife. He had married her in a fit of passion and his passion for her had cooled. He poured out his heart to me that he felt so shackled by marriage and that he was sorry that he had married. He said that he loved the woman but that he was sorry that he had married her. The truth was, whether John Wilkes Booth knew it or not, that he never loved anyone but himself. This was his central weakness and yet his total strenght. He always acted to his own advantage and to the advantage of others only if it advanced his own plans. No one was to know this better than I nor did anyone ever discover this fact in a more difficult manner.

I don't know just when it was that he first approached me and attempted to get me into the plot for it was at first I thought it to be part of his play-acting
manner which was his nature. I had seen this part of his nature at his home at Bel-Air when we were children. It was when I was visiting him and his guests (a couple of children, a girl and two boys, who spent the summer at the Booth home) and we would play the exciting games which children were wont to play.

Wilkes had read a book about a wicked French Nobleman named the Duc de la Voeke, a man who had taken unfair advantage of the poor maiden Elain'. He had forced her to be his unwilling guest or he would send her father to prison. The story was quite silly and morbid but it caught Wilkes fancy and he decided that we were to act out the parts. A young lad named Claude was to be the Duc, the guest by the name of Susan was to play Elain', and a colored boy by the name of Jake was to be the footman. Wilkes was to be Sir Giraud, the knight that rescued the fair Elain' (she had buck teeth and pimples and legs like toothpicks). I was to assist Wilkes as his squire. Elain', the Duc and the footman were on a spring wagon pulled by a pony and Wilkes and I were each on a pony. Wilkes had a stick which he used as a sword. As the wagon came up the road, Wilkes became so enthused by the action that he rode up and knocked the poor unsuspecting Jake from the wagon with a thrust of his "sword" and the wheel of the wagon passed over his leg, badly bruising it and for all we knew, breaking it. I pulled up short and want to see about Jake while Wilkes pursued the wagon in a cloud of dust. I helped poor Jake to the house and had him taken care of. When Wilkes came up he gave me the very devil for leaving him without a squire. He could not understand that in play, when someone is hurt, the play is stopped and the injury tended. To him, the play was the most important thing and all else must revolve about it. This was to be his, and our downfall in the years to come.

He boarded the train for New York and I was not to see him for several weeks. He then sent me a note saying that he must see me as soon as possible. I met him at a restaurant on Fayette Street and we had dinner together. I was without funds as usual and he knew it. While we are he asked me if I would like to make a few hundred dollars. I told him that I most certainly would. He then introduced me to a "Major Harris" and the three of us sat together for our brandy. The "Major said
that he had need of men that he could trust in a business endeavor which he was
starting. He offered me three hundred dollars if I would make a trip to Montreal
for him and deliver a package to him in New York. I agreed to do it and all the
arrangements were made. I went to Montreal and returned with the package which was
only about 4 inches by 4 inches by 8 inches and weighed about 2 pounds. I had no
trouble getting it back to him and felt that I had made a quick $300. When he
approached me again in about a month, I again made the trip for him for the same
amount. I made a total of five trips in as many months. To this day I do not know
what was in the packages but I know it must have been dishonest or I would not
have been paid so handsomely.

A daughter was born to Wilkes in the late Fall, November I believe. His wife was
living on the farm in Virginia and she had with her the darkies owned by Wilkes.
The farm was small and did not provide other than pasture for his horses and two
milk cows but Izola enjoyed it there. Wilkes made infrequent trips to the farm and
would then spend about a week each time. He had a good income by this time and he
kept his family well supplied except for his presence.

When the war started I saw Wilkes on infrequent occasions until 1863. In the Spring
of that year I again met Wilkes in Baltimore and he had Major Harris with him. We
met in the "Lady's Slipper" and had dinner together. The Major then asked me if I would
like to work for him again. I said that I would. This time he had a different mission
for me and I went west into Indiana. I went with two other men and we made a trip
to Owenboro, Kentucky which lay just South of the Ohio River. While there we met
a Mr. Watson who was very anxious to hear about Booth and "his plan". I did not
then know what the plan was or that a plan existed, but Watson knew of it. When
I returned to Baltimore I asked Wilkes about it. He then took me into his confidence
and told me about it.

The plan was to kidnap the president, the vice-president and the secretary of state
and take them someplace where they could not be found. There were a number of
Confederate secret service men assigned to the plan. The main backing was in the
North however, and was from here that most of the money was to come. I have in
later years thought much of this and I cannot think that all of the persons involved had the same motives. It appears that many persons with completely opposite desires were assisting the plan, each thinking that in the end he would control the activity. None knew Wilkes Booth nor how to reckon with him. I do not know how much money was behind the plan but I do know that it was more than a quarter million dollars. There were treasury notes to the extent of over $150,000 and there were large amounts of greenbacks. Booth had received $80,000 in gold coin of foreign mintage in early 1863 and had been forced to bury it in order to not become suspect. Gold coin of foreign mintage when redeemed made anyone immediately suspect by the government since this was the method of operation of smugglers. Gold coins of foreign origin had to be taken out of the country to be redeemed. Booth took the coins to his farm in Virginia and secreted them there. In the fall of 1863 Booth discovered that the treasury notes were duplicates of numbers and that due to the treasury scandals, all of that type had been called in. In order to redeem them one had to give his name when they were redeemed. The redemption of so large an amount would certainly arouse suspicion. Wilkes took these to his farm and hid them. It was about this time that Wilkes began to run short of cash. He had a fortune in his possession but he could not use it. He had invested in oil in Pennsylvania and had made other expenditures which drained heavily on his resources. He became involved in smuggling operations with a Canadian shipping firm. Major Harris had disappeared some six months earlier and none seemed to know what became of him. Booth filled in the gap. It was necessary to get quinine to the confederacy and Wilkes became determined to do it.

Since I knew a great deal about the operations of Major Harris, Wilkes enlisted me to assist him. I made another trip to Indiana and Kentucky. My trip into Indiana was without incident but when I got near to the Ohio river I was frequently stopped by patrols and my person and wagon carefully scrutinized. My story was that I was going to Owenboro to visit relatives. I gave the names of two men who lived there but who were not connected with the smuggling. When they had assured themselves that I did not carry any contraband they let me go. I proceeded across the river and into
Owenboro. I crossed the river on a ferry boat which was run by an old man with a long grey beard. He chewed tobacco and drooled the juice down over his vest. I remembered him from previous crossings. When we were almost across, the old man sidled up to me and whispered, "Doctor Magill wants to see you. He has been waiting for you for several weeks." This puzzled me since it was only about a week before when I had decided to come. I asked him where I could find Dr. Magill. He instructed me on how to find the doctor's home. I waited until dark and then went there. I knocked at the front door and the door was answered by a colored butler. I asked for the Doctor and told him that Mr. John Stevenson was calling. In a few minutes the butler returned and instructed me to go into the library and wait. I did as I was told. I waited for about half an hour when two men came into the hall and since the door to the library was ajar, I heard what they talked about. Doctor Magill was talking to a "Major". They were discussing the terrible shortage of medical supplies in Kentucky. Within a few minutes the Major left and the Doctor came into the library. He stopped short when he saw me and he looked very surprised. He took his cigar from his mouth and just stared for a minute. Then he said, "I do not know you sir."

I told him that I was a friend of Major Harris's and that I was there for the same purpose. I had never met the Doctor before but I had heard Major Harris speak of him. The doctor poured two brandy's. As we sipped them we were both silent until the brandy was finished. Then the doctor spoke, "What have you brought?" I told him that I had brought nothing but came to make the arrangements. He then asked me about quinine and opiates. I told him that I could get both for him if the price was right. We agreed on a price for both and method of communications were set up. I left in about three hours. I returned a different way. The doctor told me how to go in order to miss the patrols. The doctor also had ways of procuring passes for the contraband. He had made contracts with Gen. _______ and Col. _______ of the union army and they supplied ways of getting the stuff to the Confederates. Both these men felt that was should not be made against the sick and injured. They had made agreements with Dr. Magill, allowing him to act as go-between for the medicines.

When I returned to Baltimore I met Wilkes and we discussed the methods of getting the medicines to Dr. Magill. The doctor had supplied the names and addresses of
persons of his acquaintance who would help get the stuff to Kentucky. We went over the list and made plans for shipments. Shipments were made to Indiana by train and then sent the rest of the way by team, or messenger. Payment was made through Canadian banks, usually in gold and silver coinage of foreign mintage. Occasionally payment was made at some point in the U.S. and then it often became a problem. Anytime that large amounts of coins changed hands, the Detective Police would know about it and would investigate. We had a number of close calls.

Even though our smuggling business was a success, I was unable to get hold of any large amount of cask. I was being paid about $20 at a time and I was always without money. I suppose that Wilkes knew that if I had money I would probably not show up but would be off with some woman, probably drunk, and so I got little money. I soon became tired of this and told Wilkes so. We had quite a hassle and it ended with me quitting his smuggling operation. Within a month I was back in and he was, for a short time paying me more. But the money was building up in the Canadian Banks (as well as English Banks) and it was practically impossible to get it into American banks without arousing suspicion. Wilkes had a great amount buried at his home in Virginia. By this time Wilkes was involved in so many things that it was difficult to see him or to know when he would show up. He had brought other people into the kidnapping plot and he was receiving large amounts of money from his friends in the government.

At one time I met with Wilkes and a Captain Rodgers in Washington. Captain Rodgers delivered a package to Wilkes and I later found that it contained a large number of Treasury Bonds. These later proved to be stolen from the treasury and were made up with duplicate numbers. At another time Wilkes was given a large number of "Greenbacks" which were new and difficult to spend since they were in consecutive numbers and crisp. At one time we discussed the possibility of selling the bonds and the greenbacks at a discount. Then Wilkes offered to buy them from me. I finally accepted $1000 for my share of the contraband and thus thought to cleanse myself of the liability lest we get caught. How stupid I was.

It is all now history how the president was assassinated on April 14, 1865 at Ford’s Theater but there were many things that happened which were not supposed to happen that way. Here is, for the first time, the facts about that deed as I knew them.
In the Spring of 1864, Wilkes had lunch with me at his Hotel in Washington City and during this luncheon he mentioned to me that he had been approached by a "high government official" and asked to carry out an assignment for the Government. I knew at the time that Booth had carried dispatches for the Confederacy and that his loyalty (if he had any such thing to other than himself) lay with the South. I could not imagine him working for the Union unless it had possible advantages for the South or himself. He then went on to explain that a man high in the government had offered to pay him to kidnap the president of the United States. I did not know whether to believe him or not, but as he talked I realized that the idea appealed to him. He then asked me to get Sam Arnold, Will White, Frank Jones and several others together and meet with him at the Cockeyesville Inn in about a week, he would let me know just when. In about two weeks we met at the Inn and after about twenty minutes all except Sam and I had left, telling him that they wanted no part of it. The three of us then got drunk and no more was said of the kidnapping that day. About a week later I received a note from Wilkes asking me to meet him. I did and found that there were others there. Wilkes laid out the plot. The president, vice-president and secretary of state were to be kidnapped and spirited from the country. Then a provisional government would be designated by Congress. Wilkes emphasized the importance of keeping the nation in the dark as to the fate of the three kidnapped so that congress could act. Wilkes told us that there was "more than a quarter million dollars available to pay for the act." He also pointed out that we would all be heroes in both the north and the south.

I later talked with Wilkes and learned more of the details. A troop of cavalry would be raised and drilled in southern Maryland. They would be outfitted with stolen Federal uniforms, arms and equipment. They would be drilled to perfection and would be in charge of a lieutenant in a stolen union uniform. The president would be kidnapped from the theatre by having one of his aides to go to the theatre during intermission and calling the president to the War Department. The troop of cavalry would then appear and furnish escort for the president. They would then go by the home of the Secretary of State and summon him into the same carriage. The Vice-president who lived at Kirkwood House would be summoned by a messenger and would be forced
into a carriage while on his way to the War Department. They would all three then be taken through Southern Maryland to a waiting ship on Chesapeake Bay. Arrangements had been made to allow the ship to get out of the Bay as well as to allow the carriages to get out of Washington. It could be anticipated that it would be several hours before the three would be missed. By this time it would be hard to tell where they had gone.

I do not know exactly what went wrong at Ford's Theatre that night. I was where I should have been on that night as was Sam Arnold. Sam was to have taken care of the disablement of the telegraph at Old Point Comfort but this he did not do. This did not figure in the failure however since the plan had gone so completely awry before the failure of the Fort Monroe telegraph was needed that this small failure was insignificant.

The first thing that seems to have gone wrong was that the "troops" from southern Maryland got drunk when they got to Washington and only six showed up at the appointed place. These six were uniformed and equipped and the "lieutenant" led them to Fords Theatre. But the Major (he was a genuine major and close to Lincoln) did not come. Wilkes decided to go ahead with himself assisting. When the lieutenant and his six men moved in to escort the president's carriage, a captain who had already been assigned the task of guarding the president, ordered the men away. They had no choice but to obey. Beyond this point I do not know what happened. The story told as fact by many who were there seems fantastic and so unlike what was planned. I have always thought that perhaps Wilkes was so frustrated (this was the fifth time that the plan had gone to the brink of success only to be called off) that he completely lost his reason and killed the president. This still would not account for the attempt against Seward. In any event, the ship was waiting at Benedicts Landing on the bay and a seaman had been sent to Dr. Mudd's to act as guide and contact him. Dr. Mudd was a member of the "Doctor's Line" through southern Maryland. This was a group of doctors along a line through Maryland who would take in southerners who were going South, mainly from prisons from which they had escaped. Doctor Mudd was not a part of the kidnap conspiracy but he would give help to anyone who needed it and so it was known that if the seaman came to Mudd's he would be allowed to wait
there and be fed in the meantime.

I have always wondered just what happened in the president's box in Ford's theatre that night. Booth was not supposed to be actively involved in the plot. He was to help by smoothing the movements at the theatre and was the man in charge of the plot at the theatre. Once the president went to his carriage Wilkes planned to go to the alley in the rear of the theatre, mount his waiting horse and set out for Benedict's. He had already sent his clothes and personal possessions to the Bahamas. He had arranged for extensive bank credits in England. He planned to go to England and in about a year, Izola and his daughter would join him there. I was to assist his wife in arranging for the shipment of the gold and silver out of the country. I was to have one-third.

Things did not go as planned. The first thing which went wrong was that the men from Maryland who were to pose as soldiers, got drunk and did not appear at the appointed hour. Then the Major did not appear at Ford's as he was supposed to do. Finally, the other officer who was at Ford's lost his nerve after so much had gone awry and refused to go through with it. He went berserk when Booth told him that they would proceed and then he attacked Wilkes with a knife. This much I know.

Beyond this point I do not know what happened but I do know that the popular version of the deed is far from correct. At any rate, Wilkes ended up on the stage with a broken leg and the story from there to Dr Mudd's is about correct. The story of the arrest of Mrs. Surratt, Dr. Mudd, Sam Arnold, myself, and others is well known. Our treatment is somewhat known but no human being can ever realize the terrible inhumanities we suffered. I would not attempt to describe them for they only bring back the terrible nightmares which have possessed me for many years.

Dr. Mudd, Sam Arnold, Spangler and I were transferred to Fort Jefferson on Dry Tortugas for what was supposed to be the rest of our lives. This was not expected to be for very long for few lasted more than five years on that Hellish island. I was placed in a cubicle which was about 2 feet by 2 feet by 5 feet. This was made of bricks with stone floor and a wooden door and no window. It was completely dark and during the day, as hot as the hinges of Hell. During the night it was rather cool. But with the rising of the sun it became an oven again. Once a week I was
taken out of this hole and taken to the sickbay where I was examined by the
doctor or a hospital steward, allowed to eat one meal of meat, potato and bread
and I was then taken back to my dungeon. This procedure took exactly one hour
and during this time no one spoke one word to me. I could talk but no one answered.
I was not allowed to wash or shave but I was allowed to change clothes. Since I
had no place to go, my clothes contained my excrement. The cubicle was too small
for me to remove my clothes. I was fed once daily; I was given a piece of bread,
and a cup of water (about one pint).
I do not know how long I was in this hell-hole but it seemed like ages. One day
I was taken from the cubicle and to the sick-bay but when I got there there was only
one man there. He was well dressed and on the table was a fine meal consisting of
meat, cheese, and green vegetables, and beside it was a cup of coffee. I would not
believe my eyes and thought that I was irrational (which I partly was.) The man spoke
to me !!! He said, "Sit down and eat. I want to talk to you."
The man was W. G. Pollock and he asked me if I knew where Booth had hidden the gold
which he had. He said that if I would help him get the gold that he would see that
I got out of prison. He said that he knew about Booth's wife but that she was no
help. They had been watching her but she was of no help. They knew that she could find
the gold but as long as they watched her she would not get it.
I knew that if I helped him I would probably not live to tell about it but as dazed
as I was I realized that death would be better than staying where I was. Many things
can be worse than death.
I told him that I could not and indeed would not help him so long as I was in prison.
If he would get me out I would give my word that I would get the gold for 10% of it.
He agreed and told me that he would return in about a week. In the meantime, I would
be kept in a special room to myself and I would be reported as sick. From that time
on I was treated well, allowed to bathe and shave, and on the third day I was given
a sedative. I remember practically nothing beyond that point until I awoke in New
Orleans some time later, October 5, 1867. I was in a clean bed and had a nurse
with me. I was very weak and when given a mirror, I saw that I was as yellow
as an oriental. I was told that it was a dye and that I had been reported as
having died of Yellow Fever since the island was having an epidemic of that disease at the time.

A week later, on October 12, 1867, Pollock again visited me. I was feeling much better and was able to eat and was gaining weight. I was outfitted with clothes and luggage and made to look like the proper gentleman. The following day we left for Baltimore, arriving there on December 3. I had assumed the identity of John Henry Stevenson, a name which I had used before my arrest to some small degree. I was covered by the fact that Michael O'Laughlin was dead. I had my hair cut and my whiskers trimmed differently so that there would be no chance recognition by anyone in Baltimore. Pollock gave me the address of Izola Booth and I took a room about three blocks away. Pollock had Izola under constant surveys and now I too was constantly watched. It was obvious that Pollock did not trust us. Three days after I moved into my room I went to visit Izola. She was not in so I left my card. I wrote on it that it was necessary to see her. I signed it "J. Stevenson" and left it with a lady who was there. I told her that I would return that night.

I then returned to my room, stopping by a saloon long enough to buy a bottle of whiskey. When I got to my room I made a big pretense of drinking myself to sleep. I poured about half of the contents of the bottle out and settled into my bed, taking care to snore like a drunken man. Within about half an hour the door opened and Pollock and another man came into my room. They completely searched the room, and took care to go through all my clothes and luggage. Then they left.

After they had left, I arose, dressed, and stuffed blankets into my bed so that it would appear occupied, and left by way of the window. I went back to Izola's house and entered the second floor by means of an unlocked window. I came down the stairs and almost scared the colored woman to death. She was about to run a hair pin into me when I made her understand that I wanted to talk to Mrs. Booth. She said, "Them that sneaks around in this world like you does ain't up to no good." This was "Aunt Sarah" Johnson, a really loyal and intelligent African who many times risked her life for Izola Booth and her family. Her son was Booths valet (I believe that his name was James). I talked with Izola for several hours. She was amazed to learn that I was alive and
out of prison. She pressed me for the details of my escape and of plans for the future. I told her that I would like to help her get the money from the farm in Virginia, and that then I planned to go to Europe to live. It was then that she told me that Booth was not dead. She said that after the assassination that Wilkes had come to the farm and had recuperated from the broken leg. He had then left with his negro valet and another man and made his way to Canada. From there she did not know where he went but she had heard from him in September. He had planned to meet her in San Francisco in the spring. He wanted her to meet him there with the money. We agreed to go to the farm and get it and then I would accompany her to San Francisco. This would take me far away from Pollock and give me a new start. We agreed on a plan. I would call on Izola the following day and take her out to dine. We would make plans while Pollocks men overheard us. We would plan to go to New York while really planning to go to California. In our New York plans we set the date of January 5, but on the evening of December 23 it began to snow quite heavily and so that night at about 10 o'clock I brought 2 excellent saddle horses into the alley at the rear of Izola's house. I had retired after dinner to my room with a bottle and apparent habit I had established for the benefit of Pollock's detectives, and he had reason to believe that I was drunk and settled for the night. At 10:30 Izola, who was dressed as a boy, and I on horseback, made our way out Frederick Road in a blinding snow storm. We took with us just enough clothes to last us until we could get the money from the farm and catch the train west. We were both leaving our past behind us. Izola had left her daughter with Aunt Sarah, who would follow later by way of Boston. We had with us about $1500 in gold coin and greenbacks. It would provide the means of transportation for ourselves and the gold. By five in the morning we had gotten to Ellicott's Mills in Howard County. The going was so rough that by now the horses could hardly keep their footing. We came to an Inn and we turned into the stable. I rubbed the horses down good and gave them oats. By this time the innkeeper was up and "Johnny" (Izola's new name as a boy) and I had breakfast. The storm was still going strong so we rested the whole day. By nightfall the snow had stopped and carriages were beginning to break the trail. I told the innkeeper how we had to get to Cumberland before the end of the week and therefore my
"son" and I would have to press on through most of the night. He gave me the name of an inn at Hancock where we could get lodging the next night. I thanked him and we left. It was hard on Izola but she was spunky about it. We knew that it was only a matter of time before Pollock discovered that we were gone and started tracking us. Within several days he was bound to find out which way we had gone and be after us.

I had made a serious mistake in the selection of horses. I knew that I would have to have good horses for the coming month or so and I therefore bought 2 of the best that I could find. They were such excellent horses that wherever we went, anyone who knew anything of horseflesh remembered them. Everyone commented about what beautiful chestnuts we had. I soon began to realize that this was definitely in Pollock's favor.

We arrived in Frederick on Saturday evening and both of us were exhausted. We got a room and spent Saturday night and Sunday resting. On Monday I bought a two-horse spring wagon with harness and by nine o'clock Joe and I were on the road to Harper's Ferry. The roads were clear but somewhat muddy in the morning but by noon the weather turned cold and the mud froze. Just about dark, it began to snow again. We kept going and arrived at the farm just about daylight on Tuesday. We stabled the horses and fed them. Then we settled down in the back of the wagon and slept until dark. When I awoke I fixed a fire in the small hearth in the carriage house and prepared some food. Izola was practically exhausted from the rigors of the past few days. I was only three months away from the gruelling torments of prison and I was aching in every joint and muscle but we had to keep going if we were to escape Pollock and his men. Now, for the first time, I felt that we were safe for a while. Pollock could not have known about the farm or he would have searched there. Booth had never titled the farm in his real name for he wanted no one to know about it, nor about Izola for that matter, and they had used nom-de-plume while there. There were no close neighbors and people in that part of the country left others alone for the most part. It is doubtful whether anyone knew that the actor Booth ever had a home in their midst.

I found two large steamer trunks in the smoke house. I removed them into the carriage house and began to take the trivia from them. I saw that there were many letter from
and to Booth in them; letters from Wilkes to Izola and letters from other women to Wilkes. I tried to conceal the letters to Wilkes from her but she just smiled and said, "I know about them. I know what kind of man he is but I love him and would rather share him than not have him at all." We burned all the contents of both trunks. Izola then told me where to find the money. There was a leather saddlebag secreted in the wall behind a closet in the top floor room on the North side of the main house. I went into the house and soon found the closet. I broke the wall open and found the bag. In it were Treasury Bonds. There were bundles of them, all in thousand denominations. They looked new. I took them to the carriage house.

Next, there were gold coins. They were sewn up in sail-cloth bags and buried under the kitchen. I took a shovel to the house and began to dig. I soon found several bags of gold coins. I carried two bags to the carriage house and as I turned to leave I fainted. When I awoke Izola had me wrapped in blankets and a large fire going in the hearth, but I was still in a raging chill. I seemed to have a very high fever and was very weak and ill. For three days and nights I was sick and then I began to recover. My fever had left me weak and depleted. Izola nursed me back to health in a most amazing fashion. It had begun to snow again and a raging blizzard was in progress most of the time that I was sick. Food had begun to get short and so she had improvised. She made oat gruel from the oats we had brought for the horses. She made the meat go farther than planned by making stews and soup. She had found some potatoes in the root cellar. By the end of the week I again felt like starting with the chore of assembling the gold coins into the trunks for shipment. It was still snowing intermittently and there were huge drifts across fields and roads. I brought bags of gold coins to the carriage house and then packed them into the trunks. There were also silver coins but I did not pack them so long as there was gold. I was amazed at the quantity of gold and silver coins of all sizes and nationalities which we found. I soon had the trunks so heavily loaded that I could not load them onto the wagon and then I had to unload them of their contents, get them onto the wagon and reload them with the coins. We soon became aware of another problem. No matter how we packed the coins, if the trunk was delivered a quick blow of even slight pressure, the coins would jangle. We tried many ways and
were unable to overcome this problem. I finally became aware of one certainty, I would have to repack the coins in some manner so as to do away with the jingle. I finally came to the conclusion that the safest was to melt them down. This not only changed the nature of the coins, but it also took away the jingle.

The following morning I took several bags of gold coins to the blacksmith shop and started a fire in the forge. I then discovered that the bellows were damaged. I used my raincoat to repair the damage. I found an iron pot in which I melted the coins. I made up dirt molds from a pattern that I whittled out of wood. The bars when cast weighed about 20 pounds each. During the next several days I cast the gold coins into bars. These I packed into the trunks, wrapped the canvas from the bags around them. I could not get all of the bars into the trunks and had to bury them. I soon realized that there was a fortune in gold and silver here, not to mention the bonds and currency. To this day I cannot imagine where it all came from.

By this time it had stopped snowing and it was the middle of February. I had gone in to Halltown to the store for supplies. I had ridden one of the horses and one of the local loafers which always congregate around a country store remarked what a beautiful horse I was riding and began to ask questions about which way I came and other things. I made the answers as general as possible for fear that Pollock would eventually inquire in this area and might find where we had been. When the fellow became uncomfortably inquisitive, I made up a story of being interested in trapping in the area. I even bought some traps which the store owner had hanging there. I finally made it out of the store and back to the farm. Naturally, I left heavy tracks in the snow and it would have been a simple chore for anyone interested to have tracked me back there. I therefore became anxious to get away from the farm.

I was unable to take nearly all of the gold and none of the silver. The only thing was to hide it. This I did. I removed the boards from the feed room in the carriage house and dug a hole. I put into this hole all of the silver coins which I had dug up and the gold coins which I had not melted. I buried the gold bars under the stall in the blacksmith shop. I did not know if I would ever be able or would need to return for the remaining fiches which we were leaving behind. Izola and I discussed the possibility of getting a larger wagon so that we could take all of the stuff but we finally decided
that by taking only a slice of the loaf that we might have the chance to enjoy the
sandwich whereas if we waited, every minute courted disaster. Pollock was bound to find
us if we tarried. If had been almost 2 months since we had left Baltimore and we had
been blessed with terrible weather which made finding us almost impossible, but with the
thaw which would come would come detection unless we were well on our way to California.
The next morning we left the farm at daybreak. Our wagon was loaded with two steamer
trunks of large proportions and the springs were greatly depressed. The horses at times
had difficulty pulling it when we struck snow drifts. We planned to catch the train at
Harpers Ferry but when we got within sight of the station there were several horses tied
up to the rail and we saw men inside talking with the ticket agent and they had that look
of detectives. We decided to go into Frederick and not to tarry. We spent the night
at an Inn about 10 miles from Frederick. In the morning when I went out to hitch up
the team the stable man commented on how heavy the trunks were. He remarked that I must
have gold in those trunks and then he laughed. I had the hardest time laughing with him
for in spite of my action I knew that if one of Pollocks men would ask him he would
remember the incident. We loaded our bags onto the train at Frederick without detection.
On arriving at Frederick I discovered that the schedules were such as to be entirely
impractical for our use, and so we continued on North to Harrisburg.

The weather had turned warm and the sun came out bright. It made the trip less rigorous but at the same time the more difficult. When we reached the ford across the
Monarcy River I could see that the stream had swollen. It was still possible but the
approaches were muddy and with the thin wheeled wagon and the extremely heavy load,
it began to cut into the mud. By the time we had reached the middle of the stream we
were mired in so that the horses could not move the wagon. I realized that we would
have to lighten the load. I stepped into the freezing water and picked Izola from the
seat. I carried her to the shore and went back to lead the team out. They still could
not pull it. I quickly decided to sacrifice the butter from the slice of bread as I
opened the back trunk and began to remove gold bars. I threw them over into deep water
and did not look back as they sank from sight. I do not know how much I had taken out,
perhaps 12 or even more, when I shouted to the horses and they started forward. I push-
ed with all my might and the wagon moved out of the stream. I closed the trunk and we drove off. I was soaked and chilled to the bone and we had a long trip ahead of us. We continued on for 10 miles or more before I dared stop and build a fire. By that time I did I was so thoroughly chilled that my fever had returned. And so we then went on for several miles more to an Inn where we acquired a room. I became very febrile and delirious during the night and Izola had her hands full. I tried to leave the room without clothes and she had to call the innkeeper. When he saw her he realized that she was a woman and not a boy. He became quite upset and threatened to put us out. She then told him a story about how her father was a mountain man in West Virginia and how we had run off to be married. She withdrew the marriage licence which we had gotten for just such an occasion. I had forged the ministers name and Aunt Sarah had written in an illegible hand as witness. The innkeeper was touched and helped her subdue me. He even sent his wife up with some medicine which put me to sleep.

When I awoke the next morning I felt terrible and was unable to arise. For three days and nights we stayed there until I was able to travel. At the end of that time I knew that we must be gone or we were courting certain detection. Early in the morning we left the inn with the promise of the innkeeper and his wife that we would write to them from Boston and tell them how we were doing. They also promised that they would greatly mislead any detectives who came looking. I have always wondered if they ever realized that West Virginia mountain men do not send detectives to bring back errant daughters.

We arrived in Harrisburg several days later and got our tickets west. Our trunks weighed in at about 600 pounds, much to the surprise of the station man. He said, "Mister, you must have gold in them trunks." To which I replied, "Mister, they got lots of gold in California. The thing that they need and don't have is books. I aim to trade books for gold. I'll have trunks of gold when I come back." We both laughed and he said, "Danged if I don't think you will."

We arrived in San Francisco on April 18th. The trip had been hard on both of us and we needed rest badly. Izola was now dressed as the lady she was and we were traveling as man and wife. We took a room in one of the best hotels in San Francisco and prepared to make contact with J. B. Wilkes, as Wilkes was known. We placed an ad in the personal
column which I read "John, come home, your mother is ill." This was the signal that we had arrived. The next day a messenger brought a note which gave directions on how to contact him. I suddenly became aware of the fact that I did not want Izola to go. I did not want to see Wilkes for by this time I loathed him, first for getting me involved in a thing which put me through the terrible ordeal which I had suffered, and secondly, because I did not want to give up Izola to him. He did not love her but only wanted the gold and money which she brought and for the first time, I admitted that I did indeed love her. She was beautiful and wonderful and the past months, although rigorous, had been bearable because of her. She had nursed me through the terrible fevers that I had and had restored me to health again. She had furnished the encouragement without which I would have given up and despaired.

I then suggested to Izola that we send half of the gold to Wilkes and go north with the rest. She was understanding but said, "No." She still loved him in spite of everything. And as she went to meet him. I took one third of the gold from the trunks and packed it into wooden boxes and prepared to go north to Sacramento. I purchased a two horse team and a spring wagon and when she returned I told her what I planned to do. She kissed me goodbye and took a package from her bag. She handed it to me and later when I opened it, I found it contained $20,000 in greenbacks. I felt San Francisco at about noon and arrived in Sacramento two days later.

I took a room in Sacramento and rested for several weeks. The boxes of gold were under my bed and no one paid any mind since strangers were always plentiful in California and it was never healthy to ask too many questions about anyone's background. I loved the beauties of California and especially Sacramento. I rode out of Sacramento each morning by a different route and just rode and looked at the beautiful country. One day I rode up to a smelter and began to talk to one of the workers. He told me that the establishment was for sale. I talked to the foreman and discovered that the owner had died and that the bank held a note against the business. I got as many details as possible and then rode into town. A smelter would be just perfect for the disposal of the gold bars that I had under my bed.

I went to the bank and found that the price was $6,000. I bought it. I knew nothing
about the smelting business but the foreman named Jim Frye knew how to run a smelter. Frye was as loyal as the pay and he knew the business as none else in those parts. I was now in a business which paid me about $500 profits each month, and I had time to visit the bars and gambling houses of Sacramento and live a life of real luxury. I was good at cards and made a handsome profit from my gambling activities.

One day I took the boxes of gold bars from under my bed and hauled them up to the smelter. I unloaded them and took them into the office. When Frye came in he looked at them and smiled. "Where did you get the coin metal?" he asked. I was amazed. He had recognized it immediately. I stammered that I bought it from someone and Frye just smiled. He never said anything about it again but he knew that I hadn't bought that gold. Within two weeks he had run it through the smelter and off to the bank with never a word. Frye was a loyal man and honest. He had been a Major in the Confederate army but he never spoke of it. I once saw a picture of him in his uniform. He kept it in his room and on one occasion I went to his room to talk with him. He also had a picture of a lovely lady inscribed "To Jim, from his loving wife Julia." I don't know what became of his wife, I never heard him mention her.

I made friends in the banking and social circles of Sacramento and I was amassing a sizable fortune. I had been in Sacramento for about 10 months when there was a man came around to all the smelters seeking to buy gold on contract at a fixed price and the entire output of the smelter. He was seeking to pay in greenbacks at a rate somewhat above the current rate. I talked with a friend who knew the gold business completely. His name was Frank Bailey and he said that it appeared to be someone planning to corner the gold market. He advised that I not only not sign a contract but that I form a syndicate to hold the entire output of the smelter until the price rose. We consulted several other men of means and finally decided to follow his advice. Bailey acted as agent for the other friends and Frye and I and Bailey all went in on thirds.

Frye had considerable savings as did I, and Bailey used the money of his friends. We realized that the manipulations would probably be in the East and so it was necessary to have the gold someplace where it could be readily sold in the East. Through contacts in New York, Bailey found out that there was going to be an attempt to buy up
gold in New York and that the government of President Grant had promised to remain aloof to the manipulations. At the same time there were men in California who were planning to buy up gold on contract so as to use the incident for speculation. Bailey, Frye, and I decided to ship what gold we had to Baltimore, and so in July, Frye left with a little over 8000 ounces of .999 fine gold. He wired that he had sold the gold for a quarter of a million dollar profit on September 26, 1869. My luck had held and I was a wealthy man. On October 5th I received a letter from Izola. She was in San Francisco and needed help. I took the next stage there and found her ill, destitute and without money. She seemed dazed and so very thin and wan. I brought her to Sacramento several days later. I bought a house and moved her into it. It was a beautiful home and I hoped that we could resume our life as man and wife. She seemed so far away and so dazed. She hardly ate at all and she just sat and stared out of the window. It was several weeks before she would show any interest in anything. One night she had a nightmare. I heard her screaming and went to her. She sobbed uncontrollably in my arms and then she told me a most incredulously story.

She had met Booth aboard a ship in the harbor of San Francisco. Seamen were sent to bring the trunks to the ship and they sailed immediately. The master was Captain Scott and the ship, the Indian Queen. She was a Brig and quite seaworthy with a good captain, since I knew him well from my days in Baltimore. The ship was about 200 tons burthen and came from Nova Scotia. They sailed with the tide on April 21, 1868. They went west and south and the voyage was wonderful for the Booths. After many months there was a mutiny and Booth and Captain Scott were both killed by the crew. Izola was put adrift in a whaleboat and was later picked up by a British ship. The ship had brought her to San Francisco.

After she had told me this she began to eat better but she was not the same as before. She asked me to take her to Baltimore so that she could see her daughter. I agreed reluctantly. I told her that we could bring her daughter to California and be a happy family, but she would not agree. I wanted to come to Baltimore by ship but she said she could not stand to go that way, and then she told me that she was going to have a baby. I cleared up my business as quickly as possible and, leaving the smelter in the hands of Frye and my other business in the hands of Bailey, I made provisions to bring
Izola home to the East. We arrived in Baltimore just before Christmas and Izola gave birth to a son on February 22, 1870. We gave him my name which I had chosen, John Harry Stevenson. In later years he went by the name of Harry Jerome for both he and his mother shied away from the name "John", particularly since he bore such a resemblance to his father, JOHN WILKES BOOTH.

After the birth of Harry, I took a back seat in the life of Izola. We seemed to quarrel whenever we were together and so I moved to Boston. I was reasonably well off and I received regular amounts from my investments in California. And then one day I received a letter from Frye. It told me that I had nothing in California any more. It seemed as though Bailey's "friends" did not exist. He had embezzled money from the bank and had pyramided it into a fortune. He had then invested not too wisely and had finally lost heavily. His creditors closed in and he had taken money from my accounts and the smelter to make up his losses. Finally, in 1874 his past had caught up with him and he shot himself. My income from California stopped and I never heard from Frye again. I understand that Frye went on to become a millionaire. I have often wondered if Frye was completely honest or if he stole my smelter and blamed Bailey. One will never know.

It was just before Christmas in 1878 that I felt compelled to leave the East. I was at the time living with friends in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. They had been most gracious to me since I had become afflicted with dropsy in 1877. I had come to love both ladies, not as lovers but as friends, and they found me a welcome addition to their household. I wished before going to their farm in the west, to see Harry Stevenson and let him know that I was not really his father. Harry had been disappointed by me on several occasions and I wanted him to know that it could not be helped. I made arrangements to meet him at Delmonico's in New York for breakfast one morning and I said goodbye and told him who his father was. He then told me that he had known since reading the diary of his mother. He told me that his mother wrote in her diary that the crew of the ship had mutinied in order to get the gold. They had killed Captain Scott and when they put her adrift, she had seen Booth lying face down on the deck and covered with blood. She knew that he was dead. Sometime later in the mid 70's Harry had talked with Mr. Purdy who had mentioned that John B. Wilkes had written a letter
to someone in the theatre and that the handwriting had looked amazingly like Booth's.

Harry believed that Booth had not died on that ship. I do not know nor do I really care. Booth never gave me anything but grief and heartaches. Before Izola went to San Francisco to meet him she was warm and tender to me and showed me passion as no other woman had ever done. After she returned she was dead inside. She had lost her entire spirit. She was only half a woman. For this I could never forgive him.

I know that there are many who, if they read this garbled missive will say that I am a fraud. They will be right, but not because of what I write but of what I did. The world would have been better off had I never been born but born I was and die I shall, and judged shall we all be. I have many times atoned for the many sins that I have committed and I know that I have been promised forgiveness. If being sorry helps then I am assured relief.

There is much that I could relate but it would do no good. I am not bitter and go to my reward willingly since my life has been difficult and I am so sorry.

October 15, 1886

Mr. Stevenson died at 5:35 A.M. on June 23, 1890 at the farm of Misses Emma and Elmira Brandt in Muscatine County, Iowa. He had been ill for such a long time and he longed so for death. He was buried in a small plot which he had picked out himself. It overlooked the Mississippi River and gave a beautiful view. I have visited his grave almost daily since his passing and a headstone has been erected. It reads:

JOHN HENRY STEVENSON
1838-1890

His coming made the world a little richer,
His being here made the world a little brighter,
His passing made the world a little sadder,
His memory lingers to give us comfort.

Lottie Eaton