

The Juniata Sentinel.  
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MIFFLINTOWN, PA.

# Juniata Sentinel.

B. F. SCHWEIER,  
[THE CONSTITUTION—THE UNION—AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAWS.]  
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P. H. RAWNS.  
Dec. 4, 1872-1f

## Miscellany.

### The Assassination of the Swards.

BY T. S. VERDIL, A. M., M. D.

[NOTE.—Among the gages of war an- nals few have a more thrilling interest than those which record the murder of the President and the attempted assas- sination of his Secretary of State. Dr. Verdil, of this city, who was the family physician of the Swards, has furnished *The Republic* with the following graphic story of that terrible tragedy. The inci- dents related, of which he was not only an eye-witness, but an important part, will, we think, be deemed valuable con- tributions to political history.—Ed.]

At the breaking out of the war we find Mr. Seward in the Cabinet, and all his sons, William, Frederick, and Angu- stus, in the service of their country.

Frederick, a man of letters, was se- lected by his father as his colleague in the Department of State, with the posi- tion of assistant secretary.

Angustus already held a commission as paymaster in the regular Army. He is a graduate of West Point.

William left a very lucrative business, a young wife and baby, and, as Colonel of the Ninth New York Artillery, came to brave the hardships of a soldier. At the battle of Monocacy he distinguished himself and was wounded, for which he was raised to the rank of brigadier gen- eral.

In 1863, while commanding at Fort Foote, on the Potomac, William was seized with an acute attack of dysen- tery, induced by exposure in that ma- licious district. He was brought home to Washington by the surgeons in charge, who looked upon his case as one to ex- cite the greatest alarm. For several days he lay between life and death, causing the greatest solicitude to his parents.

At his bedside I had the opportunity of estimating the character of that angelic woman who, moving around his couch as if an ethereal form, administered to his wants with so much judgment and infinite maternal love.

He rallied and his convalescence brought a consciousness of happiness in that household, which, without excessive de- monstrations, seemed to preclude the very air. As he became convalescent, I recommended a temporary change of climate, and ordered him to his home in Auburn. There he improved greatly, and gave hope of a speedy recovery; but a few weeks after, the malaria still remaining in his system developed into a dangerous form of typhoid fever.

About the first of November Mr. Seward requested that I should immediately go with him to Auburn. He had re- ceived a telegram stating that a consul- tation of physicians had given but little hope of the recovery of his son. Fur- nished with an extra train, accompanied by his daughter Fanny—now his almost inseparable companion—we started for Auburn.

During this long journey he conversed so freely that I ventured to ask him the question "how it happened that he, the acknowledged leader of the Republican party, was not selected as the candidate for the Presidency in 1860?" I put my question with some degree of timidity, for I feared that he might be sensitive on that subject. He surprised me with his frank and unaffected answer. There was no bitterness or disappointment in the tone of his voice. If he had had the ambition to become the Chief Magistrate of the nation—particularly when his party, the child of his brain, came into power—it was smothered by the nobler desire of serving his country rather than himself. His reply was:

"The leader of a political party in a country like ours is so exposed that his enemies become as numerous and formid- able as his friends, and in an election you must put forward the man who will carry the highest number of votes. Pennsylvania would not have voted for me, and without her we could not carry the election; hence I was not the avail- able man. Mr. Lincoln possessed all the necessary qualifications to represent our party, and being comparatively unknown had not to contend with the animosities generally marshaled against a leader. We made him the candidate; he was elected, and we have never had reason to regret it."

Colonel Seward recovered, and soon returned to the field and led his regi- ment at the battle of the Monocacy. There he was wounded, and in the hasty retreat of the national forces he was left on the field. The rebels rushing wildly in pursuit, did not discover that under a simple blue blouse was an officer of so much importance. He played "possum," as they say in the Army, waited for them to get out of sight, then caught a stray mule, mounted it, and came in the lines at Washington. The simple and unobtrusive uniform saved him, as it saved many of our officers in the cam- paigns. Had it been otherwise, he would have been discovered and prob- ably would have ended his life in the murderous Southern prisons.

Colonel Seward—afterwards general—remained in service during the entire war, resigning only on June 1, 1866. In November, 1864, Frederick Seward was in New York on official business. On descending the stairs at the Astor House, he fell and broke his right arm at the elbow. He was consequently confined to his house for several weeks, and threatened with a stiff arm for the rest of his life. He, however, recovered the perfect use of it, and resumed the duties of his office.

On the 6th of April, 1865, the Sec- retary and Frederick Seward rode out to pay an official visit to one of the foreign ministers. As the carriage stopped in front of the house the driver descended from his box to open the carriage door; from some reason or other, probably from an unconscious pull at the reins, the horses started, dragging the driver. They soon became unmanageable, and flew off at a frightful speed. Both Mr. Seward and Frederick, seeing the dan- ger, jumped from the carriage. Freder- ick was unhurt, but Mr. Seward could not rise; people rushed to his assistance and found that he was seriously injured, the blood streaming from his mouth, and his right arm lying powerless at his side. He was immediately picked up and car- ried to his house, not a block distant.

I found him in his bed, his face fright- fully bruised, his lower jaw completely fractured on both sides, his right arm fractured, also, near the shoulder. He was in great pain, and it was with diffi- culty that he could be relieved. His condition, considering his age, was peril- ous in the extreme. Suffusion soon took place, his right eye closed, and the right side of his face became blue from the contusion. His lower jaw was hanging down, and being fractured on both sides, he could not raise it for mastication. The right side of the jaw, upon which he evidently fell, became greatly tume- fied and inflamed, so much so that he could not bear the slightest bandage. His sufferings became intense, a high fever rose, which greatly aggravated his con- dition.

Mrs. Seward and Fanny, after recover- ing from the shock that this new mis- fortune caused them, were unremitting in their attentions; every caprice that a feverish imagination would excite was promptly gratified by those tender and loving hands.

His nights became so restless that he required a constant watch. His jaw was in such a condition that it was a difficult problem for surgeons to decide how it could be kept in coaptation, so as to favor ossification and the knitting to- gether of the broken ends. He took his food through a tube and with great diffi- culty. His right arm was in splints, and Mr. Seward lay helpless on a bed of agony.

On the 9th, four days after this acci- dent, the news reached Washington of the surrender of General Lee. The bells chimed the joyful tidings; the people rushed to and fro in their intoxication of gladness. The President and the Sec- retaries received the ovations of the peo- ple, and he, the great premier, the man who had contributed so much to the sal- vation of his country, was held down by relentless physical suffering.

The city was thrown in a blaze by a general and spontaneous illumination; the cannon roared from every fort, and from the centre of the city the peals of gladness. Even the sympathizers with the South rejoiced that the end of the war had come. His own house was a beautiful transparency of national flags yet he hardly dared to move a finger for fear of drawing an unwilling groan. His face bespoke, however, his joy within, for the play of his features could not hide the emotions of that stout heart.

If the family sorrow was not forgotten at that moment, it was not unalloyed with happiness, for even that noble lady, whose heart was filled with grief, gave evidence that she too shared in the na- tion's joy.

For five days our city, the capital of this redeemed land, wore the garb of festivity. The people were loth to settle down, so great was the magic effect of the late events. The excitement seemed now and then to ally, but only to break forth in some new form. Every little incident was made an occasion for a gather- ing, which ended in the deafening hur- rahs for the Union, for the country, for the General, for the President, and for whatever favorite chief.

On the 14th of April, Mr. Lincoln was to receive an ovation from the people at the theatre. Preparations were made on a large scale for this soulful reception by the people of their President. At 9 o'clock I went to make my evening visit to the Secretary, and found that his con- dition was ameliorating sensibly; I staid half an hour with him; then bidding him good night, left him with Mr. Rob- inson, the night watch. From there I returned to my house, and half an hour had not elapsed when I heard a person running, who suddenly stopped to give an extraordinary pull at my bell. Think- ing that this was a pressing message, I went to the door myself, and there met

William, Mr. Seward's colored waiter, who, with a frightened look, and in the most excited manner, said, "Oh, come, doctor, Mr. Seward is killed!"

Hardly comprehending the import of so sudden an announcement, I grasped my surgical case, and, halless, ran with him to the house. There were only two blocks between my house and Mr. Seward's. While running I asked the boy what he meant, how was Mr. Seward killed? "Oh," he exclaimed, "a man came to the door and asked admittance in your name; I let him in; he went up to Mr. Seward's room, and killed him."

I was amazed! "How, who, in my name? It was all I could utter. 'Who for what, did a man go in my name?' were unanswered questions that flashed through my mind! In this short time, so great is the power of imagination, I thought of a man who had begged me to recommend him to Mr. Seward for a consulship; that I had done so, but that Mr. Seward, not having the place vacant would not gratify the office-seeker. Now this man, mad with disappointment, is surely gone to assassinate the Secretary. These thoughts had hardly crossed my mind when I reached the door of Mr. Seward's; I ascended quickly, and when I got up stairs I met the blanching face of Mrs. Seward, who, in an agonized tone, said, "look to Mr. Seward!"

Mr. Seward lay on his bed, with pallid face and half closed eyes; he looked like an exsanguinated corpse. In ap- proaching him my feet went deep in blood. Blood was streaming from an extensive gash in his swollen cheek; the cheek was now laid upon, and the flap hung loose on his neck. With prompt applica- tions of ice-water I checked the hemor- rhage, and then examined the extent of the wound. The gash commenced from the high cheek bone down to the neck, in a semi-circular form, towards the mouth; it was, probably, five inches long and two inches deep. It was a frightful wound. It seemed as if the jugular vein or the carotid artery must be wounded, so great was the loss of blood. I was greatly relieved to find that they were not.

Mr. Seward and her daughter, almost paralyzed, were waiting and watching for my first word. Believed to see that the Secretary had miraculously escap- ed the severing of those two vital vessels I said: "Mr. Seward, even in your mis- fortune, I must congratulate you; the assassin has failed, and your life is not in danger."

He could not speak, but he made a sign with the hand for his wife, and daughter to approach, took hold of their hands, and his eyes only spoke and bid them hope.

I had hardly sponged his face from the bloody strains and replaced the flap, when Mrs. Seward, with an intense look called me to her "Come and see Fred- erick," said she.

Somewhat surprised, I said, "What is the matter with Frederick?" In a pain- ful whisper she muttered, "He is badly wounded, I fear."

Without adding another word, I fol- lowed her to the next room, where I found Frederick bleeding profusely from the head. He had a ghastly appearance was unable to articulate, gave me a smile of recognition, and pointed to his head. There I found a large wound a little above the forehead and somewhat on the left of the median line, and another fur- ther back, on the same side. The cra- nium had been crushed in in both places, and the brain was exposed. The wounds were bleeding profusely, but the applica- tion of cold water pledgets soon stopped the hemorrhage. I feared these wounds would prove fatal.

Mrs. Seward again was haunting me with that intense look of silent anxiety. I gave her words of encouragement; I feared they were unmeaning words.

Again she drew me to her with that look I had seen in the other room. As I approached, almost bewildered, she said, "Come and see Augustus."

"For Heaven's sake, Mrs. Seward, what does all this mean?"

I followed her in another room on the same floor, and there found Augustus, with two cuts on his forehead and one on his right hand. They were superfi- cial.

As I turned to Mrs. Seward to give her a word of comfort, she said, "Come and see Mr. Robinson."

I ceased wondering; my mind became as if paralyzed; mechanically I fol- lowed her and examined Mr. Robinson. He had four or five cuts on his shoulders. They, too, were superficial.

Again I turned to Mrs. Seward, as if asking, "Any more?" yet unbelieving that any more could be wounded. She answered my look. "Yes, one more."

In another room I found Mr. Hansell, pitiously groaning on the bed. He said he was wounded in the back. I stripped him, and found a deep gash just above the small of the back, near the spine. I thrust my finger in the wound, evidently made by a large bladed knife, and found that it followed a rib, but had not pene- trated the viscera. Here was another

miraculous escape. Even here I was glad to be able to give a word of comfort.

And all this the work of one man— yes, of one man!

No one in that house knew then that at that very moment, a more fatal, if not so extensive a tragedy, was being per- petrated in that theater where we thought people were rejoicing.

We were so engaged with the perilous condition of the victims of this terrible slaughter, that we had not time even to ask for an explanation.

A blight, as if from a thunderbolt, had passed over this house, laying its inmates low with stricken bodies, with paralyzed souls.

What human passion, what frantic revenge, could find a vent in such a monstrous deed!

What could Mr. Seward have done, in the course of his life, to have awakened such diabolical passion?

These questions each mind put to itself, yet, no answer could be given. Yet, one man, a man unknown even to Mr. Seward himself, had done it all!

Inexplicable, as horrible, was this foul deed.

Not comprehending either object, cause, or extent, we had the doors of the house locked.

In a few minutes the city was full of the wildest rumors; horrified and excited, the people ran through the streets, giving utterance to expressions of grief and alarm, that grew deeper and deeper, and rose higher and higher, until the un- usual sounds surged into an uninterupted roar. Attracted by this unusual commotion, we went out to comprehend the meaning of the mysterious and frantic echoes of the people's lament. It was then we learned that Mr. Lincoln had been shot and killed, in the midst of his friends, by the side of his wife, at the acme of the people's joy.

The mystery was solved. It was a hellish machination of political madness. The discovery, although overpowering, was a relief. The victims of the tragic act were innocent; the causes were not personal. The odious act sanctified the victims.

In the face of so great a national calamity, the calamity of Mr. Seward paled in comparison.

What a night for these two families; what a night for the people of Wash- ington. The deed was as dark as the night; the people were convulsed with rage, with sorrow, with fear.

Tread, tread, tread! The people ex- citedly passed to and fro, as if in search of an unknown something, stopping each other to ask unanswerable questions, and to relieve with groans, their sorrow- stricken hearts. Shutters were inquiry- fully thrown open by the fearless, doors were locked by the timid, anxiety was on every face. Were we walking on a volcano? Honeholts rose from their beds, mothers folded their children within their arms, as if they feared danger in the very air. Men returned to their grief- stricken families.

Let us now recur to some of the chief incidents of the attempted assassination.

At or about 10 o'clock of the evening of the 14th of April, thirty minutes after I had left Mr. Seward, the bell of his house gave a ring. William Wells, a colored lad, who usually attended the door, answered that ring. A man hold- ing a little package in his hands, pre- sented himself, saying I must go up to Mr. Seward, to deliver him the medicine and a message from Dr. Verdil.

The lad tells him he cannot go up; but he would deliver both medicine and message himself.

No; the stranger cannot trust the im- portant message, he must go up himself.

In vain the lad remonstrates. In his testimony before the court, he stated: "I told him he could not go up; it was against my orders. That if he would give me the medicine, I would tell Mr. Seward how to take it. That would not do; he started to go up. Finding that he would go up. Finding that he would go up, I stepped past him, and went up the steps before him. Then, thinking that such might be the orders of Dr. Verdil, and that I was interfering, I begged him to excuse me. I became afraid he might tell Mr. Seward and the doctor of my interference. He answered 'all right.' As he stepped heavily, I told him to walk lightly, so as not to disturb the Secretary."

In the adjacent room to Mr. Seward's Frederick is lying on the sofa, resting. He hears steps and voices ascending; he comes out on the landing and there meets the stranger.

Frederick inquires, "What do you want?"

"I want to see Mr. Seward. I have medicine and a message to deliver from Dr. Verdil."

"My father is asleep; give me the medicine and the directions; I will take them to him."

"No, I must see him; I must see him," he repeats in a determined manner.

"You cannot see him; you cannot see him. I am the proprietor here; I am Mr. Seward's son. If you cannot leave them with me, you cannot leave them at all."

The man still insists; Frederick still refuses. The determined tone of Fred- erick causes the man to hesitate; he even turns to go down stairs, the lad preced- ing him, telling him to walk lightly. He descends four or five steps, when sudde- nly he turns back and springs upon Fred- erick, giving him a blow—doubleless with the heavy pistol—on the head, that falls him to the ground. The lad, seeing the brutal assault, runs down crying, "Mur- der, murder!" He flies to the corner— General Augur's headquarters. He finds no guard.

In the meanwhile Robinson, the nurse in attendance on Mr. Seward, hearing the unusual noise, opens the door and sees the stranger, and Frederick thrown on his hands and bleeding; before he has time for thought the assassin is on him, striking him to the ground; he quickly rises, but before he can clinch with him the assassin is on Mr. Seward, who, having awakened and comprehending the scene at once, had risen in his bed. The assassin plunges an immense knife in Mr. Seward's face; he attempts another stroke at his neck, but Robinson is on him, and the knife is partially arrested. He tries to disengage himself from Rob- inson by striking him with the knife over the shoulders.

The daughter, who, too, is watching in the dimly lighted room, screams "help" and "murder."

Augustus Seward, who is taking an early sleep to be able to watch his father later in the night, is awakened by the heart rending screams of his sister. This room is on the same floor; and unad- dressed he runs to his father's room. His mind, hardly awakened, does not take in the situation; he thinks his father delirious; he sees a man in the middle of the room; he thinks it is his father; he takes hold of him; as he grasps him he perceives, by his size and strength, it cannot be his father; he thinks it is the man servant drunk or crazy; he grapples with him to cast him out; he receives blows with some instrument about the head and hands. The man yells like a tiger, "I am mad! I am mad!" Augustus pushes him out and follows him, locking the door behind him to prevent his return.

Augustus quietly goes back to his father's room, only to discover that his father and brother have hardly escaped death from the hands of an assassin.

Mr. Hansell, a messenger of the State Department, was sleeping in a room above Mr. Seward's. He is there to help if wanted. He hears the screams of murder; not being much of a hero, he tries to make his way out of the house; as he descends the assassin is behind him, who, thinking that this man is going down to give the alarm, springs on him, plunges his knife in his back, falls him, and passes by.

William, the colored boy, in the mean- while had run about crazily to get assist- ance, and returns with three soldiers just in time to see the assassin mount his horse and ride off.

All this took less time to happen than it takes to relate.

J. Wilkes Booth the arch-assassin, educated to theatrical tableaux, must play the Brutus; he assassinates the President before two thousand people, leaps on the stage and exclaims, "Sic semper tyrannis!" He flies, but a whole army is after him, and he is run down like a cowardly fox. But the assassin of Mr. Seward no one knows; there is no clue to his identity. All the detec- tives are at work upon all sorts of im- possible theories; this man baffles their acuteness. For three days all attempts to get a trace of him are vain.

Booth, having thus exposed himself, gave the detectives a point at start in their plans of detection. They soon learn Booth's strange affiliation with John Surratt and his family. Accord- ingly an order is given for the apprehen- sion of the Surratts. At 11 p. m. of the 17th the officers go to Mrs. Surratt and inform her of their mission. While they are waiting in the hall for her to get ready, a knock is heard at the door. An officer opens, and a laboring man, with a pickaxe on his shoulder, appears. He, seeing the officers, says, "Think I am mistaken."

"Whom do you want to see?" the officer inquires.

"Mrs. Surratt."

"You are not mistaken, then, walk in. He walks in; the door is locked be- hind him.

"Do you want to see Mrs. Surratt?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"She has engaged me to dig a gutter for her in the garden."

"Where have you worked?"

"I have worked about the streets."

"Where did Mrs. Surratt engage you?"

"She knows I work by jobs; she saw me in the street and engaged me."

"Did you come to dig a gutter to- night?"

"No; I came to ask her when she wants the job done."

An officer goes and asks Mrs. Surratt if she has engaged a man to dig a gutter?

Oh, no; not she; she engaged no

man; gets excited; she fears it is a thief; she is so glad the officers are in the house!

—She comes in the hall, looks at the man, and declares she never saw him in her life. Yet, as it is proven by the evidence in the trial, this man had been for three days, March 14, 15, and 16, a guest at her house, ate at her own table, went to the theater with her son, &c.

This man gives his name as Lewis Payne. Lewis Payne is arrested under the suspicious circumstances. William Wells, the colored lad, was sent for; being shown to a room containing several people, he is asked if he recognizes the assassin among them?

No; he does not see him.

Several other people are then brought in, when suddenly he walks towards Lewis Payne, and in an excited manner exclaims: "There he is! I knew I could never forget that lip!" The recognition was complete.

Next morning I accompanied Miss Fanny and Augustus Seward to the Monitor, where Payne was held a prisoner. What a feeling must have pervaded the bosom of this girl while she was going to meet this assassin, who, before her own eyes, had so brutally assaulted, and all but killed, her father. She had seen him in a dimly-lighted room, under great excitement. Would she recognize him now? The idea of meeting this man face to face, although where he was harmless, would have excited vain fears in many a girl's heart; but she was composed, and her demeanor expressed only the dignity of her own strange position. She met the naval officer on the Monitor with the same calm and gentle manners so natural to her. The officers, on the other hand, felt almost a reverence for this girl who, instead of making a demonstration of her harrow- ing grief, was commanding self, and in her own unaffected manner received the expressions of their respect and sym- pathy with unfeigned gratefulness.

Payne gradually rose from the hatch- way, and with neck exposed, head un- covered, showing a serious if not stolid face, and colossal frame, he stood un- moved before this frail girl, who would not even utter a curse upon him. God alone knew what passed in those two hearts at that moment. Strangely quiet they stood before each other. Were they overwhelmed by the magnitude of a crime that was beyond man's redress? The scene was a solemn one—too solemn for man to utter a sound; a silence, broken only by the hissing wind and surging waves pervaded the whole ship. It was almost a weird transformation from a mysterious power.

Miss Fanny was hanging on my arm. Did I feel a quiver? Probably I did for I gently drew her from the painful scene. Conscience even at this trying mo- ment, she could not identify the man her identification, she thought, might be his death. She had only seen him by a dim light as if a faithful vision.— That is all she said.

To the questions of the detectives Payne answered hesitatingly and some- what evasively. Had he ever seen the lady before? No. Could he pronounce Dr. Verdil's name? He pronounced it so well that it made me shudder. Yet my name was a foreign one, and he a stran- ger to me. Had he ever seen Dr. Verdil before? No. Such was the assassin Payne; a head and face that expressed a preponderating criminal element.— There was a vacancy in that face amount- ing almost to imbecility. His answer bespoke only a light degree of fear, not of intelligence. His physique was her- culean; he was purely a brute; an in- strument well adapted for the use of a refined brain like Booth's.

Booth, egotistical in his plot, wanted no intelligence to share the honors of his self imposed heroism. He only wanted blind instruments to aid him in his diabolical scheme. All his accomplices were of that character.

True to his nature, Booth had prepared means of escape for himself. Payne, a stranger in these parts, had been left ignorant of the topography of the coun- try, and even without means of susten- ance. Booth had taught him well. No halolite of Mr. Seward; he had taught him the physician's name that was to bring him to Mr. Seward's couch, but had not taught him how to escape from the avenging hand of justice, and Payne fell a victim to his own ignorance and to his master's satanic egotism.

For three days Payne roamed about the country in the vain attempt to con- ceal himself. Hungry, friendless, rest- less, he wandered back to the only one who could and should offer him aid and comfort—he returned to Mrs. Surratt's. A mysterious power was dragging him there. This criminal, whom man did not know, was led by necessity to the house of Mrs. Surratt at the very moment that the functionaries of the law were appre- hending his accomplices. Useless were then the retractions of innocence. There they stood, self-accused!

An illustrative instance of this man's insensibility was related to me by Major

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