

THE
SOUTHERN REBELLION:
BEING
A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES
By W. A. CRAFTS.
1867.

The Assassination of President Lincoln.

THERE remains to be recorded the crowning act of infamy in this wicked rebellion — an act committed when the rebel confederacy was crumbling in pieces, when Lee's army had surrendered and Johnston's was at the mercy of General Sherman; committed in the capital of the nation, when the loyal people were rejoicing over victories and the hopes of a speedy peace. President Lincoln had been reëlected by a large majority of the popular vote, and a remarkable majority in the electoral colleges. On the 4th of March he was a second time inaugurated, and from the eastern portico of the Capitol pronounced a brief address, hopeful, but not triumphant, and imbued with a religious feeling and solemnity which made it deeply impressive. Its closing words exhibited the spirit with which he would administer the government — "With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

After four years of war, and all the toil, care, and anxiety which they had brought to him in the execution of his high office, he entered upon his second term under more auspicious circumstances than he had begun the first, and with hopeful prospects of peace and the more congenial labor of pacification. The final blows at the military power of the rebels were struck; he had himself entered the conquered rebel capital; the end of the rebellion was already in sight, within little more than a month after his inauguration. With the loyal people he was rejoicing over the victories and hopes of the

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ADMINISTRATION

hour, when, on the night of the 14th of April, he was assassinated,—on the night of that day, when, by his direction, with appropriate ceremonies and in the presence of a distinguished company, the national flag was raised over the ruins of Fort Sumter, symbolizing, on the spot where the rebellion achieved its first victory, the final triumph of the Union.

The assassination was the result of a conspiracy, organized during the previous winter and early spring by a number of traitors, resident in Washington and Maryland, which was intended to cripple the government by the simultaneous murder of its principal officers, and so to disorganize its power and appall the loyal people, that the rapidly waning fortunes of the rebellion might revive and perhaps ultimately triumph. The assassin, and apparently chief conspirator, was John Wilkes Booth, an actor; and with him were associated ten or twelve others, not the least malignant and active of whom was a woman, Mrs. Surratt, whose son was also a principal coadjutor. It was alleged, and with some reason, that the plot was known to, and approved by, the rebel government at Richmond, and that Davis and some of his cabinet, and their agents in Canada, were accomplices in the crime. Whether this be so or not, certain it is that propositions to assassinate President Lincoln and other prominent members of the government were received and entertained by Davis and his associates, and were not rejected at once, and with the scorn which became civilized and Christian men.

On the evening of April 14, when the people were manifesting their joy at the prospects of speedy peace, the President was induced, through the instigations of Booth, to be present at a performance at Ford's Theatre. While seated there, in his private box, with his family and one or two friends, Booth obtained admission to the box, and with fatal precision discharged a pistol at the head of the President, and then, leaping upon the stage, and crying,

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ADMINISTRATION

with theatrical affectation, "*Sic semper tyrannis!*" he rushed to the rear of the theatre, through which a free passage was prepared for him, and mounting a horse in waiting, rode away. The excitement which followed as soon as the act was known was intense, but the assassin had escaped. The President was removed to a house opposite the theatre, where, after lingering in an insensible state for a few hours, he expired.

On the same night another of the conspirators gained admission to the house of Mr. Seward, secretary of state,—who was confined to his bed by serious injuries caused by being thrown from a carriage—and made a murderous assault upon him, stabbing him in several places, and also nearly killing the secretary's son, who attempted to detain the assailant. Other conspirators, who were to despatch the Vice-President and other members of the cabinet, failed to accomplish their part of the work. The wounds of Mr. Seward and his son were severe, and their condition for some time was critical; but they ultimately recovered.

The assassination of President Lincoln sent a thrill of horror through the nation, and the deep and general feeling of grief which followed can hardly be paralleled in history. Every where the loyal people were in tears, for the President, by his fidelity to his country, his honesty of purpose, and his kindness of heart, had become endeared to them. The country was in mourning, and on the 19th of April, when the remains of the martyr President were borne to the Capitol with solemn funeral service, in every city and hamlet throughout the Northern States, the tolling bells, the minute guns, the sad processions, the insignia of grief, the fervent prayer, and the touching eulogy, told of a sorrow general and unaffected, such as was never before exhibited. And when the remains were borne in solemn funeral state through the chief cities of the east, to his former home in Illinois, their

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ADMINISTRATION

progress was marked by imposing obsequies surpassed only by the real mourning which the people every where manifested.

The death of Mr. Lincoln was a great loss to the nation, for his entire devotion to the country, his integrity, his firmness in the right, his patience, and his kindness of heart, had inspired the confidence of the people; and in the difficult questions of pacification and reconstruction which were to follow, they felt that he would desire only to attain the right result, and acting in accord with the sentiment of the north, and with the spirit of his immortal emancipation proclamation, would ultimately, though it were by slow and experimental steps, have reached the true solution.

Prompt and vigorous measures were taken by the government for the arrest of the assassin and his accomplices, and by the efforts of the detectives the conspiracy was soon discovered, some of the conspirators were arrested, and large rewards were offered for the arrest of others, including in the number Davis and some of his rebel associates. The direction of Booth's flight was soon ascertained, and he was traced through Maryland, and finally overtaken, with a comrade, at a barn in Virginia, where he showed a desperate resistance, and being mortally wounded by a shot from one of his pursuers, he died a painful death. Other conspirators were arrested and tried by a military commission. Nine were found guilty, and four of them, Harold, Payne, Atzerot, and Mrs. Surratt, were hanged; three, Dr. Mudd, Arnold, and McLaughlin, were sentenced to imprisonment for life; and one, Spangler, whose guilt was less aggravated, to imprisonment for six years. Others, who were supposed to be accessories, were not brought to trial, and the son of Mrs. Surratt, who was one of the most active of the conspirators, escaped from the country.

* Surratt was subsequently discovered in the military service of the Pope. He was arrested in November, 1866, but escaped, and was again arrested in Alexandria, Egypt.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ADMINISTRATION

The day that President Lincoln died, Vice-President Johnson took the oath of office in the presence of the cabinet, and succeeded to the presidency. Mr. Johnson was of humble birth, and a self-educated and self-made man, in a section of the country where the opportunities for such men to rise were more limited than at the north. He had risen, in spite of his early disadvantages, to the highest honors in the gift of the people of his state, and was finally elected by the people of the loyal states to a position from which he succeeded to the chief magistracy of the nation. His origin and social and political position made him more democratic than most of the leading men of the south, and he always entertained for the slaveholding aristocracy feelings of hostility. Upon the breaking out of the rebellion he gave expression to this hostility in the freest manner, and from the first declared and maintained his loyalty to the Union. Though from education and association he had always defended the institution of slavery, during the war he readily accepted emancipation as the legitimate result of rebellion, and seemed to occupy the same ground as the mass of the northern people in regard to the negro. It was this, together with his constant loyalty and his hatred of the rebels, that led to his election to the vice-presidency. Upon his accession to the presidency, his repeated declarations at that time, and previously, led some persons to fear that his hostility to the rebel leaders would lead him to pursue a harsh and vindictive course towards them, and caused others to believe that a wise dispensation of Providence had removed the kind-hearted Lincoln at a time when leniency might be fatal to a final pacification of the country. The result remains for a future history to record.

In closing the record of the Rebellion, the writer is aware that there are many things

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S ADMINISTRATION

deserving of more extended notice than he has been able to give them in the foregoing pages. The patriotic exertions and sacrifices of the loyal people to support the government and maintain their armies in the field; the noble devotion and untiring labors of the women of the north to supply the wants and alleviate the sufferings of the soldiers; the beneficent operations of those worthy instruments of the popular sympathy, the Sanitary and Christian Commissions; the voluntary contribution of immense sums, and the patient endurance of burdensome taxation; the self-sacrificing labors of heroic men in the camp, the field, and the hospital,—all these, and other things, are worthy of a more full and faithful portrayal than they could receive in a work like this. Out of the great mass of material it has been the writer's object to give, simply, a record of the more important civil and military events, aiming always at fidelity to truth, and as impartial and free from prejudice as contemporaneous history can well be.

