

Abraham Lincoln

By
GEN'L SMITH D. ATKINS

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Smith D. Atkins, Opera House, Streator, Illinois, February 12, 1909, at invitation of G. A. R., Woman's Relief Corps, Spanish-American Veterans, and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Mrs. President, and My Fellow Citizens:

I came to Streator at the invitation of many patriotic societies, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, an aristocratic society, the aristocracy of blood-relationship to men who had performed heroic deeds—true American aristocracy—the only aristocracy in this land of liberty and equal opportunity.

The Sons of the American Revolution is a like patriotic and aristocratic society. I came near being an aristocrat myself. When my friend, Major General George Crook, commanded the Department of the Lakes, with headquarters at Chicago, he wrote me that his grand-father was a soldier in the American Revolutionary War, and he knew that my grand-father was, and he thought we should organize a Society of the Sons of the Revolution. I visited him, and we talked the matter over; I conducted considerable correspondence, and we called a meeting in Chicago to organize, and some young fellow, who really knew more about the matter than General Crook or myself, raised the point that no

one could join who did not have the written certificate from the Secretary of War that his ancestor had been a soldier in the American Revolutionary War. "Well," said General Crook, "that rules me out; I know that my grand-father was a soldier in the Revolutionary War, but I do not know his name, and I have not, and cannot obtain such a certificate." I was ruled out for the same reason. We had called the meeting, and we were both ruled out.

Some years later I visited Council Bluffs, Iowa, and a pioneer merchant of that city, J. B. Atkins, took me out to ride, and we had not gone far when he said, "Was your father's name Adna Stanley Atkins?" "Yes," I replied. "And his oldest daughter's name was Cynthia?" "Yes," I said, and he continued, "Well, your father and my father were brothers." Then I said, "Perhaps you know who your grand-father was?" "Of course I do," he said, and he told me, and I wrote the name down, and when I returned to Freeport I wrote to the Secretary of War, and soon received a certificate of his service in the American Revolution. I may be an aristocrat some day.

But I came here to talk about Abraham Lincoln, born one hundred years ago, in almost as humble circumstances as the child of Judea, among the poor whites of Kentucky on whom the black bondsmen looked down in pity, and who rose from that humble beginning to become the foremost man in all the world in the century in which he lived. Today his fame fills all the world, and the world is better because he lived.

In 1816, when seven years old, with his father's family he removed to Spencer County, Indiana, and aided in building a log house to live in, and clearing and fencing a small patch of land for raising crops. His boyhood life in Indiana was uneventful, best told, as he himself said, "In the short and simple annals of the poor." He had few books, and very little

schooling, but he was an omnivorous reader, borrowing and reading by the light of burning shavings in a friendly cooper-shop all the books he could, even the statutes of Indiana, and owning a few. In one of his books he wrote:

“Abraham Lincoln, his hand and pen,
He will be good, but God knows when.”

In another of his books he wrote, as his historian tells us, as if he was ambitious to become a great man:

“Good boys who to their books apply,
Will be great men by and by.”

In 1830, when 21 years old, he came to Illinois, barefooted and driving a yoke of oxen. It is said that many years afterward while making a speech some one in the audience cried out, “Abe, is it true that you came to Illinois barefooted and driving a yoke of oxen?” Mr. Lincoln looked over the audience carefully, and replied, “I believe there is at least a dozen men in this audience by whom I could prove that to be true, any one of whom is more respectable than the man who asked that question.” He was always absolutely honest in all things, honest in his actions, and honest in his thoughts. It is related that he had borrowed a book, “Weem’s Life of Washington,” and by some accident the book had become wet, and ruined, when he worked four days to pay for it, and it became his own, and he read it, and re-read it, until Washington became his hero, whose life was to him an inspiration and example. It was fortunate for him that he became the owner of that book, and really fortunate for him that he had so few books to read, for the few that he had he completely mastered.

In 1831, in his twenty second year, he went to New Orleans as a hand on a flatboat, receiving as his pay eight dollars per month; low wages, but I have worked for less, a whole year for thirty dollars, two dollars and fifty cents per month. It was hard work, but the life of a flatboatman on the Mississippi

in those early days was full of adventure. At New Orleans, with his companions, he visited a slave market where a mulatto girl was being sold at auction. He could not stand it long, and said, "Come boys, let us get away from here—if I ever get a chance I will hit that thing hard." To all appearances, a poor boy working for low wages on a flat-boat, no chance to hit slavery would ever come to him. But long years afterward the chance did come, and he forgot not his vow—he did hit that thing hard.

He returned to New Salem in Sangamon County and clerked in a store, where his absolute honesty received a demonstration—in selling tea he had received pay for two ounces too much, which he discovered when his customer was gone, and locking up the store, he walked many miles to return the money. No wonder he so early acquired the nickname of "Honest Abe." With modesty he lived up to it all his life long, and it will cling to his memory while time shall last.

He was strong. "It is splendid to have a giant's strength; it is unmanly to use it like a giant." He never did. But the Clary Grove boys thought they could down him, and they matched Jack Armstrong against him; neither could down the other; Jack Armstrong attempted to take an unfair advantage, when young Lincoln "put his foot down firmly," and seizing the bully by the throat, he choked him until he plead for mercy. Even Jack Armstrong declared that Lincoln did right, and all the Clary Grove boys were his friends.

In 1832 came the Blackhawk Indian War, and a company was organized at New Salem. Of course Abraham Lincoln enlisted. When it came to electing a Captain the men gathered around the man they wanted for Captain, and the large majority gathered around young Lincoln. It was his first great victory, and he himself declared that it gave him more pleasure than anything that had occurred in his life

before. Captain Lincoln was not much of a military man, and did not quickly learn the proper commands to give to his company. One day when his company was marching company front, the company came to a fence and a gate, and not remembering the command to give to make the company march "endwise," he sang out, "This company is disbanded for two minutes, when it will assemble in line on the other side of the fence." During the Civil War I was talking to General Steadman, South of Triune, when Col. Jim Brownlow, son of the famous Parson Brownlow, Colonel of the First Tennessee Cavalry, reported to General Steadman for orders, when General Steadman said, "Deploy your regiment and hold the enemy." Col. Jim took off his hat, scratched his head, and said: "Well, General, I don't know exactly what you mean by deploy; but if you mean to scatter out and fight, we can do that." "Yes," said Steadman, and Col. Jim rode away at a gallop, and I heard him yelling. "Boys scatter out there and give the rebels ——." You may guess what it was that Colonel Jim Brownlow wanted his boys to give the rebels.

And when the term of Capt. Lincoln's enlistment had expired, and his company was mustered out, Abraham Lincoln enlisted as a private in another company, remaining in the service until the war was ended in victory at Bad Axe. Think of that, think of Captain Lincoln enlisting as a private soldier, and remaining until "the work he was engaged in" came to an end in victory.

Then he returned to New Salem, and became a storekeeper. One day he bought of an immigrant a barrel of trash, and for a long time his purchase remained unexamined, when he turned the contents on the floor, and found an old copy of Blackstone's Commentaries. What a mine of knowledge it was for young Lincoln, who already knew almost by heart the statutes of Indiana. No wonder he became a great lawyer. I think that my old friend Walter

Reeves sitting here on the platform, who has managed some way in gaining the reputation of being himself a pretty good sort of a lawyer, would be willing to certify: "The man who knows Blackstone by heart cannot help being a great lawyer."

In 1834 he ran for the legislature, and was defeated. Nothing daunted by defeat he ran again for the legislature and was elected. Attending the legislature at Vandalia he met Stephen A. Douglas, and they became rivals, and the rivalry continued during all the years. He moved to Springfield, resolved to practice law. He was in desperate poverty, but his wants were few and simple, and his friends supplied them. He had been postmaster at New Salem, and about two years after he removed to Springfield a postoffice inspector was inquiring for him, and his friends feared there might be trouble, and offered him assistance, but he said, "That's all right;" and when the postoffice inspector found him, he took a package out of his trunk, carefully tied up, and it contained about \$34 in the very coins he had received, the exact amount due the government. In his utmost need it never occurred to Mr. Lincoln that he might use any money that was not his own. He continued in the Legislature, and was a member of the "long nine" that succeeded in having the capital of Illinois removed from Vandalia to Springfield. That was his great object, and he was willing to make all sorts of trades, and vote for anything that would give a vote for the removal of the capital, even for the internal improvement scheme that nearly bankrupted and ruined the State. There is only one notable and praiseworthy act in his legislative career, his joining with Dan Stone in a protest against a pro-slavery resolution, showing that he could never sanction slavery. He never forgot his experience at New Orleans.

For many years his life was uneventful. He traveled the circuit as a country lawyer, telling stories at the village taverns. He was not a hand-

some man. Tall, rawboned, awkward, dressed in clothes that rarely fitted him, he was a long ways from being good-looking. While traveling from one court to another, alone in his old buggy, he met on a high bridge across a stream another man, who halted Mr. Lincoln, and getting out of his wagon, pulled out a double-barreled shotgun, when Lincoln asked him what he was going to do. "Well," said the stranger, "I have made a vow that if I ever met a man that was homelier than I was I would kill him." Lincoln looked him over, and said, "Stranger, you may shoot." After Mr. Lincoln became President a woman went to him to plead for the life of her boy who had been condemned to be shot for sleeping on his post, and she was successful of course, for Mr. Lincoln could never resist an appeal like that for mercy, and when she left the White House, tears streaming down her cheeks, she said, "They told me he was a homely man, but I think he is the handsomest man I ever saw." My father, to console me, I suppose, for my want of good looks, often said to me, "Handsome is that handsome does." Judged by that apothegm Mr. Lincoln was a handsome man. He was melancholy at times, but he was generally full of fun. General Shields, a gallant soldier, wounded in the Mexican War, succeeded Sydney Breese as Senator from Illinois, and the wags said "The ball that entered Shields' breast, instead of him, killed Breese." Shields was a pompous little fellow, and Mr. Lincoln had been poking fun at him in letters published in the Springfield papers, purporting to come from the "lost townships," and Shields challenged him to a duel, and Lincoln accepted, and as the challenged party chose broadswords with a high plank between the combatants, where little Shields with such a weapon could not reach Mr. Lincoln, and the whole thing ended in a broad farce. He traded horses one evening, "unsight, unseen," as the boys say, the parties to be at the east side of the State house at 9 a. m. the

following morning, each bringing his "horse;" his opponent was on hand early with a sorry specimen of a "horse," but promptly at 9 o'clock came Abe Lincoln with a wooden saw-horse on his shoulder, and amid great merriment it was acknowledged that Abe Lincoln had the best of it in that horse trade.

He was uniformly successful in his law suits, for the excellent reason that he never would act as attorney in any case unless his client was clearly in the right. That was a good way to obtain a reputation as a successful lawyer, and it was a good way to practice law as an honest man. Lincoln was honest in his law practice, and honest in everything he did—honest with all the world, and honest with himself in all his thoughts.

In 1844 Mr. Lincoln was defeated for Congress, but he was elected in 1846, serving one term only, and because of his anti-slavery sentiments he opposed the Mexican War waged for the extension of slavery. No man can oppose a popular war, and remain in political life, and apparently Mr. Lincoln had given up politics for good, and devoted himself to the practice of law. His rival, Judge Douglas, was the most popular and successful politician in America, winning every position he sought, and was a United States Senator from Illinois.

In 1854 occurred the most important event in the political history of this country, a new departure on the slavery question, that drove Mr. Lincoln again into politics. He had no influence in bringing about that event, but with the clear vision of a seer, he saw its mighty import. Slavery had been the bone of contention from the beginning. Although the American people, South as well as North, with equal valor, had fought to a successful issue, the American Revolutionary war, on the Declaration of American Independence, drafted by Thomas Jefferson, the enforced slavery of black people was an actual fact, and when it became necessary, after the close of the Revolutionary war, to adopt a written constitution

for the new Nation, it was found that no permanent strong government could be adopted without compromises on the slavery question. True it is that during the progress of the Revolutionary war, George Rogers Clark, under the direction of Patrick Henry, the Governor of the Colony of Virginia, had conquered the Illinois country, in one of the most brilliant military campaigns in history, as fascinating as one of the stories of Aladin's lamp—I wish I had time to dwell upon it—adding to Virginia all the country west of the Allegheny mountains, north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi, out of which five of the most populous and wealthy States of the Union have since been formed, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan, and with a magnanimity unparalleled in all the history of the world, Virginia ceded that vast empire to the general government, two years before the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, in 1787, by the Northwest Ordinance, drafted by Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of American Independence, and by that ordinance slavery was forever excluded from all that country, from the soil upon which we are now living, where this beautiful city is now located. To my mind the passage of that law, in 1787, indicated the trend of thought in the minds of the fathers of the Republic in favor of liberty, for it covered all of the territory then belonging to the general government.

But later, when the written constitution of the Republic was formulated, the most wonderful written constitution in all the world's history, referred to by Mr. Gladstone, England's greatest statesman, as "the epitome of human wisdom in the science of human government," it was found absolutely necessary to compromise with slavery, and three compromises were placed in the Constitution: 1st, the African slave trade was continued for twenty years—think of that, for twenty years the Southern States continued to import black people from Africa and hold them in perpetual bondage; 2nd, three fifths of

the black people of the South were counted for representation in Congress—five black persons—slaves—were counted the equal of three white free men—in other words, the South had representation in Congress for its property in human beings; and 3d, slaves escaping from their masters were given up on claim. All of those compromises of the Constitution were faithfully observed. The African slave trade was continued for twenty years; three-fifths of the slaves were counted for representation in Congress, and the Fugitive Slave Law was enforced.

The slavery question would not down. In 1815 Louisiana was purchased by Thomas Jefferson, then President of the United States, from Napoleon Bonaparte for fifteen millions of dollars, giving the United States a vast empire west of the Mississippi; I have not time to dwell upon that wonderful transaction between two of the most remarkable men in the world, Napoleon Bonaparte compelled to sell, for he was preparing for his last great battle of Waterloo, where he was overthrown by Wellington, England's Iron Duke, and Thomas Jefferson, the country lawyer of Virginia, who had drafted the Declaration of Independence, and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and who added to his fame by the Louisiana purchase. Five years later, in 1820, Missouri, west of the Mississippi, a part of the Louisiana purchase, applied for admission to the Union as a State, with a slave state Constitution. There was great opposition, but again a compromise with slavery, and at the instance of Jesse B. Thomas, United States Senator from Illinois—it is curious to note the prominent part of Illinois in the early history and final settlement of the slavery question—Missouri was admitted with slavery, while the compromise was that slavery was to be forever excluded in the new territory north of 36-30, the south line of the new state, again all the territory then belonging to the general government. That compromise appeared

to settle the question of slavery in the territory north of that line. Now mark well, in 1854, Stephen A. Douglas, United States Senator from Illinois, Chairman of the Committee on Territories, introduced a bill to organize the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska. The bill, like all bills for the erection of new territories, contained no provision for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise; but the bill, at the instance of Senators Dixon, of Kentucky, and Atchison, of Missouri, was recommitted to the Committee on Territories, and nineteen days afterward was again introduced by Senator Douglas with a clause repealing the Missouri compromise of 1820, and adding what Thomas Hart Benton called "a stump speech in the belly of the bill," "it being the true intent and meaning of this act not to legislate slavery into any Territory or State, nor to exclude it therefrom, but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States."

That was a new departure in the politics of this Nation. The policy of the fathers of the Republic, as shown in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, to exclude slavery from the new territories, and again in the Missouri Compromise of 1820, excluding slavery from the new Territories north of the south line of that State, was reversed and repealed, and the new Territories from which slavery was excluded by a law of Congress, were opened up to slavery. The South, dominating the Democratic party, made that new departure a part of the Democratic creed, and it was on that state of facts that Abraham Lincoln came back into political life. He saw, more clearly than any other man in America, the aim and ultimate object of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. It took complete possession of him—it permeated every fiber of his nature—for he did care whether slavery was voted up or voted down—he loved liberty, not only for himself, but for all the

world— for all men, without regard to color; he was satisfied while the policy of the fathers prevailed, while the public mind rested securely in the belief that “slavery was in the course of ultimate extinction,” but he was aroused to action when that policy was reversed, and slavery extension became the paramount political question. The entire country was aroused as never before in all its history. In October, 1854, Senator Douglas returned to Illinois to defend before the people his course in repealing the Missouri Compromise, and Abraham Lincoln “camped upon his trail,” the one public man in the great Northwest who was thoroughly aroused to action. Senator Douglas spoke for three hours October 3, in Springfield at the State Fair, and the next day, October 4, Mr. Lincoln answered him, and Douglas on the following day, October 5, replied to Lincoln. On October 12, Mr. Lincoln spoke in Peoria, a long and able speech in which he said, “No man is good enough to govern another man without that man’s consent. I say this is the leading principle, the sheet anchor of American Republicanism.” All men know it now. Mr. Lincoln was nominated and elected a member of the Illinois Legislature, but to his surprise, and the surprise of almost everyone, it was found that the Illinois Legislature would have an anti-Nebraska majority, and could elect a United States Senator on joint ballot, and Mr. Lincoln resigned as a member of the Legislature and became a candidate for Senator, receiving the caucus nomination; but the anti-Nebraska majority in the Legislature was composed of those who had been Whigs and Democrats, and four Democrats would not vote for Lincoln because he had been a Whig, and Mr. Lincoln withdrew from the contest in favor of Lyman Trumbull. No more generous action was ever taken by a public man in American politics; he was willing to subordinate himself to the triumph of the principle he advocated. When it was all over, when Mr. Trumbull was elected Senator, and Mr. Lincoln

was in the office of the Secretary of State, some one said, "Well, Abe; how do you feel?" He replied, "When I was a boy I went bare-foot ; one day I stubbed my toe! I was too big to cry, and it hurt too bad to laugh." It was a homely answer, but told the whole story.

Lincoln was more than ever in politics; he discussed it everywhere he went on the circuit practicing law. At one place he met Judge T. Lysle Dickey; they occupied a room together at the village hotel, with two beds in it, and they discussed the question until Dickey went to sleep, but when he woke up Lincoln was sitting up in bed, and, as if continuing the conversation said, "Dickey I tell you this country cannot exist half slave and half free," and Dickey replied, "O, Lincoln, go to sleep." But sleeping or waking Mr. Lincoln could not shake off his interest in the mighty problem that confronted the country. In one of his speeches he declared, "A house divided against itself cannot stand! I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect that it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South."

There was no Republican party in Illinois, no party machinery provided for calling conventions and making nominations, and on February 22, 1856, the anti-Nebraska editors of Illinois met at Decatur, and with no other authority than good common sense, appointed the first Illinois Republican State Central Committee that called the first Republican State Convention at Bloomington, May 2, 1856, that nominated Congressman William H. Bissell for Gov-

erner, a gallant soldier of the Mexican War, the first Republican nominated and elected Governor of Illinois. Mr. Lincoln was urged to become a candidate for Governor of Illinois, but he declined because he thought that Bissell, who had been a Democrat, could poll more votes than an old Whig. Mr. Lincoln was at that Convention and there made what is known as "Lincoln's Lost Speech" for the reporters were so carried away with it that they forgot to report it; he argued against the threat of disunion made by the South, and all remembered his closing words, "We will say to the Southern Disunionists, we won't go out of the Union, and you shan't." Mr. Lincoln never departed from that statement made at Bloomington on May 2, 1856.

In that campaign of 1856 the Republican party nominated its first candidate for President, John Charles Fremont, and the Democrats nominated James Buchanan, and although in Illinois the Republicans elected Bissell the first Republican Governor, the electoral vote of Illinois was given to Buchanan, and he was elected President by a tremendous majority. The repeal of the Missouri Compromise had been submitted to the people at a presidential election, and apparently the people had given it their approval by the election of the Democratic candidate. The lovers of liberty were deeply depressed, while the advocates of slavery extension were correspondingly elated.

Now again mark well. The election occurred in November, 1856. In his annual message to Congress on the first Monday of December, 1856, President Pierce demanded that the people should respect the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States, as if he was expecting some extraordinary decision from that court, and it followed almost immediately in the Dred Scott case.

The facts were simple. They arose here in Illinois. Dred Scott, a negro slave, was brought by his master in Missouri to Rock Island in Illinois, in

1834, and for two years was held as a slave at Rock Island, here upon the soil of Illinois, forty-seven years after the adoption of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, that threw its protecting shield of freedom over the soil of this State, and sixteen years after the adoption of the Free State Constitution of Illinois; and then Dred Scott was taken back to Missouri, and he brought suit in the United States court for his freedom, and that suit was appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, and that court decided:

“Every citizen has a right to take with him into the territory any article of property which the Constitution of the United States recognizes as property.

“The Constitution of the United States recognizes slaves as property, and pledges the Federal Government to protect it. And Congress cannot exercise any more authority over property of that description than it may constitutionally exercise over property of any other kind.

“The Act of Congress, therefore, prohibiting a citizen of the United States from taking with him slaves when he removed to the Territory in question to reside, (The North West Ordinance of 1787), is an exercise of authority over private property which is not warranted in the Constitution, and the removal of the plaintiff, by his owner, gave him no title to Freedom.”

Judge Roger B. Taney, the Chief Justice of the United States who delivered the opinion of the court, said, “No tribunal acting under the authority of the United States, whether it be legislative, executive or judicial, can exclude slavery from any State or Territory where the Constitution of the United States is supreme.” The slave power had become aggressive. The Supreme Court had declared the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and the free State Constitution of Illinois, so far as it related to slav-

ery, null and void. Henceforth slavery went everywhere that the Constitution of the United States was supreme, into all of the territories, and into all of the States as well, if that decision of the Supreme Court was to become the rule of the political action of the people of this country. Robert Toombs, of Georgia, was well within the meaning of that decision when he declared his purpose to call the roll of his slaves in the shadow of the Bunker Hill monument.

It was on this state of historic facts that the joint debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas took place in 1858. Slavery extension was the principal subject debated, and, all too briefly I have endeavored to state the legal status of that question. Some of you remember it well; some of you have forgotten it; most of the voters of today have never heard of it.

I attended but one of those joint debates, the one at Freeport, August 27, 1858, fifty years ago. Mr. Lincoln arrived in Freeport about nine o'clock in the morning of that day, on the train from Mendota, and went to his room in the Brewster House. I visited his room soon after his arrival. It was crowded with people calling on Mr. Lincoln. The question being discussed at the time when I entered the room was the solemn manner of Mr. Lincoln in the first joint debate held at Ottawa; nearly everyone present insisted that Mr. Lincoln should change his solemn method of debate, should tell stories, as Tom Corwin, of Ohio, did, and "catch the crowd." Mr. Lincoln listened with infinite patience and good nature to all that anyone had to say on that question, not entering into the argument himself; after a while, when the conversation appeared to be exhausted, Mr. Lincoln said, "There is another matter to which I wish to invite your attention," and he took from his breast coat pocket slips of paper on which were written in pencil the questions that Mr. Lincoln proposed to ask Mr. Douglas in the joint de-

bate in the afternoon. The reading of those questions was greeted by all present, so far as I could judge, with a storm of opposition, especially the second question, which was:

“Can the people of a United States Territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a State Constitution?”

The room was crowded, many distinguished people were present, among whom I remember Hon. Elihu B. Washburne, then a Member of Congress from that district; Owen Lovejoy, of the Princeton district; Hon. Norman B. Judd, of Chicago; Hon. Horatio C. Burchard, who was afterward elected a Member of Congress to succeed Mr. Washburne, who was sent by General Grant as Minister to France; Col. James O. Churchill, now residing in St. Louis; Colonel J. W. Shaffer, afterward chief United States quartermaster in New Orleans, and many more, for people were constantly coming and going, the door all the time wide open; it was in no sense a formal conference of leading Republicans as to the course Mr. Lincoln should pursue; it was entirely an informal conversation that appeared to have come about by accident, all present, so far as I can now remember, protested stoutly against the policy of asking that second question; all agreeing that Senator Douglas would answer, that under his doctrine of “popular sovereignty” by “unfriendly legislation” the people of a United States Territory could exclude slavery, and that he would “catch the crowd.” for the supporters of Judge Douglas in Illinois, generally speaking, were anti-slavery in sentiment: they did not believe that the people of any new Territory would curse the soil with slavery of their own free will; all predicted that Judge Douglas would so answer, and defeat Mr. Lincoln as a candidate for Senator from Illinois; again Mr. Lincoln listened with infinite patience and good humor to all that anyone had to say against the policy of his asking

that second question; after a while, Mr. Lincoln slowly said: "Well, now, as to your first proposition, that I shall change my line of argument and tell stories, I won't do it; the matter is altogether too solemn, and I won't do it; **that is settled.** Now, as to the second proposition; I don't **know** how Mr. Douglas will answer; if he answers that a Territory cannot exclude slavery, I will beat him; but if he answers as you **say** he will, and as I **believe** he will, he may beat me for Senator, but he will **never be President.**"

Mr. Lincoln, like Napoleon, was willing to listen to the advice of any one, of everybody, but like Napoleon, he followed his own opinion in the end. He had as fully as any man could have the courage of his individual convictions, and he always followed them with fidelity to the end, no matter what the cost. He appeared to be entirely clear in his own mind; nothing that anyone had said against the policy of his asking that question changed in any way his own personal conviction; by asking that question he impaled Judge Douglas on the horns of a dilemma; put him into a hole from which there was no possible escape; for, answer as he would, whatever way he chose, he must antagonize his supporters in Illinois and lose the Senatorship, or he must antagonize the people of the South, who depended upon the decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case to carry slavery into all the territories, there being according to that decision, no power on earth that could exclude slavery from any Territory, that court having decided that Congress acted illegally when it passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The superior skill of Mr. Lincoln as a debater put Mr. Douglas into that hole.

In the afternoon when the debate took place, Mr. Lincoln, against the protest of all his friends, following his own clear conviction, did ask that question of Mr. Douglas, and Mr. Douglas did answer, as

everybody said he would answer, just as Mr. Lincoln believed that he would answer, that the people of a Territory could, in a lawful manner, by "unfriendly legislation," exclude slavery and Mr. Douglas pleased his friends and supporters in Illinois, and did "catch the crowd" and he did beat Mr. Lincoln as a candidate for Senator from Illinois. But that answer made by Mr. Douglas on the afternoon of August 27, 1858, in Freeport, to Mr. Lincoln's question, so offended the people of the South that they instantly denounced Judge Douglas as a traitor to the South, and it made his nomination for President by a united Democratic party impossible, as Mr. Lincoln had predicted, and as was abundantly demonstrated two years later at the national Democratic Convention in Charleston, South Carolina, when that convention split upon the question of the nomination of Judge Douglas as the Democratic candidate for President. Mr. Lincoln had a clearer vision than any of his supporters in Illinois. He was hunting bigger game than the senatorship from this State. He gave up the senatorship to win the Presidency. His asking that question of Mr. Douglas made it impossible that Mr. Douglas should reach the Presidency, and it made Mr. Lincoln so well known throughout the country that he himself was nominated and elected President. It is a wonderful chapter in the political history of this country, full of interest to those who were living at that time, and of intense interest to those who first hear that history related.

Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln were both remarkable men; Douglas a Democrat, Lincoln a Whig; Douglas born in Vermont, Lincoln in Kentucky; both were poor, both came to Illinois when young men; Douglas well educated, Lincoln with no education; both were lawyers that early became political rivals, one as eager as the other for office and popularity among the people; Douglas meeting with remarkable success in his political ambitions,

a member of the legislature, Secretary of State, Judge of the Supreme Court, and United States Senator; Lincoln, only one term in Congress, and many disappointments; yet at Freeport, August 27, 1858, by his clear vision and superior intellectual ability as a debater, Mr. Lincoln passed his rival and went onward to the Presidency, the goal of political ambition, which Mr. Douglas never reached.

On February 27, 1860, Mr. Lincoln made his remarkable speech at Cooper Institute, New York, in which he told no stories, but captured his hearers by his sound and logical reasoning, and challenged the attention of the entire country, as the "new statesman who had come out of the West," and he closed that speech with these ringing words: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it."

On May 9, 1860, the Illinois Republican Convention at Decatur elected delegates to the Republican National Convention instructed for Mr. Lincoln. Rails that Mr. Lincoln had made were brought into the convention, and gave him the nickname of the "Rail Splitter." On May, 16 1860, Mr. Lincoln was nominated for President by the Republican National Convention at Chicago. I was present at that convention, not as a delegate, but as a visitor. Some people thought that William H. Seward, of New York, would be nominated. It was the first time a special building had been provided, called a "wig-wam," for the meetings of the Republican National Convention. There were no tickets of admission—seats for the delegates and alternates were the only seats reserved. Mr. Seward's friends had come from New York in great force, several hundred, with a fine band of forty pieces, but while they paraded the streets with fine music the friends of the Illinois "Rail Splitter" had crowded the "wig-wam" full, so that the friends of Mr. Seward when they came to the convention building could not get in, and had to

be content to do their shouting for Seward on the outside.

When Mr. Lincoln was nominated the Illinois boys shouted with joy until the rafters of the "wig-wam" shook. His nomination was ratified by the people of Illinois with great enthusiasm; when Stephen A. Douglas was told of Lincoln's nomination, he said, "There will not be a tar barrel left in Illinois," and there was not, for bonfires lighted up the sky from the Wisconsin line to Cairo. Mr. Lincoln was not there. He remained quietly at his modest home in Springfield, as unpretending as he always was, so true to his individual convictions that when the committee of distinguished Republicans visited Springfield to formally notify him of his nomination, he would not himself, or permit his friends, to regale them with anything but cold water. His temperance principles were illustrated in his daily life. Douglas took the stump. Lincoln followed the best traditions of the Republican and remained quietly at his home in Springfield. Personal abuse was heaped upon him, but he made no reply.

When the votes were counted it was found that Abraham Lincoln was fairly elected President of the United States according to all the forms of law. Then the conspirators of the South, the leading politicians of that section instantly, without waiting for Mr. Lincoln's inauguration, organized rebellion. John B. Floyd, Buchanan's Secretary of War, as if anticipating the thing that happened, emptied every arsenal in the North and filled every arsenal in the South, with arms and ammunition, and they were instantly siezed, and long before Mr. Lincoln was inaugurated, the South was an armed camp. Timid people feared disunion, and called on Mr. Lincoln for some quieting statement. He gave none. His private secretary, Mr. John G. Nicolay sent out a printed circular letter saying that Mr. Lincoln's views were already well known. To William Pitt Kellogg, E. B. Washburne, Henry J. Raymond, and

others, Mr. Lincoln himself wrote to say, "entertain no compromise on the question of the extension of slavery." On that question he was as steady as the shining stars.

He prepared his inaugural address, and had it printed in Springfield, and while he made verbal changes, there was no change of principle made in it.

On February 11, 1861, he left his home in Springfield to go to Washington. History does not contain an account of a sadder parting, and no man ever made a more pathetic speech than his farewell to his neighbors and friends at the Alton depot in Springfield, placing his dependence upon Almighty God, and asking their prayers.

His journey to Washington was an ovation. He made many speeches, but he made no apologies for having been elected. His life was threatened, but he arrived in Washington safely and was inaugurated President March 4, 1861.

His inaugural address contained no bravado—it was firm as adamant—full of pleadings with his misguided fellow-citizens, to whom he said, "You can have no war without being yourselves the aggressors. The government will not assail you. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

As he read his address, so dispassionate, so full of charity, so devoid of malice, who do you think it was who stood there by his side holding his hat? It was United States Senator Stephen A. Douglas,

of Illinois. They were political rivals, but they were not personal enemies.

And when Mr. Lincoln called for seventy-five thousand three months volunteers I enlisted in the army, and went with my company to Springfield, and between Decatur and Springfield our train was sidetracked to give a clear right of way to a special train bearing Senator Douglas to Springfield from Indianapolis, where he had spoken the evening before, and when his train went by, our train followed, and at the Wabash depot in Springfield, when we were filing out of the cars, someone on horseback told us to wait until Senator Douglas came from his hotel to make us a speech, and he soon came, and standing up in his open carriage he welcomed us to the capital of the State, bid us God speed in the serious work in which we were about to engage, and then the Senator said: "The time has come when there can be but two parties in this country, a party of patriots, and a party of traitors." I tell you, my fellow-citizens, my hat went high in air for Stephen A. Douglas. I did not agree with him in politics, but I did honor his splendid loyalty to his country. He was as loyal as was Mr. Lincoln. Better still, the Douglas Democrats of Illinois, yes, the Douglas Democrats throughout all the loyal North, were as loyal as their loyal leader. A few weeks later, at the age of only forty-seven, the great Senator died, leaving a shining record of loyalty to his country.

Abraham Lincoln was master of himself, holding steadily to his own clear convictions, and he was the "Master of Men." With patience infinite, with courage sublime, he waited for the South to fire the first shot at the old flag, and when the guns of the Southern people fired upon Sumter, he called for volunteers. When Seward wrote him that the administration was without a policy and tendered his services to lead the administration, he quietly called his attention to his inaugural address, and

told him plainly if that policy was to be changed he would do it himself. When Simon Cameron, his first Secretary of War, proved inefficient, he sent him as Minister to Russia, and appointed Stanton, who had neglected him so cruelly as an associate counsel in a great law suit at Cincinnati. He rose above jealousy, and when Stanton, in a passion, tore up an order he had sent him, he laughed, and waited until Stanton had time to cool off, and then, quietly repeated the order, and Stanton obeyed it, for he had met his master. When Fremont, and Hunter issued proclamations freeing the slaves, he annulled them without hesitation, and announced that he reserved that policy to himself alone. When he resolved upon that step he prepared his proclamation, and told his cabinet that the policy was fixed; they could not change that; but they might comment on its wording, and the time for its issue. When Greely demanded a policy looking to peace negotiations, he appointed Greely as peace commissioner, and turned the laugh upon the great editor. He removed McClellan when the time had fully come. When a great committee waited upon him to have Grant dismissed, falsely saying he was a drunkard, he completely squelched the committee by declaring that if he could find out the brand of whisky Grant used he would send a barrel to every one of his Generals. When a pompous Englishman found Lincoln blacking his own boots, and told him no gentleman in England did that, he squelched him completely by instantly inquiring "Whose boots does he black?" When an old friend said to him, "Well, Abe, this thing of being President is not what it is cracked up to be," he said, "No, I sometimes feel like the Irishman who was ridden on a rail, and remarked 'if it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I would rather have walked.'" When the lines were forming for battle, and a rabbit scurried to the rear, a major said "Go it cottontail; if it was not for my honor I would be with you." When

badgered by a committee telling him how to conduct the war, he said, 'If Blondin was carrying your treasure on a tight rope across Niagara river would you badger him by yelling, Blondin, lean a little more to the South? or, Blondin, lean a little more to the North? or would you keep still until Blondin was across?' When questioned as to his re-election he declared that it "was no time to trade horses in the middle of the stream." Homely ways, that the people understood, of hitting the nail on the head every time. When serenaded after his second election he declared, "So long as I have been here, I have never willingly planted a thorn in any man's breast." He went to the Gettysburg battlefield and spoke a few sentences in language as simple as was used by St. Paul in his sermon on Mars Hill, and it attracted the attention of the world as a masterpiece of oratory, and is today repeated in every school in America. And when Grant, the greatest General of the Century, came to the East with Sheridan, and Sherman and Thomas commanded in the West, all acting on a common plan, the Southern Confederacy was crushed, and when Richmond was evacuated Lincoln visited that city, on foot and almost alone, and hunted up the home of General Pickett, who had fought so bravely in the Confederate Army at Gettysburg, and knocking at the door, a woman opened it, and he inquired, "Is this George Pickett's home?" The woman answered, "Yes, and I am George Pickett's wife, and this is his baby," and he said, "I am Abraham Lincoln," and she exclaimed, "What, President Lincoln," and he said, "No, Abraham Lincoln, George's old friend." The foremost man in all the world was simply Abraham Lincoln. What a load was lifted from his shoulders when the end of the war came in complete victory, with slavery forever dead—how bright the future appeared to him—how happy he was! He said to his wife, "Mary, we have had a hard time of it since we came to Washington; but the war is over, and with God's

blessing we may hope for four years of peace and happiness, and then we will go back to Illinois, and pass the rest of our lives in quiet. We have laid by some money, and during this term we will try and save up more, but we shall not have enough to support us. We will go back to Illinois, and I will open a law office in Springfield or Chicago, and at least do enough to help give us a livelihood." How simple, how like the great man he was. Little did he suspect that he would so soon pass from earth. On the evening of April 14, 1865, at Ford's Theatre in the City of Washington, an assassin sent a bullet into his brain. He never spoke again. Sometimes I almost despair of the Republic. Three Presidents, all of whom I knew, for I knew Garfield while he was Chief of Staff of the Army of the Cumberland, and McKinley before he was elected to Congress, have met death by assassination. Why the Good Lord God Almighty permitted it, I do not understand. God's ways are not our ways. We dare not criticise. We must submit. His great War Secretary Stanton standing by his bedside when his spirit took its flight, said, "Now he belongs to the ages." "Name his name once more—Abraham Lincoln—then leave it in undying glory forever shining on in history."

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