

GOODLOE ON LINCOLN

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST STATESMEN.

HE PLOUGHED ROUND THE STUMP.

A List of the Minority Presidents--As a Man of Intellect, He Ranked With The Foremost Men--What the Westminster Review Thought of His Now Justly Celebrated Speech at Gettysburg.

Written for Sunday News and Observer.

WASHINGTON, June 15, 1895.

It is meet and proper that I should tell what I knew of Abraham Lincoln, in his day, as President. I was here in Washington while he was President, and had opportunities of seeing and conversing with him, repeatedly. Those interviews were not merely formal. They all possessed peculiar interest, as tending to bring out some characteristic. Of all public men it has been my fortune to encounter, he was the least pretentious, the most frank, cordial, and approachable.

In forming a judgment of Mr. Lincoln's character and conduct, Southern men should remember that he was elected President of the United States by a constitutional majority, and that his position required him to take an oath to see that the laws were duly enforced--in a word, to maintain the Union. He did not receive at his first election a majority of the popular vote; but that has happened to more than one of our Presidents, without impairing, in the slightest degree, their constitutional authority. It was the case with both the Adamses; with Mr. Jefferson at his first election; with Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Polk, General Taylor, Mr. Garfield, Mr. Cleveland, at both elections; and with Mr. Harrison. Strange still, Mr. Cleveland, when defeated by Mr. Harrison in 1880, received nearly a hundred thousand more votes than did the latter, while there were more than three hundred thousand votes cast at that election for Mr. Weaver and Mr. Dow. And at the last presidential election Mr. Cleveland fell short of a popular majority by nearly one million of the votes cast.

No party that has ever elected a president can take exception to the election of Mr. Lincoln. The most striking illustration of the discrepancies that have occurred between the electoral and the popular votes was furnished in 1860, when Mr. Lincoln was chosen. On that occasion, Mr. Lincoln received 1,866,352 of the popular vote, and 186 electoral votes. Mr. Breckenridge received 845,763 popular votes, and 72 electoral votes. Mr. Douglas received 1,375,157 popular votes, and only 12 electoral votes; and Mr. Bell received 589,581 popular votes, and 39 electoral votes. It is seen that Mr. Douglas received nearly as many of the people's votes as both Messrs. Breckenridge and Bell and yet they, together, receive more than nine times as many electoral votes as Mr. Douglas did. He had large minorities in large States.

I begin with circumstances attending my last interview with Mr. Lincoln. It was on the 19th day of October, 1864. I was at the time connected with the Daily Chronicle of this city, and in the presence of Col. Forney, was requested to call on the President and hear his views in regard to the conduct of affairs in Tennessee. Andrew Johnson had been appointed military Governor of that State, and while in that position he and his life-long political opponent, Wm. G. Brownlow, had come to terms on the basis of a common hatred of secession. Through their joint influence they had brought together at Nashville early in September of that year a hybrid Convention, partly merely political, or partizan, and partly, as they claimed, legal, with the object of reorganizing the State Government, by the election of county officers. In revolutionary times a rigid conformity with laws cannot be maintained. County governments were indispensable, and they were justifiable in adopting measures for the preservation of domestic peace and order. The form of an election were gone through in many counties. In other cases delegates were admitted from their known character as Unionists and representative men. Many delegates were intercepted, or prevented from attending by an inopportune raid of General Wheeler's Cavalry. But the Convention met and proceeded to business. After providing for a reorganization of the counties, by an ordinance which embraced a most stringent and searching test-oath for voters, they proceeded to nominate Mr. Lincoln for reelection to the Presidency, with Governor Johnson for Vice President, and to put forth an electoral ticket. They adopted a resolution calling on Governor Johnson to order an election, and appoint registrars of voters, and superintendents of the polls. He promptly complied with their wishes, and in his proclamation defined the qualifications of voters, as follows: "All citizens and soldiers, being free white men, twenty-one years of age, citizens of the United States, and for six months prior to the election, citizens of the State of Tennessee, who have qualified themselves by registration, and who take the oath prescribed in the foregoing resolution, shall be entitled to vote."

The oath, besides the usual declarations in support of the Constitution and laws of the United States, required a renunciation "of all sympathy with the so-called Confederate States; an ardent desire for the suppression of the rebellion; sincerely rejoicing at the success of the Union arms; thorough opposition to all armistices and negotiations with rebels in arms, and hearty support of the Constitution and all laws and proclamations made in pursuance thereof;" with a pledge of aid and assistance in carrying out all measures of government that might be adopted for the attainment of these ends.

The friends of General McClellan, who had been nominated for the Presidency, sent a delegation to Washington, appealing to the President to annul these proceedings, and especially the regulation prescribing the qualifications of voters, which they showed to be inconsistent with the laws made in pursuance of the

Constitution. It will be noticed that the test oath not merely required voters to swear their allegiance, but to their sentiments and wishes, which may have been justifiable under the circumstances. But the further requirement of a pledge in advance, that they would heartily approve all measures that might be adopted, was highly absurd, and was more than the most devoted Unionist would have been willing to swear to, if he had a conscience.

It was at this stage of the proceeding, before the President had given his answer to the Tennessee committee, that I saw him. It was his custom to receive persons who called on private business, in the afternoon, I went at that hour, and was told by the secretary that a number of people were waiting to see him and that I had better call again. However, as I had been sent for, I went in, and found perhaps twenty persons waiting their turn to speak with the President. I took a seat in the rear, intending to be the last to go forward. He dispatched their business rapidly, but kindly, and in a tone of voice which could only be heard by the party addressed. This I recognized as a mark of high breeding, though proceeding from a rail splitter. Nothing can be more painful to a modest person, when asking a favor, than to have his business proclaimed as from the house-top, which is apt to be done by vulgar fellows dressed in a little brief authority.

I had observed a lady in deep mourning sitting off to herself as if waiting for others to retire before presenting her petition. She wore a thick veil, but as she sometimes had occasion to remove it, I could see that she was very handsome. When all others had gone up, been heard and had passed out, she went forward. Mr. Usher, the Secretary of the Interior, had in the meantime come in; and we could hear the distressed and tremulous tones of her voice as she addressed the President. He heard her patiently for some time. She was probably persistent in pressing her suit, and this caused him, taking her hand as they rose up, to say loud enough for us to hear: "No, Emily, I cannot do that. I cannot do that. It would ruin me. But come again; I will see if I can do something for you."

She then retired. He came forward to meet us, and inquired if we knew that lady. We told him we did not. He said: "She is my wife's sister." Her husband, a Confederate General, was recently killed in battle and she has come to ask of me the privilege of crossing the lines, in order to purchase cotton." It was apparent from the circumstances, that she was not a guest of the White House; and to be inferred that the brother-in-law was kinder than the sister.

Mr. Usher soon retired when I informed the President that I had called in obedience to his request, to hear what he had to say about the Tennessee imbroglio. But he commenced talking of the events of the war. He said that half a dozen things had troubled him during the day, and he didn't know what he should have done, but for the good news from Sheridan that he had achieved a victory in the Virginia Valley. This event, of which he had heard by telegram, put him in fine spirits. He had much to say about the South. I being a North Carolinian, he never failed, when I met him, to ask me about the state of public sentiment there. He loved to believe that there was a strong union feeling among the Southern people, and especially among those of North Carolina. He had much to say about Messrs. Toombs and Stephens, of Georgia, with whom he served in Congress from 1847, to March 3, 1849. They were all Whigs then, and he cherished a very kind recollection of them--repeating some of Mr. Toomb's stories, and mentioned the correspondence he had had with Mr. Stephens after the Presidential election, in 1860, and after the remarkable speech of that gentleman before the State Convention, or Legislature of Georgia. Mr. Stephens published a *fac simile* of this correspondence in his work on the Constitution.

I said at length, to the President, I feared that I was taking up too much of his valuable time, and reminded him of the Tennessee affair, but he paid little attention to the interruption, and continued to talk about the South. I will add, that neither on this occasion, nor at other times, when I had the privilege of conversing with Mr. Lincoln--although the South was the principal topic--did he ever utter an unkind sentiment about any Southern man, or about the South. When I again reminded him of the matter regarding Tennessee, he said he had thought it over, and had come to the conclusion to do as Governor Reynolds, of Illinois, did when he was farming in St. Clair county. He found a large, crooked log in a wet piece of ground, which would neither split nor burn. He hesitated for several days as to what he would do with it. At length he decided to plow around it. Acting on this principle, three days later the President informed the Tennessee gentlemen that he could not interfere; that the President of the United States had no authority to regulate elections in the States; and that the most he could do was, when called on, to interpose for the preservation of peace and order. Moreover, if a vote were cast for President and Vice President, it would not be for him to decide whether it should be counted. That duty devolved on Congress. It was not counted.

It was perhaps in 1862, that I was requested by the Rev. Wm. H. Channing to accompany him to the White House, and introduce him to the President. Mr. Channing was Chaplain of the Stanton Hospital, and desired some change in the regulations. Having disposed of the business, the President spoke to me in regard to public sentiment in North Carolina, and expressed the belief that the people of that State, who had given a large majority of votes against secession in February, 1861, still retained a strong feeling in favor of the Union. I replied that there was doubtless a good deal of latent Union sentiment in North Carolina, "but, Mr. President, you should not believe the stories published by--(naming him) whom you appointed to the office of United States Marshal of the State, and whose confirmation by the Senate I defeated by

exposing his character." A small man in the high place of president would have resented this plain speech from a citizen. But Mr. Lincoln laughed heartily at my uncourtly speech, and said he could not know everybody; that he had to rely upon the statements of Congressmen and others, and that he had often been deceived. In the particular case he said that he had not liked the appearance of the man; that there was something hollow and hypocritical in the tones of his voice.

It was not the privilege of President Lincoln to make annual progresses over the country, nor to enjoy a pleasant retreat in the mountains or on the seaside. The incessant conflict of arms during the whole term kept him constantly in Washington, or within sight of the capitol. During the dry summers, when the streets were plowed with army wagons, and the dust would become insufferable, Mr. Lincoln followed the example of his predecessor, Mr. Buchanan, who was wont to make his temporary abode at the Soldiers' Home. While he was there I went out to see him in company with the late Prof. Hedrick, of North Carolina. Our business was to ask some favor for a citizen of the State. He received us very kindly, and was in a fine humor. He told us with glee of a letter he had cut from a newspaper, purporting to be written by a North Carolina Confederate soldier. The man had been captured, but was far from desiring to be exchanged; and on the contrary he had written the letter as an affectionate leave-taking to Mr. Jefferson Davis. He bid Mr. Davis and his Confederacy a final and affectionate farewell. It was very smartly done, and the fellows' humor delighted Mr. Lincoln, while the sentiment it breathed served to confirm his belief in the existence of a decided Union sentiment in North Carolina. Dark came on, and the parlor lamp, (not gas) was too high, and the light too dim to read by. Another man in the exalted station of President of the United States, would have rung a bell for a servant, but Mr. Lincoln, like an honest farmer of the West, went up stairs for a candle, and brought it down himself; and, holding it in one hand, and the printed letter in the other, like the picture of Dr. Johnson, reading the manuscript of the Vicar of Wakefield, the President read the letter to us with the greatest zest. A poem entitled, "Why Should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud," was a favorite with Mr. Lincoln.

I had the honor of being appointed by Mr. Lincoln, in 1862, as chairman of the three Commissioners under the Emancipation Act, to pay the people of the District of Columbia for their slaves. It was a work of no little labor and responsibility, and we were nearly nine months in completing it. Our report was returned to the Secretary of the Treasury, but in the absence of Mr. Chase at the time, my colleagues, (Hon. Horatio King and Dr. John M. Brodhead) and myself, concluded to call with our clerk, Wm. R. Woodward, Esq., upon the President, and announce the conclusion of our labors. He received us pleasantly, and said he was glad to know that somebody had finished something, and that he wished his work was done."

Of Mr. Lincoln as a man of intellect, it is sufficient to say, that English critics place him in the front rank of English prose writers. Of his brief little speech at the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery, the Westminster Review said that nothing of the kind equal to it had appeared since Xenophon's day; and the London Spectator said of him: "It is not too much to say of him that he is among the greatest masters of prose ever produced by the English race."

In 1857 or '58, he canvassed the State of Illinois with Mr. Douglas. They were rivals for the Senatorship. The Republicans published the speeches of both, as a campaign document.

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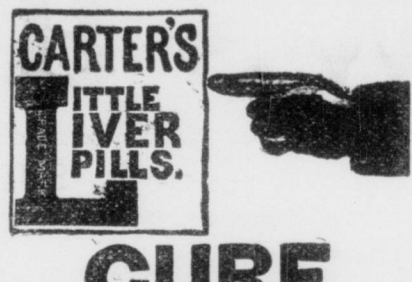
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