

STORIES OF HONEST ABEL LINCOLN

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN
BORN 1809
DIED 1865

sought opportunities to follow Douglas as closely as he could. At Havana Douglas and Lincoln spoke the same day in 1858. This was not one of the joint debates, but Lincoln in the afternoon answered what Douglas had said in the forenoon. Lyman Lacey, Sr., describes the two meetings. Lincoln avoided being present at the meetings of Douglas. He arrived in Havana just before his afternoon appointment, but there were friends who outlined to him the speech of Douglas in the forenoon.

"Douglas," said Mr. Lacey, "tried to kill Lincoln with faint praise. Referring to his opponent at the morning meeting, Douglas said: 'Mr. Lincoln is a very nice man, very sociable and entertaining. He makes a very pleasant companion. I used to know him when he lived at Old Salem in Menard county, when he kept store and sold whisky to his customers.' Douglas never referred to Lincoln as a great lawyer or as a man of ability. At the afternoon meeting Lincoln spoke of Mr. Douglas personally and said he had been informed of the tribute of praise Mr. Douglas had bestowed upon him.

"JIM" SHIELDS had what he called "Abe" Lincoln and they were going across the river to fight on Missouri soil with "broadswords," the regulation cavalry sabres of the United States army. Those were the years of "dragoons" in this country.

As soon as the ferry reached the island Mr. Lincoln was taken in one direction and Mr. Shields in the other. They were given seats on logs and left to themselves while seconds and penmen discussed the situation. In a short time a serious defect in the proceedings on the part of Shields came to light. The challenge had been sent prematurely. The mistake is explained quite clearly in the Alton traditions. Lincoln had amused himself and had entertained the Whigs by writing funny letters to a Springfield paper about the Democrats, and signing his epistle "Aunt Rebecca." Mary Todd, who afterwards became Mrs. Lincoln, and Julia Jayne conspired to add to the gaiety of the community by getting up an "Aunt Rebecca" letter of their own composition and sending it to the paper along with some verses which they signed "Cathleen." The letter which the girls wrote went outside of politics and contained a burlesque proposal of marriage to Auditor Shields. Now, the auditor, afterward a United States senator from three states, and a brave general of two wars, was a fiery young man. While Springfield laughed, Shields began an investigation. He demanded of the editor the real name of "Aunt Rebecca." The girls became frightened. Bunn, the banker, went over to Mr. Lincoln's office and said:

"We've got into an awful fix."

"What's the matter?" asked Lincoln.

"The girls have written some poetry on Shields," said Bunn. "Didn't you see it in the paper? Well, Shields says he won't stand it. What shall we do about it?"

"You go back and when you meet Shields tell him I wrote it," said Lincoln.

Shields accepted this without verification and sent the challenge. Shields saw the error of proceeding further when he learned that Lincoln was not the writer. For an hour or more the writing and exchanging of notes went on. Meantime the population of Alton stood in a dense mass on the river bank looking across the channel and having a good view of all of the movements.

"Bill" Souther, good reporter that he was, kept his eyes on the principals. He told that for some time after the landing Lincoln and Shields sat quietly on their logs. Lincoln said nothing, and Souther thought he looked serious. After a while something happened, and Souther said that when he saw it he "nearly blew up." The bundle of sabres had been laid down near the log where Lincoln was sitting. Lincoln reached out and took up one of the weapons. He drew the blade slowly from the scabbard, and Souther said "it looked as long as a fence rail."

Holding the blade by the back, Lincoln looked closely at the edge, and then after the manner of one who has been grinding a scythe or a corn knife, he began to feel gingerly the edge with the ball of his thumb. By this time "Bill" Souther was tremendously interested. Holding the sabre by the handle, Lincoln stood up and looked about him. He evidently saw what he was looking for in a willow tree several feet away. Raising the mighty weapon with his long arm, Lincoln reached and clipped one of the topmost twigs of the willow. When he had thoroughly satisfied himself as to the efficiency of the broadsword he sat down. A few minutes later the correspondence was closed on terms "honorable to both parties."

As the boat put back to Alton the spectators on the bank were horrified to see lying prone upon the deck a figure covered with blood, while a well-known Altonian leaned over the figure plying a fan vigorously. Not until the boat was close in shore was it seen that the figure was a log of wood and that the "bloody" covering was a red flannel shirt. Wentworth dropped the fan, stood up and grinned.

A Lincoln story which will never die is the reply the president made to the criticism of Grant's habits. Lin-

coln said: "He wished he knew what brand of whisky Grant drank, in order that he might send some to the other generals." The battle of Pittsburg Landing, or Shiloh, had been fought and almost lost. Three months before the country had dubbed the victor of Fort Donelson "Unconditional Surrender" Grant, and had made a hero of him. Now, with the disputed responsibility for the Pittsburg Landing surprise, there arose a mighty clamor on the part of certain newspapers and politicians, that Grant be superseded. Representative Blow talked freely with the president. He told him what he had known of Grant before the war and mentioned the fear entertained by some persons that Grant drank too much to be entrusted with high command. Mr. Blow was a smooth spoken man, with sharp blue eyes, quick to appreciate humor. He had been a very successful business man for years before he became interested in politics. He was rather below the average height. President Lincoln listened thoughtfully until Mr. Blow had expressed himself, and then asked with apparent seriousness what brand of whisky Grant drank. Explaining why he sought the information, he used the language about sending some to the other generals, which has become historic.

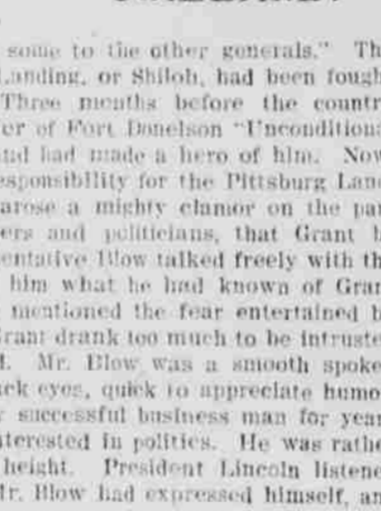
Some men "who knew Lincoln" do not believe the political history which has been written credits him with his full part in the genesis of the Republican party. They remember where Lincoln stood toward the last Whig conventions. They recall the movement to make him vice-president on the ticket with Fremont in 1856, which fortunately was abandoned on grounds of expediency. And they mention political acts of Lincoln which possess no small significance when taken with subsequent events. John R. Spears of Tallula knew Lincoln from 1833, when he was a surveyor. He was prominent in the politics of the day. He heard Lincoln speak in the Harrison convention of Illinois in 1849 and in support of the nomination of Clay before the Whig convention of Illinois in 1844, and on other occasions before the Republican party organized. Mr. Spears has this recollection of the beginning of the Republican movement:

"Lincoln called a meeting of a few friends at a country store where Tallula now is. He had been a surveyor when the county (now Menard) was a part of Sangamon. He knew almost everybody. There were 40 or 50 in the gathering at the store. Mr. Lincoln made a talk reviewing political conditions and offering suggestions as to the future. He called for some paper to write down what position he thought should be taken upon the questions of the day, especially upon slavery. There was no paper to be had. Lincoln drew a newspaper from his pocket, lay down on the cellar door and wrote on the margin the essence of the principles which formed the Republican party. This, I believe, was the first meeting of the kind in the United States. It was a year or more before the convention at Bloomington, where the Republican party of Illinois was started and where Lincoln made one of the best speeches of his life, which was lost."

Mr. Spears does not recall the exact time of this meeting at which Lincoln wrote on the margin of a newspaper the first Republican platform. He knows that the meeting was called by Lincoln two years or more before the national convention which nominated Fremont in 1856. He knows that this enunciation of Republican principles was before the Bloomington convention.

As L. BUNDY wrote from Newcastle, Ind., to the

HE DREW THE BLADE SLOWLY FROM THE SCABBARD.



"Mr. Douglas," he said, "has seen fit to give me praise in his speech, for which I am thankful. I am like the Hoosier with the gingerbread, who said he liked it better than any other man did, but got less of it. As to what Mr. Douglas said about his acquaintance with me in Old Salem, that I kept store, attended bar and sold whisky, all I have to say is that while I practiced at the bar on the inside, Judge Douglas practiced on the outside of the bar." This created great applause from Mr. Lincoln's audience. I have always remembered this debate. A few days ago I had a conversation with Ray Watkins of Menard county, who knew Lincoln in those days, and was at the speeches I have referred to; he remembered it as I have stated.

Lincoln's speeches have suffered in the reporting. As they have been collected from various sources, they show marked differences. The speeches which Mr. Lincoln wrote in advance were not many. The speeches which were taken down by a competent stenographer, like those delivered in the joint debates, are, of course, authentic. But many short speeches were written out from memory or from longhand notes, and varying versions of them appear in the later histories and collections. One of the most notable of Lincoln's impromptu, short addresses was that which is called his farewell at Springfield when he started for Washington. There are several versions of this speech. J. H. Cheney of Bloomington was one of the crowd "of not more than 150," he says, who went to the Great Western depot and heard the farewell address. "This speech," Cheney thinks, "has seldom, if ever, been correctly quoted in the histories of Lincoln; Nicolay and Hay, who are all men you would look to for a correct version, fail to give it as it was spoken."

Mr. Cheney took the copy, which is here reproduced, from the Chicago Tribune, the morning after Lincoln's departure. He thinks any one who will take the trouble to compare this with the version in the later histories will agree with him that it is the better speech.

"My Friends—No one not in my situation can appreciate my feelings of sadness at this parting. To this place and the kindness of this people I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children were born and one has died.

"I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested on the shoulders of Washington.

"Without the aid of that Divine Being who ever aided him, who controls mine and all destinies, I can not succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail.

"Trusting in him who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will be well.

"To his care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you, friends and neighbors, an affectionate farewell."

Lincoln Centennial association, contributing to the information about Lincoln's earliest relations with the formation of the Republican party.

"The Whig National convention of 1848," Mr. Bundy writes, "was completely under the control of Toombs and Stephens of Georgia. They had decided that Gen. Taylor should be nominated on no platform but his record as a soldier and slaveholder. Greeley was there from New York offering to guarantee that that state would cast its electoral vote for Clay if the convention would nominate him, but the Taylor managers would listen to no such proposition, no doubt for the reason that Clay's record as a slaveholder was not satisfactory. Lincoln and Greeley both agreed after the informal ballot that it was useless to press the name of Clay any longer, as the nomination of Taylor was a foregone conclusion, and it so turned out. In the convention of 1856, when Fremont was nominated, the name of Lincoln was suggested for vice-president, but the leaders deemed it wise to give the place to William M. Dayton of New Jersey, and it was, perhaps, fortunate for Lincoln that the convention did so."

The 8th of August the Republicans had a rally at Springfield. Christian county sent up a delegation. William T. Baker, who, while a boy, had ground Lincoln's bags of corn for him during two years at the mill on the Sangamon in the rail-splitting days, was marshal of the delegation.

"We mustered 195 wagons, most of them having four or six horses, and loaded with Christian county Republicans," said Mr. Baker. "On the way up we camped over night on the Sangamon, near Rochester. When we came to Springfield we formed in line and passed down in front of Lincoln's home, where we halted. Lincoln was standing on the steps shaking hands with hundreds of people who had come in to attend the rally. As I rode up at the head of my delegation Lincoln left the steps, came out to us, took me by the hand, and said: 'How are you, Baker?' Then he looked down the long line of wagons and men and said: 'Baker, it must take a good many men to run a threshing machine in Christian county!'"

While there were only seven joint debates of formal character under the challenge, there were other occasions when Douglas and Lincoln filed appointments as close together as to afford the excitement of personal passages. Lincoln was anxious to get before the Democratic supporters of Douglas. He did not show, but rather