

LINCOLN'S LOVE AFFAIRS

ANN RUTLEDGE was comely, of agreeable disposition, likewise bright—as to all these facts the accounts are one. She was, moreover, of excellent stock, could boast of the very best southern blood, and could count among her ancestors one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, a chief justice of the Supreme court of the nation and a leader in the American congress. Her father was an Illinois pioneer, originally from South Carolina, and long a resident of Kentucky. He was well-to-do and able to afford her better than the usual schooling of the west in that primitive place and period. It was at his hotel, or tavern, as then termed, in New Salem, Ill., in 1834 that Abraham Lincoln met her. He was 25 years old when he came to board at the Rutledge tavern, was postmaster of the village, a surveyor by profession and a member of the state legislature.

But Ann, though thus circumstanced, was unhappy; she had, in a missing lover, an ache of the heart. Before Lincoln appeared on the scene one James McNeill, a prosperous young merchant and farmer of the place, had won her affections. She was only 17 when this occurred, and the family council therefore agreed that, for a time at least, the marriage could wait. This was the state of affairs when Lincoln came to the Rutledge house to board.

McNeill had accumulated \$12,000 in New Salem and his prospects were still bright; but in 1833 he began to display a strong desire for a change. He wanted to go back east, he said, to New York state, to



Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln

proved true. He made no explanation for his long silence. And he did not sorrow long. Within a year he married.

The Second Affair
In the fall of the year 1836, when Lincoln was 29, a woman of Lincoln's acquaintance who was going to Kentucky on a visit, proposed, in a spirit of fun, to bring back a sister of hers, Miss Mary Owens, for him to marry. Lincoln laughingly accepted the proposal. Time passed; the lady duly



Mary Owens

made the journey and duly returned, sister in company, sure enough! Lincoln was astonished. The bride proposed appeared to him a trifle too willing, but he gave her the benefit of the doubt.

There were other objections to her; for one thing, that, while her face was attractive, she had no figure—she was uncommonly stout. For another, his own financial condition. He had settled at Springfield, capital of the state, and began here the practice of law, without, however, substantial result as yet. But he had told her sister, he says in letters quoted by Miss Tarbell, that he would take the lady for better or worse, and this he must do since it was a point of honor with him to stick to his word, particularly where, as in this case, others had been induced to act upon it.

He corresponded with this lady, and was firm in his resolution to marry her, and even planned how he might get along after the marriage. He took the precaution to write her from Springfield and gave her a strong hint of the poverty of his resources, asking her at the same time to "deliberate maturely." As this, however, drew from her no decision, after waiting three months he wrote again, putting the matter between them squarely up to her. "What I wish," said he, "is that our further acquaintance should depend upon yourself."

Miss Owens had the discernment to perceive his feelings. She answered, declining his offer of marriage. She found him, she said, "deficient in those little links which go to make up the chain of a woman's happiness." Lincoln was "mortified," so he wrote a friend; his "vanity wounded" by the reflection that he had been too stupid to understand her, while, at the same time, never doubting that he understood her perfectly.

The Third Affair.

It was in 1839 or 1840 that Lincoln met Miss Mary Todd of Lexington, Ky., whom he afterward married. Their courtship was interesting and rather animated. One of its incidents was a broken engagement, and that, according to one authority, on the very day set for the wedding.

Lincoln was thirty or thirty-one when Miss Todd came to Springfield, and had been practicing law in that place for some three or four years. The lady was the daughter of Robert S. Todd, a prominent Kentuckian, and was living, when Lincoln made her acquaintance, with her sister, Mrs. Ninian W. Edwards, the wife of one of the notables of Springfield. She was handsome, stylish, witty and spirited, and soon after her arrival in the Illinois capital began to cut a figure in its society and to draw in her train the more prominent beaux of the town, among others who afterward rose to distinction, besides Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, the "Little Giant" later of the stump and senate, and Shields, hero of the Mexican war, and one of the most picturesque figures in American life.

Ere long it began to be apparent that among these suitors and frequenters of the Edwards mansion Lincoln was her favorite. As the intimacy with him grew her relations protested; he was not of their sort; they were wealthy and well-bred, and looked on him as of the plebeian cast, as one socially inferior. He was of the humblest origin, crude and unpolished in manners, and, worst of all, was poor. Miss Todd, however, was unmoved by their objections. She loved him, believed in him, seems to have divined his quality and had faith in his future. In 1840 they engaged to marry.

But, as the proverb has it, "the course of true love never did run smooth." So, at least, it turned out in their case. It is not perhaps strange, considering the difference in their tastes, their ideals and breeding, that they did soon fall out. Miss Todd was an exacting sweetheart; Mr. Lincoln careless.

He was melancholic, constitutionally so; inclined, in such a matter, we know, to the most morbid view. The upshot was, at all events, that on New Year's day, 1841, the very day, as one account has it, which had been set for the wedding, he broke the engagement. According to Herndon, one of his biographers, who was also his law partner, he broke it as publicly as possible by failing to make his appearance on the appointed wedding day. The engagement was broken, no doubt of that; but Herndon's account of its breaking is not well authenticated.

Lincoln took this trouble deeply to heart. He abandoned his business and went away to forget it the following summer, making a visit with that purpose to his old friend Speed in Louisville, Ky. From this trip he returned in a better frame of mind. This, perhaps, because he had been called upon there to counsel with and resolve some doubts of Speed regarding his own approaching marriage. Lincoln and Miss Todd remained unreconciled for a year and a half. In the summer of 1842 they were brought together unexpectedly by mutual friends, and met secretly several times later at the house of Mr. Simeon Francis. At length the engagement was renewed. This came about through a circumstance of seriocomic features in which they both had part.

This circumstance is a story in itself. It involves, besides the two principals, James Shields—the same afore referred to as one of Miss Todd's admirers. He was an Irishman of ability and courage, as he afterward proved on the battlefield in the Mexican war, when, to cleanse a wound through the lungs, a silk handkerchief was drawn through his body.

At the time of the Lincoln affair Shields was a leading Democrat of Illinois and held the office of auditor of state. He was a quick, impulsive man, whose disposition put him often on the defensive with the Whig leaders, for the Republican party was then unborn. Of these Whig leaders in that state Lincoln then was one. Now, it was the custom at that time to carry on much political controversy through the press by means of personal communications, such as we know now as "Letters from the People." Great space and attention were given these in the newspapers in that day.

Just about that date Lincoln furnished such a letter to a Springfield paper; it was signed "Aunt Rebecca," and in it Shields, whose vanity and gallantry often made him a mark, was most unmercifully ridiculed. It made a hit, this letter, and Miss Todd and a friend, its real authors by the way, followed it up with another and with some doggerel rhymes, which reached the paper in the same manner as the first.

Springfield laughed loudly at these communications—not so much at the matter of them as at the anger displayed by Shields. He acted promptly, sent a friend at once to the editor of the paper to demand the name of the writer of the articles. Duelling then was still a common incident of public life, and the editor called upon Lincoln, who, unwilling to bring the ladies into the affair, gave his own name as the author.

While he was at Tremont, on the law circuit, fifteen days later, two friends of his overtook him and advised him that Shields was on the way following him up to challenge. Shields and a friend arrived shortly, and Lincoln was soon in receipt of a written demand for the "satisfaction due a gentleman" in a full, positive and absolute retraction. "This may prevent," the missive said further, "consequences which no one will regret more than myself."

Lincoln refused to apologize. Seconds were immediately named—Whitesides, editor of the paper in which the matter had appeared, for Shields; E. H. Merryman for Lincoln. The seconds talked of peace, but Whitesides refused to discuss such a settlement with his principal. "Why," he said, "he'd challenge me next, and as soon cut my throat as not!"

That night they all went back to Springfield, with Lincoln's preliminaries to follow, since he was the challenged party, namely these: Weapons, cavalry broadswords. Time, Thursday evening at 5 o'clock. Place, within three miles of Alton, on the opposite side of the river Mississippi.

On the 2nd of September, 1842, they were all upon the ground. The arrangements for the affair were about completed when the party was joined by friends. Among them was Colonel John H. Hardin, who knew Lincoln well. He had been warned of the fight by Eliza Lott, who had heard of it when the duellists stopped to breakfast going out. Colonel Hardin and the rest managed to satisfy Shields that Lincoln was not the author of the articles, but was shielding another, and to aid the seconds in settling the trouble "with honor," as the phrase is, "to all concerned."

Less than two months later a marriage license for Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd was issued. Miss Tarbell describes the event as "almost impromptu." The ceremony interrupted a meeting of the Episcopal Sewing society at the house of Miss Todd's sister, the Mrs. Edwards already mentioned.

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