

Reminiscences of a Wayfarer

Some of the Important Events of the Pioneer Days of Richardson County and Southeast Nebraska, as remembered by the writer, who has spent fifty-one years here.

Many years after the battle of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington, in company with a friend, was attending a theatre one night in London. Immediately in front of them sat two young army officers, busily engaged in discussing the details of that world-renowned engagement. The stern old Duke listened attentively to those sprigs of the army, dressed out in full military fig, and critically commenting on the most decisive battle that up to that time had been fought in modern times. Till, with some impatience in his manner, he turned to his friend and said: "Pretty soon I shall come to the conclusion I was not there."

Similarly, I have thought, when reading the various accounts of Abraham Lincoln, I have seen since he became the world famous character he now is, that I did not know the man; that it must be some other man of the same name they were writing about and not the Illinois rail-splitting lawyer I once knew, who came up by the force of his own genius to tower above the universal group of his age, and who in times subsequent, became president of the United States, conducted the greatest war in history to a successful conclusion, wiped from the escutcheon of America the foul blot of slavery, was himself murdered, imolated on the altar of feudal hate and thence by the assassin's bullet went up into everlasting history and heaven. That is the man I am going to write about.

It is entirely pertinent to the main purpose I have in mind in writing these reminiscences that I tell of the man Lincoln, at whose instance and advice I became a citizen of a western territory and to whom I owe a personal debt of gratitude and for whom I have a remembrance different from any I ever had for any other man. Appended to this paper is a letter I received from Mr. Lincoln in answer to one I had written him asking for advice in a matter that had for me at the moment, a peculiar interest. I was nearing my term in college and had about made up my mind to select the profession of the law as my vocation in life. I had known of Mr. Lincoln all my life as he and my father had been young men together in the valley of the Sangamon in the early years of the decade of 1830. His name was a kind of household word not only in the family to which I belonged but among all the people round about in the vicinity of the town he mentioned in his letter as New Salem. When I had arrived at the notion of making a lawyer of myself I addressed him for two reasons, first, because he was easily the head of a bar as brilliant as any in the United States in the middle of the last century; second, because of his friendship and association with my father and with the people among whom I was born. The letter will explain itself and will go far to show of what stuff its author was made and the great kindness of heart that characterized every act of his life. He was a distinctively great lawyer, high up in the favor of the whole state, busy with great affairs in his profession and yet he took time to write a letter to a mere boy in which he not only gives fatherly advice, but to illustrate his meaning, recites a part of his own obscure history and the circumstances under which he prepared himself for the same profession. Running all through that letter there is a vein of considerate kindness,

characteristic of the magnificent man who was writing it. Great in his profession, distinctive in the estimation of men, busy with great affairs he yet reached down his hand from his lofty place in the bar to one of the lowly who was seeking to travel the same professional road that he had traveled to give him kindly assistance and bid him a hearty godspeed.

I was born in the neighborhood in which he commenced his career as a lawyer, and in the same year he began the practice at Springfield where he afterwards passed the whole of his professional life. It is said in a recent publication that has come under my observation, that he did not wake up to find himself famous as a lawyer, or words of that import. It is not at all clear what the writer of

wonderful man above all its other household gods, and why, on this, the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, it stands at attention to do him honor.

I had peculiar and abundant opportunities for observing and studying him, and his methods of doing things, but I doubt that any of his contemporaries or anybody else ever knew what he would do next. None of them ever knew just how to take him, or what to expect from him. In the trial of a case he rarely ever made an objection to questions put to a witness by his opponent. On one occasion he was asked in my presence why he had allowed certain questions to be asked and answered by a witness. "Well," said he, "it was not very important and the witness knew a fact or two that I wanted, and could not very well get by making him my witness, and I concluded that by letting the other side have full and unobstructed latitude they would probably throw a door open for me to go after the fact on cross-examination, and they did." He gave another reason for

fort and always as something of course, as the right thing in the right place, and at the right time.

It is said he was a homely man, that is, not good looking or very graceful in his movements and action. It might strike some people that way, but I am bound to say it did not so strike me. He was tall and a little awkward, but let him get warmed up before a jury or a crowd and he became as graceful in appearance as anybody. In his quiet moments he had a sad expression of countenance, and there was an indefinable suggestion in his general appearance that he had become old before his time. The boy never entirely dies out of the man, nor the girl out of the woman but there was nothing about Mr. Lincoln to impress one with the fact that he had ever been young. Nevertheless he could make more fun than anybody, and woe unto the opponent who by any chance became the subject of his wit. It was not rasping or biting, nor was it exactly ridicule, but it was sure to subject its object to

ways the same, and like himself, looked like it had been old for a long time. It made him appear very much taller than he really was, but was essentially a part of that incomprehensible entity called Lincoln.

He knew the people better than anybody, their modes of thought and their general liability to be misled by high sounding phrase and misty statements. He had the rare faculty of illustrating a great principle by things within the ordinary experiences of men and by parallels drawn from the commonest affairs of life. Let me give an instance.

As is well known, there has always been a conflict between the followers of Jefferson and those of Hamilton in what was called their theories concerning the nature and powers of the government of this country. Jefferson was partial to a diffusive government while it is certain Hamilton was in favor of a strong central government. The conflict between those two schools has been steadily maintained since the inception of the government itself. I heard Mr.

case of extreme emergency.

There came a day when these two theories were put to the test and the homely man who was then talking, of all the millions in the great republic, had been, in the providence of God, selected to determine upon which, the nation could be saved.

He selected the one his great good common sense told him was the true one, that of Alexander Hamilton, and all the world now knows with what wisdom he made the selection. He would have done that if Hamilton had never said anything on the subject, for he was greater than Hamilton, greater than Jefferson (it is doubtful whether the latter ever had an idea of popular government that he did not borrow from the French publicist Rousseau), greater than them all, in this, that he was more completely representative of the people, and in the people in their aggregate capacity, resides all the wisdom and all the strength of any nation.

In great crises when life or death is involved in the issue, in the case of persons or nations, little attention is paid to anything but the means necessary to efficient self-defense. Constitutional limitations and current statute law have little to do with the fighting of a battle, it is nearer the truth to say they have nothing to do with it.

There came a day in the life of Mr. Lincoln when he was charged with violating the constitution by employing the war power of the government to put down armed resistance to its lawful authority.

They said to him, you cannot coerce a sovereign state. Well, said he, (in effect) I am not trying to coerce a state or states, I am only trying to wrest the arms from the hands of its, or their rebellious citizens and make them obey the law. It is a contradiction of terms to assume that the states can do anything dissociated from their citizens. You people, said he, would use the constitution to justify your attempt to destroy the Union, as though it was perfectly constitutional to do that, but you say it is unconstitutional for me to use it to preserve the Union. If you were right about this, the sooner we are rid of such a constitution the better, but you are not. Every word you say to that effect is a libel and gross slander on that great instrument, for in every line of it I see ample justification for employing force to save the Union against force employed to destroy it.

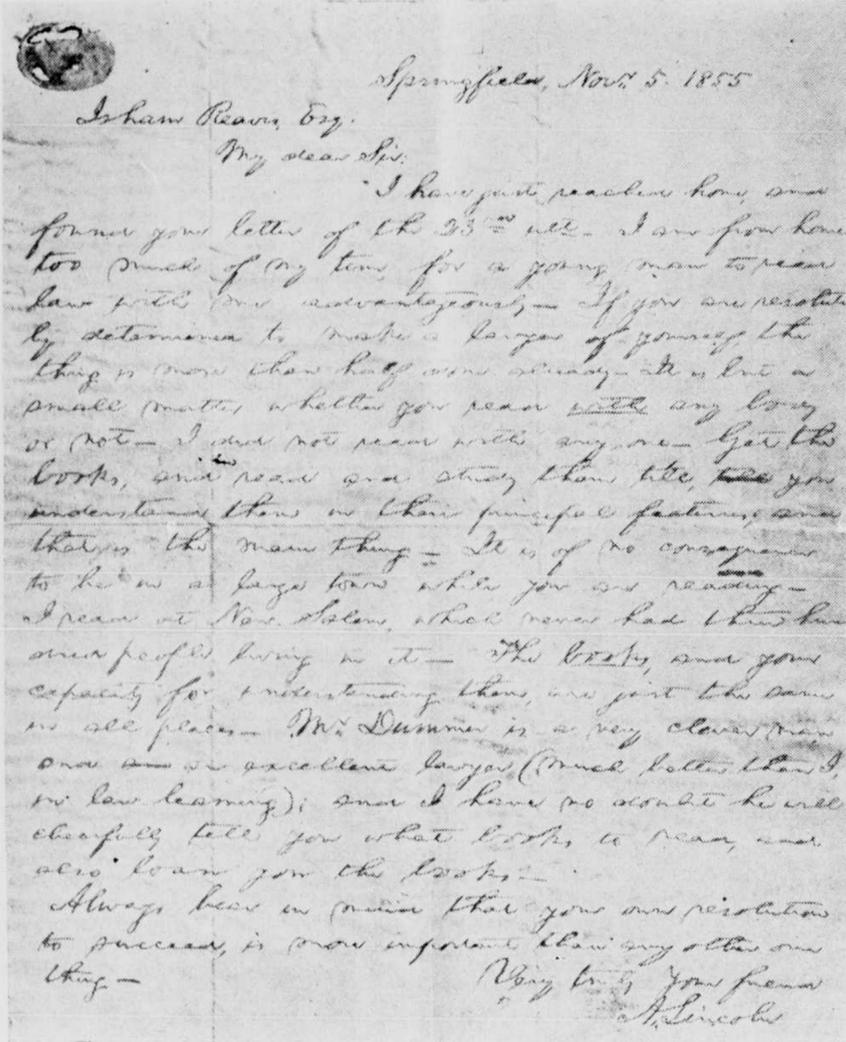
This is something of a digression, but it is done to illustrate the fact that in all the positions in life that destiny, or duty, or what not, placed him, his great good judgment, based on admirable common sense (he called it horse sense), was at all times his mighty weapon of offence or defence as circumstances required.

But it was my original intention to speak of him as I knew him, that is, as a boy knows a man, before inexorable destiny took him up and placed his name among the stars.

My acquaintance with him covered the three years I was reading law. I did not read in his office for reasons given in his letter hereto attached, but that did not prevent me having the benefit of his advice and counsel, and to have before me the constant object lesson afforded me by witnessing his conduct of many cases in the courts.

Let me give an illustration of his advice to me. He was defending in the Armstrong murder case, and I observed in selecting the jury, his peremptory challenges were not directed to individual jurors as being personally objectionable, but to a class of persons. He was fre-

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Fac-simile of Letter of Advice written by Abraham Lincoln to Isham Reavis in 1855, now published for the first time

that twaddle meant, or what idea he intended to convey. No man ever awoke from the sleep of obscurity and found himself famous, unless he had previously done something to make him so. The great Englishman who was responsible for this notion of awaking to find himself famous, had previously written the epic of "Childe Harold", which, when published, made the name of Byron an unforgettable one for all time.

But this is certain, and makes plain I think, much that is puzzling and difficult of understanding in the life and history of Abraham Lincoln, namely, that when the great God evoked him from the imperceptible and placed him upon this earth, there appeared the most completely original man the world has had for a thousand years. It was Carlyle, I believe, who said, the world loves its original men, and that is the reason, perhaps, why the world cherishes the memory of this strangely

allowing irrelevant and immaterial questions to be asked, especially when the answers were not likely to prejudice the rights of his client. It was this; that constant or frequent objections were likely to create a prejudice in the minds of jurors, leading them to think that the objector was trying to hide something from them, and whether the jurors knew it or not, that suspicion might at a critical stage of their deliberations, militate against the interest of that side.

As an advocate I don't think he had an equal anywhere. He was all powerful with a jury, and only he knew, if the fact was known at all, why that was so. That he could sway men almost as he pleased was owing to the fact that he was a complete master of the human passions, instinctively knowing all the springs of action common to men, and was able to call them into play whenever it suited his purpose to do so. And all that, was done without apparent ef-

a good deal of unpalatable merit.

Mr. Lincoln was not careful or particular about his clothes, nor whether they conformed to the latest fashion, but while they appeared, without overtaxing the imagination, to have been made for somebody else, they were still about as good, generally speaking, as the stogery of his associates. There was nothing of the "dude" about him, nor was there the slightest indication in his peculiarity of dress, that it was the effect of affectation or design to attract attention. It was always the same, very new or all showing service in about the same degree, differing from that related of R. Wilfer, whom his great biographer said, had but one ambition in life, and that was to have an entirely new suit of clothes throughout at one and the same time from boots to hat, but had never been able to achieve it.

He wore a very tall hat, al-

Lincoln in a very terse way illustrate the difference between these two theories. He said that Hamilton believed it was necessary to have a head as well as a tail to anything. While the theory of Jefferson was all tail and no head. Hamilton believed in a government resulting from a union of the states and that said resultant government was supreme and formed the head while the states formed the office of tail, so to speak. Jefferson believed that ultimate government belonged to the states, and thereby providing a multitude of tails and no head.

It was a crude and homely way of putting the case, but it was the whole case in a nut shell. The dullest mind could comprehend it easily when put in that way, and might not if put in any other way. The idea conveyed was that without a head the government would be a mere rope of sand to fall to pieces of its own weight in