Ch. 7/14-'95
promised magazine
with Lincoln
articles

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Princeton, Ills., July 15 - 1895.

Miss Ida Tarbell -

According to my promise, when introduced to you a few days ago, I write you some recollections of Mr. Lincoln: When I was a young Lawyer, in May, 1852,

I met Mr. Lincoln for the first time, in Bloomington, Ills. I heard him trying a cause before Judge David Davis, then an Illinois Circuit Judge, since a Judge of the U. S. Supreme Court and a U. S. Senator from Illinois. Mr. Lincoln's opposing Counsel in the Trial, was Gen. Asahel Gridley, of Bloomington. Gridley was a leading lawyer there, about 40 years of age, a handsome man, and a fine speaker; more fluent than Lincoln; but he had not that air of absolute sincerity which characterized the speaking of Mr. Lincoln. It was impossible to look at Lincoln speaking, and not believe, that he believed every word he said. The argument closed, the jury retired, and finally returned into Court, saying they could not agree. Mr. Lincoln and Gridley whispered a few moments, and then announced to the Court, that the cause had been settled,

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each Party paying his own costs. The action was for slander, Lincoln for the Plaintiff, Bridley for the Defendant. I had procured an introduction to Mr. Lincoln, for the purpose of employing him to help me, in a case which I had for trial at that Term of the same Court. When Court adjourned, immediately after the announcement of the settlement of the suit by Mr. Lincoln and Bridley, I said to Mr. Lincoln, "If I had been in your place, I would not have settled that way with Bridley, I think you could beat him. Lincoln's reply was in these exact words, "Well, I thought so too; but Bridley got an affirmative plea on me, and he got the open and close. I've tried it with him three times now, and hang his picker, I can't beat him". It happened in my case, that Bridley was on the other side; and as soon as he found out, that Mr. Lincoln was with me, he sent his clients to mine, and they settled very favorably to my client. I was for the Defendant in my case, and had drawn three pleas; Mr. Lincoln read them, said they were good, but that there was too much of them. He then redrew the pleas, I filed them, and the settlement ensued.

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I told Mr. Lincoln that the Cause was settled. He said "I'm glad of it", I said "what is your fee?" He said, "O! I never charge "anything for a little thing like that; "especially for helping a Young Lawyer". I replied, "Mr. Lincoln, My Client is a well off farmer, I'm no doubt, worth a good deal "more money than you and I both. "He has done better in the Case, than if "we had tried it and won it. I'm no "doubt, it was because we employed you "that he got so good a settlement. He is "a gentleman, too, and wont feel right, "if you dont take any fee" Mr. Lincoln said, "Well, just give me whatever "you please" I gave him a ten dollar gold piece, and he said, "O! that's a plenty" Had I been as sensible then, as I am now, of the value of his services, I would have given him more. When he said "Oh! that's a plenty", I think he thought so; because it would certainly have bought him a new suit of clothes as good as he had on then. During the Term of Court Judge Davis gave a party, at his house, to all the members of the Bar, there in attendance on the Court. No Ladies were present, except Mrs. Davis and two or three others, and they retired as soon

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as the banquet was over. Our entertainment for the remainder of the evening, I was listening to the conversation of Mr. Lincoln. It seemed perfectly natural to him and us, that he should do the talking; but it was only after the evening was over, that I recollected, that scarcely anyone but Lincoln had said anything. I believe it is a fact, that Mr. Lincoln told more stories, than he has the reputation of telling. I remember some of the things that he said during the evening. He got to talking about the early lawyers and Speakers of Illinois. He said, "Archy Williams is the best lawyer in Illinois; no lay title ever withstood his scrutiny". He said "Stephen T. Logan is the best Circuit Court lawyer, I ever knew; nothing can happen during the trial of a cause, which can by any possibility help his side, that he does not instantly see, and take advantage of. He said "Justin Butterfield of Chicago, was the most terse and epigrammatic speaker he ever heard", and that "Zeph Smith of Chicago was one of the most eloquent". He gave us a history of a political meeting in Springfield, Ills. in the memorable Campaign of 1840, at which both sides were heard. The Whigs were upon

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by Butterfield and Smith, and the Democrats, by Champions whose names, I am not sure I now remember correctly, and shall not say, but think one was Thompson Campbell. The Whigs had the opening and close of the debate. Mr. Lincoln said "Lysle Smith opened, and painted the hard times of that day in glowing colors; charging all the pecuniary distresses of the people to the ignorant currency tinkering of the Democratic Party." "The Democrats answered, denying that the times were hard, and saying, that it was only those who did business on borrowed capital, and branched out into wild speculation, that were in any distress; that all prudent men who did business on their own money were prosperous. Butterfield in his reply said" "These Democratic Gentlemen tell us that these are not hard times, that these are good times. Why, go where you will; on every Store door, at every Blacksmith shop, on every finger Board at the forks of a road, as you cross the country in every public place, you see Farmers, lands, Houses, Horses, plows harrows, hoes, beds, knives & forks and spoons advertised for sale under execution; and yet they tell us, these are good times: Why my fellow citizens, if these Democratic Gentlemen

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"had lived in Sodom and Gomorah, when
"the Lord God Almighty rained down fire
"and brimstone on those devoted cities,
"they would have gone out, looked up,
"and said, "Why! these are quite refreshing
"Showers".

Abraham Lincon was not only a great statesm and a pure patriot; but he was the shrewdest politician of his [redacted] day - He knew the People better than any other man - He never acted before or after, but always at the right time - As time passes, he will become more and better known, till like Washington his fame will fill the world - And posterity will sing, "We are coming, Uncle Abe, ham a thousand Millions more", to approve Thy Conduct - He was "of the people, for the people, and by the people", elected president at the right time - Although Mr. Lincoln was Commander in chief of the greatest army of modern times, and brought to a triumphant close, their greatest war, yet any one acquainted with him, well knows that he loved peace and not war; that he would say with the poet,

"Give me the harp of epic song,
"That Homer's finger thrilled along,
"But tear away the tarquine string,
"For war is not the theme I sing"

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What I have said may not help you;
but as the old play says of a sweet
kiss, take it, it will do you no harm.

Yours truly,

Geo. W. Stiff

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