Graves
(Lincoln stories)

Lincoln

222 "The Northern,"
Wichita, Kansas, April 27, 1917.

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
Care American Magazine,
New York City.

My dear Miss Tarbell:

I have had in mind for some months to write you a couple of Lincoln stories but my frequent absences from home and interruptions here have served so far to prevent my carrying out the intention. But now that my daughter Ruth E. Graves is in New York City and I have had the temerity to suggest to her that she call on you to show you some of her work, I am going to cast aside all trivial matters of business and get down to things of real importance.

My daughter is an artist. Will you permit a fond "dad" to say something about her? After she had had two years in the Art Institute at Chicago, I went down there to visit her, as I was in the habit of doing occasionally, and found that she wanted another year. Of course if it were worth while, I wanted to give it to her, so I went to see one of her instructors, Mr. Seymour (I am not sure that this spelling is correct). He didn't recognize her by name but when I showed him a card photograph which I happened to have in my pocket, he spoke very promptly. "Oh, yes," he said, "by all means give her another year. She is a young woman who has already done some notable things. She has a strong individuality, which will be a handicap to her in getting started but when she once gets a foothold, it will be a powerful asset." So she had the third year and has since been working independently.

Last summer while I was out in the Mountains, I got a letter from her in which she surprised me by saying that she was going down to Sherbrooke, Canada, her mother's birthplace. It was to be a painting and sketching trip. So long as she was in Canada, there was little sketching and no painting at all. She undertook a sketch one day but the eagle eye of a Canadian policeman found her and she was very positively, though courteously informed that nothing of the kind would be permitted in Canada during the war. After her visit, she went to the White Mountains for the fall scenery and the frost and snow, and about the first of the year went to New York, where she is living at 57 West Tenth Street. I believe she has a little studio there or "shop" as she calls it. I have asked her, Miss Tarbell, to call on you and introduce herself as the daughter of the distinguished Kansan whose contributions to the literature of all time have not yet received the appreciation which their merits deserve. (I don't believe I will have to label this a joke, to

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one whose appreciation of the Lincoln humor is so pronounced.)

Now, I think you are entitled to a couple of Lincoln stories. One of them I got from an old friend in Salina, Kansas, Mr. J. O. Wilson. Mr. Wilson is a lawyer and some thirty or thirty-one years ago was in New York City on some business connected with a sale of bonds. During his stay of several weeks, he was, I believe, at the Metropolitan Hotel, where he made the acquaintance of an elderly gentleman; Benjamin F. Camp.

Mr. Camp was alone in the world, very well to do and had made his home at the Metropolitan for a number of years. The two men, one very old, the other still a young man of about thirty, became very much attached to each other and would wait, one for the other, to dine together. They had a table in a rather secluded corner where they could indulge in conversation freely and overlook the dining room and spend all the time they wanted at their meal. It was during this visit that Mr. Wilson heard the following story from his elderly friend. I shall not attempt to give it in Mr. Camp's words. He was a Quaker and I am not familiar enough with the dialect to run the risk of ridiculous mistakes.

One evening Mr. Camp grew reminiscent and told Mr. Wilson that he once received a call from Horace Greeley, who wanted him, Camp, to take $75,000 stock in the New York Tribune,--about all that the paper was worth at that time, and it would certainly give him the controlling interest. Mr. Camp pleaded inability to raise the money, evidently wasn't very cordial in his attitude toward the proposition, upon which Mr. Greeley cussed him out in his engaging fashion and departed.

That evening Mr. Camp went home late to dinner and found Mrs. Camp and Horace at the table. Nothing was said about the business of the afternoon and Mr. Greeley departed almost immediately at the close of the meal. But before they went to bed, Mrs. Camp came over and sitting on her husband's knee and putting her arm about his neck, said, "Benjamin, I want thee to let brother Horace have $75,000."

Mr. Camp again pleaded inability to raise the money. "No," she said, "thee can get the money of Brother Jacob. He will take thy mortgage." Brother Jacob was a thrifty Quaker and known to be rather close in his business dealings, so Mr. Camp had no forebodings of Brother Jacob's acquiescence in the proposition, and readily promised to go and see him. He afterwards must have had a "hunch" that the way had been made easy for him by Mrs. Camp, for Brother Jacob accepted his proposition with remarkable readiness, gave him $75,000, accepted the transferred mortgage and said, for Mr. Camp had told him the purpose for which the money was wanted, "If thee lose it, as I think thee will, half the loss will be mine."

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So Horace got his money and Benjamin F. Camp was practically the owner of the New York Tribune. At that time, you know, of course, the New York Tribune was bitterly opposing the administration. It was a power and the power was exerted relentlessly against Mr. Lincoln's policies. Mr. Camp deplored this but it never occurred to him that as owner of the paper, he had any right to interfere with its management.

Shortly after this transaction, he received a telegram asking him to come to Washington. It was signed, "A. Lincoln." He didn't know what business Mr. Lincoln could possibly have with him but, reflecting that when one got a request from the President of the United States to call on him in Washington, it behooved one to go, he went immediately.

When Mr. Lincoln came into the room, he went up to Mr. Camp and put both hands on his shoulders and spoke first of his size, for Mr. Camp was even taller than the President and much larger otherwise. Then he said very seriously that he had understood that Mr. Camp owned the New York Tribune, that while he recognized the absolute sincerity of Mr. Greeley, the Tribune was doing great harm, and appealed to him to use his power to change its policy and help the administration save the Union. Mr. Camp told him that the purchase of the stock was simply a friendly matter, he never had thought that he had any authority in the management or of using it if he had, but promised to do what he could.

Immediately on his return to New York, he called on Mr. Greeley and urged the change of policy suggested by Mr. Lincoln. I am not sure that he mentioned Mr. Lincoln's name -- probably not. Again Mr. Greeley cussed him out in his characteristic way and Mr. Camp withdrew. Evidently he was quite familiar with Horace's idiosyncrasies and was not offended by his very uncomplimentary manner of speech.

But the next morning the famous editorial appeared which changed the whole attitude of the New York Tribune toward the Administration. Mr. Camp told my friend that he understood that Whitelaw Reed, then sub-editor or associate-editor, saw the editorial on the galley and came boiling into the sanctum, threatening to resign if that editorial went in. Mr. Greeley said he thought the owner of a paper ought to have some voice in the management, and the editorial would have to go.

In a day or two Mr. Camp received a letter from Mr. Lincoln, thanking him for his great service to his country.

The old gentleman reached into his inside vest pocket and drew out a little morocco case. From it he took three papers --

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the editorial clipping, the telegram and the letter. "Thine," he said, very impressively, "is the only eye that has ever seen this telegram and letter, except my wife's, and no other's shall see it."

I thought it well to acquaint you with this; that it would not only be a matter of personal interest, which would be a sufficient reason, but for the possibility that those papers may be found. Of course, men do strange things sometimes and it is possible that those were buried with Mr. Camp, but if not, they ought to be found and preserved.

It just occurs to me that I wrote you once about a set of formal resolutions passed by the members of a Confederate regiment still under arms, deploring the death of Abraham Lincoln. No doubt you remember the incident. Did you ever write to Mr. A. L. Teagarden, who was one of the Confederate soldiers who adopted those resolutions? I don't know his present address; he is out on the Pacific Coast somewhere, but a letter addressed to him, in care of Teagarden and Shumate, St. Louis, will reach him, and it is just possible that if you will write to him, he will interest himself and try to hunt up those resolutions, for they must be in existence somewhere, and he may be able to trace them, which I am sure he would be delighted to do.

The other story was an incident told me by my brother Hobart, now living in northwestern Missouri, and which occurred at a review of troops at Alexandria. The President and Cabinet reviewed the troops. I forget how many there were but the line was about fifteen miles long and the party had to drive and ride the thirty miles, down and back.

The Illinois troops were stationed next to the Massachusetts contingent. The difference in size between the men from the two states was very remarkable. "Them Massatoosetts troops were little bits of fellers," said Hobart, "and their voices were just like birds chirpin'. As the party came in sight, our Colonel said, 'Boys, when the President reaches the Illinois line, I want you all to take off your hats and give three cheers and a tiger.'"

The members of the Cabinet rode in carriages but of course the President must ride a horse. He had a splendid animal, well trained, that would stand a battery fire without flinching a hair. But when he reached the Illinois troops and heard that roar, the horse bolted.

"Walt," said my brother, "I wish you could a-seen it. Mr. Lincoln's hat fell off, his trousers come up to his knees. He was a-sawin' on the reins and laughin' fit to kill. The next day we

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got a letter from him. He said if he hadn't known in any other way that he was approaching Illinois troops, he would have known it from that cheer.

"Well," said Hobart, "we had a lot of fun with them Massatoosetts fellers over that letter. They was all better drilled than we was and while we was goin' through our maneuvers, they would stand around and guy us. When it got too hot, the Colonel would stop. He'd say, 'The Adjutant will now read the President's letter.' Say, Walt, you'd ought to a-seen them Massatoosetts fellers fade away!" And the old veteran would chuckle over the recollection.

One more remark occurs to me: Mr. Coler (I don't remember his Christian name, but he is the father of Bird Coler, formerly nominated for Governor of New York) knew Mr. Lincoln in the days before the War, in Illinois, and was full of anecdotes of him. I get this from my friend Wilson, above mentioned. It is not probable that Coler is still living but the possibility of it suggests that if he is and you get in touch with him, you may find some interesting material there.

Very truly yours,

WHG/D

W. H. Graves

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