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The Debates of Lincoln and Douglas.

Clark E. Carr.

There has never been a more important or far reaching discussion of political issues than was that between Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln in Illinois during the summer of 1858.

In the personality of the Champions, in the attention attracted, in the questions involved, and in the stupendous results, it may be doubted whether in ancient or modern times there has ever been a mere forensic discussion so remarkable as this conflict of ideas between these two men.

Four years before, a radical measure had been formulated and carried through Congress by Senator Douglas, known as "The Nebraska Bill", the ostensible object of which was to put an end to the slavery agitation, through a radical change of policy. By this measure the barrier against the extension of slavery north of the parallel of 36 degrees and 30 minutes, known as the "Missouri Compromise Line" was removed, and the question of ~~having~~ permitting or prohibiting slavery was left to the people of each new Territory. This doctrine was known as "popular sovereignty" or "squatter sovereignty". Against this act of breaking down the Missouri Compromise line, millions of people protested, and out of this protest, sprang into existence the Republican party.

Senator Douglas had the ability and the power to carry the measure through Congress and he was its ablest champion on the hustings before the people, and although assailed on every hand, although as he said he could, when the Nebraska Bill passed, as a consequence of having stood up for it ", "travel from Boston to

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Chicago by the light of his own effigies" the ability, the audacity, and the success, with which he defended it, was marvelous. He made it the chief plank in the National Democratic platform, two years after its passage, and upon it Mr. Buchanan, who was then President, was triumphantly elected.

Douglas was the most prominent and distinguished American then living. His name, either in praise or in blame, was upon every tongue. He had held, before he was twenty-eight years old, the positions of member of the Legislature, Attorney General, Secretary of State, and Judge of the Supreme Court of Illinois, besides some minor offices, and at twenty-eight he was elected to the lower house of Congress, in which he remained until he was thirty-four when he was elected to the Senate where he had served two terms.

He entered Congress when the great Statesmen who had learned their principles directly from the lips of the founders of the government, were still the guiding spirits of the Republic; such men as John Quincy Adams, and Webster, and Calhoun, and Clay, and Benton, and Cass, and served with them from the time of the death of Calhoun and Webster and Clay, Calhoun in 1850, and Webster and Clay in 1852, Senator Douglas was the most conspicous figure in American politics.

He had been a conspicuous actor, and frequently the most conspicuous actor, in all the great events of the generation in the (00) bound ary question between us and Great Britban, in consideration of the Clayton Bulwer treaty, an the question of the annexation of Texas which led up to the Mexican War, in the acquisition of vast domains as the result of that war, in the organization of those domains into Territories and states, in the compromise measures of

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1850, in chartering the Illinois Central Rail-way, of which he was the father, and finally in the abrogation of the Missouri Compromise line, and had just led in the defeat in the Senate of the Lecompton Constitution, through which it was attempted to force slavery upon the people of Kansas against their will, not, as he frequently said, on account of any objection to slavery on his part, but, because it had not been adopted by the people of Kansas.

His second term in the Senate was about to expire, and he was ready to come home and enter upon a campaign for re-election, when he read in the morning papers the following words:- "We are now far into the fifth year since the policy was initiated with the avowed object, to put an end to the slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand" I beleive the government cannot permanently endure half slave and half free. I do not expect the union to be dissolved, I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided; it will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it and place it where the public mind will rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward, 'till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South". "Have we no tendency to the latter condition?"

Following this striking prophetic declarations was a clear and logical and almost conclusive argument to prove that we had a "tendency" to the latter condition" and that there was "an almost

complete legal combination, piece of machinery so to speak, compounded of the Nebraska Bill and the Dread Scott decision" to fasten slavery upon "all the States, old as well as new, north as well as south."

These sentiments and these arguments came from a man who had been nominated by the Republican Convention of Illinois, as a candidate for Senator Douglas position, and whom he must, in order to be re-elected, overcome in the campaign.

Who was he? Let Douglas himself answer. "He," Mr. Lincoln, "is a kind, amiable, intelligent gentleman", a kind hearted, amiable, good natured gentleman". I have known him for nearly twenty-five years" xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx We were both comparatively boys when we got acquainted" x x x x x x x x x x x x x "He was then just as good at telling an anecdote as now". x x x x "He could beat any of the boys wrestling or running a foot race, in pitching quoits, or tossing a copper; could ruin more liquor than all the boys of the town together, and the dignity and impartiality with which he presided at a horse race or a fist fight, excited the admiration and won the praise of everybody that was present and participated" This was Douglas' description of Lincoln as he had known him.

On the other hand let us ssee what Mr. Lincoln said both of himself and of Senator Douglas.

Two years before, Mr. Lincoln said of Senator Douglas, "Twenty-two years ago Judge Douglas and I first became acquainted. We were young then, he a trifle younger than I. Even then we were both ambitious. With me the race of ambition has been a failure- a flat failure; with him it has been one of splendid success. His name fills the nation and is not unknown in foreign lands."

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lands".

Mr. Lincoln says of himself in the campaign, soon after it opened, "He(Douglas) means to keep me down; put me down I should not say, for I have never been up". In speaking of the disadvantages under which the Republicans labored, Mr. Lincoln said that they arose "out of the relitive positions of the two persons (himself and Judge Douglas) who stand before the State as candidates for the Senate", and proceeded to illustrate as follows:-

"Senator Douglas is of World wide renown. All the anxious politicians of his party, or wh o have been of his party for years past, have been looking upon him as certainly at no distant day, to be President of the United States. They have seen in his round, jolly, fruitful face, post offices, land offices, Marshallships and Cabinet appointments, chargeships and foreign missions". x x x x x x x x x x x x x x On the contrary nobody has ever expected me to be President. In my poor lean, lank face nobody has ever seen that any cabbages were sprouting out."

Mr. Lincoln was then very little known outside of Illinois. The writer was a student at the Albany Law School during the year preceeding the debates: Nobody there knew of Mr. Lincoln's existence. Even such men as Ira Harris and Amassa J. Parker and Amos Dean, who were then lecturers at the school, had never heard of him. Beleiving that there was no man in the State capable of coping with Senator Douglas, hHorace Greely at that time advised the Republicans of Illinois, through the New York Tribune, to widen draw the breach in the Democratic party by supporting Douglas.

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Senator Douglas read in Washington the sentiments of Mr. Lincoln at Springfield to which we have referred and from which we have quoted. He never could answer them. He never could get away from them. From that hour they pursued him and haunted him, and haunted him until at last they overwhelmed him. "This government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free"- "It will become all one thing or all the other." "Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it"x x x x x x "or its advocates will push it forward, until it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, north as well as south."

The "kind, amiable, intelligent gentleman, "who had up to his fifthieth year " never been up", in the quiet of comparatively obscure life, had solved the most intricate problem of national polity, had diagnosed the desease of the body politic, and had discovered the only possible alternatives through which the "government" could "permanently endure."

This plain simple man saw with a clearer vision than that of the greatest statesmen of the generation, Webster, and Clay and Calhoun and Douglas himself. When he made this announcement there was no possible way of getting away from his conclusions. They were so apparent as to appear axiomatic . The only wonder was that they had not been announced before. If, in order to "endure permanently" the government must become "all slave" or "all free" why continue the ~~political~~ patch work of compromise that had been going on since its foundation. That to make the government "all slave" would

destroy it was apparent to everybody, but theslave holder and those who were not directly or indirectly interested in the institution. Patriotic men who had been before indifferent upon the question o f slavery, sided with the party of freedom, and two years after obtained control of the government.

The great Senator upon reading that most remarkable address of Mr. Lincoln, more than any one else, realized its power and comprehended the gravity of the situation in which it placed him. He had expected to return to Illinois and conduct an aggressive campaign upon the old idea of compromise between the north and the south, and upon his own record in Congress upon the right of the people in the territory and everywhere to manage and control their own domestic institutions as exemplified in the Nebraska bill, a doctrine that is always popular with the masses, and especially upon his leadership in Congress in opposition to the "infamous Lecompton Constitution."

He now found that there was something else to demand his attention and from that day forward he never made a speech without quoting from and attempting to answer these sentiments of Mr. Lincoln. In every one of his seven joint debates he quoted from them and tried to refute them, as was the case with every speach he made in the campaign, and he spoke nearly every day for three months. Curiously it seemed as though Senator Douglas was himself beset with forebodings, and that he was worried by misgivings, and was trying to convince and satisfy himself, as well as others, that the government

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could endure permanently "half slave and half free".

Never were there more ingenious or plausible or convincing arguments than he put forward in his reply to Mr. Lincoln. It is impossible in the brief space allotted to give an extended resume of his speeches in the discussion of these questions, butwe will give one or two examples.

After quoting Mr. Lincoln " A house divided against itself cannot stand" "I do not expect the Union to be dissolved" x x x x x "It will become all one thing or all the other". Senator Douglas said, "In other words, Mr. Lincoln asserts as a fundamental principle of this government that there must be uniformity in the local laws and domestic institutions of each and all the States of the Union, and he therefore invites all the non-slave holding states to band together, organize as one body and make war upon slavery in Kentucky, upon slavery in Virginia, upon slavery in the Carolinas, upon slavery in all the slave holding States of this Union, and to persevere in that war until it shall be exterminated. He then notifies the slave holding States to stand together as a unit and make an aggressive war upon the free states of this Union, with a view of establishing slavery in them all; of forcing it upon New York, New England, and upon every other free State and that they shall keep up the warfare until it has been firmly established in them all; in other words, Mr. Lincoln advocates boldly and clearly a war of sections, a war of the North against the South, of the Free States against the Slave States, a war of extermination to be continued relentlessly until the

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one or the other shall be subdued and all the States shall either become free or become slave."

"I take bold and unqualified issue with him upon that principle. I assert that it is neither desireable or possible that there should be uniformity in the local institutions and domestic regulat ions of the States" x x x x x x x "The fathers of the revolution and the sages who made the constitution well understood that the laws and domestic institutions which would suit the granite hills of New Hampshire, would be totally unfit for the rice plantations of South Carolina" x x x x x x x "They well understood that the great varieties of soil of production and of interests in a Republic as large as this, required different local and domestic regulatéons in each locality". x x x x x x x x x x x "Uniformity in local and domestic affairs would be destructive of State rights, of State sovereignty, of personal liberty and personal freedom. Uniformity is the parent of despotism the world over, not only in politics, but in religion".

It seemed to be Senator Douglas' opinion that our government was of such a nature that all the peoples of the earth could come into this American Union, and still maintain their own regulations and laws and customs as before, and that this idea of uniformity which he claimed was the logical sequence of Mr. Lincoln's position, was in direct antagonism to the fundamental principle upon which the Union of the several States was consummated.

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