On the Fourth of July, 1863, L. E. Chittenden was to read the Declaration of Independence in Washington at the celebration. He had begun, "When in the course of human events," a boy running with a telegram stopped him, it was from the President and announced Lee's retreat. The meeting broke up and Mr. Chittenden went at once to Mr. Lincoln. In his manuscript he writes: "As swiftly as my feet could carry me, I went to the President. I was too earnest to think of the proprieties. 'President Lincoln!' I exclaimed, 'Will you not for this once leave Washington to take care of itself; order yonder regiments up the river, to cut of Lee's retreat and end the war? They can be at Harpers Ferry before the rebels can reach any of the forts?'

"He smiled that sad smile of his that was so touching. 'You are behind the times,' he said. 'Many of these gentlemen are presseing the same suggestion.'

"'Then pray do it!' I said. 'I am ready for one, to take a rifle and go into the defences of Washington.'

"'And I! and I! and fifty thousand others.' said the voices around me, and every man was in dead earnest.

"He smiled again. 'I may think as you do about the wisdom of such a movement' he said, 'but there are objections to it. In the first place I am not running the machine.'

"'I wish to Heaven you were!' growled a deep voice behind him 'It would run somewhere and do something!'

"'I hope you will pardon my earnestness in what is really none of my business, Mr. President!' I continued. 'Of all the mortifications we endured under McClellan, the most shameful was the escape of Lee's army after Antietam, without the loss of a gun. You are the Commander in Chief of the army, and can prevent the repetition of that shame. I am only one of the thousands, who at this

Digital Image, 2009. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library

moment are hoping, praying that you will do it.'

"'Much that you say may be true,' he replied 'but we must not take the reins out of the hands that we have set to drive the team. Any way, not when the team gets fractious and wants to kick over the traces. Besides it is not right to do anything that implies distrust of the army which has just won a great victory. We must rely on the officers to do the right thing!'

"'It is impertinence for me to discuss this subject I know,' I replied. 'But my interest is so great that I cannot help it. I am driven to take issue even with you. The officers are <u>not</u> the best judges of what should be done now. After forced marches for many miles, they have for three days been fighting the great battle of the century. They know how desperately the rebels fight. Last night they would have been satisfied to call it a drawn battle. This morning they find that the rebels have had enough of it and are retreating. Who can criticise them if they drop down on the bloody ground thoughtless of any thing but their need of rest? But their comrades here are fresh and strong, and ready for the march. All they ask of you is what the Israelites asked of Pharoah - to 'let them go'!

"Then others reinforced my request. They said what a glorious thing it would be to end the war and save the republic on the anniversary that gave it birth. Their arguments were forcible if not unanswerable.

"I saw that we were wasting our time and said no more. Others continued to press him, who did not know as I did, that it was his habit to listen patiently and to all appearance approvingly, when his decision had been irrevocably made. 'There was a time,' he said, 'when I thought I could command the Army of the Potomac more

Digital Image, 2009. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library

successfully than the officers in charge. But I have cured myself of the notion. Now, I let them do the commanding, and get my satisfaction by blowing them up when their plans go wrong. No! Gentlemen! If Meade has harvested this crop of rebels, I guess we will have to let him 'rake after' his own teams!'

"Now the despatches through the war office became frequent. They spoke principally of the dead and wounded - of the great losses on both sides. One spoke of Hancock's wound, as mortal! There was a tremor in the voice of our beloved President and a suspicious moisture around his deep-set eyes, as he read them out. Then as he turned abruptly away and walked into the Mansion, it was the voice of a Christian and not of a conqueror that murmured 'How long? Oh, Lord! How long?'

"And Lee's army again crossed the Potomac after a great defeat without losing a gun!"

This quotation is from the manuscript of Mr. Chittenden entitled "A Fourth of July in Washington," and submitted to the McClure's for the Syndicate; in writing History of War quote this, first consulting Syndicate to see if we have bought it; if we have not, secure promise from Mr. Chittenden to use the matter.

February 10, 1897.

Digital Image, 2009. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library