

NOTES OF AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. A. B. CHANDLER, SEPTEMBER 16, 1896.

From the spring of 1863 until his death in April, 1865, I saw Mr. Lincoln almost every day, often ^{several} times a day. ^{at that time I} ~~that~~ was one of the three confidential cipher clerks ^{engaged} in the ^{military telegraph service} ~~employ of~~ the War Department, the others ~~two~~ being Mr. Finker of the Western Union Telegraph Co. and Mr. Bates of the ^{formerly President} ~~Western~~ Bank. ^{Baltimore and Ohio} ~~My~~ ^{Telegraph Company.} ~~office~~ was ^{one} of the three ^{rooms} occupied by the military telegraph; it was commonly called "The President's Room" because he came there so often. ~~I~~ ^{used to say} I was alone in the room, and as few people came there to see me he could be alone. He ^{often said to me} "I come here to escape my persecutors; ^{many} ~~hundreds of~~ people ^{call} ~~come to~~ and say they want to see me for only a minute. That means if I can hear their story and grant their request in a minute it will be enough." ^{His desk was a large one with flat top and} ~~Mr. Lincoln's office contained a large flat-top desk, at one side of which I always sat receiving and sending my messages.~~ ^{intended to be occupied on both sides,} Mr. Lincoln ordinarily took the chair ^{opposite mine, at} ~~on the other side of this desk;~~ here he would read over the ~~messages~~ ^{this} of telegrams received by the Department, all of which came to ~~the~~ office. It was the ^{practice} ~~rule~~ ^{to whomsoever addressed,} ~~days~~ to make three copies of all the messages received by the Department, one of these was what we called a "hard copy" and was saved for the records of the War Department; two ^{copies} ~~carbon~~ ^{by stylus,} were made on yellow tissue paper, one for Mr. Lincoln and one for Mr. Stanton. Mr. Lincoln's ^{copies} ~~were kept~~ ^{the "cipher} ~~set was always put into~~ what we called the "President's drawer" of ~~my~~ desk." He would come in at any time of the night or day and go at once to this drawer and take out a file of the telegrams and begin at the top to read them. His position in running over these telegrams was sometimes very curious. He had a habit of sitting frequently on the edge of his chair with his right knee dragged down ~~on~~ to the floor. I remember a curious expression of his when he got to the bottom of the new telegrams and began on those that he had read before. It was, "Well, I guess I have got down to the raisins." The first two or three times he said this he made no explanation and I did not ask one. But one day after the remark he looked up under his eyebrows at me with a funny twinkle in his eye, and said, "I used to know a little girl out West who ^{sometimes was inclined to} ~~had a habit of~~ eating too much, ~~and~~ ^{well} ~~and~~ ^{ate} a good many raisins than she ought to and followed them up with a quantity of other goodies. It made her very sick and ~~she had to~~

do not
make it
solid

~~throw up~~ After a time the raisins began to come. She gasped and looked at her mother and said, "Well, I will be better now, I guess, ^{for} I have got down to the raisins."

Mr. Lincoln frequently wrote telegrams in my office. His method of composition was slow and laborious. It was evident that he thought out what he was going to say before he touched his pen~~to~~ to the paper. He would sit looking out of the window, his left elbow on the table, his hand scratching his temple, his lips moving and frequently he spoke the sentence aloud or in a half whisper. After he was satisfied that he had got the proper expression, he would write it out. ~~on the paper.~~

If one examines the originals of Mr. Lincoln's telegrams and letters, he will find very few erasures and very little interlining. This, of course, was because he had them definitely in his mind before ^{writing} ~~he wrote~~ them, ~~on paper.~~

In this he was the exact opposite of Mr. Stanton, who wrote with feverish haste, often scratching out words and interlining ^{frequently} ~~constantly~~. ^{Sometimes} ~~frequently~~ he would seize a sheet

which he had filled and impatiently tear it into pieces. ^{It often happened}

^{that} Mr. Lincoln, ~~frequently~~, while waiting for telegrams, or when desirous of getting away from his persecutors, as he called them, would stay for a long time in the office. He would ^{Sometimes occupy} ~~often amuse~~ himself with a book. It was not infrequent for him to tip his chair back against the wall, his feet crossed and high in the air or resting on the desk, and read half aloud. ^{Sometimes} ~~He often~~ amused himself in reading by mispronouncing words and by throwing the accent on the wrong syllable. ~~Sometimes~~

~~he did this, I fancy, for my benefit, but mainly simply as an amusement.~~ He was ~~always~~ ^{peculiarly} pleased if he ran upon an alliteration, and would repeat it over several times aloud. Any peculiar phrasing or rhythm caught his ear and he would repeat it to himself again and again.

If Mr. Lincoln had an especially important dispatch to send ^{nearly} ~~he~~ always looked after it himself. ~~I remember~~ At the time of the draft riots in the summer of '63, he wished to telegraph Governor Seymour (dispatch to be looked up) he wrote the message out before he came over to the office; coming in with it he sat down beside me and read it over aloud to me. I think his reason for doing this was two-fold, to assure himself that he had it as he wanted it, and that I understood

what he meant, ^{so that there should be no mistake in its} transmission.

The President took the greatest interest in the soldiers who had been sentenced to death, and never, if he could help it, would allow a man to be shot. I ^{think} ~~remember~~ that at least a dozen times while I was in the War Department he came himself from the White House with messages ordering execution to be stayed. He would not confide these messages to an orderly lest they go astray, ^{or suffer delay,} and he would caution the operator that they be sent immediately in order that there might be ^{no delay or mistake.} ~~no delay or mistake.~~ He ^{seemed to have great faith in doing} ~~seemed to me to have great faith in doing~~ things himself. I remember at the time the commissioners were sent down to Fortress Monroe to treat with representatives of the Confederates that the result was unsatisfactory, and Mr. Lincoln decided that he must go himself. He sat in my office with his head dropped down and soliloquised, as he frequently did, "If you want a thing done right you must do it yourself."

One of the most exciting times that we ever had in the War Department was during the Battle of Gettysburg on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of July, 1863. I think that Mr. Lincoln spent more than half his time when not asleep, in ^{our} ~~my~~ office during that battle. [#] He read every telegram with the greatest eagerness and frequently was so anxious that he would rise from his seat and come around and lean over my shoulder while I was translating the cipher.

For several days previous to the battle, while Hooker was following Lee into Pennsylvania, I noticed that he seemed ^{very} ~~very~~ anxious about the movements of the Fifth Corps, ^{Commanded} ~~by General~~ ^{Meade.} ~~Meade.~~ I did not attach any importance to this matter at the moment, but when Meade replaced Hooker I understood Mr. Lincoln's interest; he was ^{already preparing to place} ~~of the army of the Potomac.~~ ^{Meade in command.}

After the Battle of Gettysburg the President urged Meade to pursue Lee and engage him before he should cross the Potomac. ^{His anxiety} ~~was~~ ^{seemed} as great as it had been during the battle itself, and now, as then, he walked up and down the floor, his face grave and anxious, wringing his hands and showing every sign of ^{deep solicitude.} ~~distress.~~ As the telegrams ^{came} ~~were~~ ^{several times} ~~came~~ in he traced the positions of the two armies on the map and ^{called} ~~called~~ me up to point out their location; ~~it was not that I could help him at all, but he seemed~~ to feel the need of talking to some one.

As Lee approached the river he said almost in anguish, "If he does not intercept him there will be no battle." Finally, a telegram came from Meade (look this up) saying that under such and such circumstances he

would engage the enemy at such and such a time. "Yes," said the President bitterly, "He will ^{be ready to} fight a magnificent battle when there is no enemy there ~~to fight!~~" ~~##~~

There never was a more tender-hearted man; he ^{did not like} ~~could not bear~~ to see any distress ~~##~~ I remember one morning his coming into my office with a distressed expression on his face and saying to Major Eckert, "Eckert, who is that woman crying out in the hall? What is the matter with her?" Eckert said he did not know but would ^{go and} find out. He came back soon and said it was a woman who had come a long distance expecting to go down to the army to see her husband, that she had some very important matters to consult him about. An order had gone out a short time before to allow no women in the army except in special cases. She was bitterly disappointed and was crying over it. Mr. Lincoln sat moodily for a moment after hearing this story, and suddenly looking up, said, "Let's send her down. You write the order, ~~Major~~ ^{Major} Eckert." Major Eckert hesitated a moment and said, "Would it not be better ~~to have~~ ~~Mr. Lincoln~~ ^{for} ~~Mr. Lincoln~~ ^{Mr. Lincoln} for ~~Mr. Lincoln~~ ^{Mr. Lincoln} to write the order?" "Yes," said Mr. Lincoln, that is better, let ~~Mr. Lincoln~~ ^{the Major} write it." Eckert went out and soon returned saying, "Mr. ^{President} ~~Lincoln~~ would it not be better in this case to let the woman's husband come ^{to Washington} ~~up here~~?" Mr. Lincoln's face lighted up with pleasure. "Yes, yes," he said, "let's bring him ~~up~~ ^{up}." The order was written and the woman was told that her husband would come to Washington. This done, the woman's sorrow seemed lifted from Mr. Lincoln's heart and he sat down to his yellow tissue telegrams with a serene face."

^{the telegraph} It was not rare for Mr. Lincoln to bring intimate friends into ~~my~~ office, ~~for a chat~~ ^{evening} I remember his coming in one ~~day~~ ^{with} ~~Mr. Lincoln~~ Judd, ^{an important} ~~an important~~ Illinois politician, and at that time Minister to Prussia." He introduced him ~~to me by~~ saying, "This is the man I have ^{been having} ~~had~~ over in Prussia." The two sat down and began to discuss war matters. ~~I remember that~~ Mr. Judd said to ~~Mr. Lincoln~~ ^{that} Mr. Lincoln that, to him, 5000 miles away, it seemed ^{particularly in the matter of dealing with prisoners.} the policy of the government was too conciliatory, that there had not been enough retaliation. "Well," Mr. Lincoln said, "did you ever hear the story of Bill Grimes?" No, Mr. Judd said he had not. "Well," he said, "Bill Grimes had an enemy across the river and he had a habit of making dreadful threats of what he was go-

ing to do to his enemy. One day somebody said to him, "Well, Bill, when you go over to thrash your enemy what if he should strike back and you get the worst of it?" The idea of the man fighting back had never occurred to Bill Grimes, and, shaking his head, "Well, I never thought of that, I guess I won't go." You see, Judd, that it is always possible for the other fellow to retaliate and we have had to think of that in this war."

In the summer of '64 at the time that Harby made his raid upon Washington Mr. Lincoln was in the ^{telegraph} office a great deal. The only lively skirmish of that affair he saw himself, being at Fort Stevens; at the time ^{when} he came back to Washington he came directly to the telegraph office, ^{of what he had seen} coming into my room. He sat down and told us ~~all about it with great gusto~~. Taking a sheet of our military telegraph paper he drew on it a crude diagram illustrating the arrangement of the forces in the engagement, and I remember that in the course of his description he told us two little stories, much to the disgust of Mr. Stanton who never could tolerate ~~and forgive~~ Mr. Lincoln's jocularities ^{in the midst of conferences}. One of the stories ^{he told at this time} I remember was of a man who had been much troubled by the hens scratching up his garden, and who invented what he called a "patent double back-action hen-walker." This was a kind of an attachment to the hen's leg and foot which, whenever she scratched sent her ahead until it walked her out of the garden. ^{Another was} After this story he told us of a "hen persuader," as he called it, a man who arranged a trap door under his hen's nest; when the hen had laid an egg the weight on the door opened it and the egg dropped through. The hen observing as she walked off that ^{no egg was there} she had not laid an egg was supposed to be "persuaded" to try again.

While it is true that Mr. Lincoln had a natural fondness for stories that were amusing, - or that illustrated a point, - and was not over choicewas to the nature of the story itself, I have never doubted that he indulged in their use chiefly as a diversion, to relieve the fearful burden that was constantly upon his mind during his Presidency. —