

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER LXI

- 1) Cartoon from London Punch of January 10, 1863, giving the majority English opinion at the time the Emancipation Proclamation was issued.
- 2) Public bitterness towards Lincoln in the winter of '62 - '63 was reflected in many cartoons. Here is one scoring his habit of telling stories at critical junctures, taken from Harper's Weekly of January 3, 1863. By courtesy of Harper & Brothers
- 3) An immediate effect of the Emancipation Proclamation was a startling increase in what was called "Copper Head" sentiment. This is the way one cartoonist saw it. Taken from Harper's Weekly of February 28, 1863. By courtesy of Harper & Bros.
- 4) On April 4, 1863 Lincoln reviewed the Army of the Potomac, now under Gen. Hooker, at Falmouth, Va.
No review of Northern troops during the war attracted more attention, the illustrated papers giving it special attention, partly because of the dispirited public tone.
The above picture appeared in Harper's Weekly for May 2, and shows the President and Gen. Hooker riding abreast before the troops.

(Miss Marshall: If you don't think these four are a sufficient number, please include one of the pictures that Brown copied. It seems to me, however, that the above are enough.)

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CHAPTER XLI

A New Weapon

"The harpoon was in the monster," as Lincoln said, after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed; but, as he added in the same breath, "We must look out how we stir or with one flap of his tail he will send us all into eternity."

It was misunderstanding, wilful or ignorant, of what the Proclamation pretended to do, that caused the most dangerous "flops". Lincoln had gone over to the Abolitionists, changed the object of the war, people cried. Officers, soldiers, congressmen, civilians declared they would not fight a war to free negroes. Tens of thousands of voices thundered this into his ears and acted on their threats in field and election. The political and military chaos threatening throughout the fall and winter of 1862 grew worse instead of better and none of the advantages hoped showed their heads - because Lincoln had made it war against slavery instead of against secession.

But Lincoln of course had done nothing of the kind. Now just as he had written Horace Greeley in August of 1862, what he did "about slavery and the colored race, he did because he believed it would help save the Union." The Proclamation was a "fit and necessary war measure". It freed slaves of insurgents, not because they were slaves and slavery was hateful to him, but because they were property; and to destroy the property of an enemy in war was

a right recognized by the Constitution and by all nations.

Another feature of his Proclamation which those who insisted it changed the nature of the war overlooked was that it did not free any slave outside of insurgent territory - no negro was freed in the Border States, none in those counties of Louisiana and Virginia which had come back into the Union.

For months now one of Lincoln's daily tasks was explaining what the Emancipation Proclamation did - and did not do - why it did not change the object of the war, and why he thought he had a right to issue it. He seems never to have resented these repeated calls on his time and strength. People must be made to understand - that could only be done by line upon line, precept upon precept of teaching. There is a strong similarity between his attitude towards expounding his Proclamation now and that in developing his argument against the extension of slavery in 1858 - there is the same struggle for clarity and simplicity, the same conviction that you could not take too much trouble to be understood. Obligated to go over and over his argument, explain and defend, as he was, he seems never to have grown stale or perfunctory. Indeed, the finest expression of his reasons for the Proclamation - the one with the greatest clarity and firmness - was framed eight months after he signed it, in a letter sent to a mass meeting of Unconditional Union men held in Springfield, Ill. In this letter he addresses "those who

are dissatisfied with me" - meeting their criticisms among them that of the Proclamation.

"You dislike the Emancipation Proclamation, and perhaps would have it retracted. You say it is unconstitutional. I think differently. I think the Constitution invests its Commander-in-Chief with the law of war in time of war. The most that can be said--if so much - is that slaves are property. Is there - has there ever been - any question that by the law of war, property, both of enemies and friends, may be taken when needed? And is it not needed whenever taking it helps us or hurts the enemy? Armies, the world over, destroy enemies' property when they cannot use it; and even destroy their own to keep it from their enemy.

"But the proclamation as law either is valid or is not valid. If it is not valid, it needs no retraction. If it is valid, it cannot be retracted any more than the dead can be brought to life. Some of you prefer to believe that its retraction would operate favorably for the Union. Why better after the retraction than before the issue? There was more than a year and a half of trial to suppress the rebellion before the proclamation issued; the last one hundred days of which passed under an explicit notice that it was coming, unless averted by those in revolt returning to their allegiance. The war has certainly progressed as favorably for us since the issue of the proclamation as before. I know as fully as one can know the opinions of others, that some of the commanders of our armies in the field, who have given us our most

important successes, believe the emancipation proclamation and the use of the colored troops constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion and that at least one of these important successes could not have been achieved when it was but for the aid of black soldiers. Among the commanders holding these views are some who have never had any affinity with what is called Abolitionism, or with Republican party politics, but who hold them purely as military opinions.

"You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but no matter. Fight, you, then, exclusively, to save the Union. I issued the proclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union. Whenever you shall have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time then for you to declare you will not fight to free negroes."

"Dark and doubtful days" were his portion now, but somehow, in spite of turmoil and labor and public contempt, he found time to interest himself in the private needs and ambitions of all sorts of people. His own burdens were crushing; he lightened them, forgot them, in listening to the needs of others. On the very day that he signed the Emancipation Proclamation he was so disturbed by the difficulties of an "old lady of genteel appearance" was having over her Washington boarding house that he sat down and wrote Secretary Stanton in her behalf. The lady had had a common enough war-time experience. She had fitted up a building, had boarders

in it, others "including members of Congress" engaged, and the war powers had decided she must leave. She went straight to the President for help, and here he was, on this most eventful of days, espousing her cause.

He espoused everybody's cause, wasting his time shockingly, so his official family privately thought, and by his interest and good will frequently making muddles for this or that department to straighten out. Lincoln's exhaustless curiosity about inventions, devices, natural phenomena, made him listen to people with "ideas," "discoveries" and "patents" long after they had been turned out of the departments. Frequently, in the end he had to drive them away in self-protection. There was a "weather man" to whose assurance that he could foretell rain and shine he had given attention; but the "weather man" was over persistent and Lincoln ended the welcome he had been giving him by writing on his card: -

"It seems to me Mr. Capen knows nothing about the weather in advance" He told me three days ago that it would not rain again till the 30th of April or first of May. It is raining now" ("now" was April 28th) "and has been for ten hours. I cannot spare any more time to Mr. Capen,"

which was an unusually crushing endorsement for Mr. Lincoln.

He could be crushing, however, when his patience and interest in schemes was abused. Three men who had an invention which which they warranted to end the war if the Government would only adopt it, forced their way in one day and tried to bully him.

"We have been here again and again," they reminded him.

"You have referred us to the Secretary of War, to the Chief of

Ordinance, and the General of the Army, and they give us no satisfaction. Our money and patience are exhausted, and we demand of you a final reply to our application."

Mr. Lincoln listened to them quietly. "You three gentlemen remind me of a little boy out West who was required every day to learn a chapter of the Bible by heart and recite it to the family clergyman. He did very well until he came to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. He couldn't remember the names. He was given another day and no better results; another day and still he couldn't remember them.

"I will give you one more day on this lesson," his tutor told him, "and if you don't know the names then I'll punish you."

The next day when he came to recite, the question was asked:

"Who were put into the fiery furnace."

"Oh," said the boy, "here come those three infernal bores, I wish the devil had them."

He was not troubled further by the gentlemen.

His interest seems now and then to have gotten him in deeper than in these cases. Mr. Welles has much to say in his Diary of his annoyance that Lincoln should have given the inventor of a new gun-powder a written promise of \$150,000. if it proved effective. "The President had no authority for such a promise," Welles writes irritably, "there was no appropriation in the Navy Department from which the money could be paid. The President,"

"he goes on, "has a propensity to engage in matters of this kind and is liable to be imposed upon by sharpers and adventurers. Finding the heads of departments opposed to these schemes, the President often goes behind them as in this instance, and subordinates flattered by his notice, encourage him."

It was contrary to orderly procedure, no doubt, but the harrassed President found so much diversion in considering the curious devices brought him and no doubt in those who brought them, and, as we saw above, he was so capable of taking care of himself when imposed upon that one ought to be thankful that in these hard months he had even these distractions.

His propensity to listen to people whatever their grievances, involved him sometimes against his will in factional and personal quarrels in both the civil and military establishments. All the States of the North were riven more or less by factional fights, but in none were they more persistent, bitter and noisy than in Missouri. From the beginning of the war the Unionists of the state were in a continual dispute. By the spring of '63, matters were worse than ever and the leaders were writing and visiting Lincoln, hoping to enlist his sympathy and influence. Rarely do we find him more impatient, more blunt in his disapproval than with these Missouri factions. "I have stoutly tried to keep out of the quarrel and so mean to do" he told one of them who had asked to be "sustained." But it was too much for him. "It is very

painful to me," he wrote in May just on the heels of the defeat of the Army of the Potomac at Chancellorsville, so close did troubles dove-tail in these days, dispute for his attention - "It is very painful to me that you in Missouri cannot or will not settle your factional quarrel among yourselves. I have been tormented beyond endurance for months by both sides. Neither side pays the least respect to my appeals to your reason. I am now compelled to take hold of the case."

As the factions had headed up in the Governor of the State, Gamble, and in the Commander of the Missouri Division, General S. R. Curtis, both of whom he respected and neither of whom he held responsible for the position in which they found themselves, he decided to change the commanding officer. He did not like to do it - Curtis he considered "honest, capable, faithful and patriotic" just as he considered Gamble "honest and true" but in spite of all his pleas to them to "confer," "act together," "agree," they had been unable to quell the disturbance "almost as a matter of personal self-defense" he had somehow to break up the state of things in Missouri. So he replaced Curtis by General John M. Schofield. His advice to Schofield on handling the situation is a precious bit of wisdom born of experience: - "If both factions, or neither, shall abuse you, you will probably be about right. Beware of being assailed by one, and praised by the other."

These pestiferous quarrels between supporters were more trying than the hostilities of his out-and-out enemies. He particularly

dreaded them in the army between generals, so hampering had he found them in military undertakings. Here was McClelland, determined to pick a quarrel with Halleck. Lincoln set out to stop the thing at the beginning. "I have too many family controversies, so to speak, already on my hands to voluntarily, or so long as I can avoid it, take up another. You are now doing well - well for the country, and well for yourself - much better than you could possibly be if engaged in open war with General Halleck. Allow me to beg that, for your sake, for my sake, and for the country's sake, you give your whole attention to the better work."

Here was Rosecrans, fussing about rank. "Truth to speak," Lincoln wrote him, "I do not appreciate this matter of rank on paper as you officers do. The world will not forget that you fought the battle of Stone River, and it will never care a fig whether you rank General Grant on paper or he so ranks you."

None of his letters to military men in this period compare with those to General Joseph Hooker whom he had put at the head of the Army of the Potomac when it became necessary in January to remove General Burnside. Lincoln was "not quite satisfied" with Hooker, and he told him why, in making the appointment. "You have taken counsel of your ambition and thwarted him (General Burnside) as much as you could." . . . "I have heard in such a way as to believe it of your recently saying that both the army and the government need a dictator." . . . "I much fear that the spirit you have aided to infuse into the army, of criticizing their commander and withholding

confidence from him will now turn upon you."

It was not because of these things, he said, but in spite of them that he gave Hooker the command. He would risk the dictatorship, for "only generals who gain successes can setup dictators," and he closed his letter with the fine advice: "Beware of rashness, but with energy, sleepless vigilance, go forward and give us victories."

Taking this letter to Hooker all in all it is one of his best, standing easily, I think, in his greatest dozen - a very great dozen indeed!

From the time of the appointment - January 26, 1863 - Lincoln kept up his fatherly and frank letters to the general. They are full of sound military sense - the kind of directness and straight thinking that characterized his letters to McClellan, and in them are found several of his happiest homely illustrations, as when he told Hooker who faced Lee, the Rappahannock between them:

"I would not take any risk of being entangled upon the river, like an ox jumped half over a fence and liable to be torn by dogs front and rear without a fair chance to gore one way or kick the other," - or this equally vivid piece of military wisdom: "If the head of Lee's army is at Martinsburg and the tail of it on the plank road between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, the animal must be very slim somewhere. Could you not break him?"

It was natural enough with the President writing him so familiarly that Hooker should have fallen into the habit of communicating his plans and sending his information directly to him,

instead of to Halleck, the General-in-Chief of all the armies; and military etiquette and discipline being what it is it was inevitable that Halleck should finally become irritated at what he felt was a disrespect on Hooker's part. His displeasure convinced Hooker that the major-general commanding had withdrawn his confidence and he so wrote to the President. What a sense of human relations Lincoln had to put his finger so immediately on the real difficulty: -

"I believe Halleck is dissatisfied with you to this extent only," he wrote Hooker, "that he knows that you write and telegraph ('report' he calls it) to me. I think he is wrong to find fault with this; but I do not think he withholds any support from you on account of it. If you and he would use the same frankness to one another and to me, that I use to both of you, there would be no difficulty. I need and must have the professional skill of both and yet these suspicions tend to deprive me of both. . . . All I ask is that you will be in such mood that we can get into our action the best cordial judgment of yourself and General Halleck, with my poor mite added, if indeed he and you shall think it entitled to any consideration at all."

Failure was following Hooker as it had McClellan and Burnside. In May came the defeat at Chancellorsville - early in June Lee's escape from his position on the Rappahannock and his race for Pennsylvania, Hooker after him. Never did Lincoln feel himself a greater failure. Indeed through all these

disastrous months since the issuing of the Proclamation he had felt so keenly that he was not saving the Union, possibly was not keeping enough popular confidence ever to save it, that he had cast about for some way in which he could aid the Democrats - to whom popular sympathy seemed to be swinging - to save it when they came into power. He was quite ready to throw his influence for the next term of the presidency to any Democrat who would place himself at the head of a coalition union party. ^{had} It seemed to him ^{in the fall of 1862} when Horatio Seymour was elected governor of New York that he might be the man and he sent for Thurlow Weed. Weed found the President in a black mood. "Everything goes wrong," he complained. "The rebel armies hold their own; Grant is wandering around in Mississippi; Burnside manages to keep ahead of Lee; Seymour has carried New York; and, if his party carries and holds many of the Northern States, we shall have to give up the fight, for we can never conquer three-quarters of our countrymen, scattered in front, flank and rear. . . .

"Governor Seymour could do more for our cause than any other man living," he went on. "If he would come to the front he could control his partisans and give a new impetus to the war. Go to him. Tell him I do not wish to be President again, and that the leader of the other party, provided it is in favor of a rigorous war against the rebellion should have my place. If he will, as he easily can, place himself at the head of a great union party, I will gladly stand aside and help to put him in the Executive Chair. All we want is to have the Rebellion put down."

Weed took the message to Governor Seymour, who apparently agreed; but, as Weed said in telling the story, "Seymour's feeling was always right but his head was generally wrong." When the message came, far from being an appeal to save the Union, it was an arraignment of the efforts the Republicans were making to save it.

Lincoln tried again, this time sending Weed to McClellan whose popularity with his party seems to have been increased by his removal from the command of the Army of the Potomac. "Tell him," ordered Lincoln, "that if he will come forward and put himself at the head of a Union-Democratic party and push forward the Union cause, I will gladly step aside and do all I can to secure his election in 1864."

McClellan professed to be eager to do all he could to put down the Rebellion and agreed to preside at a Union-Democratic mass meeting to be held in June, 1863, in Union Square, New York. Three days before the meeting he withdrew. His letter of declination was warm in its assurance that he believed "the war must be prosecuted to save the Union and the Government at whatever cost of time and treasure and blood" but apparently he feared saying that at a coalition meeting might encourage the Republicans.

Everything failed. There was incessant fighting without victories of note; envy and quarreling between generals; soldiers deserting because of the Emancipation Proclamation; disunion in his own party because of it; England still hostile because of the blockade and worrying the navy with privateers; even his Democratic opponents refused his offers to withdraw in exchange for a vigorous

prosecution of the war!

Yet, as long as he was responsible he would yield not an inch of his policy, he must do the thing as he saw it and trust to God to show him his errors. *How much* of his struggle, his despair and his faith can be read in his proclamation setting aside April 30, (1863) as a National Fast Day.

"And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that these nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord:

"And inasmuch as we know that by his divine law nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people? We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings

were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us:

"It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."

This Proclamation was no perfunctory state document. It was born of the man's incessant meditation in those hard days upon the meaning behind the struggle. God allowed it. Why? Among his published papers this scrap - written in September '62, the month when he issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, shows where his mind had been: -

"The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, one of the best adaptation to effect His purpose - I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest and wills that it shall not end yet. By His mere great power on the minds of the now contestants he could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest, yet the contest began. And having begun he could give the final victory to either side any day. And

yet the contest proceeds."

And so he meditated while men raged around and at him. He was a dictator - a cruel dictator, destroying the liberties of men, for it was not only defeats and interference with slavery that brought criticism and wrath upon him in these days. It was his treatment of those in civil life who interfered with his handling of the war; his "arrests, banishments and assessments," as he called them.

How about it? Was Lincoln giving beyond his constitutional rights? Was he playing dictator? We can best answer that inquiry by looking in our next chapter into what he was doing.