

IN MR. LINCOLN'S TOWN

By

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Other Billy Brown Stories

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(In the thirty-five years that it has been my privilege to keep in touch with the life of Abraham Lincoln, I have known many a man and woman who had been his friend, neighbor, professional or political associate. No one among them all has left with me so strong a sense of accepting intimate unselfish friendship as the original of the Billy Brown of this story.

When I knew him in the '90s, he was "keeping drug store" in Springfield, Illinois, as he had done since sometime in the '40s. Humorous, wise, companionable, Billy had always drawn to him men of parts, who had an appreciation of native, salty qualities, among them Abraham Lincoln, who in the '40s and '50s, dropped in so often for talk and story telling, that he came to have his own special chair by Billy's stove.

There is hardly an important event in Mr. Lincoln's life on which Billy and I did not touch in our talks, and always he was ready with shrewd and affectionate comments.

In the present story I have attempted to give Billy's explanation of Mr. Lincoln's retirement from public life in '49, his return in '54.)

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"What's the matter, Billy, something gone wrong?
I had dropped into Billy Brown's drug store on the Public Square of Springfield, hoping to find him free for what he loved as well as I did - a talk about Mr. Lincoln. The prospect was not hopeful. Billy plainly was cross. He banged the big glass jar from which he'd been measuring quinine back to its place on the shelf, he dusted the scales with an angry flourish

and when he rinsed his hands in the wash basin at the back of the store, he did it with an impatient splash that sent the water flying and made him mutter something which sounded like "Gosh dang it."

But as I'd heard Billy himself say apologetically more than once, he "just couldn't stay mad". He didn't now. His face cleared with the drying of his hands and he came back to the front of the store, a welcoming if slightly sheepish smile on his face.

"Glad to see ye," he said. "Come in and take 'The Chair' - 'The Chair' being the sacred old Windsor in which, as Billy never failed to tell a visitor of whom he approved, Mr. Lincoln had "set for hours and hours back in the '40s and '50s."

"Yes, sir, I wuz out of temper - all right now. It wuz that feller you see goin' out as you kum along. Been in here whinin' about bein' a failure - I'll have to admit he's havin' a hard time - had to give up a little business he'd started - too bad, but what's that? He's got his trade, ain't he? Started his business on that and nothin' can take that away. More'n that he's got a good wife and he owns his home and he's ain't got any debts but what he can work out - and here he is tellin' what a hard time he's havin' and how he's lost his courage and that a man who's nearin' forty ain't got any chance and the country's goin' to the dogs - monopoly eatin' it up.

"Well, I finally bust right out and I said "See here, Jim, you ought to be ashamed of yourself - you born in this town where Abraham Lincoln lived and where his grave is talkin' about givin' up at forty. Think you're the only man who ever had to

start over - thought he's lost everything. You ain't as old as Abraham Lincoln wuz when he thought that. What did he do? He did just what you'd oughter do and would if you want a baby. He went to work at his old trade and that's what you got to do - went to work and he came out a bigger man than he'd ever been if he hadn't had all that trouble - Git out'a here and git a job.

"Well, Jim looked sorter scared, said somethin' about not bein' any Abraham Lincoln which it wasn't necessary to tell me, and he went off. If he don't git some carpenter work right away, I'm goin' after him. Blamed if I'll see any man in Mr. Lincoln's town give up at forty if I can help it.

"Believe that - Billy. That Mr. Lincoln would never have been the great man he was if it hadn't been for his losing out in '49?

"Believe it - course I do, know it - know it because I saw it - went on right under my eyes. Didn't I see nearly everybody in his party goin' back in '49 - not wantin' him any longer in office - sorter shovin' him off the shelf. Yes, sir, there he wuz forty years old and whut out's the kind of life he wanted most. No mistake about it Mr. Lincoln wuz what you might call a natural politician, liked politics betterin' anything else - sight betterin' he did law I allus thought. Course he had to have a trade and in them times law seemed to be what you had to know if you wuz seekin' office - so he studied law but he wuz in politics before he

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took that up. started almost as soon as he landed in old Sangamaw early in the 30's. I hear them historians sayin' sometimes that it was Mary Lincoln who pushed him into politics. Humph - He wuz seekin' office long before he ever saw her - Been at it ten years before he ever married her.

Easy for him to git elected in them days. People liked him and I tell you we boys wuz his friend from the first. You've heard how he piloted a steamboat down the Sangamaw from up near here - first one - and I reckon the only one ever got anywhere near this town. A pilot on a steamboat them days looked to a boy like a locomotive engineer ^{does} ~~is~~ to one nowadays. Then he went to war - Indian War - made Captain - and that made him popular, and then he got the capitol for Springfield - at least he wuz one of them that got it, but somehow he seemed to get most of the credit. People wuz allus talkin' about him - tellin' funny things he'd said - listen' to his opinion. There wasn't any doubt this District thought a sight of Mr. Lincoln and his party wuz allus willin' to give him an office when it could.

They sent him to Congress in '49. He wuz tickled to death about goin' and so wuz Mary Lincoln. I don't wonder, she'd been pretty poor ever since she married Mr. Lincoln - couldn't have a lot of things she'd been used to and goin' to Washington just suited her. Reekon she expected to make quite a splurge down there - thought they'd make a lot of her because she was a Kentucky Todd.

"Well as I wuz sayin' they went down the fall of '47 - you oughter seen Mr. Lincoln when he went off - so smilin' and happy, standin' up straight like he did when things were goin' to suit him or when he'd got a big fight on and had his mind clear. I never like to think of the difference between him then and the way he wuz lookin' after two years or so when he wuz back to stay. Greatest change.

"What wuz the matter? Well you know they didn't send him back to Congress, but 'tan't that. I reckon he didn't expect that much for he must a seen this District wuz goin' Democratic. The Whigs - Mr. Lincoln wuz a Whig - wuz goin' to pieces out here. I reckon he knew we'd elect our man like we did. No 'twan't not goin' back to Congress. But he did think he'd get an office from the government. He'd worked hard to elect old Zack Taylor President, made speeches up in New England - out here - wrote letters - give all his time to it - and I reckon he expected something. Mary Lincoln did you ^{better} believe, but somehow he spiled the hull business of office gettin' - fer himself and what wuz worse fer his popularity out here - fer his friends. Didn't git anything to speak of fer anybody. They do say he could'a been made governor in Oregon, but Oregon didn't look like much in the '40s and then Mary Lincoln never a' done that after havin' been East and seen Washington and New York and got it into her head that she'd git to Europe some day. Least that's what the women said.

"What he wanted and tried hard to git wuz the Land

Office down in Washington - that wuz a good job - paid well. He wanted it and tried hard to git it but trouble was he didn't go after it fer himself till after he'd tried to git it fer one of his friends. He did his best fer this man - name was Cyrus Edwards lived down to Edwardsville - and when he saw he couldn't he tried fer himself, but it was too late.

But wasn't only his not bein' any great shakes at gettin' offices that soured people on him out here. It was the way he went on in Congress about the Mexican war not bein' just and necessary, as the President was trying to get Congress to say it wuz. He didn't think so - wouldn't say so. Made speeches that were mighty unpopular out here with everybody. You got to remember there were a lot of our boys down there fightin' - boys from Whig homes as well as Democrat homes. We wuz in the war, our folks were gettin' wounded and killed and there wasn't anything to do but git through best we could - and here wuz Lincoln assertin' it wuz wrong - sorter pokin' fun at the President for gettin' us into it.

"Bein' a Democrat that made me mad. It was our war and we wan't goin' to stand any Whig even if it wuz Mr. Lincoln standin' up in Congress and making fun of it like he did. Seemed to me fer a fact, he sorter did drive the President into a corner but I wouldn't say so then. People felt so strong about it, some of Mr. Lincoln's friends got scared at what he wuz doin'. Billy Herndon - that wuz his law partner - tried to call him off. Herndon told me Mr. Lincoln just skinned him when he answered.

'What would you have me do?' he wrote back. 'skulk the vote? Lie when I vote? Well I won't do it and neither would you.'

"Well", said Herndon. 'He thinks he's right and when he thinks he's right, you never can stop him, but he's hurtin' the party and he's hurtin' himself, and so he wuz and so he found out when he got home. 'Stead of crowds of people pushin' up to shake hands like he'd been used to, lots of 'em kinda hung off - wan't hearty like they used to be. Young men in the party didn't hang around askin' advice like they used to. I reckon it looked to him a little mite as if the time had come when the youngsters he'd known wuz goin' to try to edge him off the shelf. Quite a puzzlin' and a discouragin' thing for a man. It's a good deal like discoverin' you're growin' old. Well Mr. Lincoln had that to face, when he got back from Congress. All comin' together as it did he wuz pretty blue, - went around quiet-like, his head down, didn't come in here like he used to, when he did, didn't tell so many stories. 'Mr. Lincoln's got the blues', boys used to say. The Democrats wuz tickled. I wan't. I felt plumb bad seein' him like that.

"I reckon he didn't get much help home either. Mary Lincoln had got it into her head she was goin' to live in Washington - she'd talked a lot about it - sort of set up - so the women said. Natural enough - she didn't like comin' back here any too well, didn't like his bein' set aside any better than he did. I reckon she took it out on him at home sometimes. Mighty oncertain in her temper. But when she'd

had a cross spell she allud did her best to make up for it - 'specially if 'twuz the children. Call 'em over next day - mebbe that night - give 'em pop-corn, make 'em candy.

"Out our way it got to be so everybody kept out of sight when she had a tantrum. You couldn't help knowin' it. Scold so you could hear her down the street. They say she used to chase Mr. Lincoln out of the house sometimes with a broomstick. I asked Ma about that onct and she said: 'William I don't want you to listen to all the things they say about Mrs. Lincoln. Taint right to spread 'em, only makes it harder for him if he knows we're talkin'. Of course Mrs. Lincoln's got a temper, but don't you blame her too much. He ain't so easy fer her to live with. He's careless about things. She wants things nice and wants them proper. He don't know when they're nice and when they aint. He's too natural to be proper like she understands it - then he's allus kind to all kinds and she don't like riff raff around.'

"Well you kin understand how all this made him gloomy. Party gone back on him - losin' friends and the everlastin' naggin' and complainin' at home. He began to look bad - awful bad.

"'Peelin' a little out of sorts ain'tt you Mr. Lincoln' I sez to him one day in here when I couldn't keep still any longer.

"'I ain't sleepin' so good, Billy' he said. I knew it. Not long before I'd heard one of the boys who'd been on the Circuit with him worryin' about the way he acted. Said one night he waked up - you know in them old taverns those days they all slept together in one big room - Well he waked up and there wuz Mr. Lincoln settin' up in bed mutterin' to himself, pretty soon he got up and set by the fire lookin' as if he wished he wuz dead - Probably did. Lots of men goin' through a discouragin' spell such as he wuz havin' would be glad enuff to die - easiest way out.

"He wuz havin' black nights. Curious how a man's mind jumps from one thing to another when he's lying awake worryin'. Can't keep it settled on anything. If he aint well, he sees himself dyin' of consumption or somethin' and then he goes to

wonderin' what his wife will do - how she's goin' to get along without any more'n he'll leave and then he remembers some money he ain't paid and thinks he'll never git far enuff ahead to pay it and he sees his children growin' up without the education he meant to give 'em - the boys turnin' out bad and the girls marryin' no-account men. And then he gits to thinkin' how if he done this or hadn't done that, everything would have been different and he gets to pityin' himself and wonderin' how 'twould be if he'd take something and git out of trouble onct fer all. I tell you things kin look mighty queer nights when you can't sleep and you git to worryin'.

"I reckon Mary Lincoln wan't exactly soothin' when he got to tossin' about. Now Ma's different. She's allus real understandin' allus suggestin' something she thinks might help. 'Count yourself to sleep William' she sez to me the other night when I got to worryin'. Humph, I'd been tryin' that fer an hour or more and every time I'd got to about ten May'd go my mind chasin' down some new kind of tribulation.

"Well, somehow Ma allus soothes me down no matter what she says and I like to tease her. ~~Ma's like a cat~~. So what I'd do but begin to count out loud - top of my voice - 'one - two - three' - but before I got to ten we wuz both laffin' and then next thing I knew it was mornin. I'd had a good sleep.

"But Mary Lincoln wan't like Ma. When he wan't sleepin' good like as not she'd scold. There wuz those who said it wuz on account of her scoldin' so much that he didn't come home regular over Sunday when he wuz ridin' the circuit.

You know how the lawyers did them days - went from town to town follerin' the judge who wuz holdin' Court - started out in March and got back in June - out again in September and back first of December. Most everybody from here got back home Sundays, but Mr. Lincoln stayed away a lot - Boys used to speak about it pityin' like.

"What wuz savin' him wuz the way he went to work at the law. As soon as he saw he wan't goin' to get an office, he buckled down to work in a way that everybody noticed. You see he had never been what you might call larned in law, that is he never had burnt no midnight oil over books - too all-fired interested in folks doings and the way they go on - sorter tried his cases on what he knew about human nature and then too he'd been so taken up with politics and away in Washington two years, that all told he hadn't made much out of law. But I tell you, 'twuz different now. Here he wuz forty years old, practice all gone and understandin' a big sight better'n' he did when he went to Congress that he didn't really know much. What he'd do? Go around like Jim is sayin' he wuz a failure and everybody wuz agin him? Nothin' of the sort. He went to work - went to readin' nights - wuld come downtown after supper and 'stead of joining the boys over in the Court House or comin' in here would go to his office and read and read. I've heard Herndon tell how when they wuz off on the Circuit, while the rest of 'em wuz sleepin' he'd prop himself up in bed and read and study 'til one or two o'clock in the mornin'. He'd make up his mind he wuz goin' to know what he

wuz about - wuz goin' to be as good a lawyer as the best of 'em.

"They all said he took a lot of care with his cases - more'n he ever thought'a doin' before. Every now and then somebody comes in with a piece of his writin' showin' how he'd figured out a case on paper, before he went into court. His handwritin' was small and careful - took pains with it allus - used to surprise me to see how neat it wuz. I reckon he argued writin' wuz meant to be read and it ought to be done so you wouldn't have trouble with it. Anyway he wrote plain and small. These pieces on his cases showed how he worked to get the thing clear in his mind. He put down the pints just as he'd worked 'em out - tickled me to see how they all fitted together - no screws loose - and there were never no words used I didn't know - nuthin' a jury couldn't understand and then sometimes he'd set down one his unexpected sayin's - make you laugh - sounded so like him.

"There's a piece that's been passed around often here - showin' how he tried a case for a poor old womin-widder of a soldier that had fit in the Revolution - He had put down all the things on which he wuz goin' to argue and then he ended up Skin Def't just like that" and Billy stopped his monologue long enough to print the words on a piece of paper. "Skin Def't. "and I tell you," he went on, "they said he did it - made the man that was tryin' to skin her curl up in his chair. Of course he got her off and Herndon allus claimed he didn't charge her a cent - beside payin' her hotel bill and buyin' her ticket back home.

"He wuz funny about chargin' - seemed allus to be seein' the other side - wonderin' how much he'd earned - I've known of his sendin' back part of the money some one had sent him - 'what I done wan't worth as much as you've sent - I'm sending back part'. His bein' queer about money wuz all a part of something he seemed to be tryin' to work out after he went back to studyin' and practicin' and that wuz how you could be a good lawyer and a good man at one and the same time. I reckon there's trades outside of law where 'twouldn't hurt to figger on that proposition. Mr. Lincoln seemed to me to be tryin' to work out some rules - things he oughtn't to do ever. One wuz never to let people go to law if he could help it - Try to get 'em to settle.

"I recollect how one night when we got to talkin' in here while he wuz waitin' for my closin' time, so we could walk up street together, that he got to tellin' me about some trouble he'd been havin' tryin' to settle a case a loud-mouthed preacher who lived out in the country wanted him to bring against a man that Mr. Lincoln knew real well, knew he wuz fair and honest, ^Ryou'd think a preacher would want to settle, wouldn't you Billy. Think the last thing he'd ever try to do would be to go to law - but here's this feller bellowin' and threatenin' and I don't believe what he sez can be true. At any rate I've been workin' at him all day tryin' to get him to settle - told him that if he would, I wouldn't charge him a cent and would thank him to boot. Hope he does.

"I've made up my mind, Billy, now that I'm goin'

back to law for good and all that I ain't goin' to drag folks into court if I can help it.

"Well, his workin' so hard and these curious ways of his - bein' so generous and fair and bein' so kind - took hold all over the Circuitt. It wan't more'n three or four years before everybody wuz wantin' Mr. Lincoln and he wuz beginnin' to get big cases - Illinois Railroad - big Patent cases. I've allus thought you might hev seen him going down to New York and Washington and mebbe Boston tryin' cases if it hadn't happened sudden like - after bein' out five years - he went back back to politics.

Of course you know what brought him back was the slavery question - their tryin' to get it into a part of the country that everybody had agreed for thirty years and more wuz allus to be free. Settled, just as settled as Constitution.

"There'd been a lot of excitement and talkin' and fussin' all the time Mr. Lincoln was in Congress about lettin' slavery into the land we took from Mexico after the War. Trouble wan't over when he left. 'Twant over 'till sometime in '50. Then they made up a lot of new laws - called 'em the Compromise - Best thing about it wuz that when they got through there wan't a foot of soil in the hul United States that wan't fixed as far as slavery went. You knew what wuz free and you knew what wuz slave. Of course everybody hoped they'd stop arguin' then - South be satisfied with she'd got - North be satisfied with what she'd got.

I asked Mr. Lincoln in here one night what he thought about the way 'twas fixt up. He looked at me kinda queer.

"Well, Billy' he said, 'it aint what I'd liked to have seen, but lookin' at it all around I reckon its the best we could do. Clay thought so. Webster thought so and they're the biggest men we've got. Better to trade even if you don't git all you want than to break up the country - or go to war' - And he went off, head down, lookin' worried.

"Seemed fer a long time as if 'twas goin' to be a law about sendin' back runaway slaves that would stir up trouble. Pretty harsh law. Couldn't get it obeyed. Why, we wuz railroadin' slaves through to Canada right here in Illinois and plenty of people who talked about the duty of obeyin' the laws shuttin' their eyes. I'm a Democrat - allus wuz - believed we oughtn't to do anything to excite the South which wuz getting bitterer and bitterer over the way the abolitionists talked and acted. But I never took no pains to locate an underground railroad station.

"'spite of all the talk and hard feelin's over the Fugitive Slave law as they called it, 'twant that that made real trouble again. It was something nobody ever would have thought of happenin'. It wuz the south tryin' to git slaves into the land that had been made free in 1830 - Might as well hev tried to git 'em into Illinois or Wisconsin or Iowa and worst of all fer us out here wuz that one of our own senators, Stephen Douglas - 'Little Doug' we called him - 'bout the

smartest and most popular man in the country, if I do say it - fixt it up for them. Came about this way.

"Douglas had allus been interested in gettin' territories opened up - wanted to see all the West country, what's now Kansas and Nebraska brought in - wanted a railroad to the Pacific - and he had a bill fixin' it - all right enuff - good thing - people wanted it - but along early in '54 he found out his bill wan't like to git through if he didn't change it so slaves could be taken in in case the settlers wanted 'em. Well, you'd never thought he'd hev listened to that talk - why he himself had said more'n onot that the Missouri Compromise - that's what they called the law makin' Nebraska free - wuz sacred - Yes sir, that's the word he used sacred, sacred as the Constitution.

"And then he puts in a bill that repeals it and Congress passes it.

"Well, you could almost heard a pin drop out here when news of that Repeal first come and then such an uproar as bust out - Same everywhere. Whole North mad - fightin' mad - lots of Democrats talkin' about leavin' the party. 'Course Douglas had to come out and explain. When he got to Chicago they tolled the bells - put crape on the door - First time he tried to talk up there they hooted and hissed him 'til he got mad and told 'em to go to Hell, he wuz goin' to bed.

When he went to a new town to speak he was likely to see himself hangin' to a lamp post and when he rode across country to see himself bein' burned alive. They called him

all sorts of names - 'Traitor', 'Judas Iscariot', said he wuz workin' for the Catholics.

But you couldn't scare Douglas. More'n that he loved a fight - loved to bring people over to his side - and he wuz doin' it too. He talked his way down from Chicago to Springfield gittin' stronger every day so they said. He's got an argument nobody could answer - the party claimed.

It wuz Fair time when he came here. Ever been to one of our State fairs? Well, you've missed something. Still they ain't what they were back in the '50s. Kebbe I'm gettin' old but some way I don't seem to enjoy 'em as I did then. One thing's sure they don't have no such speakin' as we did then. Take the time Douglas came - seemed as if hull state wuz here - he spoke three hours and they'd have listened three hours more I reckon. I know I would. 'Twant so much what he said, I reckon, as 'twas the way he put a spell on you. When he walked in onto that platform so proud and elegant you'd have done anything for him - he wuz that dominatin'. Short man. Stocky. Wonderful head. Big flashing eyes - bushy hair - Allus seemed to me he looked like a president ought to - wore his clothes like one. Walked like one, - and that's what we all thought he'd be sooner or later - President - President of the United States.

That day he came to the Fair to tell what the Repeal meant - he seemed somehow bigger than ever, more dominatin'.

One thing he wuz mad - fightin' mad. You knew that as soon as he began to talk and you knew, too, he didn't think any too highly of those who were attackin' him.

Had a voice that lifted you up and carried you along so you didn't care what he wuz sayin', you liked so to listen to it. It could be soft and mellow and it could roar like a bull. He roared a lot that day, stormin' up and down the platform and shakin' his big bushy head 'til you couldn't think of anything but a lion - mad and let loose. You ought to have heard the crowd cheer him. He had us. We went home sayin' he couldn't be answered - that of course people ought to have a right to decide what kind of property they'd have in a new state - Congress ought never to have passed a law takin' that right away. I believed it - till I heard Mr. Lincoln next day.

"Yes, it wuz Mr. Lincoln they put up to answer him. He wuz back in the party now ^{workin' for} ~~makin' trouble~~ ^{workin' for} ~~and wait~~ ^{workin' for} - The minute he'd heard about that Repeal he said 'Boys nuthin' else ever would have brought me back into politics, but we've got to fight this or we're going to have slavery all over this country. If you can take it into territory made free the way Nebraska wuz you can take it into Illinois - and if they gft it into Nebraska - like as not we'll live to see 'em get it into Illinois.'

"He began right off to write articles to the newspapers and make speeches but I hadn't paid no attention. First time I heard him wuz when he answered Douglas. I went

feelin' a little sorry for him. Didn't expect much. Good many like me. What could you expect of a man who'd failed like Lincoln, answering a big man like Douglas - a man likely to be President of the United States before he died, so we all thought.

I'll never get over bein' surprised at that speech - He hadn't been talkin' any time at all before I saw this wasn't Mr. Lincoln as I'd been figgerin' him - this wasn't the Mr. Lincoln I'd heard speak time and time again at political meetin's. This wuz a big man - a man I didn't know. He wan't pokin' fun, wan't tellin' stories. He wuz arguin' and the more he talked the bigger he looked.

Don't you know how you feel when somebody comes along and challenges the best fighter in town - one you've allus put your money on, and you see right away he's got a punch your man ain't used to - don't know how to get away from.¹ Well, Mr. Lincoln hadn't talked a half an hour before I saw he knew how to hit and where to hit that argument of Douglas and I see too that it wuz a blow Douglas wan't expectin' and didn't like - made him mad - more'n once he jumped up right there on the platform and tried to break in. Bad fer a man in a fight to get mad.

"Didn't bother Mr. Lincoln - his breaking in-only seemed to make him pound harder on that ~~argument~~ ^{point} I thought - the night before nobody could answer one about people havin'

the right to take in or keep out of a state any kind of property./ Their business. They oughter be allowed to settle it. (That's all right, Mr. Lincoln said when you legislate about oyster beds or hogs or cranberry bogs, but it aint when you talkin' about men. If a negro is a man you can't treat him like you do hogs!') You ought to have heard the crowd cheer when he said that.

"It wuz curious the way he passed over a lot Douglas said - give you an idea he wan't goin' to waste any time on what he didn't think necessary to what he wuz drivin' at - and I saw clear as day that what he wuz drivin' at wuz that unless we stopped slavery spreadin' it wuz goin' to be all over the country and that mustn't be because slavery wuz wrong.

"And he made you feel it wuz wrong. Gorter convinced you of sin fer not comin' out sayin' so bold like he wuz doin', no matter if they did call you abolitionist - say you wanted a nigger wife.

"But the most surprisin' thing wuz his not bein' afraid of Douglas - not afraid to grab him and pound him - more'n that you knew he wasn't goin' to be satisfied until he had fought the thing to a finish - He wuz in it fer keeps. He wuz goin' to break Douglas' argument or die atryin'.

"I wan't the only one that went home from that speech bothered in my mind. Day before I'd been that proud of Little Doug - all set up because he wuz my candidate, but after hearin' Mr. Lincoln - Well as I say I wuz bothered - so wuz Douglas,

and wan't long before he wuz tryin' to get rid of debatin' with Mr. Lincoln.

"But twant any use. Mr. Lincoln followed him around - allus after him - poundin' so hard you began to feel almost sorry fer him - him a champion havin' to pay attention to a man who hadn't any record - never had won a big fight in his life.

"Well you know how it came out. Took Mr. Lincoln four years to get Douglas face to face fer a real show down. Fall of '58 that big fight came off and when it wuz over Illinois had a new champion.

"Puzzled me a lot about what had happened to him - What made him all of a sudden a big man - him that I'd been lookin' at as a failure. It's clear as day to me now that the five years or so when he wuz goin' around, workin' at the law, something wuz happenin' that give him a big advantage. He didn't see it then - reckon he felt bitter and jealous soometimes seein' Douglas goin' ahead so fast and he set aside. But bein' out of politics give him time to think and study things over. He'd been followin' that slavery discussion down in Congress and natural enuff he read everything that went on after he got out. Studied it hard, so Billy Herndon said - never got excited about it - never said anything - just studied it - makin' up his mind what the country ought to do - whether it ought ever to risk a war - He'd got it thought out, so far's he wuz concerned - Slavery mustn't go any further - and when they tried to push it further

there wuz nothing fer him to do but fight.

"You know that hymn they sing in church?" and to the old tune of Bedford Billy intoned in what was left of a once deep and mellow bass the stately phrases, 'God works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform'. Well, that wuz sure so in Mr. Lincoln's case. You'd never thought seein' him goin' about so gloomy and so hard workin' that the Lord was gettin' him ready for the biggest job any man has had to handle in this country since we started. But there ain't no other way to explain it. When the Lord took Mr. Lincoln out of politics, sent him back to work, he give him the biggest advantage a man can have - the chance to think things out.