

Copy I.

Report of interview with
Lincoln by Jesse W. Fell.

In the fall of 1858, during the discussion between Senator Douglas and Mr. Lincoln, I had occasion to visit the Middle and Eastern States; and as the whole country was then agitated by the slavery question and that discussion cut a prominent figure in the agitation, I was frequently applied to for information in reference to Mr. Lincoln. I felt my State pride flattered by these inquiries, and still more to find the New York Tribune, and other papers, publishing copious extracts from these discussions, taken from the Chicago press. I did what little I could to satisfy so laudable a curiosity, not thinking, at first, that anything further would come of this discussion, in reference to Mr. Lincoln, than his election to the Senate. At length from the frequency of these inquiries and public notices of the Illinois contest, an impression began to form, that by judicious efforts he could be made the Republican candidate for presidency in 1860. Very soon after my return home, and after the senatorial contest had closed, one evening, as I passed on the south side of the public square of this city, I espied the tall form of Mr. Lincoln emerging from the court-house door, Judge Davis's court then being in session. I stopped until he came across the street, when, after the usual salutations, I asked him to go with me into my brother's (K. N. Fell) law-office, then kept over what is now the Home Bank. There we sat down, and in the calm twilight of the evening, had substantially the following conversation:--Fell.---"Lincoln,
Lincoln said he
I have been East, as far as Boston, and up into New Hampshire, traveling in all the New England States, save Maine: in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Indiana; and everywhere I hear you talked about. Very frequently I have been asked: 'Who is this man Lincoln, of your State, now canvassing in opposition to Senator Douglas?' Being,

of your State, now canvassing in opposition to Senator Douglas?' Being, as you know, an ardent Republican and your friend, I usually told them we had in Illinois two giants instad of one; that Douglas was the little one, as they all knew, but that you were the big one, which they didn't all know.

"But, seriously, Lincoln, Judge Douglas being so widely known, you are getting a national reputation through him, as the result of the late discussion; your speeches, in whole or in part, on both sides, have been pretty extensively published in the East; you are there regarded by discriminating minds as quite a match for him in debate, and the

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truth is, I have a decided impression that if your popular history and efforts on the slavery question can be sufficiently brought before the people, you can be made a formidable, if not a successful, candidate for the presidency."

He said
Lincoln.---"Oh, Fell, what's the use of talking of me for the presidency, whilst we have such men as Seward, Chase and others, who are so much better known to the people, and whose names are so intimately associated with the principles of the Republican party. Everybody knows them; nobody, scarcely, outside of Illinois, knows me. Besides, is it not, as a matter of justice, due to such men, who have carried this movement forward to its present status, in spite of fearful opposition, personal abuse, and hard names? I really think so."

Fell.---"There is much truth in what you say. The men you allude to, occupying more prominent positions, have undoubtedly rendered a larger service in the Republican cause than you have; but the truth is, they have rendered too much service to be available candidates. Placing it on the grounds of personal services, or merit, if you please, I concede at once the superiority of their claims. Personal services and merit, however, when incompatible with the public good, must be laid aside. Seward and Chase have both made long records on the slavery question, and have said some very radical things, which, however just and true in themselves, and however much these men may challenge

just and true in themselves, and however much these men may challenge our admiration for their courage and devotion to unpopular truths, would seriously damage them in the contest, if nominated. We must bear in mind, Lincoln, that we are yet in a minority; we are struggling against fearful odds for supremacy. We were defeated on this same issue in 1856, and will be again in 1860, unless we get a great many new votes from what may be called the old conservative parties. These will be repelled by the radical utterances and votes of such men as Seward and Chase. What the Republican party wants, to insure success, in 1860, is a man of popular origin, of acknowledged ability, committed against slavery aggressions, who has no record to defend and no radicalism of an offensive character to repel votes from parties hitherto adverse. Your discussion with Judge Douglas has demonstrated your ability and

your devotion to freedom; you have no embarrassing record; you have sprung from the humble walks of life, sharing in its toils and trials; and if we can only get these facts sufficiently before the people, depend upon it, there is some chance for you. And now, Mr. Lincoln, I come to the business part of this interview. My native State, Pennsylvania, will have a large number of votes to cast for somebody on the question we have been discussing. Pennsylvania don't like, over much, New York and her politicians. She has a candidate, Cameron, of her own; but he will not be acceptable to a larger part of her own people, much less abroad, and will be dropped. Through an eminent jurist and essayist of my native county in Pennsylvania, favorably known throughout the State, I want to get up a well-considered, well-written newspaper article telling the people who you are and what you have done, that it may be circulated, not only in that State, but elsewhere, and thus help in manufacturing sentiment in your favor. I know your public life, and can furnish items that your modesty would forbid, but I don't know much about your private history: when you were born, and where, the names and origin of your parents, what you did in early life, what your opportu-

origin of your parents, what you did in early life, what your opportunities for education, etc., and I want you to give me these. Won't you do it?"

(2) Lincoln. ~~---#~~ "Well, I admit the force of much that you say, and admit that I am ambitious, and would like to be President. I am not insensible to the compliment you pay me, and the interest you manifest in the matter; but there is no such good luck in store for me as the presidency of these United States; besides, there is nothing in my early history that would interest you or anybody else; and, as Judge Davis says, 'It won't pay.' Good night." *and he disappeared in the darkness #*

And thus ended, for the time being, my pet scheme of helping to make Lincoln President. I notified him, however, as his giant form, wrapped in a dilapidated shawl, disappeared in the darkness, that this was not the last of it; that the facts must come. The next year, 1859, I was engaged much of the time as the corresponding secretary of the Republican State Central Committee, in traveling over the State and in carrying out plans for a more thorough organization of the Republican party, preparatory to the great contest of 1860. I visited personally a large majority of the counties in the State, and nearly everywhere had the satisfaction of learning that, though many doubted the possibility of nominating Lincoln, most generally it was approved of. This fact became in time very apparent to Lincoln himself, whom I not infrequently met in my travels; and in the month of December of that year, feeling that perhaps it would "pay," I induced him to place in my hands this eminently characteristic paper. Such is the history of a paper that has already become historic, and which, to me at least, has a value I little dreamed of at that time.

"Springfield, Dec. 20, 1859.

"J. W. Fell, Esq.

"My Dear Sir:

"Herewith is a little sketch, as you requested. There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me. If anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest, and not to go beyond the materials. If it was thought necessary to incorporate anything from any of my speeches, I suppose there would be no objections. Of course, it must not appear to have been written by myself.

"Yours very truly,

"A. Lincoln."