

Memo. of Talk with Gilbert Tracy, April 4, 1916.

Mr. Tracy is 80 years old, a tall, thin man, wearing an old fashioned frock coat, scrupulously neat. He has the old-style New England farmer of cultivation written all over him.

Tracy lived in Washington from 1863 to 1868, a clerk in the War Department. He evidently saw Mr. Lincoln repeatedly, as he went back and forth in Washington. He heard him deliver the second inaugural, and his last speech. He refuses to say that he knew Lincoln. All he will say is that he saw him. I wondered if it was possible on this to make a story, "He Saw Lincoln." He seems to feel that it is a kind of irreverence to Lincoln to claim more of an acquaintance than one really had. This is the form his veneration takes.

He left Washington in 1868 because he said he would have a bilious attack every fall there if he stayed, and he was ^{not} willing to do that. He bought a farm of 160 acres in Connecticut, and claims he is one of the few men in New England, and the only one in his district, that has made money farming. He has made it by the simplest of living, one can tell, and by the most persistent and intelligent of application to his work. It has been by a herd of twenty Jersey cattle, and by fattening pigs twice a year, as he said, that this has been done.

Through all this severe work he has found time to cultivate his literary interests. He knew Theodore Tilton, and regarded him highly as a poet. He corresponded with Tilton from Paris for years, and received from his heirs at his death a large quantity of manuscript, part of which he has sent to the Congressional Library.

He has put up in Tilton's memory somewhere a monolith. He carried on for years an intimate literary correspondence with Mrs. Akers, who wrote "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother." He also erected somewhere a tablet or stone to her memory.

He has evidently been always a careful student of Lincoln's life and works. He regarded his letters as his great contribution outside of the Lincoln and Douglas debate, at least ~~xx~~ that is the way I understood him.

It was the realization a few years ago that all of Lincoln's letters available had not been collected and put into permanent form that set him on the quest. He knew Tandy very well, and I think must have helped him a good deal in getting together the Gettysburg edition. In spite of that edition, which Tandy considered final, Tracy has got 300 letters which have had no publication excepting in pamphlets or in newspapers. Some of these letters are very valuable. I read them all at our sitting. My impression is that they intensify our knowledge of Lincoln as a fair play politician, and that they give some of the most characteristic expression of his traits of any that we have. This comes out in several pieces which refer to the Congressional contest with Hardin in 1845.

In writing to James in 1846 telling him how they ought to conduct themselves, he says, "It will be just all we can do to keep out of a quarrel." And in another letter of 1845 he says to James, "Let nothing be said against Hardin. Nothing deserves to be said against him. Let the pith of the whole argument be, 'Turn about is fair lay'"

There is considerable more of the same advice at this period.

When it comes to the struggle with Douglas, there is some splendid stuff. One of the most penetrating refers to the impression he got from the speech that Douglas made in Chicago in July, 1858. This letter was to Keener. He gets Douglas exactly right that ~~was~~ what he was trying to do was to make it appear that he was on a triumphal tour. His speeches, Lincoln says, sound to him "like Napoleon's letters from Russia."

There are not a few personal letters mixed in with others. The letters contain three or four references to his wife. One of the most amusing is a letter written in 1842 in which he says: "Nothing new here except my marraige, which to me is a most profound wonder."

The way in which Lincoln mixed his law and his politics up to the time that he threw himself into the Kansas, Nebraska fight is very interesting. There are very few of the legal letters which have not political paragraphs tacked on. There are some very clever political suggestions, especially the letter in which he warns Judd against the Celtic gentlemen that are invading the country with the carpet bags, suggesting a detective ; or the one to Harrison telling him that a young man before the enemy has learned to watch him can do more than anyone else. Some of Lincoln's best personal characteristics come out. The very best letter of advice to a young man going into the law is in this collection. The willingness to own himself wrong when he has been wrong , as it was shown again and again in the Civil War and the view expressed in a letter to Siegel in 1863 apologizing for having been cross, he says, "If I do get up a little temper, I have