

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ILLUSTRATIONS
for
CHAPTER XLVI

- 1) Statue of Lincoln on facade of the Capitol at Harrisburg, Pa.
- 2) Fac-simile of an autograph written by Lincoln for a friend in 1864.
- 3) In the winter of '63-64, the coming contest over the next President began to show itself in sneering cartoons. The Republicans were especially bitter over the growth of Democratic opposition; and this is the way that one cartoonist saw them.

Copied from a set of plates published by Currier & Ives, '56-72, gathered into book form and copyrighted in 1892 by Wright & Swasey.

(Miss Marshall: This cartoon in the book I am sending. It is captioned "Heads of the Democracy." At the same time, please have the second cartoon from this copied - "The Rail-splitter at Work Repairing the Union," - also the second from that, "The True Issue, or 'That's What's the Matter!'"

I will depend upon you to see that the photographer takes good care of this delapidated book. It is supposed to be valuable.)

- 4) Cartoon from the London Punch of November 14, 1863. The depredations of the Confederate privateer, the Alabama, built in Liverpool, coaled by the English, and manned chiefly by them, caused great bitterness in the United States from the fall of '62 on. While the Alabama was at large, two Confederate rams were building also in England for the Confederacy, but a strong protest arose in England itself among the common people, with the final result that the rams were not allowed to escape. This of course enraged the South. The above cartoon shows how Punch viewed the matter.
- 5) In the fall of '63, the attempt of the Czar of Russia to coerce Poland was looked upon by Punch as much the same thing as the Northerners attempt to coerce the South, as this cartoon of the issue of November 7, 1863 shows.

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CHAPTER XLVI

"The People's Choice"

The war had been dragging its sorrowful way for some thirty-three months when in December 1863 Abraham Lincoln in his message to Congress made the extraordinary statement: "Under the sharp discipline of Civil War, the nation is beginning a new life."

It was true. Looking back we find movements of vast importance first getting under way in that period. There was the Homestead Act, passed in 1862. In spite of the war the opportunity had been eagerly seized by hundreds of settlers and 1,456,514 acres of land taken up under the Act in its first year, so Mr. Lincoln told Congress in his message. This increasing settlement demanded better communications, and the work on the Pacific railroad had been begun. But Mr. Lincoln was not content with this. The navigation of the Western rivers had been a subject dear to him from his boyhood days, and he emphasized now the necessity of enlarging the water communications between the Mississippi river and the northeastern seaboard. How surprised he would be to know that no, sixty years from the date of this message, the people are still crying for better water connections between the Mississippi river and the northeastern seaboard!

Then, too, so rapidly were mines being opened in the West, so tremendous was the call for workers that Mr. Lincoln asked Congress

to consider whether it was not possible to establish a system for encouraging immigration. Tens of thousands of persons were thronging the foreign consulates and offering to migrate if they had but a little assistance. It was worth Congress' thinking about. Men were beginning to dream of quicker communication between Europe and America, and in this message which gives one so lively a sense of the growth and advancement of the North, in spite of the struggle so upsetting to men and property that it was carrying on, the President recommends the favorable consideration of an international telegraph across the Atlantic ocean. He was right, the nation was beginning a new life.

But there were other amazing material developments. At the beginning of the war the North had been compelled to rely almost entirely on foreign countries for arms and ammunition, but now she was practically independent, not only manufacturing what she needed but drawing the raw materials from her own fields and mines.

There were other consoling features. To offset the continued, ill-concealed hostility of England and France, a great and powerful nation suddenly gave a most unexpected sign of sympathy. In the fall of 1863 the Russian government sent fleets to both the Atlantic and Pacific seaboard for the winter. Possibly the Administration got its greatest satisfaction from knowing how much annoyance this friendly expression caused England and France! The Russians were welcomed royally, and when several of the ships ascended the Potomac in December, Washington official society, drab enough in these days, took on new life and new color. Balls and dinners could

at that moment be given with better heart because of the new courage that Grant was giving them.

Then there was the change in popular feeling. We have seen how, in the fall of 1862, the elections through all the important Middle States went against Lincoln, Ohio giving him an adverse vote of 7,000; but now in that State, the governor supporting the Administration had received a majority of nearly 62,000 votes. And one of the interesting things was that the soldiers, so hostile to Lincoln a year before, gave him over 39,000 votes in contrast to 2200 for Vallandigham, now back in the country and more active than ever against the President who had made it possible for him to return. Other States which a year before had repudiated the Administration now supported it strongly.

It was the backing of the soldiers which undoubtedly pleased Lincoln most. It was genuine. Gen. John M. Palmer of Illinois, who was with the army at Chattanooga in December of 1863, wrote to Senator Lyman Trumbull, at that time disaffected with Lincoln and looking around for sympathy, that Lincoln was by far the strongest man with the army and that no combination could be made which would impair his strength. He was sure the Illinois troops were all for him. And so it turned out.

All these signs of a healthy North and a solid backing among the people were of great importance. A presidential year was coming, and who was to be the nominee of the Republicans was being discussed far and wide. Lincoln wanted a renomination. He wanted to finish the job as he said, and then, too, he regarded it as sound

policy. Swapping horses in the middle of the stream was dangerous business. But could he be nominated? He knew well enough that there was a strong opposition to him among those people who felt that he had not moved rapidly enough in the matter of slavery. They could not forgive him for insisting that the only application he could make of emancipation, under the Constitution, was inside those States which were in insurrection, that he could not touch slavery except as a war weapon. Then of course there were individuals who had not received from him the treatment that they felt was their due, glad to join in any movement to displace him. There were many factions through the country that had not succeeded in winning his help in their particular undertakings, and they were against him.

Before the beginning of the new year, 1864, these disaffected elements had fixed on a candidate - the Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase.

Mr. Chase, it must be said, had done his best for a year or more now to persuade men that he was the best possible person in the country for the presidency. He believed and preached that if the Chicago convention in 1860 had had the wisdom to nominate him, the course of the war would have been different. Mr. Lincoln knew perfectly what was in Chase's mind. Indeed it did not require any great astuteness for one sitting in the same Cabinet with Mr. Chase to know his feelings. He had no skill in self-concealment, although he was far from realizing this fact himself. Mr. Lincoln had not been long associated with him before he read him like a book and saw that he carried on a continual underhanded effort to build himself

up as a successor. Lincoln not only sensed this but multitudes of friends who knew what Chase was doing, took pains to bring him repeated proofs. He put them aside, refused to listen, to read. Mr. Chase was a good and able man, if he could convince the country that he would make a better president than Mr. Lincoln did, it was for him to do it. "I hope we may never have a worse man," he told one of his private secretaries, who, early in the fall of 1863, had insisted on calling his attention to the Secretary's intrigues. "I am entirely indifferent about his successor failure in these schemes so long as he does his duty as the head of the Treasury Department.

It was rather a cruel fate for Chase that mistaken friends should after his death have published the multitude of letters that he was writing at this time in an effort to persuade people that he was the man to succeed Lincoln. It was an equally cruel fate that he should have had as a colleague a diarist who practically ever night, after the family was in bed, set down with painstaking frankness the political manipulations that were going on in and around the Administration, and his impressions of the manipulators. This was Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, a dry, self-satisfied, astute man, with a bottomless contempt for oppertunists, radicals, compromisers, intriguers. He set down in an astonishingly impersonal fashion what men said to him and what he thought of them. He has many comments in his diary on the efforts to sound him about Chase for President. For instance, he tells of Charles Sumner's coming to him to find out what he

thought about the nominee. "Sumner's present leanings," Welles says, "after vague and indefinite dreamings for himself, are for Chase."

Other men came to Welles complaining of the President's want of energy, decision, promptness. They wanted somebody else. But they got little consolation from Welles. His diary registers many complaints of the President, but for his part he was for Lincoln and believed that this was the general public opinion. As for Chase, his many caustic comments show what he thought of him. "He is destitute of wit" - "His jokes are always clumsy" - "He wants the courage and candor to admit his errors."

The gossip went on all winter. There was not a gathering, even in the White House itself, in which on the side the possibility of nominating Chase was not discussed. In February of 1864 one of Chase's friends, Senator Pomeroy of Kansas, ruined the Secretary's chances by issuing a circular under the heading "Strictly Private" in which he declared that Chase had more of the qualities needed in a president during the next four years than were contained in any other available candidate.

But the circular did not confine itself to describing Chase's merits, it made a violent attack on Lincoln, declaring that the cause of human liberty and the dignity of the nation suffered in his hands. It was a bad move. "It will damage Chase more than Lincoln," wrote Welles in his diary, and that is what happened. Chase seems to have sensed something of the impropriety of his having connection with a committee which would issue a circular of that

nature and wrote a frank letter at once to Mr. Lincoln announcing his candidacy: "I have thought this explanation due to you as well as to myself. If there is anything in my position which, in your judgment, will prejudice the public interest in my charge, I beg of you to say so. I do not wish to administer the Treasury Department one day without your entire confidence."

It was a week before Mr. Lincoln replied, and when the reply came there was a note of indifference to what had been done which must have been rather galling to the self-conscious, self occupied Secretary.

"My knowledge of Mr. Pomeroy's letter having been made public", Mr. Lincoln wrote, "came to me only the day you wrote, but I had, in spite of myself, known of its existence several days before. I have not yet read it, and I think I shall not. I was not shocked or surprised by the appearance of the letter, because I had had knowledge of Mr. Pomeroy's committee, and of secret issues which I supposed came from it, and of secret agents who I supposed were sent out by it, for several weeks. I have known just as little of these things as my friends have allowed me to know. They bring the documents to me, but I do not read them; they tell me what they think fit to tell me, but I do not inquire for more. I fully concur with you that neither of us can be justly held responsible for what our respective friends may do without our instigation or countenance; and I assure you, as you have assured me, that no assault has been made upon you by my instigation or with my countenance. Whether you shall remain at the head of the Treasury Department is a question which I will not allow myself to consider from any standpoint other than my judgment of the public service, and, in that view, I do not perceive occasion for a change."

The letter was not one to flatter the Secretary's vanity, and his grudge against Lincoln was too deep to be changed by the President's magnanimity. And then, too, everything seemed to conspire to annoy and anger him. There were the Blairs - Montgomery Blair, Postmaster General, his colleague in the Cabinet, and Frank Blair in Congress. They were among Mr. Lincoln's warmest supporters and his bitterest enemies. In April Mr. Lincoln had the ill-luck to appoint Frank Blair a major-general at the moment that gentleman saw fit to make a violent attack in Congress on Chase. Of course Lincoln knew nothing of Blair's intentions. "There's another beehive knocked over," he said ruthfully when he was told of the speech. Chase was furious and would have been glad no doubt to have been able to accuse Lincoln of a calculated indirect blow but soon found that the President was as ignorant as he of Blair's intention. He soon found, too, that even if he had a case against Lincoln in the matter it would have done his candidacy no good, for in April his own State, Ohio, on which he had counted to name him as its candidate at the Republican convention which was to come off in June, declared against him and for Lincoln by a large majority. As a matter of fact, the most determined of Mr. Lincoln's opponents saw by this time that it was quite useless to try to nominate anybody else. The people would have nobody else. There has never been a clearer popular expression of choice for the presidency in the country than that for Lincoln in 1864. It has always seemed to me to have been based on the fact that people understood what he was about.

He had done the wisest thing possible for a leader under our system, that is, he had frankly and consistently explained what he was doing. They knew his purpose, his whole purpose; they knew the methods he had adopted to realize that purpose. He had convinced them that he was right and wise, and that done they could not be shaken.

But there had been other candidates besides Chase to dispute the position with him. There was one other that if he had lent himself to the call might very well have turned great numbers from Lincoln, and that was General Grant. His success at Vicksburg, at Chattanooga had made him for the moment the idol of the North. And, as always, there were politicians that wanted to utilize this popularity in spite of the obvious need that there was of Grant in the field. Senator Lyman Trumbull, now thoroughly intent on ousting Lincoln, had asked General Palmer of Illinois, who was with the army at Chattanooga, to feel out the situation. Palmer was an honest man and he came back with a frank letter:

"I saw Grant yesterday, and had a conversation with him. . . He doesn't desire to be a candidate for the presidency, prefers his present theatre of service to any other, nor will the officers of the army willingly give him up. . . . I don't think he will be anybody's candidate for the presidency this time, but after the war his stock will be at a premium for anything he wants. Mr. Lincoln is popular with the army and will as far as the soldiers can vote, beat anything the Copperheads can start."

Lincoln did not know of this letter. It was not the kind that Trumbull at the moment would have shown him, and he was

really anxious lest Grant might have the presidential bee in his bonnet - so anxious that he summoned a Chicago friend of Grant,, J. Russell Jones, the only man of whom he could get hold that had really summered and wintered with him. It happened that just as Jones was starting for Washington, he received a letter from the General in which he had said in regard to the already pretty lively newspaper talk of his candidacy, that he felt he had as big a job on hand as any man needed, that his only ambition was to suppress the rebellion and that even if he had a desire to be president he could not possibly entertain the thought of becoming a candidate or accepting a nomination were one tendered him so long as there was a possibility of keeping Mr. Lincoln in the presidential chair. Mr. Jones put this letter before Lincoln. It was evidently a great relief to him.

"My son," he said, "you will never know how gratifying that is to me. No man knows when that presidential grub gets to gnawing at him just how deep it will go until he has tried it, and I didn't know but what there was one gnawing at Grant."

At this time Lincoln had never met Grant. That did not happen until February of 1864, when the General was summoned to Washington to be made commander-in-chief of all the armies of the United States, and to decide, as he did then, that the place for him was at the head of the Army of the Potomac. After looking Grant over I don't think Lincoln ever had any real doubt but that the General

was a man whom ambition could never turn from a task which he had undertaken, and believed he had nothing to fear from him as a rival candidate.

And yet the rivals were not out of the way though the third one that made a ripple before the convention was not one of whose success he had any fear. A considerable group of radicals who would not accept the popular verdict which it was obvious would be recorded at the coming convention, decided to have a candidate of their own, and accordingly a convention was called - a convention of protestors was what it really amounted to - in Cleveland in May, and here Frémont was nominated.

The convention had been widely advertised. Thousands of people would be present, it was urged. There were about four hundred there, and when this number was reported to Lincoln he took up the Bible that lay on his desk and turning to Samuel read:

"And everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them; and there was with him about four hundred men."

The real motive of the Cleveland convention was hatred of Lincoln. E. L. Godkin put it in one of his foreign letters better than anybody else: "

"The radicals" he wrote, "who named Frémont at Cleveland convention hate him (Lincoln) with a stern and holy hatred, but it is the hatred which ardent and passionate people usually feel for a man who sees the two sides of a question and hesitates in choosing. He does not march rapidly enough for them, and he has a patience and fine sympathy with those who differ from him which is utterly incomprehensible to such logical politicians as the Germans who form a large part of his opponents."

Godkin did not think at this writing that Lincoln had much to fear from Frémont's competition, nor did Lincoln think so. He had taken the General's measure long before this; once in the intimacy of the White House had said to John Hay, who had remarked that Frémont would be a dangerous man if he had ability and energy, "Yes, he is like Jim Jett's brother. Jim used to say that his brother was the d----st scoundrel that ever lived, but in the infinite mercy of Providence he was also the d----st fool."

There were efforts to put off the convention by people who hoped that if there was a little more delay there might be some unfortunate episode which would turn from Mr. Lincoln the tide which was flowing so strong for him. But the leaders of the movement were too wise for that. The Union Republican convention was called in Baltimore on the 7th of June. There were certain extraordinary features about it - features showing how things had moved in the four years since the Chicago convention. First, boldest and most important, was that the chairman that called the meeting to order, in the brief speech that he made, presented a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery throughout the United States; and following that revolutionary suggestion, one of Kentucky's first men, Dr. Robert J. Breckenridge spoke, and the bulk of his eloquence was that the nation must not be destroyed and that the institution which had lifted a sword to destroy it, "we must use all power to exterminate and extinguish" - a long ways the Republicans had gone since 1861!

But there was another extraordinary feature. The roll call included all of the Southern States, and delegates from Tennessee, Arkansas and Louisiana were recognized and admitted on the same footing as all other delegates.

When it came to the nomination for the Presidency, the only struggle was over who should have the honor of naming Abraham Lincoln. Nobody else was put in nomination, not even poor Mr. Chase. Lincoln received 497 votes at the first ballot, Missouri alone dissenting - it cast 22 votes for General Grant for whom it had been instructed.

Another significant action of the convention was in its selection of a vice-president. Mr. Hamlin of Maine had made an honorable record in that obscure position. He was ardently anti-slavery, but he had never obstructed Mr. Lincoln's policies in regard to the institution. He would have been renominated no doubt now but it was felt that for policy's sake the vice-president should represent the South and so Andrew Johnson of Tennessee was put in nomination, much to Mr. Lincoln's satisfaction.

He was to have his chance again, and when the committee and delegations came to Washington to notify him of his renomination he showed his satisfaction and also his level headedness. It was then he made his famous remark: "I don't allow myself to suppose that either the convention or the League have concluded to decide that I am either the greatest or best man in America, but rather they have concluded that it is not best to swap horses while crossing the river, and have further concluded that I am not so poor a horse that they might not make a betch of it trying to swap."

He did not forget at this time to emphasize the fact that the great business was finishing the war. "What we want", he told a visiting delegation, "still more than Baltimore conventions and presidential elections is success under General Grant. I propose that you constantly bear in mind that the support that you owe to the brave officers and soldiers in the field is of the very first importance and that we should therefore bend all our energies to that point."

There was reason enough at the moment - more reason than his hearers knew, that he should call attention to the necessity of pushing ahead the war. He did not suggest it to them that day, but he did in a speech at the Sanitary Fair in Philadelphia a week later that it might be necessary for him soon to make another draft.

Renominated, Lincoln was facing another crisis - the crisis of a country disappointed in thinking that its great General to whom they had turned over the task of finishing the war, could not do it quickly, by some legerdemain. Already the administration saw that they probably were in for months of terrible fighting. The battles that had already occurred had been horrible in their results. Washington was sick and chilled by the crowding of thousands of dead and dying into its hospitals, pouring back from Grant's battlefields. This was going on at the very time of the convention although the country had not realized it. Lincoln saw the slaughter with dismay. He could not stay in Washington. He must satisfy himself by seeing Grant, talking with him, about what this meant. So, two weeks after the convention - much to poor Secretary Welles' disgust, who disapproved of the President and the Secretary junketing around so much, who had

even refused on the score of duty to go to Gettysburg as the President had urged him to - Lincoln went to Grant's headquarters. He wanted to see for himself. And what he saw seems to have satisfied him - Grant would "fight it out on that line if it took all summer." What we must do now, he said, is to support the line. But he could not have known in June of '64 a long trial was before him - he could not have realized that in that trial his own fortunes were to fall as low if not lower than they had done in the sad and distracted year of '62.

It is through the hard months intervening between his nomination and his reelection in November that we will now follow him.