

By the Man Who Closed Mr. Lincoln's Eyes in Death.

By Gen. Thomas M. Vincent, U. S. A.

BORN in a humble cabin, in La Rue County, Kentucky, with its three-legged stool, bedstead of poles supported by crotched sticks, log table, pot, kettle and skillet, and a few tin and pewter dishes, Abraham Lincoln's ascent in life began as he "climbed at night to his bed of leaves in the loft, by a ladder of wooden pegs driven into the logs of the cabin wall."

Upon this man it was that the choice of the nation fell—the man who, in the year 1831, when an obscure flatboatman, after having witnessed the dragging of a slave woman, said, "If ever I get a chance at that institution, I will hit it hard!"

It was a frequent thing for Mr. Lincoln to visit my office (in the War Department), thus to obtain direct information. I was particularly interested in the success of the recruitment, and for his own convenience he personally tabulated the daily telegraphic reports on a slip of paper. After he had made the necessary record, he would roll the slip around a short lead pencil, and place it in his vest pocket. If the number of men obtained was satisfactory, he would sit for a brief moment conversing cheerfully, but if otherwise the furrows of care on his face would indicate the sadness of his disappointment, and, without a word, he would depart.

Soon after the act of July 17, 1862, authorizing persons of African descent to be received into the service of the United States, and before the President had decided fully what he would do under it, he received an application—may have been from a Mr. Black or Mr. Brown—for permission to raise a regiment. In his characteristic way, he endorsed the application: "Referred to the Secretary of War. This gentleman wishes to engage in the ebony trade. A. Lincoln."

His interest manifested in the recruitment of colored troops is apparent from his letter, dated April 1, 1863, to Major-General Hunter, in which he said:

"I am glad to see the account of your colored force at Jacksonville, Fla. I see the enemy are driving at them fiercely, as is to be expected. It is important to the enemy that such a force shall not take shape, and grow and thrive in the South; and, in precisely the same proportion, it is important to us that it shall. Hence the utmost caution and vigilance is necessary on our part. The enemy will make extra efforts to destroy them; and we should do the same to preserve and increase them."

After the colored troops had won their reputation, he said that their employment was one of the greatest blows dealt to the rebellion. On one occasion, in defining the franchise, he said that some of the colored people "might be let in." They would "probably help, in some trying time to come, to keep the jewel of liberty in the family of freedom."

April 14, 1865, I had, about 10 o'clock p. m., returned from the War Department to my house, and very soon thereafter was informed by a cousin of Mrs. Lincoln—Dr. Lyman Beecher Todd—that the President had been assassinated, and the members of his Cabinet attacked. I at once hurried to the house of the Secretary of War, and learned that he had gone to the scene of the tragedy, on Tenth street. I found him at the house to which the President had been taken from Ford's Theatre, and there I remained, near the Secretary, and at his request, during the night.

He was greatly saddened, and referred to the change of scene from that at the Cabinet meeting, a few hours before, at which General Grant was present, when the state of the country and the prospect of a speedy peace were discussed. He stated that the President during the meeting was hopeful and very cheerful, and had spoken kindly of General Lee and other officers of the Confederacy. Particularly had his kindly feeling gone out to the enlisted men of the Confederacy, and during the entire session of the Cabinet his manner and words manifested emphatically a desire to restore a satisfactory peace to the South. Yet, while he was buoyant on that Good Friday in his advocacy of "peace on earth to men of good will," he seemed depressed, at times, in consequence of a dream of the previous night, which had recurred several times on the eve of some important event—a vague sense of floating away, on some vast and indistinct expanse, toward an unknown shore!

About 1:30 a. m. it was determined that the wound was mortal, that the President was dying, and that it was not probably that he would live through the night. The Secretary then informed me that it would be necessary to stand prepared to communicate the President's death to the Vice-President, and soon thereafter handed me the rough draft of the formal notification, from which I prepared a fair copy, and held it until after the President's death, which was officially announced at 7:55 a. m., April 15, by a telegram from the Secretary to Major-General Dix, as follows:

"Abraham Lincoln died this morning at twenty-two minutes after seven o'clock."

The death bed scenes were harrowing in the extreme. Surrounding and near the illustrious one, who was insensible from the first in consequence of his mortal wound, from which his life's blood was oozing, were the sobbing, grief-stricken wife, all the members of the Cabinet save Mr. Seward (himself the victim of an assassin's attack), and others in civil and military circles.

Soon after 8 o'clock the devoted War Minister (Mr. Stanton) had ordered all to be arranged for the removal of the body to the Executive Mansion, and then left me, as his representative, until after the transfer should take place. It was about this time that, after pressing and smoothing the eyes of the dead President, I placed coins upon them for a last long slumber.

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