

A SENATOR OF THE SIXTIES

Personal Recollections of William M. Stewart, of Nevada—
Lincoln, Johnson, and Mark Twain as a SecretaryEDITED BY GEORGE ROTHWELL BROWN
ILLUSTRATED BY HORACE TAYLOR

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THE election of Andrew Johnson to the office of Vice-President of the United States was a calamity. It was caused by the desire of Northern Republicans and Union men to have a representative from the South on the ticket in 1864.

Johnson was very bitter in his language against the Southern leaders, and the Northern people supposed he was really patriotic. He came to Washington in January or February, 1865, and was around the Capital for some weeks previous to the inauguration of President Lincoln, on the fourth of March. When he entered the Senate Chamber to take the oath of office as Vice-President, and to call that body to order, he had been drinking. He was assisted to the chair by the sergeant-at-arms and two door-keepers. He appeared as a man who did not realize what he was doing.

Immediately after the oath had been administered he grasped the desk before him with an unsteady hand, and began an incoherent tirade.

There was no particular point or sense in what he attempted to say. "The people are everything!" he bawled. "The people are everything!" and this seemed to be the sole idea he possessed. He pointed to Mr. Seward, who was seated directly in front of the desk.

"You are nothing; you are nothing, Mr. Seward," he said. "I tell you, the people are everything."

This continued for some time. Several Senators endeavored to persuade him to leave the stand. Finally, he was removed by the sergeant-at-arms to the Vice-President's room, where he was detained until the ceremony was concluded. All persons present were shocked and amazed, and there was a universal appeal to the representatives of the press to refrain from publishing anything about the disagreeable scene. The newspapers of the country which alluded to it at all did so in vague and obscure language.

After the inauguration of President Lincoln, Vice-President Johnson continued to drink a good deal. He was not choice in the selection of his company. Almost anybody was good enough for Johnson, apparently.

One evening, not long after Mr. Lincoln's second term began, I was passing through Judiciary Square. A great crowd of street hoodlums and darkies was congregated about the City Hall steps, listening to the Vice-President. His face was very red, and he was excited. I listened. He was contending before the rabble that all the rebels must be hanged. Johnson didn't make any distinction. He put the whole South in one class. He said it was treason to fight against the Government, and that he was in favor of hanging every traitor.

Lincoln's Last Written Words

IT WAS quite common for Mr. Johnson to make these open-air speeches, and, as he delivered them whenever he had been drinking, naturally he became the most persistent orator in the Capital.

Shortly after this, on the day before Mr. Lincoln was assassinated, I was in New York, where I met my old friend and partner, Judge Niles Searles, who, although a Democrat, was a Union man and a gentleman of ability and sterling worth. He said he wanted to meet Mr. Lincoln, and I invited him to go to Washington with me that night and call on the President the next day. We had not met for several years, and, instead of going to bed on the train, we sat up in the smoking compartment and talked nearly all night.

The train arrived in Washington at an early hour, and we went to Willard's Hotel, where we took a nap, but, being tired, we overslept. When breakfast was over it was too late to call on President Lincoln, who received visitors at ten o'clock in the morning and at seven o'clock at night. We waited until evening, and called to see him. An usher took our cards. He returned in about five minutes with a card from Mr. Lincoln, on which was written:

I am engaged to go to the theatre with Mrs. Lincoln. It is the kind of an engagement I never break. Come with your friend to-morrow at ten, and I shall be glad to see you.
A. LINCOLN.

Those were the last words Abraham Lincoln ever wrote. I did not preserve the card, not considering it of any importance, for I had received many such from the President at various times. As I walked downstairs with Judge Searles on our way out, I dropped the President's note on the floor. At the front entrance Mr. Lincoln was putting his wife in a carriage. I was intending to pass without interrupting



them, but he saw us and extended his hand cordially. I introduced Judge Searles to him. He repeated that he would be glad to see us in the morning, bade us good-night, entered the carriage and drove away. It was the last time I saw him alive.

"I have seen Mr. Lincoln," said Judge Searles; "I have had a good look at him, and heard him speak. That was all I came to Washington for, and I shall return to New York at once."

We walked together rapidly to the depot of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which was the only railroad entering Washington. I walked back uptown alone, and when I reached the corner of Tenth Street I decided to go to Ford's Theatre. When I reached the door I found a large crowd on the outside. They told me the theatre was jammed so full they couldn't get in. I gave it up, and went to the room of Senator Conness, which was on Thirteenth Street, between F Street and Pennsylvania Avenue.

I had been there but a few minutes when Senator Sumner, of Massachusetts, came in. We had been talking fifteen or twenty minutes when a colored man employed by Senator Sumner rushed excitedly into the room, shouting that Mr. Seward was assassinated.

The Night the President was Shot

SECRETARY SEWARD occupied what was afterward known as the Blaine house, on the east side of Lafayette Square, where a theatre now stands. Conness, Sumner and I started there as fast as we could go, and, as I was a stronger man than either of them, I took the lead, with Sumner panting along in the rear.

I rushed up Seward's steps, and found the front door partially opened, pushed my way into the hall, and saw Secretary McCullough, of the Treasury Department, who told me that Seward was badly hurt and that the doctor had given orders to admit no one to his room, as he needed all the air it was possible to give him.

Conness, Sumner and I then started on a run to the White House, diagonally across the street. Two soldiers were on duty, acting as guards, and marching backward and forward. As we arrived one of the White House attachés came running from Ford's Theatre with the news that the President had been shot. Senator Conness, with great presence of mind, said:

"This is a conspiracy to murder the entire Cabinet." Turning to the soldiers he said:

"Go immediately to Secretary Stanton's house, and prevent his assassination, if possible."

The soldiers started off on a "double quick," with their loaded muskets on their shoulders. Stanton resided at

that time on the north side of Franklin Square. As the soldiers approached his house they saw a man on his steps, who had just rung the bell. Seeing them he took fright and ran away and was never afterward heard of. When the soldiers ran up the steps Stanton himself had come to the door in response to the ring. Had the soldiers been a few minutes later I have no doubt that Stanton also would have been one of the victims of the plot.

Senator Conness, Senator Sumner and I went directly from the White House to the theatre. We learned that the President had been carried across the street, and went to the house. I saw Surgeon-General Barnes, who told me that Mr. Lincoln was mortally wounded, and that too many persons had already crowded into his room.

"But you can go in if you insist," he said, "as you are a Senator." There were too many people in there hastening the President's death, and I declined. Senator Conness received the same statement and retired. Senator Sumner did not retire, but rushed into the room, notwithstanding the suggestion of General Barnes, and remained until the death of the President.

"I will go in," he said. Nothing could keep Charles Sumner out.

From that time until daylight the excitement in Washington was intense. There were in the city about thirty thousand Confederate soldiers, and from sixty to one hundred thousand Federal soldiers. In every group of men—and the streets fairly swarmed—some one would constantly cry out:

"Kill the rebels; kill the traitors!" and then the mob would go tearing off, searching for the Confederates, until somebody else would climb upon a flight of steps or a tree-box, and scream as loud as he could:

"What would Mr. Lincoln say if he could talk to you?"

This argument never failed to quiet the frenzied people. Throughout that vast concourse, the whole population of Washington, tramping the streets all night long, the voice of violence would always hush at the name of Lincoln.

Johnson is Made President

I WALKED the streets, caring very little where I went, and every minute I expected to see the Federal soldiers fall upon the unarmed paroled Southerners, and slay them. A bloody battle which would have shocked humanity was averted a thousand times that night by a miracle.

Mr. Lincoln died about daylight, and, within ten minutes of the time, I met Senator Foote, the grand, gray-haired statesman from Vermont, who was chairman of the Republican caucus and master of ceremonies in the Senate. He was hailing a dilapidated wagon, which had seen better days as a carriage, in front of Willard's Hotel. He put his hand on my shoulder as the news of the President's death reached us, wafted on a thousand excited tongues, and said:

"We must get the Chief Justice at once and swear in the Vice-President. It will not do in times like these to be without a President."

We directed the driver of the hack to take us to the residence of Mr. Chase, who lived in what was then known as the Sprague mansion, at the corner of Sixth and E Streets. Mr. Chase was in his library, pacing back and forth and in deep thought. We explained our business, and he got into the vehicle with us, and went to the old Kirkwood house, on Pennsylvania Avenue.

I sprang out, went to the desk, and asked the clerk what room the Vice-President occupied. He said:

"I will send up your card."

"No, you won't," I said; "I'll go up myself. We want to see him on important business. Send a boy to show the way." The clerk then said:

"It is on the third floor. Turn to the right at the head of the stairs." There were no elevators in the hotels at that time, and we climbed the stairs laboriously. A negro boy showed us the room, and I rapped on the door. There was no answer. I rapped again and again. Finally I kicked the door and made a very loud noise. Then a voice growled:

"Who's there?"

"Senator Stewart," said I; "and the Chief Justice and Senator Foote are with me. We must see you immediately."

After some little delay the door was opened and we entered. The Vice-President was partially dressed, as though he had hurriedly drawn on a pair of trousers and a shirt. He was occupying two little rooms, about ten feet square, and we entered one of them, a sitting-room, while he finished his toilet in the other.

In a few minutes Johnson came in, putting on a very rumpled coat. He was dirty, shabby, and his hair was matted, while he blinked at us through squinting eyes. As he came into the room we were all standing. Johnson felt for a chair and sat down. Chief Justice Chase said very solemnly:

"The President has been assassinated. He died this morning. I have come to administer the oath of office to you." Johnson seemed dazed at first. Then he jumped up, thrust his right arm up as far as he could reach, and said: "I'm ready!" in a thick, gruff, hoarse voice. The Chief Justice administered the oath. Johnson—President Johnson—went back to his bedroom, and we retired.

I then went to Stanton's house. As I arrived his carriage was being driven to his door, and, presently, he came down the steps.

I told him of the condition of Johnson, and said that he must be taken care of—the man who had just taken the oath of office as President of the United States. Stanton and I were driven back to the Kirkwood house, and, accompanied by the coachman, we went directly to Johnson's room. He was lying down. We aroused him, led him downstairs, and put him into Stanton's carriage.

We took him to the White House, and Stanton sent for a tailor, a barber and a doctor. He had a dose administered, and the President was bathed and shaved, his hair was cut, and a new suit of clothes was fitted to him. He did not, however, get into a presentable condition until late in the afternoon, when a few persons were permitted to see him to satisfy themselves that there was a President in the White House.

A Reign of Terror in Washington

THEN came a reign of terror. No man dared to talk. Notwithstanding the war was over and peace prevailed throughout the United States, by order of President Johnson a drumhead court martial was ordered to try the conspirators charged with the murder of Mr. Lincoln. Among others, Mrs. Mary Surratt was arrested, tried, convicted and executed in a summary manner. Andrew Johnson appointed the officers who constituted the court, approved their findings, and signed the warrant for her execution.

The fact that some of the conspirators occasionally visited her lodging-house gave her an opportunity of knowing something of their movements, although she was undoubtedly ignorant of the conspiracy.

The death of Mr. Lincoln shocked the civilized world. People of every land were bowed with sorrow at the great bereavement. The country was without a trusted leader; the work of reconstructing and harmonizing the several States in the Union which had been preserved required the highest wisdom and patriotism. Congress was not in session. Andrew Johnson neglected to convene Congress in the emergency and to consult the friends of the Union with whom Mr. Lincoln had advised. Before Johnson became President he lost no occasion, in season or out of season, to denounce rebels. Between February 1, 1865, and the assassination of Mr. Lincoln he declared, on the steps of every public building in Washington, that every rebel ought to be hanged.

He was particularly vindictive against the social and political leaders of the South. He sprang from the lower stratum of society, and, by great vigor, industry and will, had occupied many honorable positions. He rose to be Senator of the United States and Vice-President