

True Stories of Lincoln

Never Published Until Now

LINCOLN was never in the least ashamed of his own humble origin. Quite the contrary, indeed. It was evidently—as it should have been—a matter of great pride with him

that he had been able to uplift himself from such small beginnings.

"Folks like us, who had no slaves, were called 'scrubs,' he said on one occasion. "We were as poor as poor could be, and I remember very well how I earned the first dollar that ever belonged to me. I was then eighteen years old. Having a small amount of garden truck to sell, mainly produced by my own labor, I built a little flat-boat, and started with the stuff by river for New Orleans. A steamer hove in sight—there were no wharves in those days—and two men came down to the shore in carriages, with trunks. They said: 'Will you take us and our trunks, and put us aboard of that steamer?' Glad of the job, I complied, and, when I had put them aboard, with the trunks, each of them pulled out a silver half-dollar and threw it on the floor of my boat. I could scarce believe that I had actually earned a whole dollar. From that time on I was a more hopeful and confident being."

He was under no illusions in regard to his lack of personal beauty. There was a story which he told many a time with glee, about a stranger who, meeting him on a train, said: "Excuse me, sir, but I have an article in my possession which belongs to you."

"How is that?" asked Mr. Lincoln. Whereupon the stranger took a jack-knife out of his pocket, and explained: "This knife was placed in my hands some years ago, with the injunction that I should keep it until I found a man homelier than myself. I have carried it from that time to this. Allow me now to say, sir, that I think you are fairly entitled to the property."

Humor was to Lincoln a consolation. During the dark days of 1862 Mr. Ashley, a Representative from Ohio, called at the White House early, just after the news of a disaster had arrived. The President began a humorous anecdote, to which the Congressman was in no mood to listen. "Mr. President," said he, "I did not come here this morning to hear stories. The situation of affairs is too serious." Instantly the smile faded from Lincoln's face. "Ashley," said he, "sit down! I respect you as an earnest, sincere man. You cannot be more anxious than I have been constantly since the beginning of the war, and I say to you now that, were it not for this occasional vent, I should die."

Signing a pardon for a soldier who had deserted, Mr. Lincoln said one day: "I don't believe shooting him would do him any good." Then he added: "Some of our generals complain that I impair discipline in the army by granting pardons and respites, but it makes me rested after a hard day's work if I can find some

good excuse for saving a man's life, and I go to bed happy when I think how joyous the signing of my name will make him, his family and his friends."

In no instance could Mr. Lincoln ever be persuaded to sign an order for the execution of a soldier who had run away from the enemy. No matter how gross the cowardice had been, he could always find an apology for such "leg cases," as he called them. When expostulated with on the subject, he would say: "I dare say that very often these fellows are brave enough. They want to fight, but their legs are their weak point, and carry them away against their will. Now, I myself am no coward, I am sure, but I should not feel that I could count on my legs in an emergency of the kind."

Judge Bates said: "I have sometimes told Mr. Lincoln that he was unfit to be trusted with the pardoning power. If a man comes to him with a touching story, his judgment is almost certain to be affected by it. Should the applicant be a woman—a wife, a mother, or a sister—in nine cases out of ten her tears, if nothing else, are sure to prevail."

There is a clerk now in the War Department at Washington named J. C. Hesse, who has been employed there ever since the days of Lincoln. He well remembers a case where a notorious bounty jumper, duly condemned to death, as he undoubtedly deserved, sent his wife to Mr. Lincoln to make an appeal in his behalf. She shed a good many tears, saying that she and her children had not received or benefited by any of the bounty money, and that, if her husband was shot, they would starve. The appeal was successful, and the President signed the pardon. When the document was delivered at the War Department the Adjutant-General declared that it was too outrageous; Mr. Lincoln had been imposed upon. Accordingly, he sent Mr. Hesse over to the White House to speak to Mr. Lincoln about it. When the President learned his errand he pointed to the paper containing the pardon, and said: "Is that my signature?" The clerk acknowledged that he recognized it. "That's enough, then!" rejoined Mr. Lincoln. There was nothing more to be said, and Mr. Hesse was glad to depart as quickly as he could get out of the room.

Though so kindly and sympathetic, Abraham Lincoln could be angry and severe—though never unjust. It is remembered that a certain officer who, for amply sufficient cause, had been cashiered from the army, saw the President personally about the matter on three occasions, presenting the argument in his own behalf at length. The third time, he said: "Well, Mr. President, I see that you are fully determined not to do me justice!" Whereupon Lincoln quietly arose from his chair, laid down a package of papers that he held in his hand, and, seizing the officer by the coat collar, marched him forcibly to the door, saying, as he ejected him into the pas-

sage, "Sir, I give you fair warning never to show yourself in this room again. I can bear censure, but not insult!"

Another time he said to Governor Curtin: "What do you think of those fellows in Wall Street, who are gambling in gold at such a time as this?" "They are a set of sharks," returned Curtin.

"For my part," said the President, bringing his clenched hand down upon the table, "I wish every one of them had his devilish head shot off."

The Proclamation of Emancipation was signed on New Year's Day, 1863. After affixing his signature Lincoln said to Speaker Colfax: "The South had fair warning that if they did not return to their duty, I would strike at this pillar of their strength. The promise must now be kept." To Secretary Chase he said: "I made a solemn vow before God that if General Lee was driven back from Pennsylvania, I would crown the result by a declaration of freedom to the slaves."

F. B. Carpenter writes: "I would often find Mr. Lincoln with a book open before him, as he is represented in the popular photograph, with little Tad beside him. There were a great many curious books sent to him, and it seemed to be one of his special delights to open these books at such an hour that his boy could stand beside him, and they could talk as he turned over the pages."

The speeches made by the President on receiving newly appointed foreign Ministers were always written in the State Department. One day a messenger brought such a document to Mr. Lincoln, and, finding half a dozen Senators and Representatives with him, whispered: "The Secretary has sent this speech, which you are to deliver to-day to the Swiss Minister." Lincoln laid down his pen, and, taking up the manuscript, said in a loud voice: "Oh, this is the speech Mr. Seward has written for me, is it? I guess I will try it before these gentlemen, and see how it goes."

On another occasion an ar committee called at the White House to press the adoption of an election policy. The chairman, who was a clergyman, made a powerful largely made up of quotations from the Old Testament. Mr. Lincoln listened in silence; then, drawing a long breath, he said: "Well, gentlemen, it is often that one is favored with a revelation direct from the Almighty."

A young man, calling to thank the President for his appointment as lieutenant in the army, took pains to inform Mr. Lincoln that he belonged to one of the oldest and noblest houses of Germany. "Oh, never mind that," replied Father Abraham; "you will not find it an obstacle to your advancement."

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