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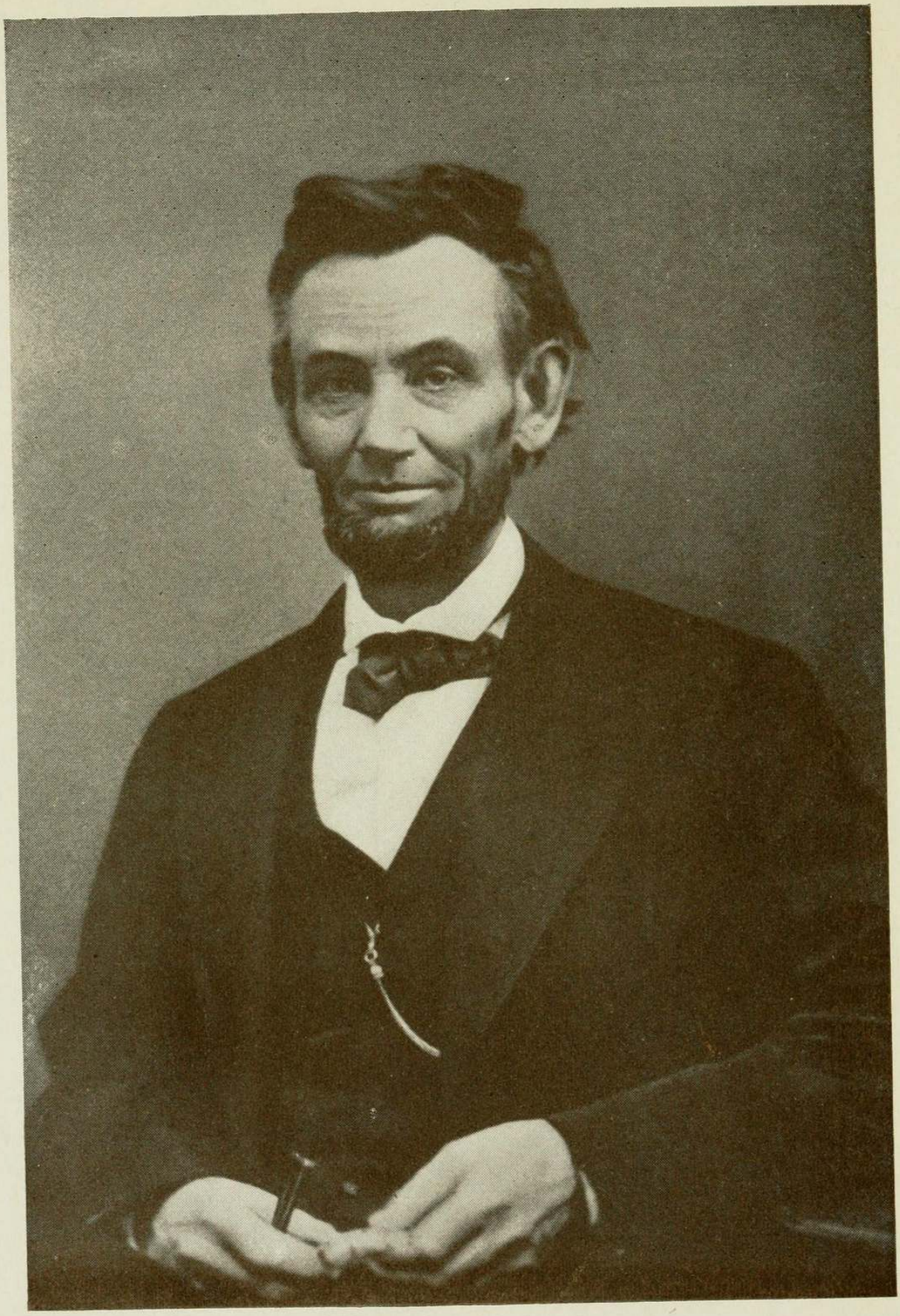
Lincoln's Last Day



LINCOLN IN 1865

From a glass negative made by Alexander Gardner at Washington, April 9, 1865, six days before Lincoln's death. An enlargement of this photograph hangs in the White House. It was regarded by many authorities as the best existing likeness of Lincoln at that time. The plate is owned by Robert Bruce of Oneida, N. Y.

Lincoln's Last Day

by

John W. Starr, Jr.

Author of "Lincoln as President," "What was Abraham Lincoln's Religion?" etc.

With Eight Black-and-White Illustrations from Photographs

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Lincoln's Last Day

Lincoln's Last Day

April the fourteenth, 1865, was a day of general thanksgiving throughout the northern states of the Union. After four years of fratricidal strife, General Lee had surrendered, and the early capitulation of Johnston's army was looked for.

The President had selected this date also, as being especially fitting on which to have the re-raising of the Flag over Fort Sumter. It would then have been exactly four years since it had been lowered there. General Robert Anderson, commandant of the Fort at the time of surrender, had been selected as the one who should hoist the identical flag lowered

by him in 1861, when the opening guns of the war of the rebellion were fired.

It was also Good Friday on the church calendar, and as such was observed by a certain portion of the people in fasting and religious meditation.

The city of Washington, particularly, seemed to catch the spirit then pervading the North, and, as one writer puts it, "was in gala attire."

Meanwhile, that morning, President Lincoln had arisen at the usual hour, about seven o'clock, and wended his way to his office to transact some business before breakfast, as was his custom. His bedroom and office were on the second floor of the White House, both fronting on the south, and but a few doors apart. Seated at his desk he was looking directly south—there was the Potomac river yonder, and beyond it, Arlington Heights.

He despatched a note to Assistant Secretary of State Frederick W. Seward, then acting as Secretary, instructing him to call a Cabinet meeting for 11 o'clock that morning, and informing him that General Grant would be present.[1] Then, in order to insure the General's attendance upon the meeting at that time, he sent him a brief note requesting him to call at the White House at 11 A.M. instead of at 9, as had been previously agreed upon.[2] General Grant had arrived in Washington the preceding day, and was staying at Willard's Hotel.

It must have been at this time, also, that he received and replied to a communication from General James Van Alen of New York City, requesting him not again to expose his life unnecessarily as he had done at Richmond a short time before, for the sake of his friends, and the

nation at large. In his reply the President said: "I intend to adopt the advice of my friends, and use due precaution," and thanked the General for the assurance given that he would be supported by the conservative men of the nation in his efforts to restore the Union.[3]

He then proceeded to breakfast,[4] where he found Mrs. Lincoln and Tad awaiting him. As they sat there chatting, Captain Robert Lincoln, the President's eldest son, stepped in upon them. The Captain, who had been at the front for the last two months, on the staff of General Grant, had just arrived in the city that morning. He was warmly greeted by the rest of the family, and joined them in their morning meal.

With him his father conversed for nearly an hour, the President being particularly anxious to get all of the details

of the closing scenes of the campaign, and listening attentively to the description of the surrender at Appomattox, as related by Robert. Little Tad was also an eager listener.

Robert had brought along a portrait of General Lee and handed it to his father.[5] In the words of one who witnessed the incident, "the President took the picture, laid it on the table before him, scanned the face thoughtfully," and then said, with deep feeling:

"It is a good face; it is the face of a noble, brave man. I am glad that the war is over at last."

"Well, my son," he continued, looking up at Robert, "you have returned safely from the front. The war is now closed, and we soon will live in peace with the brave men that have been fighting against us. I trust that the era of good feeling

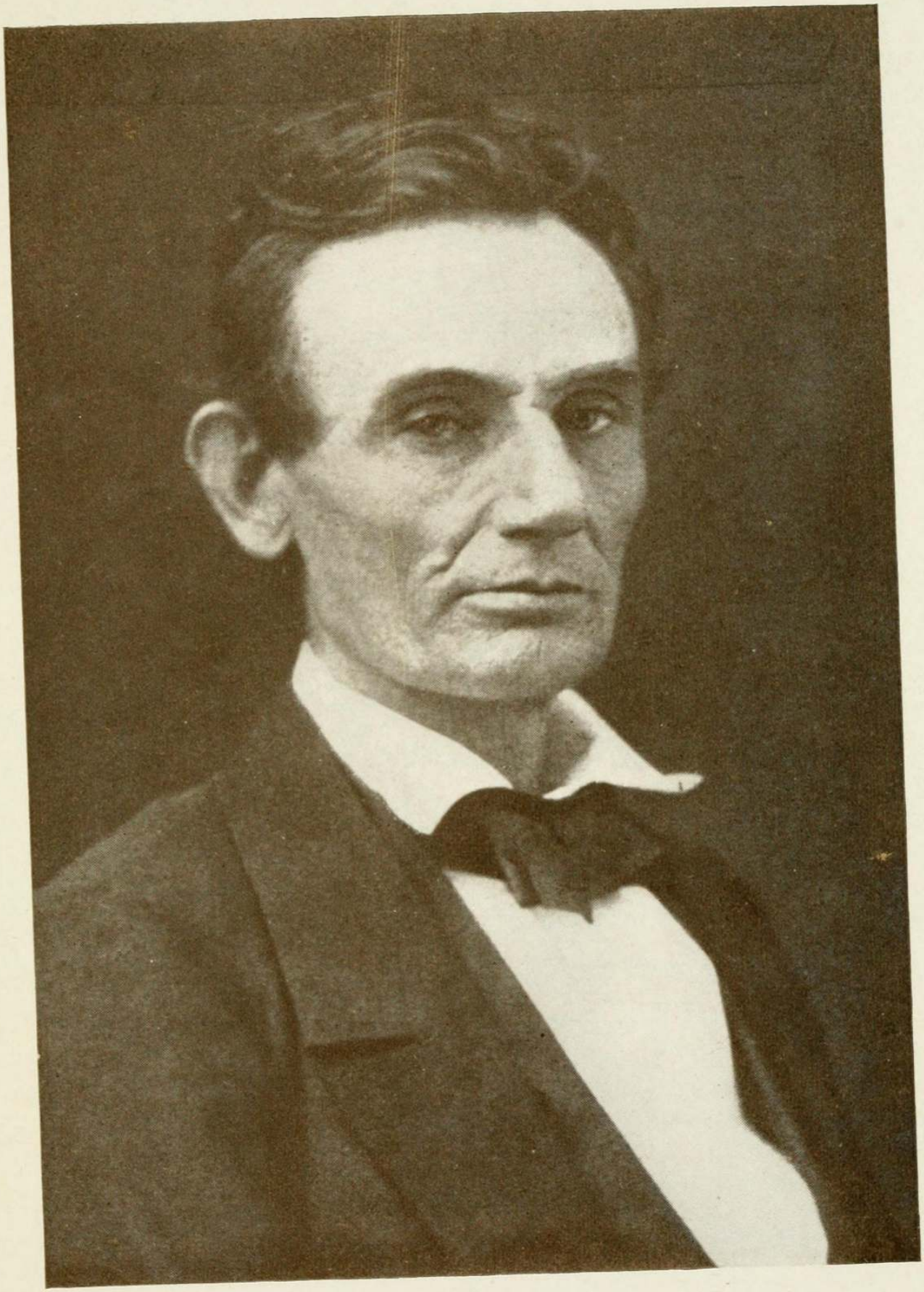
has returned, and that henceforth we shall live in peace.

"Now, listen to me, Robert: you must lay aside your uniform, and return to college. I wish you to read law for three years, and at the end of that time I hope that we will be able to tell whether you will make a lawyer or not."

And the narrator continues, "His face was more cheerful than I had seen it for a long while, and he seemed to be in a generous, forgiving mood."

Yet he seemed to have a presentiment that something of importance had taken place or was about to transpire, for he narrated a dream he had had the night before which he was later to mention to his cabinet.[6]

As they sat there talking, the President was informed that Schuyler Colfax, then Speaker of the House of Representatives,



LINCOLN IN 1858

From a photograph taken probably by Alexander Hesler, in Chicago, in 1858. It is used by courtesy of Frederick Hill Meserve of New York and is No. 8 in his collection of Lincoln photographs. This is one of the best of the early photographs showing Lincoln without a beard.

was in the White House, and he sent him word that he would see him immediately in the reception room.[7]

It was the Speaker's intention to take an extended trip to California and the mining regions of the West, and he had called that morning to find out whether the President intended to call an extra session of Congress that summer.

Lincoln assured him that he did not.

They had a long and interesting conference together. The President spoke quite freely as to his future policy regarding the rebellion, which he intended to submit to his Cabinet that day. He also gave the Speaker the following verbal message, which he desired him to convey to the miners in the West: [8]

"Mr. Colfax, I want you to take a message from me to the miners whom you visit. I have very large ideas of the min-

eral wealth of our nation. I believe it practically inexhaustible. It abounds all over the western country, from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, and its development has scarcely commenced. During the war, when we were adding a couple of millions of dollars every day to our national debt, I did not care about encouraging the increase in the volume of our precious metals. We had the country to save first. But now that the rebellion is overthrown, and we know pretty nearly the amount of our national debt, the more gold and silver we mine, we make the payment of that debt so much the easier.

"Now," he went on, speaking with more emphasis, "I am going to encourage that in every possible way. We shall have hundreds of thousands of disbanded soldiers, and many have feared that their return in such great numbers might

paralyze industry, by furnishing suddenly a greater supply of labor than there will be demand for. I am going to try to attract them to the hidden wealth of our mountain ranges, where there is room enough for all.

"Immigration, which even the war has not stopped, will land upon our shores hundreds of thousands more per year from overcrowded Europe. I intend to point them to the gold and silver that wait for them in the West.

"Tell the miners for me, that I shall promote their interests to the utmost of my ability; because their prosperity is the prosperity of the nation; and," he added, his eye kindling with enthusiasm, "we shall prove, in a very few years, that we are indeed the treasury of the world."

As he had for some time been thinking of settling in California permanently

when his term of office should expire, in order to give his two boys better chances than he thought any of the older states could offer, he told Colfax to bring back to him a full report of what he should see on his trip. This would help him to decide in his mind better, whether to return to his old Springfield home, or remove to California when he relinquished the Presidential office.

Following this interview, General John A. J. Cresswell, of Maryland, was shown into the room.[9] He had come over that morning from Baltimore to see the President in regard to setting free a Confederate prisoner who had been an old college mate of his. He brought with him an affidavit vouching for the soundness of character and worth of the prisoner.

As the Marylander entered the reception room, Lincoln rose from his chair and

stepped towards him, extending his hand.

"Hello, Cresswell. The war is over," greeted the President, shaking his caller's hand warmly. And without giving him time to explain his errand, the chief executive entered into a discussion of the theme uppermost in his mind, namely, the end of the rebellion.

"Look at that telegram from Sherman," he said, extending it for the General's perusal. "It has been an awful war, Cresswell, an awful war, but it's over," he added thankfully.

Finally, the thought occurring to him that the General must have come to see him for some particular purpose, he said, with a touch of humor:

"But what are you after? You fellows don't come to see me unless you want something. It must be something big, or you wouldn't be here so early."

General Cresswell then explained his errand and handed Lincoln the affidavit.

"That's not so hard," responded the President, "you did right to put it in writing. I don't care to read the statement. I know you know how to make affidavits. But it makes me think of an Illinois story, and I'm going to tell it to you.

"Years ago a lot of young folks, boys and girls, out in Illinois, got up a Maying party. They took their dinners and went down to a place where they had to cross the Sangamon river on an old scow. They got over all right and had a good picnic. When it was time to go back they were hilarious at finding that the scow had got untied and floated down the stream. After a while the thing looked more serious, for there was no boat and they couldn't throw out a pontoon. Then the girls became scared. Pretty soon a young

man, a little brighter than the rest, proposed that each fellow take off his shoes and stockings and pick up the girl he liked best and carry her over. It was a great scheme, and it worked all right until all had gotten over but a little, short young man, and a very tall, dignified old maid. Then there was trouble for one young man in dead earnest.

"Now, do you see," he continued, "you fellows will get one man after another out of the business until Jefferson Davis and I will be the only ones left on the island, and I'm afraid he'll refuse to let me carry him over, and I'm afraid there are some people who will make trouble about my doing it, if he consents."

Lincoln's auditor laughed heartily at the story and its application.

"It's no laughing matter; it's more than likely to happen," the President went on.

"There are worse men than Jefferson Davis, and I wish I could see some way by which he and the people would let us get him over. However, we will keep going on and getting them out of it, one at a time."

Then, taking up the affidavit, he endorsed it, and handed it to his visitor to take over to the War Department, where his wishes would be carried out.

His old Illinois friend, "Dick" Yates,[10] who had recently taken his seat in the Senate, called, bringing along another Illinoisan, Colonel William P. Kellogg. Kellogg had been a Presidential elector and Federal judge, aside from his military service as Colonel of the Seventh Illinois Cavalry, and Senator Yates believed him to be well adapted for the post of collector of the port of New Orleans, which he knew to be open.

"Mr. President, here is the man you want," Yates said, after stating his reasons.

"That's so, he'll do," Lincoln replied. Then turning to Colonel Kellogg, "I am going to send you to New Orleans to be collector of the port—you will have two thousand employes under you, all northerners, because, substantially, all southerners are disfranchised; but I want you to make love to those people down there," he added, referring to the southerners.

"I want this commission issued now," he went on, and took steps to have it issued and sent over by the Secretary of the Treasury before his callers left the White House.

He then had a short interview with Hon. John P. Hale, whom he had recently appointed Minister to Spain.[11]

When Hale had left, he saw several

Representatives and Senators,[12] and then left for his regular visit to the War Offices, to get the latest news from the front.[13] This he was accustomed to do every morning and evening, and ofttimes late at night, as the only telegraph offices in Washington at that time connected with the Government were located in the War Department.

His visit that morning must necessarily be brief, if he was to get back to the Executive Mansion in time for the Cabinet meeting.

While looking over the files, he informed Secretary Stanton that General Grant, who, with his wife, had intended to accompany the President's party to the theatre that evening, had cancelled that engagement.

Thereupon, the War Secretary, who had been instrumental in getting the Gen-

eral to stay away, remonstrated with Lincoln about his intention of going to the play, but to no avail.

He then urged the President to have a competent guard.

"Stanton, do you know that Eckert can break a poker over his arm?" Lincoln asked, referring to the chief of the telegraph offices in the War Department, an unusually strong man, and alluding to an incident he had witnessed in the offices some time before, when Eckert had actually broken several cast-iron pokers of a rather poor quality over his arm.

"No, why do you ask such a question?" replied the astonished Secretary.

"Well, Stanton," said Lincoln, "I have seen Eckert break five pokers, one after the other, over his arm, and I am thinking he would be the kind of man to go with me this evening. May I take him?"

Stanton replied that he had some important work for Eckert that evening and so could not let him go.

"Well, I will ask the Major myself, and he can do your work to-morrow," and suiting the action to the word, he passed into the cipher-room to see the chief. To him Lincoln explained his intentions for the evening, and said that he wanted him to join the party, but that on mentioning the fact to Stanton, the Secretary had replied that he could not spare him.

"Now, Major," the President went on, "come along. You can do Stanton's work to-morrow, and Mrs. Lincoln and I want you with us."

Eckert, however, declined the invitation on the grounds that the work which was to be done, could not be postponed, but must be done that evening, although he thanked the President for the offer.

"Very well," replied Lincoln, "I shall take Major Rathbone along, because Stanton insists upon having some one to protect me; but I should much rather have you, Major, since I know you can break a poker over your arm."

Then, as it was nearing the hour for the Cabinet meeting, he returned to the White House.

Meanwhile, that morning, Mrs. Lincoln, who usually attended to the arranging of the theatre parties for the President, had sent word to Ford's theatre, accepting on behalf of the President and General Grant, an invitation from the management to attend the comedy to be played there that evening, "Our American Cousin," played by Laura Keene, and engaging a box for the performance.[14]

She had tried to persuade her husband not to go, but he persisted, in order, as he

said, to escape the multitude who would otherwise, that evening, press into the White House to shake hands with him.[15]

"I must," he said, "have a little rest. A large and overjoyed, excited people will visit me to-night, if I am here. My arms are lame by shaking hands with the multitude, and the people will pull me to pieces."

He also told Robert there would be room for him in the box, and asked him to be of the party. But Robert excused himself on the plea that he was tired and would prefer to rest.[16]

Shortly thereafter a note was brought from the National, the other leading theatre in Washington at that time, extending an invitation to President Lincoln and family to see Wallack and Davenport in "Aladdin."

To this offer, Mrs. Lincoln replied

that the President was sorry that the invitation had not been sent earlier, but that as he had already accepted an invitation from Ford's, of course, it would be impossible for him to be present. However, Tad and his tutor would be glad to accept.[17]

When, later, Mrs. Lincoln found out definitely that General Grant and his wife would not attend, she sent an invitation to Major Henry R. Rathbone and Miss Harris, step-son and daughter, respectively, of Senator Ira Harris of New York.[18]

Promptly at eleven o'clock General Grant arrived at the White House, and he and President Lincoln repaired to the President's office, where the Cabinet meetings were held.[19]

Secretaries McCulloch, of the Treasury, and Welles, of the Navy, Postmaster-

General Dennison and Attorney-General Speed were there on time, as was Frederick W. Seward, acting Secretary of State since his father, the Secretary, had been injured by a fall from his carriage a short time before.

Congratulations were interchanged with the General, who gave a short description of the events connected with the surrender of Lee.

"What terms did you make for the common soldiers?" the President asked at one point.

"I told them to go back to their homes and families, and they would not be molested if they did nothing more," General Grant answered, to which reply Lincoln's face glowed in approval.

The President had seated himself by the south window, in his study chair, to preside over their deliberations.

LINCOLN IN 1863

From a photograph by Alexander Gardner taken in Washington on November 8, 1863. Used by courtesy of Mr. Meserve. No. 58 in his collection, and considered by him to be one of the best portraits showing the full figure.

The question arising as to what disposition should be made of the leaders of the fallen Confederacy, the Postmaster-General said that he supposed the President would not be sorry to see them escape out of the country.

"Well," Lincoln slowly replied, "I should not be sorry to have them get out of the country, but I should be for following them up pretty closely to make sure of their going."

On the General remarking that he was anxiously awaiting news from Sherman and was expecting to hear from him at any time, the President said that "news would come soon, and come favorably he had no doubt, for last night he had had his usual dream which had preceded nearly every important event of the war."

The Secretary of the Navy then inquired the particulars of the remarkable

dream, to which Lincoln replied that it always occurred in his (the Secretary's) department; he seemed in every case, to be on a singular, indescribable vessel, which floated or drifted with great rapidity towards an unknown shore. This dream, he added, he had had preceding the firing on Fort Sumter, and the battles of Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, Stone River, Vicksburg and Wilmington.

The practical Grant, however, remarked that Stone River was no victory, and that a few victories like that would have ruined the country.

"However the facts may be," replied Lincoln, "the singular dream preceded that fight; victory did not always come, but the event and results were important.

"I have no doubt," he added, "that a battle has taken place or is being fought, and Johnston will be beaten, for I had

this strange dream last night. It must relate to Sherman; my thoughts are in that direction, and I know of no other very important event which is likely just now to occur. But," he abruptly broke off as Secretary Stanton just then entered the room, "let us proceed to business, gentlemen."

Immediately the members settled down to a consideration of momentous questions.

Almost the entire discussion of this, the last session over which Abraham Lincoln was to preside, was given over to the manner in which the Government should deal with the seceded states.

"The President was very hopeful and cheerful, and spoke kindly of General Lee and other officers of the Confederacy. Particularly did his kindly feelings go out to the Confederate enlisted men, and he clearly showed that he desired to restore a

satisfactory peace to the South, through due regard for her vanquished citizens.

"Yet, while buoyant, he seemed depressed at times, notably when referring to his dream of the night before."[20]

After the several members had expressed themselves on the question of opening up the different southern ports to trade, the President appointed a committee consisting of the Secretaries of Treasury, War and Navy to look up the matter carefully and settle it in any manner they should agree upon.

Secretary Stanton then brought up the subject of reconstructing and preserving civil governments in the southern states. He had already formulated and drawn up a plan setting forth his own views, a copy of which he had handed to the President the preceding day.

The President's opinions on this have

been preserved to us by Secretary Welles, who entered it in his diary at the time, and wrote it out in detail seven years later.[21]

"I proposed to bring forward this subject," President Lincoln said, "although I have not had time as yet to give much attention to the details of the paper which the Secretary of War gave me yesterday; but it is substantially, in its general scope, the plan which we have sometimes talked over in Cabinet meetings. We shall probably make some modifications, prescribe further details; there are some suggestions which I shall wish to make, and I desire all of us to bring our minds to the question, for no greater or more important one can come before us, or any future Cabinet.

"I think it Providential that this great rebellion is crushed just as Congress has adjourned, and there are none of the dis-

turbing elements of that body to hinder and embarrass us. If we are wise and discreet, we will reanimate the states and get their governments in successful operation, with order prevailing and the Union re-established, before Congress comes together in December. This, I think, is important. We can do better, accomplish more without than with them. There are men in Congress who, if their motives are good, are nevertheless impracticable, and who possess feelings of hate and vindictiveness, in which I do not sympathize and can not participate.

"I hope there will be no persecution, no bloody work, after the war is over. No one need expect me to take any part in hanging or killing those men, even the worst of them. Frighten them out of the country, open the gates, let down the bars,

scare them off," he continued, throwing up his hands as if scaring sheep.

"Enough lives have been sacrificed. We must extinguish our resentments if we expect harmony and union. There is too much of a desire on the part of some of our very good friends to be masters, to interfere with and dictate to those states, to treat the people not as fellow-citizens; there is too little respect for their rights.

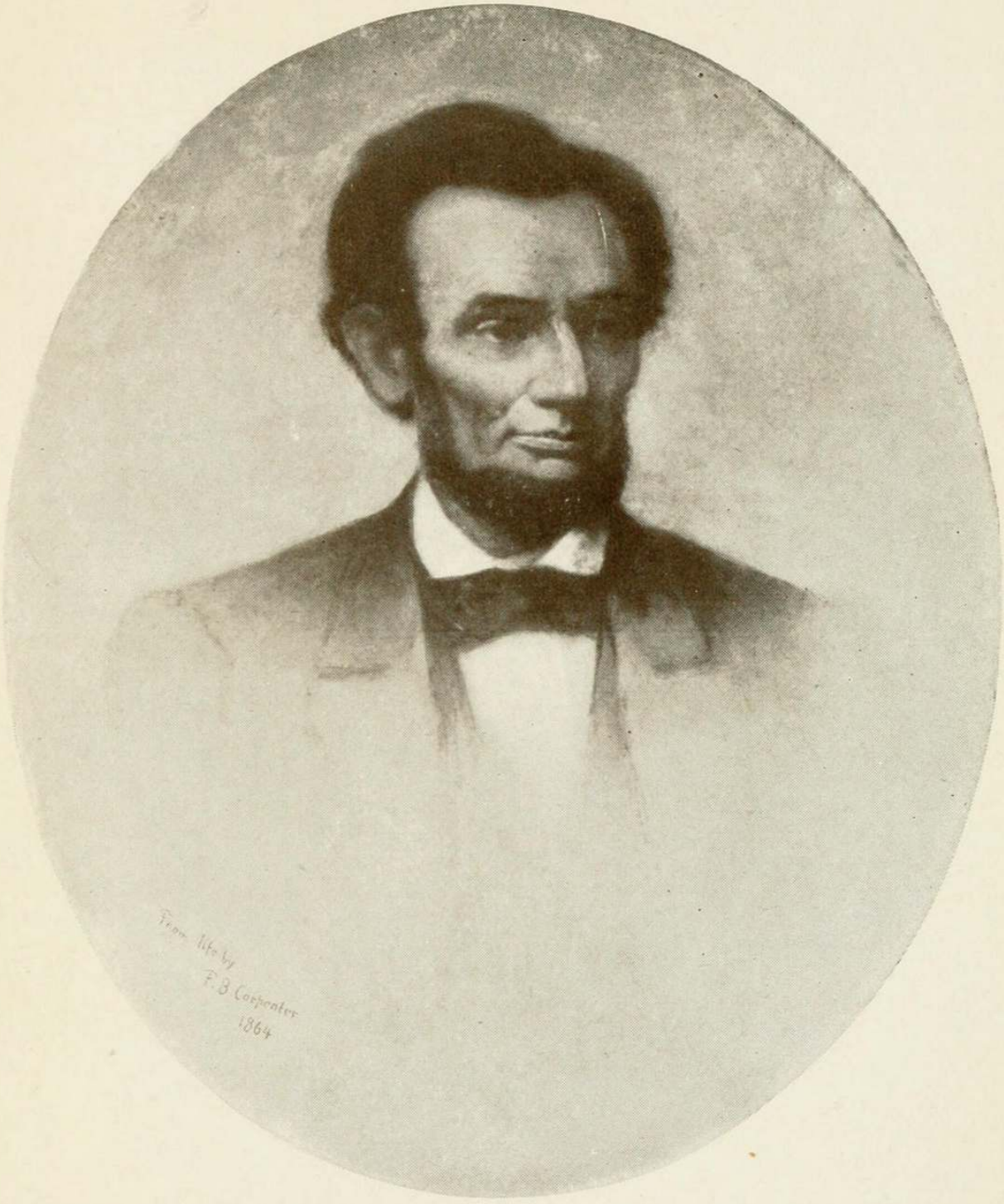
"I do not sympathize in these feelings.

"Louisiana has framed and presented one of the best constitutions that has ever been formed. I wish, however, they had permitted negroes who have property or can read, to vote; this is a question which they must decide for themselves. Yet, some, a very few of our friends, are not willing to let the people of the states determine these questions, but, in violation of first and fundamental principles, would

exercise arbitrary power over them. These humanitarians break down all state rights and constitutional rights. Had the Louisianians inserted the negro in their constitution, and had that instrument been in all other respects the same, Mr. Sumner would never have taken exception to that constitution. The delegation would have been admitted, and also the state.

"Each House of Congress," he continued, "has the undoubted right to receive or reject members; the Executive has no control in this matter. But Congress has nothing to do with the state governments, which the President can recognize, and under existing laws treat as other states, give them the same mail facilities, collect taxes, appoint judges, marshals, collectors, etc., subject, of course, to confirmation.

"There are men," he concluded, "who object to these views, but they are not



THE CARPENTER PORTRAIT OF LINCOLN

From the portrait painted by the late Frank B. Carpenter at the White House in 1864. The circumstances of its painting are described in Mr. Carpenter's book, "Six Months at the White House, The Story of a Picture," published in 1866. The original portrait now hangs in the Union League Club, New York City. The line across the left side of the face is a crack in the original canvas.

here, and we must make haste to do our duty before they come here," (again referring to Congress).

Secretary Stanton then read his project for establishing a temporary military government for the states of Virginia and North Carolina.

Secretary Welles objected to military control, and the plan of putting two states temporarily under one government, and cited his objections.

"Your exceptions, some of them at least," the President said, "are well taken. Some of them have occurred to me. It was in that view I had been willing that General Weitzel should call the leading rebels together, because they were not the legal Legislature of Virginia, while the Pierpont Legislature was.

"What would you do with Pierpont

and the Virginia Constitution?" he continued, turning to Stanton.

But the War Secretary said that he had no apprehension from Pierpont, and that the paper which he had submitted was merely a rough sketch, subject to alteration.

Postmaster-General Dennison then gave his objections to Stanton's plan, and was followed by Welles, who again spoke on the matter.

As the meeting was drawing to a close, Lincoln directed his War Secretary to take the document and draw up two different plans for the two different states, and have copies made of each and furnished to each member of the Cabinet by the following Tuesday, when they would have their next regular meeting. They required different treatment, the President said.

"We must not," he added, "stultify

ourselves as regards Virginia, but we must help her. North Carolina is in a different condition."

Then he impressed upon each member the importance of deliberating upon and carefully considering the subject of reconstruction, as that was the great question now pending, and that they must all begin to act in the interest of peace. He again expressed himself as thankful that Congress was not then in session to embarrass them.

At the adjournment of the meeting the acting Secretary of State remarked that the new British Minister, Sir Frederick Bruce, had arrived in Washington, and asked the President at what time it would be convenient for him to receive him.

Lincoln thought a moment.

"To-morrow, at two o'clock," he replied, adding with a smile, "Don't forget to send

up the speeches beforehand—I would like to look them over."

As the members of the Cabinet filed out,[22] they all remarked on the fine personal appearance of the President, Stanton observing to Attorney-General Speed, as they went downstairs, "Didn't our chief look grand to-day?"

And, writing twenty years afterward, this Attorney-General says: "I fondly cling to the memory of Mr. Lincoln's personal appearance as I saw him that day, with cleanly shaven face, well brushed clothing, and neatly combed hair and whiskers."

General Grant remained behind for a few moments to converse with Lincoln, the latter urging him to go along to Ford's that evening.[23] But the General remained firm in his refusal. He said that as he and Mrs. Grant had made arrangements to go

to Burlington, New Jersey, to see their children, it would be a great disappointment to his wife to delay the trip.

The President mentioned how delighted the people would be to see the General at such a public place, and told him that he ought to stay and attend on that account.

Grant, however, never had a taste for display of any sort whatever. At this point a note was brought in from Mrs. Grant, who was desirous of leaving the city on the four o'clock train, and was getting anxious over the General's continued absence. So he decided finally that he could not accept the President's invitation, and, shaking his hand, bade him good-bye. This was between one and two o'clock in the afternoon.

After General Grant had left, President Lincoln found Major J. B. Merwin,

of Connecticut, waiting to see him. The Major had called by appointment some little time previously, and, finding the President engaged, had determined to wait, rather than leave the Executive Mansion and call later.[24]

As it was already past luncheon time, the President had a lunch brought up to them and they dined together.[25]

Major Merwin was an old friend of Lincoln; they had stumped the state of Illinois politically together, and the Major had often been entrusted with special missions to the armies and elsewhere by the President.

On this occasion he had been called to the White House for the purpose of carrying a secret proposition to Horace Greeley and one or two other leading editors of the country, in regard to the employment of colored troops in the dig-

ging of a contemplated Panama canal. Lincoln at that date realized the importance of constructing such a waterway, and he was also greatly concerned, now that the negro troops were soon to be discharged, as to what should be done with them. There really did not seem any place for them to go, and those who had borne arms did not feel like going back to the plantations. He discussed the subject at some length with Merwin.

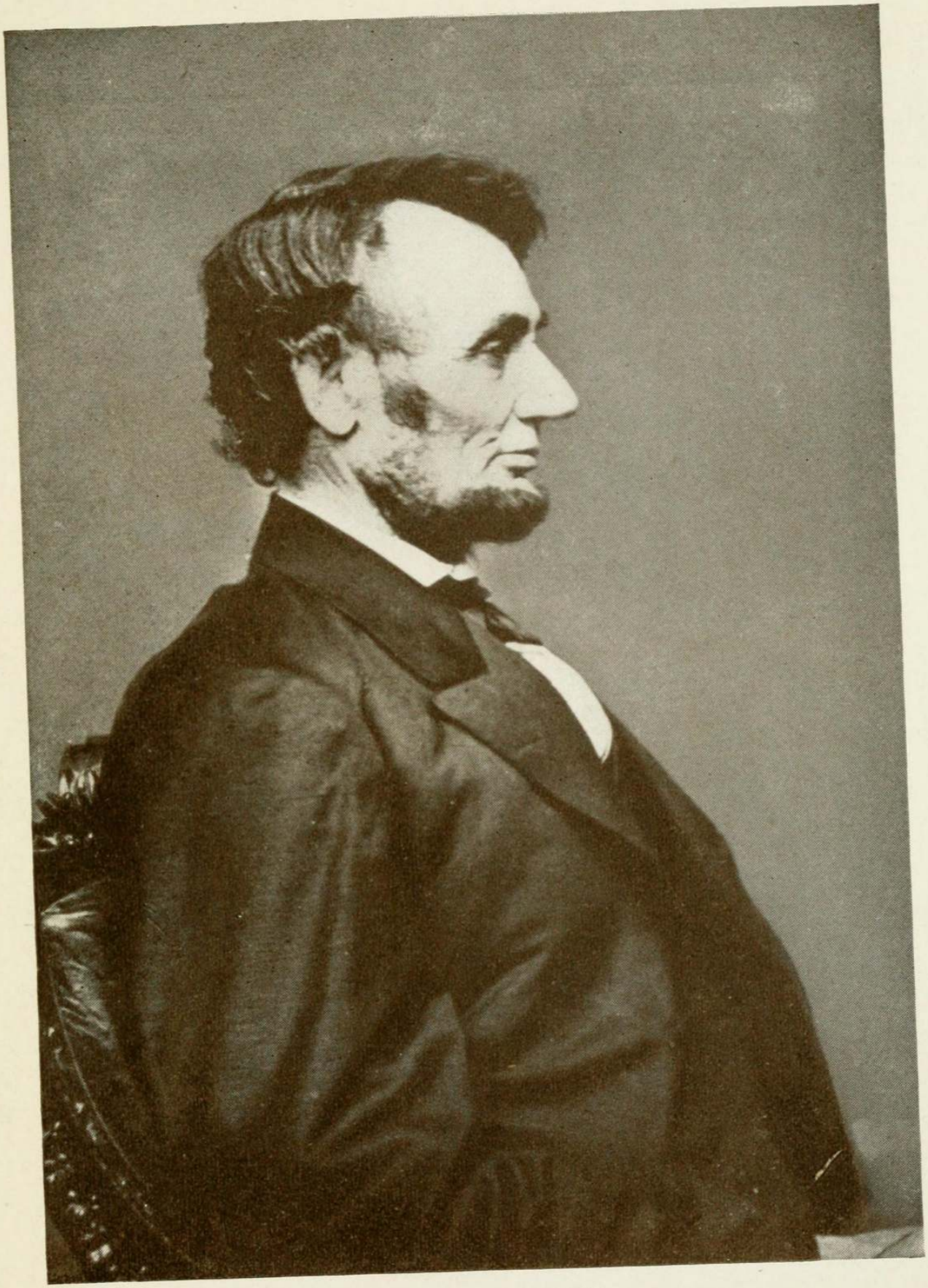
His idea was to interest public opinion in the project, which had been first suggested to him by General Benjamin F. Butler, who had also given him much information on the subject. He sought to have Greeley, especially, favor it in his paper, the New York *Tribune,* on account of its influence and wide circulation. He informed Merwin that he had spent the most of three nights on the document

embodying his views, which was to be delivered to the journalists, and instructed him that he should go to Philadelphia, see some of the editors there, and then go on to New York. After Greeley had read the plan, he was to tell the President just what he thought of it.

Writing, after a lapse of forty-five years, Major Merwin remembered the President to have been "in fine spirits."

As his visitor arose to leave, President Lincoln handed him the papers connected with the proposition and gave him his final instructions. Then, recalling their campaigning together ten years before, Lincoln said:

"Merwin, we have cleared up a colossal job. Slavery is abolished. After reconstruction, the next great question will be the overthrow and suppression of the legalized liquor traffic, and you know my



LINCOLN IN 1864

The famous profile, one of Lincoln's best-known photographs, taken by M. B. Brady at Washington in 1864. It is from Mr. Meserve's collection (No. 81) and is used through his courtesy.

head and my heart, my hand and my purse will go into this contest for victory. In 1842, less than a quarter of a century ago, I predicted that the day would come when there would be neither a slave nor a drunkard in the land. I have lived to see one prediction fulfilled. I hope to live to see the other realized."

This struck Merwin as so important a statement, that he said:

"Mr. Lincoln, shall I publish this from you?"

"Yes, publish it as wide as the daylight shines," the President replied.

While President Lincoln was lunching with Merwin, Edward D. Neill, one of his private secretaries, had occasion to seek him to procure his signature to a paper.[26] Hearing that Lincoln was at luncheon, the secretary began examining some of the papers on the President's table, to see

whether he could find the desired commission. While looking them over, Lincoln came into the room, eating an apple, having just bade Merwin good-bye.

Neill commenced to tell him for what he was looking, but as he spoke, noticed that the President had placed his hand on the bell-pull.

"For whom are you going to ring?" asked the secretary.

"Andrew Johnson," Lincoln responded, placing his hand on Neill's coat.

"Then I will come in again," said the secretary, and as he was leaving the room the Vice-President had been ushered in and Lincoln advanced and took him by the hand.

This interview with Johnson was of short duration, and dealt with future action towards the South, now that the rebellion was practically over. The Vice-

President urged harsher and more vengeful measures than Lincoln would agree to.

After Johnson had left, the President settled down to his afternoon routine transaction of business, and reception of callers.

He signed a pardon for a soldier sentenced to be shot for desertion, remarking as he did so:

"Well, I think the boy can do us more good above ground than under ground."[27]

He also approved an application for the discharge of a Confederate prisoner, on his taking the oath of allegiance.[27]

"Let it be done," he wrote on the recommendation and then signed it.

A significant comment on Lincoln is made by Gen. James Harrison Wilson[28] who says that one of the great secrets of Lincoln's strength was that he refused to make any important decision unless physi-

cally and mentally at his best, or comparatively so. As a result of this practice, while he sometimes deferred matters beyond the time when his subordinates thought he should have acted on them, he safeguarded his action and accomplished more in the end.

Hon. John B. Henderson, then Senator from Missouri, called on the President to obtain an order from him for the release of a Confederate prisoner by the name of George Vaughn, from the Senator's home state.[29] Some time before this, Vaughn had been captured and sentenced to death as a spy. Henderson, however, knew all the details of the case, and thought that the findings of the court had been too severe. On two previous orders from President Lincoln, retrials had been held, but the verdict remained as originally given.

Nothing daunted, Henderson had then determined to try to obtain an unconditional pardon from the President, and it was for this purpose that he sought him that afternoon.

Calling the attention of Lincoln to the fact that the war was now practically over, he added:

"Mr. Lincoln, his pardon should be granted in the interest of peace and conciliation."

"Senator, I agree with you," replied the President, "go to Stanton and tell him this man must be released."

"I have seen Stanton, and he will do nothing," protested Henderson.

"See him again," was the reply, "and if he will do nothing, come back to me."

The Senator then left the White House and proceeded to the offices of the War Secretary.

Right in line with this spirit of kindliness and good feeling is an anecdote happening the same afternoon, related by the Rev. Joseph P. Thompson, of New York City, in a sermon preached two weeks later.[30]

The Governor of Maryland called to pay his respects to the President, bringing along a friend. They found him very cheerful over the state of the country.

At the close of the interview, one of the visitors asked Lincoln for a small favor for a friend.

"Anything, now, to make the people happy," responded the President as he wrote the necessary order.

Another caller was Major William H. Anderson, on the staff of General Sheridan.[31] The Major had been sent from the front with despatches for the War Department, and had arrived in Washington the

day before. As was the custom, he had been provided with a duplicate set of despatches for the President, and when he presented himself at the White House found the usual large crowd in the main reception room on the first floor waiting for an audience. He showed his despatches to the usher on duty, and was immediately shown upstairs to the President's office. As he entered the room, he noticed John Hay, one of Lincoln's private secretaries, Secretary Stanton and several army officers and civilians. President Lincoln came quickly forward and took both the Major's hands in his own.

"God bless you; how are all my boys in the field?" he asked, for his heart always went out to the men in the ranks who were bearing the brunt of the fighting.

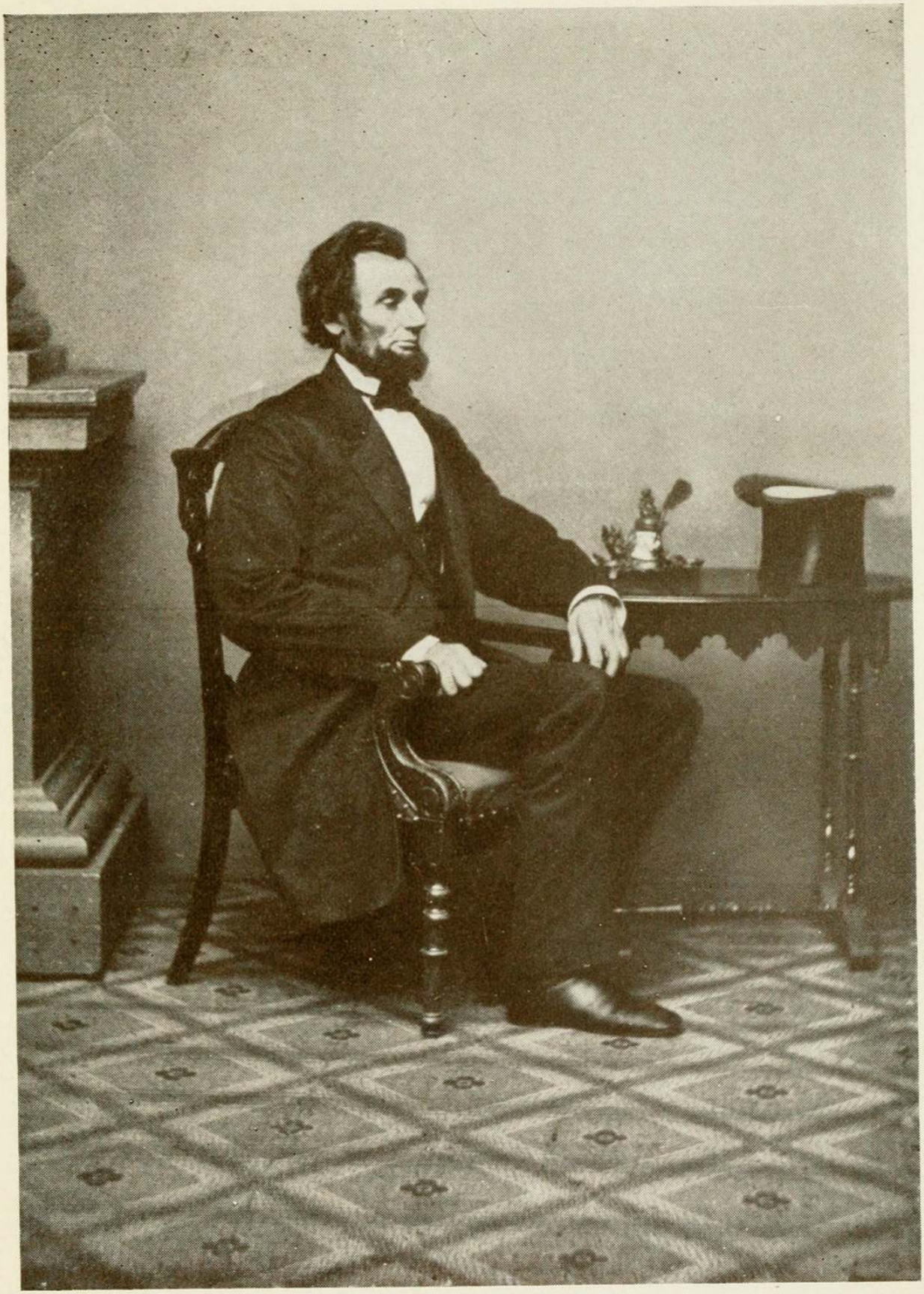
He asked Anderson if he would remain in the city over night.

Anderson replied that he would.

"Be sure and call here before you return," said the President, and that terminated the interview.

A lady who had at one time been a servant in the Lincolns' Springfield home, gained admittance.[32] Since leaving the Lincoln household, she had married, and her husband subsequently enlisted in the army. She was now in Washington trying to secure his release from the service. Of course, the President remembered her, and was glad to see her again. He had her presented with a basket of fruit, and also directed her to call the next day, when he would see that she should obtain a pass through the lines, and money to buy clothes for herself and children.

It must have been a very busy afternoon for President Lincoln. L. E. Chittenden,[33] his Register of the Treasury,



LINCOLN IN 1864

From an enlargement of the original negative by M. B. Brady. Taken at Washington in 1864. It is owned by Mr. Meserve and is No. 68 in his collection. He regards it as one of the finest of the portraits.

tells us that that afternoon, intending to leave Washington, he called at the White House to take leave of the President, and found so many waiting, and the President so occupied with pressing business, that he came away without even sending in his card.

However, the callers were finally disposed of.

It was getting rather late in the afternoon, but he and Mrs. Lincoln had determined to take a drive, and the carriage was ordered.[34]

Before starting, Mrs. Lincoln asked him whether any one should accompany them.

"No," was the reply, "I prefer to ride by ourselves to-day."

As the President was coming down the stairway,[35] he noticed a one-armed soldier standing below and heard him say:

"I would almost give my other hand if I could shake that of Abraham Lincoln."

This soldier had arrived too late to be shown into the President's office, and regretted that he should not see him.

Lincoln walked up and grasped the man by his remaining hand.

"You shall do that and it shall cost you nothing, my boy," he said. He also asked him his name and regiment, and where he had lost his arm, spoke pleasantly to him for a few moments and called him a brave soldier.

Then leaving him, President Lincoln started along the corridor, where he happened to notice two ladies standing.[36] Going up to them, he shook hands and inquired of them their names. One of them was Mrs. C. D. Hess, wife of one of the managers of the National theatre, and the other was her sister.

Recognizing the name of Mrs. Hess, the President remarked that he was very sorry to have been unable to accept the invitation from the managers of the National to attend the play there that evening.

Upon the ladies mentioning the fact that the White House conservatory was their objective that afternoon, the President escorted them to it.

Arriving there, he inquired of them whether they had seen his favorite lemon tree, and upon receiving a negative reply, pointed it out.

One of the visitors remarked on the fact of the rebellion being crushed, and asked Lincoln whether he was not very happy over the news.

"Yes, madam; for the first time since this cruel war began, I can see my way clearly."

And the one who has recorded this incident, herself one of these visitors, adds, "such a tender look was in his deep-set eyes as he uttered these words."

Then picking a lemon for each of the ladies from his favorite tree, and requesting the gardener to gather them some flowers, the President left them.

As he and Mrs. Lincoln entered their carriage, he ordered the coachman to drive in the direction of the Soldiers' Home, where the Lincoln family was accustomed to spend the summer months.

The early afternoon was bright and sunshiny, a typical spring day, but towards evening the weather became rather cold and raw.

"Mary," said the President as they moved along,[37] "we have had a hard time of it since we came to Washington, but the war is over, and, with God's blessing,

we may hope for four years of peace and happiness, and then we will go back to Illinois, and probably pass the rest of our lives in quiet there."

He then spoke of their old Springfield home, recalled his early days there, the little old cottage, his law office and the court room. He dwelt on his varied experiences while riding the circuit, and the green bag he used for carrying his law papers.

"We have laid by," he went on, "some money, and, during this term we will try to save up more, but shall not have enough to support us. We will go back to Illinois, and I will open a law-office at Springfield or Chicago, and practise law, and at least do enough to help give us a livelihood."

However, he continued, he was not wholly certain whether it would be best to

fix his residence finally in his old home in Springfield, or remove to California, his mind reverting to his conversation with Colfax in the morning.

Throughout the whole drive he seemed in the best of spirits, and Mrs. Lincoln commented on the fact.

"And well I may feel so, Mary, for I consider this day the war has come to a close," adding, "we must both be more cheerful in the future; between the war and the loss of our darling Willie, we have been very miserable." [38]

As they drove through the suburbs they were greeted by the people affectionately wherever recognized.

On their return to the White House, late in the afternoon, as the President was leaving his carriage, he saw going across the lawn towards the Treasury building, two of his old Illinois friends, Governor

Richard Oglesby and General Isham N. Haynie.[39] These gentlemen had called to see Lincoln, and, finding him out, had started to leave the grounds.

"Come back, boys, come back," shouted the President, waving his arms.

Recognizing the voice, the party turned and came back, joining Lincoln on the portico.

Telling them to wait a few moments in the reception room, the President went upstairs to his office to brush the effects of his drive from his clothing.

As he stepped into a small side closet, connected with the office, to wash his hands, the Assistant Secretary of War, Charles A. Dana, entered the room.[40] Seeing no one he turned to go, when the President, spying him, called out:

"Hello, Dana. What is it? What's up?"

"Well, sir," was the reply, "here is a despatch from the Provost Marshal of Portland, who reports that Jacob Thompson is to be in that town to-night, and inquires what orders we have to give."

"What does Stanton say?" Lincoln asked.

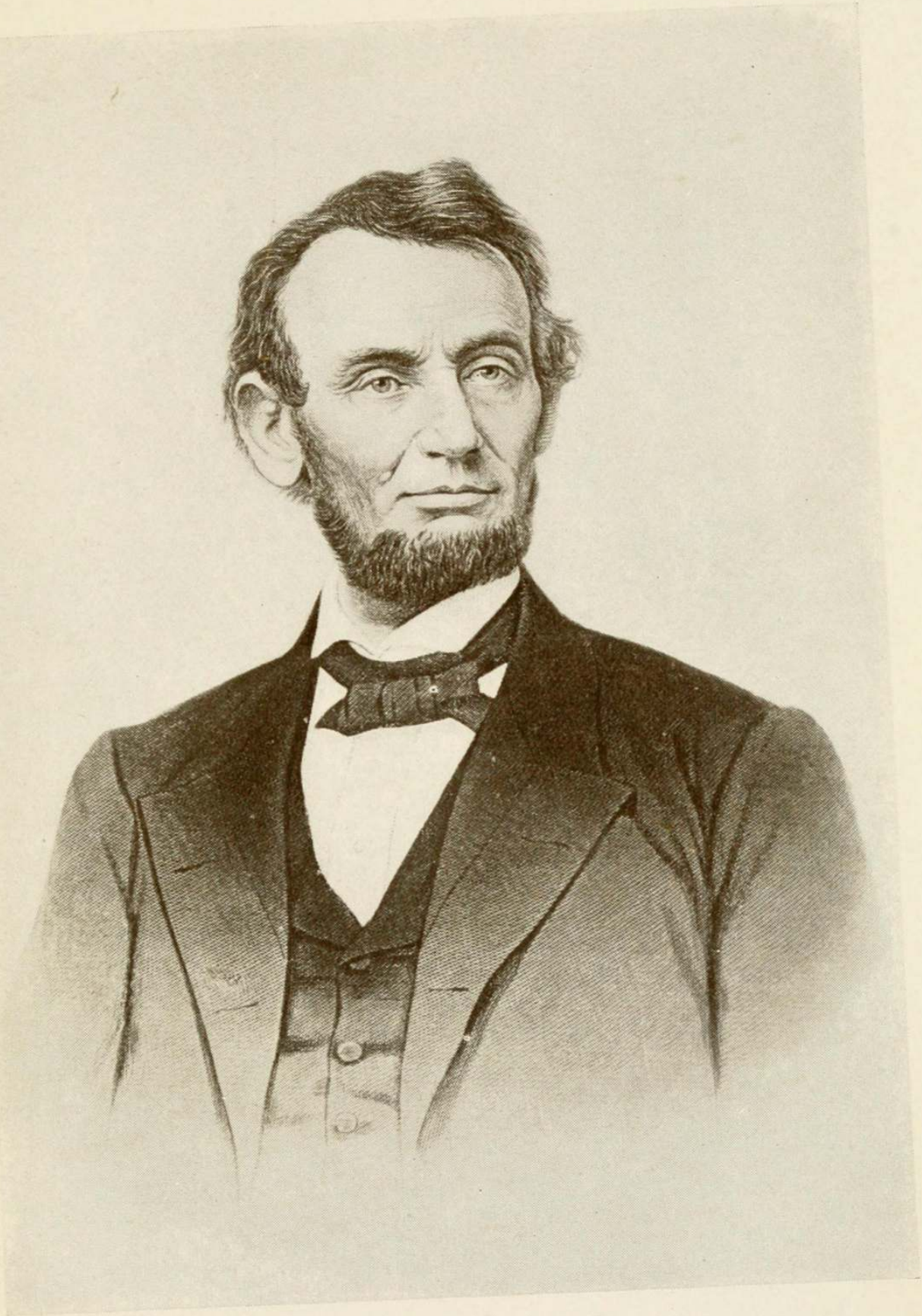
"He says arrest him, but that I should refer the question to you."

"Well," answered Lincoln slowly, wiping his hands, "no; I rather guess not. When you have got an elephant by the hind leg, and he is trying to run away, it's best to let him run."

And with this direction Dana returned to his chief.

The President rejoining his visitors, they all went up to his office, where a pleasant hour was spent together, laughing and talking and telling stories.

During the conversation Lincoln



A Steel Engraving of Lincoln

From a steel engraving used as the frontispiece to "Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time," edited by Allen T. Rice and published in 1886 by the North American Publishing Company.

informed his friends that he intended going to Ford's that evening, and asked them if they would accompany him. His visitors, however, had made other arrangements for the evening and so had to decline.

Finally, Lincoln got out a book he had but recently secured, the latest work from the pen of "Petroleum V. Nasby." He was always interested in this particular kind of humorous literature as a means of relaxation, and on this occasion he read four entire chapters of the work to his auditors, laughing heartily as something would strike him as being especially funny.

While thus engaged, the President was informed several times that the evening meal was ready. Each time he promised to go, but would continue his reading. Finally the doorkeeper called Oglesby aside, and explained that as the President

was going to the theatre that evening, it was necessary for him to dine at that time, so the visitors departed.

Lincoln dined alone with his family that evening.[41]

Immediately following dinner, Noah Brooks, then a newspaper correspondent and one of the President's intimate friends, called by appointment.[42]

Lincoln informed him that he "had had a notion" of sending for him to go to the theatre with himself and Mrs. Lincoln that evening, but that Mrs. Lincoln had already made up a party to take the place of General and Mrs. Grant, who had somewhat unexpectedly left the city for Burlington, New Jersey.

He also told Brooks that the party had been originally planned for the purpose of taking the Grants to see "Our American Cousin" at Ford's theatre, and that

when Grant had decided not to stay, he "felt inclined to give up the whole thing."

But, he added, as it had been announced in the morning papers that this distinguished party would go to the theatre that evening, Mrs. Lincoln had insisted that they ought to go, in order that the expectant public should not be wholly disappointed.

After the correspondent had taken his leave, the President wished to make a hurried trip to the War Department. So, calling the attendant or guard whose duty it was to be near the President at such times, he started out. This evening his attendant happened to be William H. Crook, a man but recently living in Washington, D. C.[43]

As they walked along, the guard noticed that Lincoln seemed unsually depressed and his step slower than usual. As we

know him to have been in quite a different mood all day, up to this time, this depression, as Colonel Crook says, must have been due to one of the sudden changes of mood to which President Lincoln was ever subject.

In crossing over to the War building, they passed a crowd of drunken men.

This suggesting a possibility to the President, he said:

"Crook, do you know, I believe there are men who want to take my life?" adding after a pause, half to himself, "and it is possible they will do it."

"Why do you think so, Mr. President?" asked the dismayed guard.

"Other men have been assassinated," was the reply.

"I hope you are mistaken, Mr. President," said the guard, unable to say anything else.

After walking a few paces in silence, Lincoln spoke in a more ordinary tone:

"I have perfect confidence in those around me, in every one of you men. I know no one could do it and escape alive. But if it is to be done, it is impossible to prevent it."

At this point they arrived at the War Department, and the President went in for a short conference with the Secretary.

Of course, Stanton had something to say about the President's order permitting Jacob Thompson to escape.[44]

"By permitting him to escape the penalties of treason, you sanction it," he said.

"Well," replied Lincoln, "that puts me in mind of a little story. There was an Irish soldier last summer who stopped at a chemist's, where he saw a soda-fountain.

" 'Misther Doctor,' he said, 'give me, please, a glass ov soda-wather—and if ye

can put a few drops of whiskey in unbeknown to anyone, I'll be obleeged till yees.'

"Now," the President continued, "if Jake Thompson is permitted to go away unbeknown to anyone, where's the harm? Don't have him arrested."

They both spoke briefly and feelingly of the fact that at last the end of bloody fratricidal strife was in sight.

At that moment Stanton realized, as never before, his deep affection for the President. "As they exchanged congratulations, Lincoln from his greater height, dropped his long arm upon Stanton's shoulders, and a hearty embrace terminated their rejoicings over the close of the mighty struggle."[45]

When the President came out of the Secretary's office, Crook noticed that every trace of his recent depression was gone.

On the way back he said that Mrs. Lincoln and he, with a party, were going to the theatre to see "Our American Cousin," that evening.

"It has been advertised that we will be there, and I cannot disappoint the people," he said. "Otherwise I would not go. I do not care to go now."

For some unaccountable reason, now that the time was approaching for his attendance upon the performance at Ford's, President Lincoln seemed reluctant to go. Just a short time before he had intimated this to his friend Brooks. Later, others of his friends were to notice this.

Reaching the Executive Mansion, the President climbed the steps, while the guard turned towards his residence out on "Rodbird's Hill."

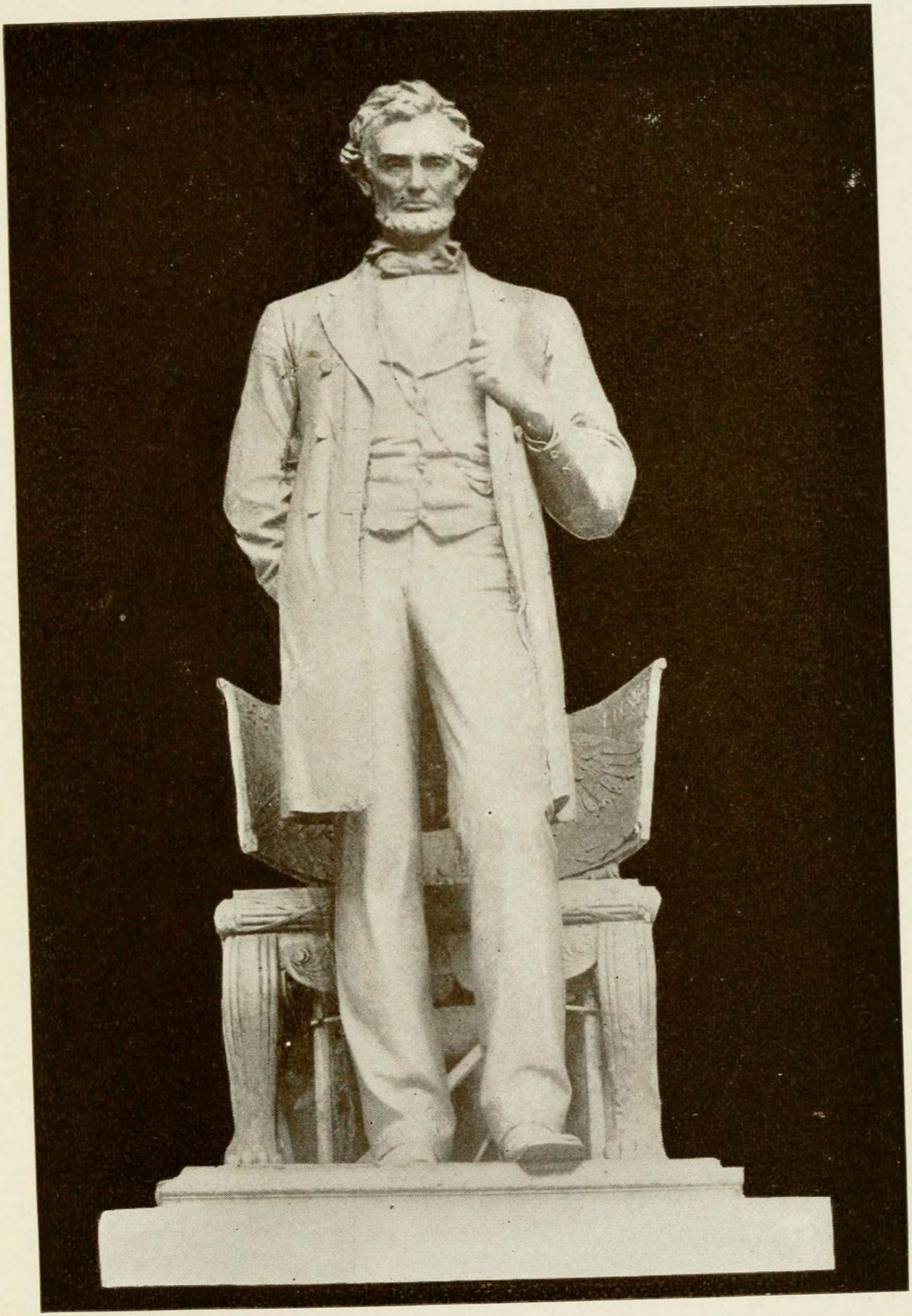
"Good-bye, Crook," Lincoln called,

and entering found Speaker Colfax and Hon. George Ashmun, of Massachusetts, waiting for him in the Red Room.[46] Ashmun had been chairman of the Republican National Convention of 1860 which had nominated Lincoln for the Presidency. The Speaker had come to say farewell to the President, as he intended leaving on his Pacific trip the next morning.

The party proceeded to the library for conference. President Lincoln was now in the best of spirits. To his auditors he spoke of his recent visit to the Confederate capital.

"Was it not," Ashmun asked, "rather imprudent for you to expose yourself in Richmond? We were much concerned for your safety."

"I would have been alarmed myself if any other person had been President and



THE ST. GAUDENS STATUE OF LINCOLN

From a photograph of the statue in Lincoln Park, Chicago, made by Augustus St. Gaudens and unveiled in 1887.

gone there, but I did not find any danger whatever," Lincoln replied.

Then turning to Speaker Colfax he said:

"Sumner has the 'gavel' of the Confederate Congress, which he got at Richmond, and intended to give it to the Secretary of War, but I insisted he must give it to you, and you tell him from me to hand it over."

Ashmun then alluded to the "gavel" used in the convention of 1860, and added that he had preserved it as a valuable memento. He then referred to a matter of business connected with a cotton claim, preferred by a client of his, and said that he desired to have a commission appointed to examine and decide upon the merits of the case.

"I have done with commissions," Lincoln warmly replied, "I believe they are contrivances to cheat the Government out

of every pound of cotton they can lay their hands on."

Ashmun's face flushed, and he said that he hoped the President meant no personal imputation.

Lincoln saw that he had unwittingly wounded his friend.

"You did not understand me, Ashmun," he instantly replied, "I did not mean what you inferred. I take it back," adding after a moment of silence, "I apologize to you, Ashmun."

Subsequently the President excused himself to get his hat and coat, and stepped into his office, where a moment later Senator Henderson, who had somehow managed to elude the usher, found him.[47]

Henderson, after leaving Lincoln that afternoon, had sought out Stanton and informed him of the President's request regarding the case of George Vaughn.

But the Secretary became violently angry and would not comply with it.

The Senator noting that President Lincoln was ready for the theatre, quickly narrated the results of the meeting. Without a word Lincoln turned to his desk and wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper.

"I think that will have precedence over Stanton," he remarked, handing the order to Henderson, who thereupon left him.

Before leaving the office, the President picked up a commission lying on his desk, reappointing Alvin Saunders Governor of the territory of Nebraska.[48]

Penning the following lines, "rather a lengthy commission, bestowing upon Mr. Alvin Saunders the official authority of Governor of the Territory of Nebraska," below the document, he then signed it, and left it on his desk unfolded.

On his way back to the library the

President stopped at Robert's room. Thinking that possibly by this time Robert was rested up, and had decided to go along to the theatre with them, he said:[49]

"We're going to the theatre, Bob, don't you want to go?"

But as the young Captain had not slept in bed for nearly two weeks, he told his father that if he did not care, he would rather stay at home and "turn in early."

Of course his father, who was always an indulgent parent, told him to do as he wished, and again started for the library, bidding his son a cheery "good-night."

Re-engaging momentarily in conversation with Colfax and Ashmun, the cards of Senator William M. Stewart, of Nevada, and Judge Niles Searles, of New York, were brought in. The Senator knew the President very well, and had called to

introduce his friend, the Judge, to the chief executive, whom he had never met.[50]

Lincoln picked up a card and wrote the following, which he directed the usher to take down to the callers:

"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."

As it was then half an hour later than the time he had intended to start for the theatre, the President prepared to depart, although he indeed mentioned something about staying a half hour longer. Both of his visitors afterwards noted that he seemed rather loth to leave the White House that evening.

"You will accompany Mrs. Lincoln and me to the theatre, I hope?" he asked of Colfax.

But the Speaker pleaded other engagements, recalling his trip the next morning.

Ashmun, however, was disappointed that the interview had been cut so short, and so expressed himself.

The President then made an engagement with him for nine o'clock the next morning, and in view of the fact that that was an hour earlier than the stated time for receiving visitors, noted the following on a card in order that the statesman might have no trouble in being admitted:

"Allow Mr. Ashmun and friend to come in at 9 A.M. to-morrow. A. LINCOLN."

The friend to be admitted was Judge C. P. Daly, of New York.[51]

This card the President then handed to Ashmun.

As they left the library, another interruption occurred. Two gentlemen who desired to go to Richmond importuned the

President to give them a pass in order to get through.[52] Returning, Lincoln picked up another card and made this notation thereon:

"No pass is necessary now to authorize any one to go to and return from Petersburg & Richmond—People go and return just as they did before the war.

"A. Lincoln."

Handing this to his callers, the President again started for his carriage. Mrs. Lincoln having joined them a short time before, the party went downstairs, Mrs. Lincoln taking the arm of Mr. Ashmun, while the President and Speaker walked together.

When they reached the portico, Lincoln again referred to the Speaker's trip.

"Colfax," he said, "don't forget to tell the people of the mining regions what

I told you this morning about the development when peace comes."

Then, happening to notice Senator Stewart and his friend standing on the stone flagging, he walked over and extended his hand. The Senator introduced Judge Searles to him, and the President, reiterating the statement on his card that he would be glad to see them the following morning, bade them good-night.

As he stepped into the carriage, he saw his friend, Hon. Isaac N. Arnold, then a member of Congress, approaching.[53]

"Excuse me now," he remarked, "I am going to the theatre. Come and see me in the morning."

He and Mrs. Lincoln seated themselves in the carriage. He ordered the driver to drive around to the residence of Senator Harris, at the corner of Fifteenth and H

Streets, for Major Rathbone and Miss Harris, the other members of the party.

"I will telegraph you, Colfax, at San Francisco," called back the President as the carriage rolled away.

What followed is a matter of history.

Notes

Notes

1. SEWARD. Note to Frederick W. Seward, acting Secretary of State:

"Please call a Cabinet meeting at eleven o'clock to-day. General Grant will be with us.

"A. LINCOLN."

2. WORKS xi, 94. Note to General U. S. Grant:

"LIEUTENANT-GENERAL GRANT:

"Please call at 11 A.M. to-day instead of 9 as agreed last evening.

"A. LINCOLN."

3. WORKS xi, 94; WRITINGS vii, 371. Letter to Gen. Van Alen:

"MY DEAR SIR:

"I intend to adopt the advice of my friends and use due precaution. . . . I thank you for the assurance you give me that I shall be supported by conservative men like yourself, in the efforts I may make to restore the Union, so as to make it, to use your language, a Union of hearts and hands as well as of states.

"Yours truly,

"A. LINCOLN."

The fact is self-evident from Lincoln's notes to Seward and Grant that they must have been written early in the morning. The author has chosen this also as the time he in all probability penned his reply to General Van Alen, as later in the day he would hardly have had the time to do so. We infer from Chittenden, 240–241, and elsewhere, that during the time the President was in his office in the afternoon, he was so besieged with callers that it would have been impossible for him to have attended to correspondence. Thayer, 435, also gives the morning as the time this letter was written.

4. See Tarbell ii, 233; Laughlin, 68–69; Arnold, 429, for accounts of breakfast period.

5. Keckley, 137–138. Mrs. Keckley was modiste in the White House at this time, and present at the incident.

6. *New York American.*

7. Crosby, 374–375.

8. Writings vii, 370–371; Oldroyd, 3–4; Raymond, 694.

9. Draper. Related to A. S. Draper by General Cresswell.

10. Yates, 11.

11. Crosby, 375; Shea, 59; and Morris, 19.
12. Idem.
13. See Laughlin, 69–71; and Bates, 366–368, for accounts of his morning visit to the War Department. Bates was an eye-witness.
14. Moss; Laughlin, 73; Mudge, 303–304; Glimpses, 48.
15. Reed.
16. Stevens, 72.
17. Moss.
18. Laughlin, 74.
19. For detailed accounts of Cabinet meeting, see Seward and Welles. Many others have shorter accounts. Both Secretaries Seward and Welles being present, render their descriptions invaluable.
20. Secretary Stanton to General Thomas M. Vincent in Benjamin, 84–85.
21. Welles has recorded these remarks in the third person; the author transposes them to the first.
22. Attorney-General Speed in Barrett ii, 356.
23. Porter, 891–892.
24. For Merwin interview, the author has collated the accounts of Crispin, 30–31; White; Hobson, 61; Dunn; *National Prohibitionist*; Omaha Issue. Also com-

munications from Major Merwin January 3, and February 19, 1912.

25. Major Merwin to the author, February 19, 1921.

26. Neill in Glimpses, 47, 50; Browne, 703–704.

27. Browne, 704–705.

28. General James Harrison Wilson is the oldest general of the Civil War living in 1922. He communicated this comment to Mr. Robert Bruce, a Lincoln student, in 1921.

29. Pratt, 211–212; Success; Williams, 200–201.

30. Thompson, 18.

31. Major Anderson to the author, March 24, 1921.

32. Herndon ii, 138.

33. Chittenden, 240–241.

34. Arnold, 429–430; Mudge, 302–303; Brooks' Life, 455; Carpenter, 293; Nicolay and Hay x, 285–286; Coffin, 514; best accounts of President's drive.

35. L. E. Chittenden in Tributes, 148.

36. Moss.

37. Conversation as recalled by Mrs. Lincoln, and related to Hon. Isaac N. Arnold; see Arnold, 429–430.

38. "The last day he lived was the happiest of his life." Mrs. Lincoln to Rev. Dr. Miner. Reed Lecture, 343.

39. Tarbell ii, 235; Haynie.

40. Dana in Rice, 375–376; Dana, 67–70.

41. Communicated to the author by Col. William H. Crook, personal attendant and body-guard of the President in 1865, January 24, 1912.

42. Brooks' Washington, 257–258.

43. Gerry; Crook; *New York World.* In the communication above referred to, Col. Crook stated that it was before dinner that he accompanied President Lincoln to the War Department, but in this respect his memory is evidently at fault. The article in the *Century Magazine* for April 1896 (see Haynie) contains excerpts from a letter written by General Haynie, who, with Governor Oglesby, was entertained by Lincoln after his drive, and in his account of their call in the President's office, mentions that "he (Lincoln) read four chapters of Petroleum V. Nasby's book (recently published) to us, and continued reading until he was called to dinner at about six o'clock when we left him." This letter of General Haynie's was written April 14, 1865, shortly after his call,

and before the news of the assassination reached him, and may be presumed to be correct.

44. Leland, 419.

45. Stanton to James B. Fry, in Rice, 404.

46. For the evening interview of Colfax and Ashmun, see Coffin, 515; Carpenter, 285–286; Shea, 60–61; Browne, 705; Crosby, 375–377.

47. Pratt, 213; Success; Williams, 201–202.

48. McClure, 416.

49. Robert T. Lincoln to Miss Laughlin, in Laughlin, 76.

50. Stewart; *Philadelphia Public Ledger.*

51. Holland, 518, note.

52. To the author, communication of O. H. Oldroyd, September 16, 1920. Capt. Oldroyd is custodian of the Lincoln Museum in Washington, D. C., in the house in which Lincoln died, and has the original pass in his possession.

53. Arnold, 431.

Correction of Some Commonly Accepted Stories

Correction of Some Commonly Accepted Stories

In the compilation of the foregoing article, the author ran across much matter of an erroneous nature, which has crept into accepted biographies, and other publications dealing with Lincoln's last day upon earth.

One of these stories, which has probably attained wider publicity than any other, is the so-called "Last Story," which the President is supposed to have related to Ward Hill Lamon, Marshal of the District of Columbia, and a warm personal friend of Lincoln's.

We first find this in Carpenter's "Six Months at the White House," which

appeared in 1866, and it persists to the present day. At times it has gone the rounds of the press, presumably quoted on the authority of Thomas Pendel, who was front door-keeper in the White House at the time. But in Pendel's "Thirty-six Years in the White House," the Neale Publishing Company, Washington, D. C., 1902, we do not find this anecdote, although he gives an account of that last evening, just previous to the President and Mrs. Lincoln leaving for the theatre.

It is to be found in "The True Abraham Lincoln," by William Eleroy Curtis, J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, Pa., 1907, pages 310–311. Also in "Anecdotes of Abraham Lincoln and Lincoln's Stories," edited by J. B. McClure, Rhodes & McClure, Chicago, Ill., 1879, page 182, and his later work, "Abraham Lincoln's Stories and

Speeches," edited by J. B. McClure, A.M., Rhodes & McClure Publishing Company, Chicago, Ill., 1896, page 279. McClure seems to have lifted his account bodily from Carpenter.

The story as given by Carpenter is as follows (pages 284–285):

The last story told by Mr. Lincoln was drawn out by a circumstance which occurred just before the interview with Messrs. Colfax and Ashmun, on the evening of the assassination.

Marshal Lamon, of Washington, had called upon him with an application for the pardon of a soldier. After a brief hearing the President took the application, and when about to write his name upon the back of it, he looked up and said: "Lamon, have you ever heard how the Patagonians eat oysters? They open them and throw the shells out of the window until the pile gets higher than the house, and then they move;" adding: "I feel to-day like commencing a new pile of pardons, and I may as well begin it just here."

This is proven false from the fact that at this time, Marshal Lamon was not in Washington, but in Richmond, Va., where he had gone two days before. In "Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847–1865," by Ward Hill Lamon, edited by Dorothy Lamon, A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago, Ill., 1895, on pages 274–275, the following excerpt is found:

> When the dreadful tragedy occurred, I was out of the city, having gone to Richmond two days before on business for Mr. Lincoln connected with the call of a convention for reconstruction, about which there had arisen some complications. I have preserved the pass Mr. Lincoln gave me to go through to Richmond, of which the following is a facsimile:
>
> "Allow the bearer, W. H. Lamon & friend, with ordinary baggage to pass from Washington to Richmond and return.
>
> "A. Lincoln."

This order as stated appears in fac-

simile form, and there is no doubt as to its authenticity.

In Francis F. Browne's "Every-Day Life," edition of 1886, in speaking of the events of that last morning, page 702, he says:

> Mr. Lincoln took a short drive with General Grant, who had just come to the city to consult with him regarding the disbandment of the army and the parole of rebel prisoners. The people were wild with enthusiasm, and wherever the President and General Grant appeared they were greeted with cheers, the clapping of hands, waving of handkerchiefs, and every possible demonstration of delight.

This is repeated in his revised edition of 1913, published by Browne & Howell Company, Chicago, Ill., page 583.

Mr. Charles Wallace French in his "Abraham Lincoln the Librator. A Biographical Sketch," Funk & Wagnalls

Company, New York, 1891, pages 332–333, makes practically the same statement.

There is no authority for any such account. The truth of the matter is that General Grant arrived in Washington on the morning of the 13th. During the day he took a drive through the city with Mrs. Lincoln, and was wildly acclaimed wherever recognized. He took no drive either that day or the next with the President. These facts we gather from an article on "Lincoln and Grant," by General Horace Porter in the *Century Magazine* for October, 1885. Porter certainly knew, for he was on the staff of General Grant.

Nicolay and Hay, in their monumental work in ten volumes, also make the same misstatement as to General Grant arriving in Washington the morning of the 14th, although they make no mention of a "drive" (volume ten, page 281). The

date of the arrival of the General as being the 13th, is further corroborated by the note which President Lincoln sent to him the morning of the 14th.

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