

Chapter Thirty-five

“Let the Thing Be Pressed”:

Victory at Last (November 1864-April 1865)

Republican unity, which had made Lincoln’s reelection possible, would be essential if Reconstruction were to proceed smoothly. That unity, however, was gravely threatened by Radicals who had supported Lincoln during the presidential campaign but might not be accommodating afterwards. To keep them cooperating with Moderates and Conservatives was the president’s greatest challenge in the wake of his electoral triumph.

CHASE AS CHIEF JUSTICE

On October 12, a special opportunity to conciliate Radicals presented itself with the death of the octogenarian Supreme Court Chief Justice, Roger B. Taney. A year earlier, Ben Wade had quipped: “I prayed with earnestness for the life of Taney to be prolonged through Buchanan’s Administration, and by God I[’]m a little afraid I have overdone the matter.” N. P. Banks opined that the Republican victories of the previous day had caused the judge’s death. Upon hearing of Taney’s demise, Lincoln said he would not name a replacement right away but would remain “shut pan” for a while.¹

¹ Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 76-77, 241 (entries for [July-August 1863], 13 October 1864).

Preoccupied with the election and his annual message to Congress, he postponed consideration of the matter till December.² In the meantime, he would await “expressions of public opinion from the Country.”³

The White House mailbag overflowed with such expressions. Among the names mentioned by correspondents were New York attorney William M. Evarts, Montgomery Blair, Associate Justice Noah H. Swayne, Edward Bates, and Edwin M. Stanton. When Methodist Bishop Matthew Simpson urged him to choose Stanton, Lincoln asked: “where can I get a man to take Secretary Stanton’s place? Tell me that, and I will do it.”⁴ To Congressmen Owen Lovejoy and George W. Julian the president eloquently acknowledged his reliance on Stanton: “He is the rock on the beach of our national ocean against which the breakers dash and roar, dash and roar without ceasing. He fights back the angry waters and prevents them from undermining and overwhelming the land. Gentlemen, I do not see how he survives, why he is not crushed and torn to pieces. Without him I should be destroyed.”⁵ When a caller lobbied on behalf of another candidate for chief justice, the president lauded his war secretary: “Mr. Stanton has excellent qualities and he has his defects. Folks come up here and tell me that there are a great many men in the country who have all Stanton’s excellent qualities without his

² In a cabinet meeting, Lincoln said “there was a great pressure and a good many talked of, but that he had not prepared his message [to Congress] and did not intend to take up the subject of the judge before the session ended.” Howard K. Beale and Alan W. Brownsword, eds., Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson (3 vols.; New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 2:181 (entry for 23 November 1864).

³ John Jay to Chase, New York, 23 November 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴ Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln’s Secretary of War (New York: Knopf, 1962), 337.

⁵ Frank Abial Flower, Edwin McMasters Stanton: The Autocrat of Rebellion, Emancipation, and Reconstruction (New York: W. W. Wilson, 1905), 369-70.

defects. All I have to say is, I haven't met 'em! I don't know 'em! I wish I did!"⁶ Though Stanton hoped for the appointment, he gave no outward signs of doing so. When speculation about his potential candidacy ran in the press, he denied it, saying that he favored his friend Chase.⁷

Charles A. Dana thought that Lincoln preferred Montgomery Blair.⁸ Fellow Democrat Gideon Welles praised the former postmaster general as an ideal candidate for the chief justice's post, for he was, in the navy secretary's view, a politician and not a partisan, a man in sympathy with the Republican program, and personally friendly and loyal to the president. When the navy secretary lauded Blair for "his ability, his truthfulness, honesty, and courage," Lincoln "expressed concurrence" and "spoke kindly and complimentarily of Mr. Blair, but did not in any way commit himself."⁹

At the White House, Francis P. Blair, Sr., pleaded his son's case. Mary Lincoln implored Old Man Blair to help thwart Chase's candidacy. The former treasury secretary and his allies, she told him, "are besieging my Husband for the Chief-Justiceship[.] I wish you could prevent them." So Blair called on Lincoln and told him "that if he would make one of his Ex-Cabinet men a Judge, I thought Montgomery was his man, that he had been tried as a Judge and not found wanting, that his practice in the West had made him conversant with our land law, Spanish law, as well as the common & civil law in which his university studies had grounded him, that his practice in the Supreme Court brought him into the circle of commercial & constitutional questions. That, besides on political

⁶ Undated memo by Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar enclosed in Hoar to James Ford Rhodes, Concord, 9 February 1894, Rhodes Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷ Thomas and Hyman, Stanton, 338.

⁸ Charles A. Dana to James Shepherd Pike, Washington, 12 December 1864, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

⁹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:182 (entry for 26 November 1864).

issues he sustained him in every thing.” Lincoln replied that he could not commit himself before consulting others. He implied that while he might favor Blair, there was significant opposition to the former postmaster general: “Although I may be stronger as an authority yet if all the rest oppose, I must give way. Old Hickory who had as much iron in his neck as any body, did so some times. If the strongest horse in the team would go ahead, he cannot, if all the rest hold back.” Blair inferred that the president “is well disposed to appoint Montgomery.”¹⁰

Several other leading Republicans supported Blair, including Seward, William Cullen Bryant, John Murray Forbes, and Joseph Medill. The former postmaster general tried to add Edwin D. Morgan to the list. “There is one consideration which I hope you will bring to the President’s attention to prevent Chase’s appointment,” he wrote to the New York senator. “He is known to be so vindictive towards me for supporting the President, that no one would employ me as counsel to the Court if he were Chief Justice. Now the President cannot consent not only to turn me out of his Cabinet, but to drive me from the bar for life, because I supported him for the Presidency.”¹¹

But Lincoln decided against nominating Blair because, according to Charles A. Dana, many senators “were resolved that no second-rate man should be appointed to that office.” Dana added that “if Montgomery Blair had succeeded in presenting his programme to that body, I have no doubt it would have been smashed to pieces in a moment. Mr. Blair’s idea was that one of the existing justices, as for instance Judge

¹⁰ Blair to John A. Andrew, Silver Spring, 19 November 1864, Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹¹ Montgomery Blair to E. D. Morgan, 20 November 1864, Morgan Papers, New-York Historical Society, in Allan Nevins, The War for the Union (4 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1959-1971), 4:118.

[Noah H.] Swayne, should be appointed Chief Justice, and that he himself should be made an Associate justice.” In time Blair thought he would move up.¹²

David Davis, who disliked Chase intensely, persuaded his colleagues on the high court to back Swayne for chief justice.¹³ But in time two of them, Stephen J. Field and Samuel Miller, withdrew their support and climbed aboard the Chase bandwagon.¹⁴

Edward Bates, who was about to step down from his cabinet post, personally asked Lincoln for the chief justiceship, which he thought would be a “crowning and retiring honor.” Lincoln told Isaac Newton he would gladly name Bates to that position “if not overborne by others” like Chase, who “was turning every stone, to get it.” In addition, “several others were urged from different quarters.” When Newton informed Bates of this conversation, the attorney general cheerfully confided to his diary: “I am happy in the feeling that the failure to get the place, will be no painful disappointment for my mind is made up to private life and a bare competency.”¹⁵

(At the end of November, Bates resigned as attorney general, to be replaced by Lincoln’s Kentucky friend James Speed, brother of Joshua Speed. The president had wanted to name Joseph Holt, but Holt peremptorily declined.¹⁶ In choosing Bates’ successor, geographical considerations weighed on Lincoln’s mind. “My cabinet has

¹² Charles A. Dana to James Shepherd Pike, Washington, 12 December 1864, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

¹³ Noah H. Swayne to Samuel J. Tilden, Washington, 4 December 1864, Tilden Papers, New York Public Library.

¹⁴ Donn Piatt, Memories of the Men Who Saved the Union (New York: Belford, Clarke, 1887), 120-23.

¹⁵ Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925-1933) 1:688 (entry for 18 October 1864); Howard K. Beale, ed., The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866 (Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1930, vol. IV; Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), 428 (entry for 22 November 1864).

¹⁶ Washington correspondence, 1 December, New York Tribune, 2 December 1864.

shrunk up North, and I must find a Southern man,” he told Assistant Attorney General Titian J. Coffey. “I suppose if the twelve apostles were to be chosen nowadays the shrieks of locality would have to be heeded.” In explaining his choice of Speed, Lincoln said he knew him well, but not so well as his brother Joshua: “That, however, is not strange, for I slept with Joshua for four years, and I suppose I ought to know him well. But James is an honest man and a gentleman, and if he comes here you will find he is one of those wellpoised men, not too common here, who are not spoiled by a big office.”¹⁷

Chase was indeed turning every stone, disingenuously insisting that he would rather be chief justice than president.¹⁸ When a friendly letter from him arrived at the White House, Lincoln instructed a secretary: “File it with his other recommendations.”¹⁹ Those recommendations were especially numerous. Chase had improved his chances for the job by actively campaigning for Lincoln in the fall. Coyly remaining in Cincinnati while the decision about the chief justiceship was pending, he urged friends to lobby the president on his behalf. Among them was Charles Sumner, who pleaded Chase’s case with special urgency, telling Lincoln that the country needed “a Chief Justice whose position on this great question [of slavery], in all its bearings, is already fixed & who will not need arg[umen]ts of counsel to convert him.”²⁰ Schuyler Colfax also championed the former treasury secretary’s candidacy, praising his “fine judicial talents, robust health & promise of long life (not an unimportant condition), and soundness on many questions,

¹⁷ Coffey in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Publishing Company, 1886), 241.

¹⁸ Schuyler Colfax to Chase, Washington, 5 December 1864, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁹ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 9:391-2.

²⁰ Sumner to Lincoln, Boston, 20 November 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

financial, political & military, which the events of the War may bring before that tribunal.”²¹ Another Hoosier, Senator Henry Lane, assured Lincoln that “[e]very Union man in Indiana desires Gov. Chase’s appt. and every Democrat expects it.”²²

Numerous critics denounced Chase as a treacherous schemer who was “never distinguished at the bar or on the Bench for his judicial attainments.”²³ Gideon Welles called him “selfishly stubborn,” lacking “moral courage and frankness,” “fond of adulation, and with official superiors . . . a sycophant.”²⁴ Thomas Ewing told Lincoln that the former treasury secretary “has no considerable reputation as a lawyer. He is a politician rather than a lawyer & unless he change[s] his nature always will be even if made Chief Justice. I am unwilling to see a Chief Justice of the U S intriguing & trading for the Presidency.”²⁵

Lincoln too worried that Chase’s insatiable desire for the presidency would undermine his ability to be a good chief justice. To Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson, who urged Chase’s appointment as a gesture to placate Radicals, Lincoln said: “He is a man of unbounded ambition, and has been working all his life to become President; that he can never be; and I fear that if I make him Chief Justice, he will simply become more restless and uneasy, and neglect the place in his strife and intrigue to make himself President. He has got the Presidential maggot in his head and it will wriggle there as long as it is warm. If I were sure that he would go upon the bench and give up his aspirations

²¹ Colfax to Lincoln, South Bend, Indiana, 23 October 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²² Colfax to Chase, Washington, 5 December 1864, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²³ Albert Smith to Lincoln, Boston, 29 November 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁴ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:193 (entry for 6 December 1864).

²⁵ Ewing to Lincoln, Washington, 3 December 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

to do anything but make himself a great judge, I would send in his name at once.”²⁶ To another Radical senator, Lafayette Foster of Connecticut, he predicted that if Chase “keeps on with the notion that he is destined to be President,” he “will never acquire that fame and usefulness as a Chief Justice which he would otherwise certainly attain.”²⁷ Should Chase continue his quest for the White House from the bench, Lincoln said, it would “be very bad for him and very bad for me.”²⁸ Presciently, he speculated that if Chase attained “so high and honorable a place,” it might well “heighten rather than banish political ambition.”²⁹ Sumner and Schuyler Colfax insisted that Chase would, as chief justice, quit pursuing the presidency.³⁰ More accurately, Edwards Pierrepont noted that Chase was “ambitious as Satan” and “so soon as he is rested a little he will start again for the Presidency, and will tire of the Bench within a year.”³¹

In late November, Lincoln informed the cabinet that there was “a tremendous pressure just now for [William M.] Evarts of New York, who I suppose is a good lawyer.”³² Chase acknowledged that Evarts clearly outshone him as an attorney.³³ When Richard Henry Dana and Judge Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar pressed Evarts’ case and

²⁶ Henry Wilson interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Washington, 1 April 1874, in Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 85.

²⁷ Lafayette Foster interviewed by John G. Nicolay, 23 October 1878, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 53.

²⁸ George Sewall Boutwell, Reminiscences of Sixty Years in Public Affairs (2 vols.; New York: McClure, Phillips, 1902), 2:29.

²⁹ Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, Men and Events of Forty Years: Autobiographical Reminiscences of an Active Career from 1850 to 1890 (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1891), 173.

³⁰ Boutwell, Reminiscences, 2:29-30; Colfax to Chase, Washington, 5 December 1864, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³¹ Edwards Pierrepont to Lincoln, New York, 24 November 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:181 (entry for 25 November 1864).

³³ Brainerd Dyer, The Public Career of William M. Evarts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1933), 156-57.

denigrated Chase, Lincoln replied: “Chase is a very able man” who happened to be “a little insane” on the presidency and who “has not always behaved very well lately.” Still, when people recommended that “now is the time to crush him out,” Lincoln replied: “Well I’m not in favor of crushing anybody out! If there is anything a man can do and do it well, I say let him do it. Give him a chance.”³⁴ Hoar had hoped that Stanton and Chase would cancel each other, leaving Evarts as the obvious compromise candidate.³⁵

Lincoln told Colfax that he wanted to name Evarts but “in deference to what he supposed to be public sentiment” he appointed Chase instead.³⁶ The nation, he explained, “needed assurances in regard to two great questions,” emancipation and the legal tender act. Many eminent attorneys were sound on those issues, but Chase had been so identified with them that he would never overturn them.³⁷ Lincoln could not be certain of others. “We cannot ask a man what he will do,” he explained to George Boutwell; “if we should, and he should answer us, we should despise him for it.” But it was unnecessary to quiz Chase, for his views were well known.³⁸

Lincoln evidently decided on Chase as early as the spring of 1864, when he told Charles Sumner that he intended to name the Ohioan to fill Taney’s place.³⁹ At the end of

³⁴ Undated memo by Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar enclosed in Hoar to James Ford Rhodes, Concord, 9 February 1894, Rhodes Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁵ Hoar to Evarts, Concord, 16 November 1864, Diedrich Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

³⁶ J. W. Schuckers to Evarts, 11 June 1875, in Dyer, Evarts, 157n.

³⁷ Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser, 9 December 1864, in Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 15, 94.

³⁸ Boutwell, Reminiscences, 2:29.

³⁹ Sumner to Chase, Boston, 24 October 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

June, he repeated his intention to Samuel Hooper and William P. Fessenden.⁴⁰ Upon accepting Chase's resignation from the cabinet, Lincoln said to John Hay that he should "go home without making any fight and wait for a good thing hereafter, such as a vacancy on the Supreme Bench."⁴¹ A week after Taney's death, the president told Fessenden that he intended to appoint Chase "but as things were going on well he thought it best not to make any appointment or say anything about it, until after the election."⁴² He evidently did not want to antagonize Conservatives during the campaign.

Chase's adherents bemoaned the delay, calling Lincoln a "very Sphynx."⁴³ The president explained to Richard Henry Dana "that he was waiting to receive expressions of public opinion from the Country."⁴⁴ Those expressions led him to conclude that Chase "occupies the largest place in the public mind in connection with the office."⁴⁵ In early December, when Lincoln finally submitted Chase's name to the senate, his belief that doing so would please the Radicals was confirmed by their praise.⁴⁶ One of them remarked: "I will now excuse many foolish things in the President, for this one 'big' thing."⁴⁷ A colonel in the U.S. Colored Troops thought Chase's appointment was "equal to a military victory" and that it showed "that Mr. Lincoln is in sympathy with the spirit

⁴⁰ Hooper to Chase, Boston, 31 August, 9, 20 November 1864, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:686 (entry for 13 October 1864). John Sherman evidently reported that at the time of Chase's resignation Lincoln told the Senate Finance Committee that he would appoint Chase chief justice. S. S. L'Hommedieu to Chase, Chicago, 19 October 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴¹ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 217 (entry for 1 July 1864).

⁴² Fessenden to Chase, 20 October 1864, in J. G. Randall and Richard N. Current, Last Full Measure (vol. 4 of Lincoln the President; New York: Dodd, Mead, 1955), 271.

⁴³ George Wood to Chase, Washington, 21 November 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁴ John Jay to Chase, New York, 23 November 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵ Boutwell, Reminiscences, 2:29.

⁴⁶ John Niven, Salmon P. Chase: A Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 374.

⁴⁷ Truman Woodruff to Chase, St. Louis, 7 December 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

of those who supported him at the last election.”⁴⁸ But the editor of the Cincinnati Gazette erred in maintaining that Chase’s appointment “preserves the Administration party, and heals up any real or imaginary breach that may have existed in it.”⁴⁹ While applauding Lincoln’s supreme court selection, some Radicals continued their fierce opposition to his Reconstruction plans.

“Probably no other man than Lincoln,” Nicolay wrote to his fiancée, “would have had, in this age of the world, the degree of magnanimity to thus forgive and exalt a rival who had so deeply and so unjustifiably intrigued against him. It is however only another most marked illustration of the greatness of the President, in this age of little men.”⁵⁰ Lincoln was magnanimous indeed, for Chase had deeply angered him. The president said that personally he would rather “have swallowed his buckhorn chair” or “would sooner have eat[en] flatirons” than appoint Chase.⁵¹ Montgomery Blair speculated plausibly that Chase “was the only human being that I believe Lincoln actually hated,” and Charles A. Dana thought “the appointment was not made by the President with entire willingness. He is a man who keeps a grudge as faithfully as any other living Christian, and consented only to Mr. Chase’s elevation, only when the pressure became very general, and very urgent.”⁵² Though Dana overestimated Lincoln’s capacity for nursing grudges and

⁴⁸ R. D. Musser to Chase, Nashville, Tennessee, 8 December 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁹ Richard Smith told this to Enoch T. Carson. Carson to Chase, Cincinnati, 7 December 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁰ Nicolay to Therenia Bates, Washington, 8 December 1864, Michael Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 166.

⁵¹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:196 (entry for 15 December 1864); Virginia Woodbury Fox, diary, 10 December 1864, Levi Woodbury Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵² Blair to Samuel J. Tilden, Washington, 5 June 1868, in John Bigelow, ed., Letters and Literary Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden (2 vols.; New York: Harper, 1908), 1:233; Dana to James Shepherd Pike, Washington, 12 December 1864, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

underestimated his political savvy and commitment to freedom, there is some truth in his analysis; appointing Chase taxed the president's legendary powers of forgiveness to the utmost.

Chase's supporters may have cynically exploited Lincoln's desire to avoid appearing petty or vindictive. Colfax asked fellow Congressman James A. Garfield to suggest to Lincoln that if, in the face of the "overwhelming public sentiment" in favor of Chase, "he app[ointe]d some one else, History might . . . say that he did so" because Chase "had dared to be a candidate for the Presdt. nomination agst. him."⁵³

Lincoln was intensely averse to doing anything that might be considered selfish. He told a close friend: "Mr. Chase's enemies have been appealing to the lowest and meanest of my feelings. They report ill-natured remarks of his upon me and my Administration. If it were true that he made them, I could not be so base as to allow the fact to influence me in the selection of a man for the Chief-Justiceship."⁵⁴ To tale-bearers recounting the treasury secretary's severe attacks on him, he stoically remarked: "I do not mind that" and said those attacks "will make no difference whatever in my action."⁵⁵ When some Ohioans showed him letters by Chase sharply criticizing the president, Lincoln good-naturedly replied "that if Mr. Chase had said harsh things about him, he, in his turn, had said harsh things about Mr. Chase, which squared the account."⁵⁶ To New York Congressman Augustus Frank, he explained that Chase had stood with him "in the

⁵³ Colfax to Chase, Washington, 5 December 1864, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁴ Washington correspondence, New York Independent, n.d., copied in the National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 17 December 1864.

⁵⁵ John B. Alley in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 582; Henry Wilson, conversation with John G. Nicolay, Washington, 1 April 1874, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 85.

⁵⁶ J. W. Schuckers, The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase (New York: Appleton, 1874), 487.

time of trial, and I should despise myself if I allowed personal differences to affect my judgment of his fitness for the office of Chief-Justice.”⁵⁷ (Lincoln’s reference to a time of trial probably referred to the 1858 Illinois senatorial contest, when Chase was one of the few nationally prominent Republicans to stump the Prairie State.) In early December, Lincoln told Noah Brooks: “I have been all day, and yesterday and the day before, besieged by messages from my friends all over the country, as if there were a determination to put up the bars between Governor Chase and myself.” Gesturing toward a pile of letters and telegrams, he said that those correspondents had nothing new to impart, for “I know meaner things than any of those men can tell me.”⁵⁸ Lincoln resented their tactics, telling John D. Defrees that “he had often been mortified at some of our friends who urged him not to appoint Chase because he had abused him at a public table at Newport – and on other occasions.” The president took offense at the implication that he was “capable of being influenced in making an appointment of such importance to the country by mere personal considerations.” Those “appeals were made to the worst side of him and he did not like it.”⁵⁹

Upon receiving word of his appointment, Chase promptly expressed his gratitude to Lincoln: “I cannot sleep before I thank for this mark of your confidence, & especially for the manner in which the nomination was made. I shall never forget either and trust

⁵⁷ Francis B. Carpenter, The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 219.

⁵⁸ Noah Brooks, Statesmen (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 170-171.

⁵⁹ John D. Defrees to Josiah G. Holland, Washington, 8 August 1865, in Allen C. Guelzo, “Holland’s Informants: The Construction of Josiah Holland’s ‘Life of Abraham Lincoln,’” Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 23 (2002):46-47.

that you will never regret either. Be assured that I prize your confidence & good will more than nomination or office.”⁶⁰

On the bench, Chase confirmed Lincoln’s fears that he would continue intriguing to win the presidency.⁶¹ Ironically, Chase’s appointment proved unnecessary either for protecting emancipation (the Thirteenth Amendment took care of that) or upholding the Legal Tender Act (in 1870 he voted with the majority in Hepburn v. Griswold to declare it unconstitutional).

THE BIXBY LETTER

In the immediate aftermath of the election, Lincoln was unusually preoccupied. When Charles S. Spencer, head of the Lincoln and Johnson Campaign Club of New York City, asked him to provide a toast for a banquet, the president wished to compose the text himself rather than have John Hay do it. But, as Hay told Spencer on November 25, Lincoln “was literally crowded out of the opportunity to writing a note” because “the crush here just now is beyond endurance.”⁶²

Nor did Lincoln have time to write a suitable reply when Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew requested a presidential acknowledgment of the heroic sacrifice allegedly made by one of his constituents, a widow named Lydia Bixby, who had purportedly lost five sons in the war. For the president’s signature Hay wrote a letter of condolence: “Dear Madam, – I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts, that you are the mother of five sons

⁶⁰ Chase to Lincoln, Washington, 6 December 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress

⁶¹ Niven, Chase, 426-32, 438-40.

⁶² Hay to [Charles S.] Spencer, Washington, 25 November [1864], in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 101.

who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.”⁶³

The Bixby letter, as Lincoln biographer James G. Randall noted, “has taken a pre-eminent place as a Lincoln gem and a classic in the language.”⁶⁴ Another biographer, Carl Sandburg, deemed it “a piece of the American Bible. ‘The cherished memory of the loved and lost’ – these were blood-color syllables of a sacred music.” Comparing the Bixby letter to the Gettysburg Address, Sandburg remarked: “More darkly than the Gettysburg speech the letter wove its awful implication that human freedom so often was paid for with agony.”⁶⁵ Yet another biographer asserted that “Lincoln’s three greatest writings” – the Gettysburg Address, the Bixby letter, and the Second Inaugural – are the compositions “upon which assessment of his literary reputation must ultimately be based.”⁶⁶ Those documents, according to a pair of literary scholars, are “great prose-poems” which “were the direct outgrowth of his whole life, of all those mysterious

⁶³ Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby, Washington, 21 November 1864, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 8:116-17; Michael Burlingame, “The Authorship of the Bixby Letter,” in Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side, 169-84.

⁶⁴ Randall and Current, Last Full Measure, 48.

⁶⁵ Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln: The War Years (4 vols.; New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), 3:669; Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), 640.

⁶⁶ David A. Anderson, ed., The Literary Works of Abraham Lincoln (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1970), vi.

qualities of heredity and environment that went into the making of his genius.”⁶⁷ An analyst of the development of Lincoln’s prose style pictured him writing to Mrs. Bixby: “we can imagine how that great heart throbbed and that strong, beautiful right hand rapidly traversed the paper while he was bringing comfort to a bereaved patriot mother. There was as true lyrical inspiration at work in the plain office of the White House that twenty-first day of November, 1864 as that which impelled Wordsworth to compose the ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality.’”⁶⁸

The beautiful Bixby letter was not written by Lincoln but rather by John Hay, nor was its recipient the mother of five sons killed in the war. She lost two of her boys and tried to cheat the government out of money by claiming that the others had been killed. Of the three survivors, one had deserted to the enemy, another may have done so, and the third was honorably discharged. Mrs. Bixby was born in Virginia, sympathized with the Confederacy, and disliked Lincoln so much that she apparently destroyed the letter in anger. Evidence suggests that she ran a whorehouse in Boston and was “perfectly untrustworthy.”⁶⁹ (Though he did not compose the famous communication to Mrs. Bixby, Lincoln on occasion wrote exceptionally moving and beautiful letters of condolence, like those he sent to the parents of Elmer Ellsworth in 1861 and to Fanny McCullough the following year.)

⁶⁷ Herbert Joseph Edwards and John Erskine Hankins, Lincoln the Writer: The Development of His Literary Style (University of Maine Studies, second series, no. 76; Orono: University of Maine, 1962), 90, 92.

⁶⁸ Daniel Kilham Dodge, “The Emotional and Intellectual Side of Lincoln,” typescript enclosed in Dodge to David Kinley, Urbana, Illinois, 17 February 1924, Dodge Papers, Lincoln Shrine, A. K. Smiley Public Library, Redlands, California.

⁶⁹ Burlingame, “Authorship of the Bixby Letter,” 170-71.

The adjutant general of Massachusetts, after hand-delivering the letter to Mrs. Bixby, provided copies to newspapers, which gave it wide distribution. One partisan Democratic journal sneeringly asked why “Mr. Lincoln’s sons should be kept from the dangers of the field, while the sons of the laboring men are to be hurried into the harvest of death at the front? Are the sons of the rail-splitter, porcelain, and these other commons clay?”⁷⁰ Of course Tad was far too young to serve, but twenty-one-year-old Robert was not. Robert was eager to drop out of Harvard and enlist, but his mother adamantly objected. “We have lost one son, and his loss is as much as I can bear, without being called upon to make another sacrifice,” she insisted to the president.

Lincoln replied: “But many a poor mother has given up all her sons, and our son is not more dear to us than the sons of other people are to their mothers.”

“That may be; but I cannot bear to have Robert exposed to danger. His services are not required in the field, and the sacrifice would be a needless one.”

“The services of every man who loves his country are required in this war. You should take a liberal instead of a selfish view of the question, mother.”

“Don’t I know that only too well?” she cried; “before this war is ended I may be like my mother in Kentucky, with not a prop in her old age.”⁷¹

On another occasion, she remarked to her husband: “I know that Robert’s plan to go into the Army is manly and noble and I want him to go, but oh! I am so frightened he may never come back to us.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Philadelphia Age, n.d., copied in the Columbus, Ohio, Crisis, 16 December 1864.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1868), 121-22.

⁷² Katherine Helm, The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln (New York: Harper, 1928), 227.

To New York Senator Ira Harris, who bluntly asked why Robert was not in uniform, Mary Lincoln replied that her son was “making his preparations now to enter the Army,” was “not a shirker as you seem to imply for he has been anxious to go for a long time. If fault there be, it is mine. I have insisted that he should stay in college a little longer as I think an educated man can serve his country with more intelligent purpose than an ignoramus.”⁷³

In January 1865, when the First Lady finally yielded, Lincoln asked Grant to place Robert on his staff: “Please read and answer this letter as though I was not President, but only a friend. My son, now in his twenty second year, having graduated at Harvard, wishes to see something of the war before it ends. I do not wish to put him in the ranks, nor yet to give him a commission, to which those who have already served long, are better entitled, and better qualified to hold. Could he, without embarrassment to you, or detriment to the service, go into your Military family with some nominal rank, I, and not the public, furnishing his necessary means? If no, say so without the least hesitation, because I am as anxious, and as deeply interested, that you shall not be encumbered as you can be yourself.”⁷⁴

Grant replied graciously: “I will be most happy to have him in my Military family in the manner you propose. The nominal rank given him is immaterial but I would suggest that of Capt. as I have three staff officers now, of considerable service, in no higher grade. Indeed I have one officer with only the rank of Lieut. who has been in the service from the beginning of the war. This however will make no difference and I would

⁷³ Helm, True Story of Mary, 229-30.

⁷⁴ Lincoln to Grant, Washington, 19 January 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:224.

still say give the rank of Capt.”⁷⁵ On February 11, Robert entered the army as a captain and served creditably on Grant’s staff until he resigned five months later.

LAST ANNUAL MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

In late November, Lincoln was busy drafting his annual message. On the 14th, he told Orville H. Browning that he “had not yet written a word of his message, and thought he would close doors tomorrow and go to work at it.”⁷⁶ As he did so, he jotted his thoughts on slips of paste board or box board. “It is a favorite habit of the President,” Noah Brooks informed readers of the Sacramento Union, “when writing anything requiring thought, to have a number of these stiff slips of board near at hand, and, seated at ease in his arm chair, he lays the slip on his knee and writes and re-writes in pencil what is afterward copied in his own hand, with new changes and interlineations. Then being ‘set up’ by the printer with big ‘slugs’ in place of ‘leads,’ spaces of half an inch are left between each line in the proof, when more corrections and interlineations are made, and from this patchwork the document is finally set up and printed.”⁷⁷

The message dealt at length with foreign relations, especially developments in the country’s immediate neighbors, Canada and Mexico. Confederates operating in Ontario laid various schemes to undermine the Union war effort. Jacob Thompson, who had served as secretary of the interior in Buchanan’s administration, helped to foment armed uprisings by the Sons of Liberty in the Northwest. One was scheduled to coincide with

⁷⁵ Grant to Lincoln, Annapolis Junction, Maryland, 21 January 1865, John Y. Simon, ed., The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant (30 vols.; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-2008), 13:281.

⁷⁶ Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:693 (entry for 14 November 1864).

⁷⁷ Washington correspondence, 7 December 1864, Sacramento Daily Union, 11 January 1865, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 151.

the Democratic convention at Chicago in late August. Among other things, the plan called for the liberation of Camp Douglas, a sixty-acre prison facility near the city, housing thousands of Rebel POWs, guarded by only 800 troops. The conspirators ultimately lost their nerve, but others quickly hatched another scheme targeting Camp Douglas for election day in November. It was squelched when detectives got wind of it and arrested the leaders, among them John B. Castleman, a captain in John Hunt Morgan's guerilla band. Lincoln mercifully ordered that Castleman be banished rather than tried as a spy.⁷⁸

The president was not so merciful with John Yates Beall of the Confederate Navy, a ringleader of the "Lake Erie Conspiracy" aiming to liberate Rebel prisoners held at Johnson's Island off Sandusky, Ohio. Beall and his co-conspirators operated out of Windsor, Canada. In September, their plan to commandeer a Union gunboat on Lake Erie fizzled. Beall escaped but three months later was captured while plotting to derail trains in upstate New York. Tried as a spy and guerilla, he was sentenced to death.⁷⁹

Lincoln resisted the numerous appeals for clemency from ninety members of the U.S. House, among them Thaddeus Stevens. The president said that Beall's case, like that of the slave trader Nathaniel Gordon, was one "where there must be an example." The young man's supporters "tried me every way. They wouldn't give up; but I had to stand firm on that, and I even had to turn away his poor sister when she came and begged for his life, and let him be executed. I can't get the distress out of my mind."⁸⁰ Lincoln was

⁷⁸ Lincoln to Alvin V. Hovey, Washington, 29 November 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:123.

⁷⁹ Isaac Markens, President Lincoln and the Case of John Yates Beall (New York: Printed for the author, 1911).

⁸⁰ H. P. H. Bromwell's reminiscences in the Denver Tribune, 18 May 1879.

evidently persuaded by the argument of General John A. Dix, who presided at Beall's court martial. On February 14, 1865, Dix wrote him that the "testimony seemed to me very clear and conclusive; and, in view of the transactions, in which Beall bore so important a part, as well as in consideration of the intelligence daily reaching me that new outrages on our frontier are meditated by rebel emissaries in Canada, I deemed it my duty to order the sentence pronounced upon him to be promptly executed."⁸¹ Joseph Holt endorsed Dix's recommendation, and Beall was hanged on February 24.

Lincoln was equally stern with another terrorist, Captain Robert C. Kennedy, one of eight conspirators operating out of Canada who attempted to burn down several buildings in New York City in November 1864. The fires were quickly extinguished and did little harm. Kennedy was apprehended shortly afterwards and tried before a court martial, which found the arsonist guilty and condemned him to death. No intercessors pleaded for mercy, and he went to the gallows on March 25.⁸²

In October, American anger at the British for letting Confederate saboteurs and terrorists use Canada as a staging area grew stronger when twenty raiders plundered St. Albans, Vermont. After robbing banks, killing one man, and unsuccessfully trying to burn the town, they retreated to Canada, where authorities released them rather than extraditing them to the U.S. The American public was understandably outraged and cried for revenge against Great Britain, whose policies throughout the war seemed to favor the Confederacy. On December 16, the New York Times talked darkly of war: "if it must

⁸¹ Dix to Lincoln, 14 February 1865, New York, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸² William C. Harris, Lincoln's Last Months (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 155.

come, let it come. Not ours the guilt; it will belong only to English malignity and lawlessness. We were never in better condition for a war with England.”⁸³

In his annual message, Lincoln recommended a less confrontational policy but one that would nevertheless signal American displeasure with the “recent assaults and depredations committed by inimical and desperate persons, who are harbored there.” He threatened that the U.S. might expand its navy on the Great Lakes, require Canadians to have passports to enter the U.S., and abrogate the reciprocity treaty of 1854, thus hindering trade between the two countries. But he hoped that taking such steps would be unnecessary, for “there is every reason to expect that, with the approval of the imperial government,” Canadian authorities “will take the necessary measures to prevent new incursions across the border.”⁸⁴

Earlier in 1864, Lincoln had expressed his irritation with the governor-general of a Canadian maritime province which was careless about preventing Confederate blockade runners from using its ports. When the official sarcastically asked if he might vote in the impending presidential election, Lincoln, who was exasperated by the governor-general’s lax enforcement of neutrality rules, said he was reminded of a story about an Irishman who arrived in America one election day and was “perhaps, as eager as your Excellency, to vote, and to vote early and late and often. So, upon his landing at Castle Garden, he hastened to the nearest voting place, and, as he approached, the judge, who received the ballots, inquired: ‘who do you want to vote for? on which side are you?’ Poor Pat was embarrassed, he did not know who were the candidates. He stopped, scratched his head, then, with the readiness of his countrymen, he said: ‘I am forment the Government,

⁸³ New York Times, 16 December 1864.

⁸⁴ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:141.

anyhow. Tell me, if your Honor plases, which is the rebellion side, and I'll tell you how I want to vote. In Ould Ireland, I was always on the rebellion side, and, by Saint Patrick, I'll stick to that same in America.' Your Excellency would, I should think, not be at all at a loss on which side to vote?"⁸⁵

Less conciliatory than Lincoln, General John A. Dix instructed his troops to pursue Confederate raiders into Canada. The president swiftly revoked the order but with the caveat that if Canadian authorities did not extradite miscreants like the St. Albans terrorists, he would authorize cross-border pursuit.⁸⁶

In Canada, the prime minister took steps to appease the outraged Americans: nine of the St. Albans terrorists were arrested and tried in local courts; \$50,000,000 of the \$200,000,000 stolen from Vermont banks was repaid by the government; militia were instructed to patrol the border more conscientiously; and Confederate terrorist cells were uprooted. To show his appreciation, Lincoln rescinded the passport order. In England, government leaders spoke "in the highest terms of the manner in which Mr. Lincoln's Administration had conducted its relations to foreign Powers."⁸⁷

Relations with France became strained in 1864 when Louis Napoleon's government installed the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian as emperor of Mexico. Three years earlier, the French had joined the British and Spanish in sending a military expedition to Mexico to collect debts. Spain and England withdrew their forces after the mission was accomplished, but French troops stayed on and overthrew the republican government of Benito Juarez, thus openly violating the Monroe Doctrine.

⁸⁵ Isaac N. Arnold, "Abraham Lincoln: A Paper Read Before the Royal Historical Society, London, June 16th, 1881" (pamphlet; Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1881), 190.

⁸⁶ Stanton to Dix, Washington, 15 December 1864, Stanton Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸⁷ Harris, Lincoln's Last Months, 160.

When it seemed that French troops might intervene in the American Civil War, Lincoln angrily said “he would be d[amne]d if he wouldn’t get 1,000,000 men if France dares to interfere.”⁸⁸

In the spring of 1864, in order to send a message to the French, Lincoln ordered Nathaniel Banks’ army in New Orleans to move into Texas. That expedition up the Red River floundered, and the administration assured France that it had no desire to threaten Maximilian’s regime. Led by the implacable Henry Winter Davis, chairman of the House committee on foreign affairs, congressional Republicans denounced Lincoln’s appeasement of the French. In April, Davis persuaded the House to approve a resolution condemning France for establishing a puppet regime in Mexico. When Seward assured Louis Napoleon’s government that the U.S. had no intention of picking a fight over Mexico, the infuriated Davis asked Charles Sumner to bring his resolution to the floor of the senate. Sharing Lincoln’s “one war at a time” approach to foreign affairs, Sumner urged his fellow Radical to postpone the matter to a more propitious time.⁸⁹ “Our friends are very anxious to get into a war with France,” Lincoln observed, “using this Mexican business for that purpose. They don[’]t consider that England and France would surely be together in that event. France has the whip hand of England completely. England got out of the Mexican business into which she had been deceived by France, by virtue of our having nothing to do with it. They have since been kept apart by good management, and our people are laboring to unite them again by making war on France. Worse than that, instead of doing something effective, if we must fight, they are for making mouths and

⁸⁸ Josephine Shaw Lowell, diary, 20 May 1862, copy, Allan Nevins, Papers, Columbia University.

⁸⁹ Gerald S. Henig, Henry Winter Davis: Antebellum and Civil War Congressman from Maryland (New York: Twayne, 1973), 202-4.

shaking fists at France warning & threatening and inducing her to prepare for our attack when it comes.”⁹⁰

In his annual message, Lincoln glossed over the Mexican problem, prompting Davis to introduce a resolution criticizing the administration for ignoring the Congress’s power to shape foreign policy. It was tabled because, as a Washington correspondent noted, Republicans “are all in too good a humor with Mr. Lincoln to criticise or complain.” To be sure, they disliked Seward’s earlier “apologies to France about the House action on the Monroe doctrine,” but they believed that Davis “is a very dangerous lion any way, needing to be kept under the most watchful restraint, lest he fall upon the administration party and rend it.”⁹¹ But shortly thereafter, the House reversed itself when Davis assured the members that his resolution did not imply any criticism of Lincoln. Despite his denial, the New York Times condemned the action of the House as “a splenetic ebullition against the President, on the part of those who failed to prevent his re-election.”⁹²

Congressmen applauded Lincoln’s reference to the new Maryland constitution: “Maryland is secure to liberty and Union for all the future. The genius of rebellion will no more claim Maryland. Like another foul spirit, being driven out, it may seek to tear her, but it will woo her no more.” His allusion to the results of the election – “there is no diversity of opinion among the people” on the question of Union – and his reaffirmation of the commitment to end slavery were also cheered.

⁹⁰ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 211 (entry for 24 June 1864).

⁹¹ Boston Commonwealth, 24 December 1864, in Harris, Lincoln’s Last Months, 163.

⁹² New York Times, 20 December 1864.

As Elizabeth Cady Stanton noted, the message for the most part was a “dry, barren document,” consisting largely of a routine summary of his cabinet secretaries’ reports.⁹³ But some lauded it. A Massachusetts judge and former member of the U.S. senate called it an “honor to the country” and thought it was so “remarkably well written” that it “would not suffer in comparison with any message of any President.” Another judge, Samuel F. Miller of the U.S. Supreme Court, detected in Lincoln’s message “a vigor not usual to him.”⁹⁴ Thaddeus Stevens declared “that it is the best message which has been sent to Congress in the past sixty years.” According to Noah Brooks, the “verdict of all men is that the message is immensely strengthening for the President, and that while it has all of the dignity and polish of a first-rate State paper, it has the strong common sense, the practical knowledge of details which will commend the document to the minds of ‘the simple people.’” Brooks told a friend that it was “interesting and curious to observe how the President has grown morally and intellectually since he has been at the White House; take his messages and read them through ad seriatim and you will see his advancement in ability, logic and rhetoric. The last message is a model of compact, strong sense, practical knowledge and argument.” Brooks asserted that Lincoln “is the man for these times; I know him well – very well, and I do not hesitate to say that he is a far greater and better man than our own people think.” Prophetically Brooks speculated that the time will come when people generally will concede his true merit and worth.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Susan B. Anthony, New York, 8 December 1864, Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, eds., Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences (2 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922), 2:103.

⁹⁴ Julius Rockwell to David Davis, Pittsfield, 7 December 1864; Samuel F. Miller to David Davis, Washington, 21 December 1864, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

RENEWED PATRONAGE HEADACHES

As 1864 drew to a close, Lincoln was also busy dealing with importunate office-seekers, for many would-be civil servants regarded the president's second term as the occasion for "a new deal."⁹⁶ A congressman advised job applicants that the only way to get Lincoln to remove incumbent office holders was to harass him with delegation after delegation. In March 1865, the president told Colonel James Grant Wilson, who joined him at an opera performance, that he attended musical events not so much for aesthetic enjoyment "but for the rest. I am being hounded to death by office-seekers, who pursue me early and late, and it is simply to get two or three hours' relief that I am here."⁹⁷ On March 25, Noah Brooks reported that Lincoln's "health has been worn down by the constant pressure of office-seekers and legitimate business, so that for a few days he was obliged to deny himself to all comers." To protect himself he refused to see visitors after 3 p.m. He also asked Senator John B. Clark of New Hampshire: "Can't you and others start a public sentiment in favor of making no changes in offices except for good and sufficient cause? It seems as though the bare thought of going through again what I did the first year here would crush me."⁹⁸ He was so harried that he sometimes failed to remember promises he had made. To a senator who had extracted a patronage pledge,

⁹⁵ Washington correspondence, 7 December 1864, Sacramento Daily Union, 11 January 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 150-151; Brooks to George Witherle, Washington, 10 December 1864, Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 155.

⁹⁶ Washington correspondence by Noah Brooks, 10 January, Sacramento Daily Union, 22 February 1865, Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 157.

⁹⁷ James Grant Wilson, "Recollections of Lincoln," Putnam's Magazine, February 1909, 529.

⁹⁸ Washington correspondence by Noah Brooks, 22 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 19 April 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 175-76; Carpenter, Inner Life of Lincoln, 276.

Lincoln said he would carry it out if he did not forget it: “as a man said to his debtor, 'I will see you tomorrow if I do not forget it.'”⁹⁹

Of all the clamorous horde, none dismayed Lincoln more than the eminent Shakespearean actor, James H. Hackett. After seeing Hackett play Falstaff, the president wrote him a fan letter. The indiscreet actor allowed it to get into the hands of newspapers, including the New York Herald, which ridiculed Lincoln’s taste in soliloquies. Abashed, Hackett apologized to Lincoln, who replied: “Give yourself no uneasiness on the subject. . . . My note to you I certainly did not expect to see in print; yet I have not been much shocked by the newspaper comments upon it. Those comments constitute a fair specimen of what has occurred to me through life. I have endured a great deal of ridicule without much malice; and have received a great deal of kindness, not quite free from ridicule. I am used to it.”¹⁰⁰ The friendly correspondence between them ended when Hackett asked for a diplomatic post that could not be given. John Hay recalled that a “hundred times this experience was repeated: a man would be introduced to the President whose disposition and talk were agreeable; he took pleasure in his conversation for two or three interviews, and then this congenial person would ask some favor impossible to grant, and go away in bitterness of spirit.”¹⁰¹

Another painful request came from Lincoln’s old friend Anson G. Henry, who wished to replace William P. Dole as head of the bureau of Indian affairs. The president was sympathetic but demurred, saying that the “thing that troubles me most is, that I dislike the idea of removing Mr. Dole who has been a faithful and devoted personal &

⁹⁹ Henry B. Anthony to Lincoln, Providence, 24 August 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁰ Lincoln to Hackett, Washington, 2 November 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:558.

¹⁰¹ Hay, “Life in the White House in the Time of Lincoln,” in Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side, 136.

political friend.” Henry replied, “Well Mr. Lincoln, I will go home & remain where I am, not only, without a murmur, but entirely satisfied that you have done what you believe to be best calculated to promote the welfare and prosperity of the Government.” With emphasis the president said: “Henry – you must not understand me as having decided the matter.” He explained that there was fierce competition for Dole’s job: “The Delegation from Minnesota are pressing very strongly for that place for Ex-Senator Wilkinson, and the Delegation from Illinois headed by Yates & Trumbull are pressing their man judge Kellogg.” Henry replied: “our Pacific men are beginning to think that the old North West are getting the Lyons share of the offices.” Lincoln laughingly responded, “It does look a little that way.”¹⁰²

When pressed to remove officeholders who had not committed treason but were insufficiently loyal to the administration, Lincoln balked: “I have made up my mind to make very few changes in the offices in my gift for my second term. I think now that I will not remove a single man except for delinquency. To remove a man is very easy, but when I go to fill his place, there are twenty applicants, and of these I must make nineteen enemies.”¹⁰³ Earlier in the war, John Murray Forbes remarked that Lincoln “is notoriously tender hearted about removing anybody. It is his weak point.”¹⁰⁴ Hay noted that Lincoln was not predisposed to cashier civil servants for political treachery: “It seems utterly impossible for the President to conceive the possibility of any good resulting from a rigorous and exemplary course of punishing political dereliction. His

¹⁰² Henry to his wife, Washington, 13 March 1865, Henry Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁰³ Carpenter, Inner Life of Lincoln, 276.

¹⁰⁴ Forbes to Henry W. Bellows, Boston, 13 December 1861, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, in William Quentin Maxwell, Lincoln’s Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission (New York: Longmans, Green, 1956), 114.

favorite expression is, ‘I am in favor of short statutes of limitations in politics.’”¹⁰⁵

Samuel Hooper thought that Lincoln probably would not replace many civil servants “because of his aversion to do anything that he thinks would be unpleasant to anyone.”¹⁰⁶

In March, Chase’s successor as treasury secretary, William P. Fessenden, resigned in order to accept the seat in the U.S. senate. To replace him, Lincoln wanted Edwin D. Morgan, who refused. So the president turned to Hugh McCulloch, an Indiana banker then serving as comptroller of the currency. Suspecting that he might be offered the job, McCulloch told his wife that he would rather not have it, but if it were tendered to him, “I should be ambitious enough or rather foolish enough to accept it.”¹⁰⁷ The president summoned McCulloch and said: “I have sent for you, Mr. McCulloch, to let you know that I want you to be Secretary of the Treasury, and if you do not object to it, I shall send your name to the Senate.” McCulloch later wrote that he was “taken all aback by this sudden and unexpected announcement,” for “it was an office that I had not aspired to, and did not desire.” He “knew how arduous and difficult the duties of the head of that department were,” and he had been offered a lucrative bank presidency in New York. He “hesitated for a moment, and then replied: ‘I thank you, Mr. President, heartily for this mark of your confidence, and I should be glad to comply with your wishes if I did not distrust my ability to do what will be required of the Secretary of the Treasury in the

¹⁰⁵ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 249 (entry for 11 November 1864).

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Hooper to Chase, Washington, 10 March 1865, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁰⁷ Hugh McCulloch to his wife, Washington, 2 October 1864, Hugh McCulloch Papers, Indiana University.

existing financial condition of the Government.” Lincoln responded: “I will be responsible for that.”¹⁰⁸

INTERVENING TO WIN PASSAGE OF THE THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT

Lincoln’s chief legislative goal in the aftermath of the election was to secure passage of the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing slavery throughout the country. It failed in June to win the requisite two-thirds majority of the House and did not become a significant issue in the presidential campaign, for Republicans soft-pedaled it while Democrats focused on miscegenation, civil liberties, conscription, and Lincoln’s Niagara Manifesto. Voters assumed that Congress would not address the amendment again until the members elected in 1864 took their seats in December 1865, and so they did not consider it a pressing matter. Thus the president’s reelection could not legitimately be interpreted as a mandate for the amendment.¹⁰⁹

Yet in his annual message to Congress, Lincoln did just that, boldly claiming that the electorate had endorsed the amendment: “It is the voice of the people now, for the first time, heard upon the question.” And so he urged the immediate passage of the stalled measure. In justifying such action, Lincoln noted that the “next Congress will pass the measure if this does not. Hence there is only a question of time as to when the proposed amendment will go to the States for their action. And as it is to so go, at all events, may we not agree that the sooner the better?” Emphatically he reiterated his commitment to emancipation: “I repeat the declaration made a year ago, that ‘while I remain in my

¹⁰⁸ Hugh McCulloch, Men and Measures of Half a Century: Sketches and Comments (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1888), 193.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Vorenberg, Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 141-75.

present position I shall not attempt to retract or modify the emancipation proclamation, nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the Acts of Congress.’ If the people should, by whatever mode or means, make it an Executive duty to re-enslave such persons, another, and not I, must be their instrument to perform it.”¹¹⁰ Congress applauded this statement loud and long.¹¹¹ Radicals hailed its “unblemished moral grandeur” and predicted that it would “have immortal life” and “go down as a heritage to future generations.”¹¹² Echoing that sentiment, a colonel in the U.S. Colored Troops wrote to Lincoln: “God bless you Abraham Lincoln for these noble words that bring joy to so many thousands of Colored Soldiers and so many hundreds of thousands of women and children; words that would of themselves had you no other claim endear you for all time to all who love Freedom and the Nation.”¹¹³ The editor of the National Anti-Slavery Standard thanked Lincoln “for the noble words in your Message to Congress, which give assurance that nothing shall be wanting on your part to extirminate slavery, root and branch, from the American soil You have justified the confidence which the great body of Abolitionists, led by Wm. Lloyd Garrison, have placed in you.”¹¹⁴

Lincoln’s motives in urging passage of the amendment were partly political, for he evidently calculated that it might help heal the breach in the Republican ranks by rendering moot the thorny question of whether Congress had the power to abolish slavery by statute. Moreover, with the slavery issue solved, some Democrats might be more

¹¹⁰ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:152.

¹¹¹ Washington correspondence, 6 December, New York Tribune, 7 December 1864.

¹¹² New York Independent, 8 December 1864.

¹¹³ Reuben D. Mussey to Lincoln, Nashville, 9 December 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁴ Oliver Johnson to Lincoln, New York, 7 December 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

willing to join the Republicans, who had been able to win in 1860 and 1864 only because of highly unusual circumstances.¹¹⁵

The president also argued that rapid adoption of the amendment might shorten the war. In December he lobbied the slaveholding Missouri Congressman James S. Rollins, who had voted against the amendment in the spring: “I am very anxious that the war should be brought to a close, at the earliest possible date, and I don’t believe this can be accomplished as long as those fellows down South can rely upon the Border States to help them; but if the members from the Border States would unite, at least enough of them to pass the 13th amendment to the Constitution, they would soon see they could not expect much help from that quarter, and be willing to give up their opposition, and quit their war upon the Government; this is my chief hope and main reliance, to bring the war to a speedy close, and I have sent for you, as an old Whig friend, to come and see me, that I might make an appeal to you to vote for this amendment. It is going to be very close; a few votes one way or the other will decide it.” When Rollins agreed to support it, Lincoln offered profuse thanks and asked him if he could persuade Missouri colleagues to follow suit. He urged Rollins to tell “them of my anxiety to have the measure pass,” for it “will clinch the whole subject” and “bring the war, I have no doubt, rapidly to a close.” Rollins said he had “never seen any one evince deeper interest and anxiety upon any subject than did Mr. Lincoln upon the passage of this amendment.” Rollins was as good as his word, lobbying fellow Representatives on behalf of the amendment.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Vorenberg, Final Freedom, 177.

¹¹⁶ Rollins in Osborn H. Oldroyd, The Lincoln Memorial: Album-Immortelles (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1882), 491-94.

Patronage considerations may have helped induce Rollins and his fellow Missourian Austin A. King to change their vote. In September, the death of a federal judge in Missouri had created a vacancy. On December 7, Lincoln consulted with Abel Rathbone Corbin, a wealthy financier and former resident of Missouri then living in New York. Corbin also met with Interior Secretary John P. Usher, with whom he schemed to gain the votes of Rollins and King. Usher thought he could persuade Rollins and that Corbin would be able to win over King “by co-operation” (i.e., favors). Corbin told the president he would guarantee nothing to either Representative, but would like “to have ‘a serpent hanging’ up ‘on a pole’ in the sight of all.” Therefore he urged Lincoln not to fill the judgeship until after the House had passed the amendment. Corbin promised the president that “if you will allow a vacancy to remain unfilled, and allow it to be known to Sec. Usher that it is unpromised, I will please you by the result. Your amendment shall pass. I can get you some New York votes.” Even if he could not persuade Democrats to reverse their earlier vote, they might be convinced to absent themselves. (Corbin reminded Lincoln that the two-thirds vote requirement applied only to the members present, not the entire House.) Thus the amendment might pass and even gain ratification by the time of Lincoln’s second inauguration.¹¹⁷ Both Rollins and King made passionate speeches in favor of the amendment. It is not clear if their enthusiasm had anything to do with the vacant judgeship, but it may have. According to Elizabeth Blair Lee, writing two days after the amendment passed, Rollins “has the credit of carrying the constitutional

¹¹⁷ Corbin to Lincoln, Washington, 8 December 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

amendment.” Her father, Francis P. Blair, had helped round up votes for the amendment, winning over some Democrats but failing to persuade James S. Brown of Wisconsin.¹¹⁸

Lincoln recruited another Democratic congressman, the lame-duck Samuel S. Cox of Ohio, to lobby his colleagues. Cox enjoyed great respect among his party confreres in the House. He had voted against the amendment that spring but after the election changed his mind. In December, eager to eliminate the slavery question from politics, he met with New York Democratic leaders S. L. M. Barlow, Samuel J. Tilden, and Manton Marble to discuss the amendment. He argued that the party should cast off the “proslavery odium” and “get rid of the element [of slavery] which ever keeps us in a minority and on the defensive.”¹¹⁹ During the holiday recess, Cox called at the White House with John Todd Stuart, Lincoln’s former law partner and, like Cox, a lame-duck Representative. They urged the president to make a good-faith effort to end the war through honorable negotiations.

Lincoln told Cox and Stuart that he wanted their assistance in winning Democratic support for the amendment. Cox “promised the President his help, provided a sincere effort was made for peace within the Union.” If the attempt failed, Cox added, he would still pitch in: “not only by his help would the amendment be adopted, but the war would be pursued with renewed vigor.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, Washington, 2 February 1865, Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 472.

¹¹⁹ Samuel S. Cox, Eight Years in Congress: From 1857 to 1865 (New York: Appleton, 1865), 397; David Lindsey, “Sunset” Cox: Irrepressible Democrat (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959), 93.

¹²⁰ Samuel S. Cox, Union-Disunion-Reunion: Three Decades of Federal Legislation. 1855-1885 (Washington: J. M. Stoddart, 1885), 310.

In the end, Cox voted against the amendment, believing it “would prove an insurmountable obstacle to peace and union.”¹²¹ He evidently did appeal to some Democrats effectively, however, for Seward – who organized a high-pressure lobbying effort on behalf of the amendment – later declared that it was the Ohio congressman “to whom personally, more than any other member, is due the passage of the constitutional amendment abolishing African slavery.”¹²² Lincoln, perhaps to encourage Cox, authorized James W. Singleton and Francis P. Blair, Sr., to undertake peace missions to Richmond. (Their exploits are discussed below.)

Lincoln had met earlier with Cox, who asserted that he was both “a good friend” to the administration and “a good Democrat at the same time.” The congressman’s statement reminded Lincoln of an old sow belonging to one Jacob Straus. When she could not be found for several days, Straus told his two sons that she “was down the creek somewhere, for he saw where she had been rooting among the ironweeds, and he was going to find her.” He instructed his boys to help him: “Now you go over the creek and go down that side of it, and I’ll go down this side and we’ll find her, for I believe she is on both sides of the creek.” Lincoln believed Cox “is trying to be on both sides of the creek.”¹²³

In mid-January, when the amendment seemed likely to fail yet again, Lincoln stepped up his lobbying efforts. Congressman Ashley prodded him, saying: “You must

¹²¹ Cox, Eight Years, 398.

¹²² Seward, “The Situation and the Duty: Speech of William H. Seward at Auburn, N.Y., 31 October 1868” (pamphlet; Washington: Philp and Solomons, 1868), 23; William van Zandt Cox and Milton Harlow Northrup, Life of Samuel Sullivan Cox (Syracuse, N.Y.: M. H. Northrup, 1899), 95.

¹²³ Memo by John J. Janney, in Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Lincoln, 265.

help us [find] one vote[.] Don[']t you know of a sinner in the opposition who is on praying ground?”¹²⁴

According to Massachusetts Congressman John B. Alley, the president told a pair of House members that two more votes were needed and that they were to be obtained by hook or crook. He evidently implied that favors could be expected from the administration in return for those votes.¹²⁵ As a Democratic opponent of the amendment remarked on the House floor, the “wish or order of the President is very potent. He can punish and reward.”¹²⁶ Lincoln tried to woo a Representative who had lost a sibling in the war, saying: “your brother died to save the Republic from death by the slaveholders rebellion. I wish you could see it to be your duty to vote for the Constitutional amendment ending slavery.”¹²⁷

No evidence survives that Lincoln offered a specific quid pro quo for votes, but it seems that he authorized his lieutenants to bargain, particularly Seward and Ohio Congressman James M. Ashley, floor manager of the amendment. Ashley cut a deal with Democratic Representative Anson Herrick of New York, who was lobbied by Abram Wakeman, Augustus Frank, Homer A. Nelson, and Charles A. Dana as well as Ashley. (Nelson, who spoke with Herrick several times, claimed he had Seward’s authorization to offer a reward.) They assured Herrick that his brother would receive a federal job in return for the congressman’s vote. After the amendment passed, Lincoln allegedly told Herrick “in person that whatever Ashley had promised should be performed, and he

¹²⁴ Ashley to Lincoln, Washington, 25 December 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²⁵ John B. Alley in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 585-86.

¹²⁶ Allen C. Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 262.

¹²⁷ Isaac N. Arnold, The History of Abraham Lincoln and the Overthrow of Slavery (Chicago: Clarke, 1866), 469.

signified his good faith by sending the name [of Herrick's brother] to the Senate."¹²⁸ (In March, Lincoln did nominate Hugh Herrick as an assessor of internal revenue, but the senate did not confirm him.)

Ashley did not always receive Lincoln's support. The Ohioan had been approached by spokesmen for the Camden and Amboy Railroad of New Jersey, who wanted to stop Charles Sumner's bill ending their line's monopoly control of train service between New York and Philadelphia. If Ashley could have Sumner's measure postponed, the railroad would persuade a pair New Jersey Democratic congressmen either to support the Thirteenth Amendment or to absent themselves when it came up for a vote. After Sumner rebuffed him, Ashley asked the president to lobby the senator. According to the Ohio congressman, Sumner "thinks the defeat of the Camden & Amboy monopoly would establish a principle by legislative enactment, which would effectually crush out the last lingering relics of the States' Rights dogma."

"I can do nothing with Mr. Sumner in these matters," Lincoln explained, according to a memo by Nicolay. "While Mr. Sumner is very cordial with me, . . . I think he would be all the more resolute in his persistence . . . if he supposed I were at all watching his course on this matter."¹²⁹

When the senate commerce committee refused to report Sumner's bill, and two New Jersey Democratic congressmen (George Middleton and Andrew J. Rogers) failed to show up for the vote on the Thirteenth Amendment, it was widely rumored that the

¹²⁸ Herrick to Seward, New York, 8 August 1865, Seward Papers, University of Rochester.

¹²⁹ Nicolay, memorandum, 18 January 1865, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 171.

president had struck a deal.¹³⁰ In light of Nicolay’s memo, that seems highly unlikely. Ashley may have misled the Camden & Amboy lobbyists into thinking that the president would cooperate. Possibly those lobbyists convinced the commerce committee that bottling up Sumner’s bill would yield political gains.¹³¹ In any event, the railroad appears to have persuaded Congressman Rogers, who had strongly opposed the amendment and had ties to the Camden & Amboy, to remain absent when the vote was taken. In the House, Lincoln’s operative James S. Rollins explained that Rogers was “confined to his room several days by indisposition.”¹³² Rollins’s involvement suggests that some arrangement had been made with the White House. Middleton’s absence is more easily explained, for he was an opponent of slavery who had a tendency to skip tough votes.¹³³

A Pennsylvania Democratic congressman whose election was being contested, Alexander Coffroth, voted for the amendment apparently in return for Republican pledges that the party would support his claim to the seat.¹³⁴ Moses Odell, a Democrat representing Brooklyn, received the coveted post of naval agent in New York after supporting the amendment (in both 1864 and 1865). Lame-duck Congressman George Yeaman of Kentucky, who had voted against the amendment in 1864, supported it in 1865. Six months later, he was named minister to Denmark. (In 1862, he had practically begged Lincoln for an office. “I would like right well to have a good office,” he wrote. “I don[’]t want any office, but I do want the comforts and salary of a good office, I need

¹³⁰ William Gillette, Jersey Blue: Civil War Politics in New Jersey, 1854-1865 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 300.

¹³¹ Vorenberg, Final Freedom, 200-1.

¹³² Congressional Globe, 38th Congress, 2nd session, 530 (31 January 1865).

¹³³ Gillette, Jersey Blue, 300.

¹³⁴ A. G. Riddle, Recollections of War Times: Reminiscences of Men and Events in Washington, 1860-1865 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1895), 324-25; Vorenberg, Final Freedom, 201.

them, and I deserve them.” Immodestly he averred: “I am qualified for anything from Brig Genl or District Judge down to anything except a Clerkship– I would not make a good clerk – it is so mechanical.”)¹³⁵

Seward’s agents evidently offered cash in return for votes. In early January, one of the more prominent agents, Robert W. Latham, told the secretary of state that he had “no doubt about passing” the amendment, for “[m]oney will certainly do it, if patriotism fails.”¹³⁶ Latham was a shady character who had worked closely with the notoriously corrupt John B. Floyd, Buchanan’s secretary of war.¹³⁷ Of the sixteen Democrats voting for the amendment, six represented New York districts. The Seward lobby evidently persuaded the Democrats’ flagship newspaper, the New York World, to change its anti-amendment stance to quasi-neutrality. Other important papers were also cajoled into taking similar action.¹³⁸

Just how much corruption was involved in the passage of the amendment is hard to measure. According to Montgomery Blair, Seward “made Lincoln believe [sic] that he had carried that Amendment by Corruption.” Blair denied Seward’s contention, saying the only case resembling bribery was the post offered to Anson Herrick’s brother. Blair gave most credit to Dean Richmond, leader of the upstate New York Democracy. The

¹³⁵ George H. Yeaman to Lincoln, Owensboro, Kentucky, 13 January 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³⁶ Robert W. Latham to Seward, Washington, 9 January 1865, Seward Papers, University of Rochester.

¹³⁷ LaWanda Cox and John H. Cox, Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1865-1866: Dilemma of Reconstruction America (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 11-12.

¹³⁸ Cox and Cox, Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1-20.

Democrats who voted for the amendment, Blair insisted, did so for “patriotic & party considerations.”¹³⁹

Sunset Cox told a different tale of corrupt New Yorkers. Many years after the event, he alleged that a Radical who was boarding with him at the same house acknowledged that men in the Empire State were offering substantial bribes to Democrats willing to vote for the amendment.¹⁴⁰

On January 31, as the hour for voting drew near, rumors swept through the House that Confederate peace commissioners were en route to the capital. Ashley panicked, fearing that some Democrats might backslide and defeat the amendment. To prevent that, the congressman appealed to Lincoln, who was busy writing instructions for Seward’s use in negotiating with the Confederate emissaries. The president, who was confident that the amendment would pass, interrupted that chore and penned a disingenuous message that calmed the storm: “So far as I know, there are no peace commissioners in the city, or likely to be in it.” This was a clever lawyer’s quibble, for Lincoln knew full well that commissioners were en route to Hampton Roads, Virginia, where they would meet with Seward to discuss peace terms.¹⁴¹ This “little secret piece of history” amused Lincoln, who told a caller several days later, “I eased it [the amendment] along – and concluded to send Seward down” to Fort Monroe. Recalling Ashley’s fear that his Democratic

¹³⁹ Blair to Andrew Johnson, Washington, 16 June 1865, LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., The Papers of Andrew Johnson (16 vols.; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-2000), 8:247.

¹⁴⁰ Cox, Union-Disunion-Reunion, 329.

¹⁴¹ Lincoln to Ashley, Washington, 31 January 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:248; Ashley to Herndon, Toledo, Ohio, 23 November 1866, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 413-14.

"converts" might "have gone off in a tangent at the last moment had they smelt Peace," he laughed and repeated that phrase "as far as I knew."¹⁴²

With the peace rumors thus denied, the amendment narrowly won the necessary two-thirds majority in the House (119 to 56). As the vote proceeded, one Republican congressman wrote to his wife: "I never felt so much excitement over any measure before."¹⁴³ All Republicans and sixteen Democrats voted for it; eight Democrats were absent and not paired. "The scene that followed the announcement of the result of the vote was worthy of the great event," Carl Schurz reported. "All arose as at a word of command" and "embraced, they shook hands, and ten minutes passed before the hurraing and the enthusiastic racket ceased."¹⁴⁴ Women in the packed galleries fluttered their white handkerchiefs "as if by one impulse till there was a perfect snow-storm," while men "cheered in tones of thunder," threw their hats in the air, and vigorously waved their canes.¹⁴⁵ Blacks in the galleries, including Henry Highland Garnet, also cheered heartily. "Oh what a pepper and salt mixture it was," Garnet remembered.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Elizabeth Peabody to Horace Mann, Jr., [mid Feb. 1865], in Bruce A. Ronda, ed., Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, American Renaissance Woman (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 328.

¹⁴³ Cornelius Cole to his wife, Washington, 31 January 1865, in Memoirs of Cornelius Cole, Ex-Senator of the United States from California (New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1908), 220.

¹⁴⁴ Schurz to his wife, Washington, 1 February 1865, in Joseph Schafer, ed., Intimate Letters of Carl Schurz, 1841-1869 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1928), 314-15.

¹⁴⁵ Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 1 February, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 4 February 1865.

¹⁴⁶ Martin B. Pasternak, Rise Now and Fly to Arms: The Life of Henry Highland Garnet (New York: Garland, 1995), 120.

Lincoln was equally delighted when Congressman Isaac N. Arnold brought him the news. It “filled his heart with joy,” Arnold recalled, for he “saw in it the complete consummation of his own work, the emancipation proclamation.”¹⁴⁷

Lincoln’s active lobbying of congressmen was highly unusual, for he generally obeyed the Whig dictum that the executive should defer to the legislature when statutes were being framed. He seldom initiated or vetoed legislation. His willingness to intervene so vigorously for the Thirteenth Amendment indicated the depth of his commitment to black freedom.

William Lloyd Garrison fully appreciated that commitment, writing to the president shortly after the amendment passed: “God save you, and bless you abundantly! As an instrument in his hands, you have done a mighty work for the freedom of the millions who have so long pined in bondage in our land – nay, for the freedom of all mankind. I have the utmost faith in the benevolence of your heart, the purity of your motives, and the integrity of your spirit. This I do not hesitate to avow at all times. I am sure you will consent to no compromise that will leave a slave in his fetters.”¹⁴⁸ On February 4, before an enthusiastic crowd in Boston’s Music Hall, Garrison asked rhetorically: “And to whom is the country more immediately indebted for this vital and saving amendment of the Constitution than, perhaps, to any other man?” The answer was obvious: “I believe I may confidently answer – to the humble railsplitter of Illinois – to Presidential chain-breaker for millions of the oppressed – to Abraham Lincoln!” The

¹⁴⁷ Isaac N. Arnold, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, 1885), 366.

¹⁴⁸ Garrison to Lincoln, Boston, 13 February 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

president “will never consent under any circumstances to the re-enslavement of any one of the millions whose yokes he has broken.”¹⁴⁹

Lincoln modestly disclaimed credit while praising Garrison’s role in the ultimate abolition of slavery. “I have only been an instrument,” he told D. H. Chamberlain in April 1865. “The logic and moral power of Garrison, and the anti-slavery people of the country and the army have done all.”¹⁵⁰ To John Murray Forbes, the president described Garrison “as one of ‘the Powers’ a Radical with a substratum of common sense & practical wisdom.”¹⁵¹ Lincoln also gratefully acknowledged the contribution of the Women’s National Loyal League, which had collected 400,000 signatures on petitions calling for the passage of the amendment.

The day after the House passed the amendment, Lincoln told serenaders that he “could not but congratulate all present, himself, the country and the whole world upon this great moral victory.” He hailed it as “a very fitting if not an indispensable adjunct to the winding up of the great difficulty.” It was essential “to remove all causes of disturbance in the future; and to attain this end it was necessary that the original disturbing cause should, if possible, be rooted out.” The Emancipation Proclamation “falls far short of what the amendment will be when fully consummated.” If the Proclamation were all that protected the freedom of the slaves, a “question might be raised” about its legal validity. “It might be added that it only aided those who came into our lines and that it was inoperative as to those who did not give themselves up, or that it would have no effect upon the children of the slaves born hereafter. In fact it would be

¹⁴⁹ The Liberator (Boston), 10 February 1865, in Harris, Lincoln’s Last Months, 134.

¹⁵⁰ Lincoln said this to D. H. Chamberlain on April 6, 1865. Chamberlain to the editor, New York, 22 September 1883, New York Tribune, 4 November 1883.

¹⁵¹ John Murray Forbes to Garrison, Boston, 18 January 1865, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

urged that it did not meet the evil. But this amendment is a King's cure for all the evils. [Applause.] It winds the whole thing up.” It “was the fitting if not indispensable adjunct to the consummation of the great game we are playing.”¹⁵²

Lincoln was proud that Illinois was the first state to ratify the amendment. By mid-April, nineteen others had followed suit, and by December it won endorsement by three-quarters of the states and thus became part of the Constitution.

To commemorate the amendment's passage, Lincoln with the approval of the cabinet and congressional chaplains invited Henry Highland Garnet, a prominent black Presbyterian minister and emigration champion, to deliver a sermon in the House chamber. Garnet did so on Sunday, February 14, before an enthusiastic, racially mixed audience.¹⁵³

Before 1865, it was not clear that the amending process was designed to do more than merely permit minor adjustments to the Constitution. Now it was clear that major social changes could be accomplished through it. The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment set in motion a chain of events foreseen by the Democratic Cincinnati Enquirer, which predicted accurately that it would be followed by other amendments enfranchising blacks and women.¹⁵⁴

THE HAMPTON ROADS CONFERENCE

In his annual message to Congress, Lincoln had explained how he hoped to end the war swiftly. He reported that upon “careful consideration of all the evidence

¹⁵² Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:244-45.

¹⁵³ Joel Schor, Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 205-9; Earl Ofari Hutchinson, Let Your Motto Be Resistance: The Life and Thought of Henry Highland Garnet (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 187-203.

¹⁵⁴ Cincinnati Enquirer, 10 February 1865.

accessible it seems to me that no attempt at negotiation with the insurgent leader [Jefferson Davis] could result in any good. He would accept nothing short of severance of the Union – precisely what we will not and cannot give Between him and us the issue is distinct, simple, and inflexible. It is an issue which can only be tried by war, and decided by victory.” While Davis could not bring about peace because of his mulish insistence on independence, the people of the Confederacy “can, at any moment, have peace simply by laying down their arms and submitting to the national authority under the Constitution. . . . If questions should remain, we would adjust them by the peaceful means of legislation, conference, court, and votes, operating only in constitutional and lawful channels.” Lincoln was here drawing a distinction between the end of bloodshed, which the people could bring about on their own, and ultimate peace terms, which must include not only the restoration of the Union but the abolition of slavery: “In presenting the abandonment of armed resistance to the national authority on the part of the insurgents, as the only indispensable condition to ending the war on the part of the government, I retract nothing heretofore said as to slavery. I repeat the declaration made a year ago, that ‘while I remain in my present position I shall not attempt to retract or modify the emancipation proclamation, nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the Acts of Congress.’” Concluding the message, he reiterated that the Rebels could end the war by simply laying down their arms: “In stating a single condition of peace, I mean simply to say that the war will cease on the part of the government, whenever it shall have ceased on the part of those who began it.” Though this distinction seemed like a quibble, the president was sticking to the

conditions spelled out in the Niagara Manifesto: the nation restored and slavery abolished.

Lincoln may have been trying to make an end-run around Jefferson Davis by indirectly appealing to Robert E. Lee, whose power in the Confederacy was waxing as Davis's waned, or to other war-weary Confederate leaders like Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell, Governor Joseph E. Brown of Georgia, Representatives William W. Boyce of South Carolina and Jehu A. Orr of Mississippi, and Senators William C. Rives of Virginia and William A. Graham of North Carolina, a state which had long been a hotbed of a powerful if ill-organized peace movement which gained strength below the Mason-Dixon line as one defeat followed another throughout the late summer and autumn of 1864.

Lee did make overtures to Grant, suggesting that they meet to discuss peace terms. When Grant forwarded the proposal to Washington, he received a harsh response from Stanton: "The President directs me to say that he wishes you to have no conference with General Lee, unless it be for the capitulation of General Lee's army, or on some minor or purely military matter. He instructs me to say that you are not to decide, discuss, or confer upon any political questions, such questions the President holds in his own hands and will submit them to no military conferences or conventions. Meanwhile, you are to press to the utmost your military advantages."¹⁵⁵

In his annual message, Lincoln tactfully acknowledged that Congress had a role to play in setting peace terms. Some "questions are, and would be, beyond the Executive to adjust; as for instance, the admission of members into Congress, and whatever might

¹⁵⁵ Stanton to Grant, Washington, 3 March 1865, Simon, ed., Grant Papers, 14:91.

require the appropriation of money.” Furthermore, he conceded that his power “would be greatly diminished by the cessation of actual war. Pardons and remission of forfeitures, however, would still be within Executive control.” He warned Southerners that the amnesty policy he had announced a year earlier might not remain in effect much longer, for “the time may come – probably will come – when public duty shall demand that it be closed; and that, in lieu, more rigorous measures than heretofore shall be adopted.”¹⁵⁶

The peace initiative that nearly sidelined the Thirteenth Amendment in late January had been undertaken by Francis P. Blair, Sr., who entertained the delusive idea that the North and South might compose their differences by joining forces to expel the French from Mexico. (His scheme resembled the one that Seward had suggested in his April 1, 1861 memorandum, “Some Thoughts for the Consideration of the President.”) In early December, Greeley had pleaded with Blair to lobby the president: “You have Mr. Lincoln’s ear, as I have not, and can exert influence on every side where it is needed. Do urge and inspire him to make peace among our friends any how, and with or foes so soon as may be.”¹⁵⁷ Without explaining his plan, Blair asked Lincoln for permission to visit Richmond and confer with Jefferson Davis. The president replied: “Come to me after [the fall of] Savannah.” Sherman took that Georgia port on December 22, and Lincoln gave Blair the pass he had requested. In Richmond, Jefferson Davis indicated a willingness to participate in a joint invasion of Mexico. In mid-January, upon receiving a report of this conversation, Lincoln authorized Blair to tell Davis “that I have constantly been, and am now, and shall continue ready to receive any agent whom he, or any other influential

¹⁵⁶ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:136-51.

¹⁵⁷ Elbert B. Smith, Francis Preston Blair (New York: Free Press, 1980), 363.

person now resisting the National authority, may informally send to me, with the view of securing peace to the people of our one common country.”¹⁵⁸

Davis should have realized that his cause was hopeless, for the Union had recently captured Fort Fisher at Wilmington, North Carolina, thus plugging the last hole in the blockade and cutting one of Lee’s most important supply lines. Sherman had spent December marching across Georgia en route to Savannah, a city which he tendered to the president as a Christmas gift. That month George H. Thomas had obliterated Hood’s army at Nashville and Franklin. Sherman followed up his spectacular march by thrusting into the Carolinas as he headed toward a rendezvous with Grant.

(When some White House callers expressed anxiety about the military situation, Lincoln went to a map, showed how Grant had Lee trapped at Petersburg and how Sherman was marching thither. He remarked that his own situation, after being elected twice to the presidency, called to mind “an old fellow in the early days of Indiana who had been a wicked and lascivious sinner, and had joined the church and was getting baptized. The preacher had dipped him in a river, and he had come up gasping and rubbing his face, and then calling on the preacher to dip him again and baptize him once more. The preacher said one was enough. But the old fellow insisted.” So the preacher dunked him again. “As he came up and rubbed the water out of his eyes and mouth and got his breath, he blurted out, ‘Now I’ve been baptized twice, and the Devil can kiss my ass.’” Lincoln pointed to a spot on the map “and said that when Sherman’s army got to that place the war would be ended. ‘And then,’ said Lincoln, ‘the Southern Confederacy

¹⁵⁸ William Ernest Smith, The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1933), 2:363-67; Blair to Greeley, Silver Spring, [20?] December 1864, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library; Lincoln to Blair, Washington, 18 January 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:220-21.

can kiss my ass.”)¹⁵⁹ More decorously he told another caller: “Grant has the bear by the hind leg while Sherman takes off his hide.”¹⁶⁰

Instead of regarding Lincoln’s offer seriously, Jefferson Davis defiantly dispatched a trio of peace commissioners with instructions to confer informally with Lincoln “for the purpose of securing peace to the two countries.” (Davis ignored the recommendation of his exceptionally capable secretary of state, Judah P. Benjamin, to omit any reference to “two countries.”) Many members of the Confederate Congress, persuaded that the war was lost, had urged the appointment of peace commissioners to effect a surrender. They were surprised to learn much later of Davis’s unyielding instructions, which doomed the conference to failure before it began.¹⁶¹ One Confederate emissary, Alexander H. Stephens, considered his mission a “humbug” from the outset.¹⁶²

When word of Blair’s mission leaked out, Radicals expressed alarm. “Blair is an old fool for going to Richmond upon a peace mission & the Administration is little better for permitting him to go upon any pretense whatever,” Zachariah Chandler grumbled. “Nothing but evil can come of this nonsense.”¹⁶³ The senator and his ideological compeers suspected that Lincoln might offer universal amnesty to the Confederates, restore their confiscated property, allow their army to join with Union forces to attack Mexico, offer slaveholders enormous financial compensation for their escaped

¹⁵⁹ Carl Sandburg’s notes of an interview with Joseph Fifer, [1923], Sandburg-Barrett Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago. A sanitized version of this account can be found in Sandburg, War Years, 4:137-38.

¹⁶⁰ Sandburg, War Years, 4:672.

¹⁶¹ Arthur S. Colyar to R. M. T. Hunter, Nashville, Tennessee, 3 January 1877, reproduced in an unidentified clipping, John B. Baldwin Papers, Virginia Historical Society. Colyar represented a Tennessee district in the Confederate House of Representatives. Cf. Wilfred B. Yearsns, “The Peace Movement in the Confederate Congress,” Georgia Historical Quarterly 41 (1957):14-18.

¹⁶² Thomas E. Schott, Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia: A Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 442.

¹⁶³ Chandler to his wife, Washington, 25 January 1865, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

bondsmen, while leaving those still outside Union lines in slavery. Leaders of the committee on the conduct of the war were “in a state of high indignation,” believing that they “shall be sold out” and that the administration would agree to “a dishonorable peace.”

Upon learning that Lincoln would meet with the Confederate emissaries, Ben Wade reportedly sneered that the country was “disgraced by the president running down to Fortress Monroe to see the understrappers of a traitor. Europe will say we are beaten and suing on our knees for peace.” Another prominent senator contemptuously remarked that “Lincoln never did, never could, rise above the county politician” and “that his trip was a scandal.” He predicted that “other humiliations were in store for us.” Wisconsin Senator Matthew Hale Carpenter feared that Lincoln may have “lowered the dignity of the nation most damnably” and believed that Seward, ever eager to play the pacificator, was the evil genius behind the conference.¹⁶⁴ “Some of my friends in Congress,” Lincoln remarked, “act as if they were afraid to trust me with a dinner; yet I shall never compromise the principles upon which I was elected.”¹⁶⁵ Joseph Medill warned the president not to “be in too much hurry for Peace. Don’t coax the rebel chiefs but pound them a little more. When they are sufficiently whipped they will gladly accept your terms, and the peace then made will be enduring.”¹⁶⁶

On February 1, when Henry Ward Beecher called at the White House to express alarm at the proposed peace parley, Lincoln told him: “Blair thinks something can be

¹⁶⁴ Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 4 February 1865; Matthew Hale Carpenter to John Pope, Washington, 4 February 1865, Pope Papers, New-York Historical Society.

¹⁶⁵ Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 6 February, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 20 February 1865.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Medill to Lincoln, Washington, 15 January 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

done, but I don't, but I have no objection to have him try his hand. He has no authority whatever but to go and see what he can do." Beecher recalled that Lincoln's "hair was 'every way for Sunday.' It looked as though it was an abandoned stubble-field. He had on slippers and his vest was what was called 'going free.' He looked wearied and when he sat down in a chair looked as though every limb wanted to drop off his body."¹⁶⁷

Moderates also had qualms. Gideon Welles confided to his diary that Lincoln "with much shrewdness and much good sense, has often strange and incomprehensible whims; takes sometimes singular and unaccountable freaks. It would hardly surprise me were he to undertake to arrange terms of peace without consulting anyone."¹⁶⁸

When Blair returned, Lincoln said he believed that "peace was much nearer at hand than the most confident have at any time hoped for."¹⁶⁹

On January 30, the Southern commissioners (Confederate Vice-president Alexander H. Stephens, Senator Robert M. T. Hunter, and Confederate Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell) arrived at Grant's lines and asked permission to proceed to Washington. Lincoln sent word that they would receive a safe conduct pass only if they agreed to negotiate "with a view of securing peace to the people of our one common country." When they seemed to agree to that condition, the president on January 31 dispatched Seward to parlay with them informally at Hampton Roads.¹⁷⁰ The secretary of state was to inform them "that three things are indispensable." First, "the national authority" must be restored "throughout all the States." Second, there was to be no

¹⁶⁷ Henry Ward Beecher in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 249-50.

¹⁶⁸ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:231-2 (entry for 30 January 1865).

¹⁶⁹ New York Herald, 23 January 1865.

¹⁷⁰ The Confederates did not formally state that they would drop the demand for independence but hinted that they might.

“receding, by the Executive of the United States on the Slavery question.” And finally, there was to be no “cessation of hostilities short of an end of the war, and the disbanding of all forces hostile to the government.” Seward was told to “inform them that all propositions of theirs not inconsistent with the above, will be considered and passed upon in a spirit of sincere liberality. You will hear all they may choose to say, and report it to me. You will not assume to definitely consummate anything.”¹⁷¹ Lincoln also instructed Grant to let “nothing which is transpiring change, hinder, or delay your military movements or plans.”¹⁷² The general replied that he would do so.

When the Confederates seemed to renege on their agreement to negotiate based on Lincoln’s conditions, the talks nearly collapsed. The president was poised to recall Seward when he received a dispatch from Grant that changed his mind. On February 1, sensing that such a denouement would “have a bad influence,” Grant urged Lincoln to meet with the commissioners.¹⁷³ (The general’s wife had prodded him to do something that might break the logjam.)¹⁷⁴ In addition, that night Major Thomas T. Eckert reported that the commissioners were hinting that they would be willing to drop Davis’s insistence on Confederate independence.¹⁷⁵

The day that Grant sent his crucial telegram, Lincoln met with an amateur peace negotiator, James W. Singleton of Illinois, just back from a sojourn in Richmond.¹⁷⁶ On

¹⁷¹ Lincoln to Seward, Washington, 31 January 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:251.

¹⁷² Lincoln to Grant, Washington, 1 February 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:252.

¹⁷³ Grant to Lincoln, City Point, 1 February 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷⁴ R. M. T. Hunter, “The Peace Commission of 1865,” Philadelphia Weekly Times, 24 March 1874, in Peter Cozzens and Robert I. Girardi, eds., The New Annals of the Civil War (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole, 2004), 493-94.

¹⁷⁵ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:285n.

¹⁷⁶ Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 2:5 (entry for 1 February 1865).

January 5, the president had issued Singleton a pass enabling him to travel through Union lines to the Confederate capital. Lincoln had known Singleton in pre-war years, when he was a prominent Whig-turned-Democrat at Quincy and a close friend of fellow-townsmen Orville H. Browning. During the war, the Virginia-born Singleton, whose brother served in the Confederate Congress, became the leader of Illinois' radical Peace Democrats. In the fall of 1864, Browning had entered into a business deal with Singleton, New York Senator Edwin D. Morgan, Robert E. Coxe, and Judge James Hughes of the federal court of claims; they planned to purchase cotton and tobacco in Virginia and sell it for a hefty profit to Northern merchants and manufacturers. Such commerce was legal under the 1863 Captured and Abandoned Property Act. Lincoln felt obligated to Singleton for helping undermine McClellan's 1864 presidential campaign by refusing to support the general's candidacy.¹⁷⁷

Lincoln's relations with Singleton are murky and confusing. During the election campaign of 1864, the president evidently sent him to Canada to confer with Confederate agents there. In September, Singleton informed one of those operatives that he had met twice with Lincoln who "says he will go as far 'as any man in America to restore peace on the basis of Union[.]' He declares that he never has and never will present any other ultimatum – that he is misunderstood on the subject of slavery – that it shall not stand in the way of peace."¹⁷⁸ On Thanksgiving, Singleton told Orville H. Browning that before the election, Lincoln had informed him that the Niagara Manifesto "put him in a false

¹⁷⁷ "Old-Time Facts and Fancies" by "An Old-Timer," clipping marked "Chicago News, 2-29-1896," Lincoln Financial Foundation "Lincoln Collection In Indiana" research collection, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne.

¹⁷⁸ [Singleton] to [Beverly Tucker?], [11?] September 1865, Clement C. Clay Correspondence, Record Group 109, National Archives, in Ludwell Johnson, "Lincoln's Solution to the Problem of Peace Terms, 1864-1865," Journal of Southern History 34 (1968):579.

position – that he did not mean to make the abolition of slavery a condition, and that after the election he would be willing to grant peace with an amnesty, and restoration of the union, leaving slavery to abide the decisions of judicial tribunals.” Two days later, Singleton added that Lincoln had sent him word “that slavery should not stand in the way of adjustment, and that he intended to say so in his message [to Congress] – that he would determine after the meeting of Congress whether he would send commissioners to Richmond, and if he concluded to do so he would send him, Singleton.”¹⁷⁹ On Christmas Eve, Lincoln also told Browning (according to Browning’s diary) that he had not intended to make abolition a precondition for peace.

These reports clash with explicit evidence that Lincoln had decided not to retract his insistence on abolition as a precondition for peace. Perhaps the president was referring to the peculiar distinction that he made in his annual message. In any event, Singleton traveled to Canada where he talked with Clement Clay and Nathaniel Beverly Tucker. He told Browning that according to those gentlemen, the South was ready to cease fighting if it could retain slavery and receive amnesty.

Singleton later claimed that he had made four or five trips to Richmond at Lincoln’s behest. When the president asked him what could be done to expedite peace, he replied that the Confederate leadership entertained false hopes inspired by some Democrats who claimed that the North was so war-weary that it was on the verge of revolt. Lincoln, who thought Singleton was ideally qualified to disabuse them of those notions, told him: “if there is anybody in the country who can have any influence on those people, and bring about any good, you are the man. They must have confidence in

¹⁷⁹ Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:693-95, 699 (entries for 24, 26 November, 24 December 1864).

you; you have been as much their friend as it was possible for you to be and yet be loyal to the government under which you live.” Singleton replied said he was honored and would do his best to enlighten the Davis administration. Lincoln insisted that he would never retract the Emancipation Proclamation but added that the courts might rule it invalid and he would have to enforce that judicial decision.¹⁸⁰ To his wife, Singleton wrote on January 7: “I cannot . . . too highly appreciate the confidence Mr. Lincoln has reposed in me and the honor conferred by the bare privilege of making the effort in behalf of my country and suffering humanity.”¹⁸¹

Two days later, Singleton left for Richmond on a mission that was supposed to be secret. Alexander Long, a leading Peace Democrat and former congressman from Ohio, expressed the hope that Singleton’s effort “may result in good – God grant that some means may be used through whatever instrumentality to once more give peace to the country.”¹⁸² In Richmond, Singleton made purchases for his business partners and also met with Jefferson Davis and others to discuss peace terms. He evidently helped persuade the Confederate president to send peace commissioners to Hampton Roads.¹⁸³

When he returned to Washington on January 31, Singleton told William Cornell Jewett that the people of the South “are all anxious for peace,” that it was “in the power of the North to reconstruct by an offer of liberal terms – to be considered and acted upon during an armistice of sixty days,” that the Confederates “will not consent to reconstruction upon any other basis than the clearest recognition of the rights of States

¹⁸⁰ Singleton interviewed by John E. Wilkie, Chicago Times, 26 December 1885.

¹⁸¹ New York Times, 12 February 1928.

¹⁸² Alexander Long to Greeley, Washington, 11 January 1865, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library.

¹⁸³ Singleton interviewed by John E. Wilkie, Chicago Times, 26 December 1885; Washington correspondence, 15 January, Quincy Herald, 8 February 1865.

respectively to determine each for itself all questions of local and domestic government, Slavery included,” and finally that they “will not permit Slavery to stand in the way of Independence – to that [i.e., independence] it [slavery] would be promptly surrendered, but to nothing else – unless it should be a fair compensation coupled with other liberal terms of reconstruction secured by Constitutional Amendments.”¹⁸⁴ Although Lincoln was “not carried away” by Singleton’s “suggestions as to the best way to restore harmony between the two ‘nations,’” he may well have been encouraged by the news that “fair compensation” and “other liberal terms” might persuade the Davis government to cease fighting.¹⁸⁵

Upon reading Grant’s dispatch, Lincoln hastened to Fort Monroe and on February 3 parlayed with the Confederate delegation.¹⁸⁶ Aboard the steamer River Queen, anchored in Hampton Roads, he greeted the commissioners warmly. He and Alexander H. Stephens had worked together for the nomination of Zachary Taylor seventeen years earlier when both of them were serving in Congress. As the diminutive Stephens began to remove his heavy overcoat and large scarf, the president poked gentle fun at him: “Now, gentlemen, you see what a large among of ‘shuck’ Mr. Stephens has – just wait a minute and you will be surprised to find what a small ‘nubbin’ he is.”¹⁸⁷ The president laughed

¹⁸⁴ Washington correspondence, 1 February, New York Tribune, 2 February 1865; Jewett to the editor of the New York Tribune, Washington, 4 February, New York Tribune, 6 February 1865.

¹⁸⁵ Washington correspondence, 1 February, Cincinnati Gazette, 2 February 1865.

¹⁸⁶ Because the participants in this conference agreed that nothing would be written down, we have no record from Lincoln or Seward of what transpired (other than a perfunctory presidential message to Congress) and only reminiscent accounts by the three Confederates in addition to their brief official report to Davis. The following account is based on those recollections, supplemented by newspaper reports that may reflect what Lincoln and Seward told others.

¹⁸⁷ Reminiscences of Stephens given to Evan P. Howell in 1882, in Howell to Henry Watterson, n.p., n.d., in the Louisville Courier-Journal, n.d., copied in an unidentified clipping, Lincoln Financial Foundation “Lincoln Collection In Indiana” research collection, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne. Cf. Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant (New York: Century, 1897), 407-8.

heartily when Stephens retaliated with a story from their time in Congress: one day at the capitol several Representatives were discussing the proper pronunciation of “Illinois.” Some said it was “Illinoy,” others “Illinoise.” Smilingly, John Quincy Adams quipped: “If one were to judge from the character of the representatives in this congress from that state, I should decide that the proper way to pronounce the word would be ‘All noise.’”¹⁸⁸

During the informal conversation which preceded the negotiations, Lincoln “was very talkative and pleasant with all of the commissioners,” Stephens recalled. “He seemed to be in a splendid humor, and was in excellent spirits.”¹⁸⁹

After these pleasantries, the five men got down to business. According to Stephens, Lincoln was “perfectly frank,” submitting “his views, almost in the form of an argument.”¹⁹⁰ The only way to restore peace and harmony was “for those who were resisting the laws of the Union to cease that resistance.” The president reiterated that the “restoration of the Union is a sine qua non with me, and hence my instructions that no conference was to be held except upon that basis.” Ignoring this plain language, Stephens expatiated on a plan like the one suggested by Francis P. Blair, involving an armistice and a joint expedition against the French in Mexico. Lincoln firmly rejected the idea of an armistice, which “would be a quasi recognition of the States then in arms against the National Government, as a separate power.” That he “never could do.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Washington correspondence, 22 February, by Van [D. W. Bartlett], Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 25 February 1865.

¹⁸⁹ Reminiscences of Stephens given to Evan P. Howell in 1882, in Howell to Henry Watterson, n.p., n.d., in the Louisville Courier-Journal, n.d., copied in an unidentified clipping, Lincoln Financial Foundation “Lincoln Collection In Indiana” research collection, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne.

¹⁹⁰ Stephens’ account of the conference, given shortly after its conclusion, to the editor of a newspaper in his hometown. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 7 June 1865.

¹⁹¹ Alexander H. Stephens, A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States: Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results, Presented in a Series of Colloquies at Liberty Hall (2 vols.; Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1868-70), 2:604-8.

Hunter, speaking “at length, in rather congressional style,” urged “that the recognition Mr. Davis’s power to make a treaty, was the first and indispensable step to peace.” Hunter referred “to the correspondence of King Charles the First, and his Parliament, as a reliable precedent, of a constitutional ruler, treating with rebels.” Lincoln’s face “then wore that indescribable expression which generally preceded his hardest hits,” and he remarked drolly: “Upon questions of history, I must refer you to Mr. Seward, for he is posted in such things, and I don’t profess to be bright. My only distinct recollection of that matter is, that Charles lost his head.” That observation “settled Mr. Hunter for a while.”¹⁹²

As for the projected invasion of Mexico, Lincoln said “that it could not be entertained. That there could be no war without the consent of Congress, and no treaty without the consent of the Senate of the United States. That he could make no treaty with the Confederate States because that would be a recognition of those States and that this could not be done under any circumstances. That unless a settlement were made there would be danger that the quarrel would break out in the midst of the joint operations. That one party might unite with the common enemy to destroy the other. That he was determined to do nothing to suspend the operations for bringing the existing struggle to a close [in order] to attain any collateral end.”¹⁹³

Turning to more realistic questions, Lincoln said the Confederate states could regain their place in the Union once they had laid down their arms and allowed the federal government to resume its traditional functions. Seward reminded the

¹⁹² Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 7 June 1865. Cf. Hunter, “Peace Commission of 1865,” 497.

¹⁹³ Campbell, Reminiscences and Documents Relating to the Civil War During the Year 1865 (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1887), 12-13.

commissioners that in the president's annual message he had announced: "In stating a single condition of peace, I mean simply to say that the war will cease on the part of the Government whenever it shall have ceased on the part of those who began it." Congress would determine who was legitimately elected to serve in it, Lincoln pointed out, but he believed "that when the resistance ceased and the National authority was recognized the States would be immediately restored to their practical relations to the Union."¹⁹⁴ He added that "individuals subject to pains and penalties under the laws of the United States might rely upon a very liberal use of the powers confided to him to remit those and pains and penalties if peace be restored." Of course, he could not infringe on the powers of Congress or repeal its laws or undo the findings of courts; but "he did offer all the power of mercy and pardon and influence, both as the Chief Magistrate, and as a popular party leader." When Hunter remarked that he had no fear of harsh treatment, "Lincoln retorted, that he, also, had felt easy as to the rebels, but not always so easy about the lamp posts around Washington city – a hint that he had already done more favors for the rebels, than was exactly popular with the radical men of his own party."¹⁹⁵ (This was clearly an allusion to the fear he had expressed earlier to Congressman William D. Kelley that he might be hanged by disaffected Republicans.)¹⁹⁶

As for emancipation, Lincoln said that he "never would change or modify the terms of the proclamation in the slightest particular." But that document had freed only about 200,000 slaves thus far; the status of the remaining 3,000,000-plus would be settled by the courts. (Lincoln doubtless underestimated the number of slaves already liberated).

¹⁹⁴ Stephens, Constitutional View, 2:612.

¹⁹⁵ Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 7 June 1865.

¹⁹⁶ William D. Kelley in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 276.

Seward interjected that if the Thirteenth Amendment, whose passage by Congress was unknown to the Confederates, were ratified by three-quarters of the states, all slaves would be free.

A propos of the Thirteenth Amendment, Lincoln “suggested that there was a question as to the right of the insurgent States to return at once, and claim a right to vote upon the amendment.”¹⁹⁷ Seward hinted that if the Confederates surrendered and quickly regained admission to the Union, they might defeat the amendment.

Taking a different tack, Lincoln “intimated that the States [in rebellion] might do much better to return to the Union at once, than to stand the chances of continued war, and the increasing bitterness of feeling in Congress. And that the time might come” when Confederates “would cease to be [regarded as] an erring people, invited back to the Union as citizens.”¹⁹⁸

If slavery were abolished, Stephens asked: “what are we to do? I know that negroes will not work, unless forced to it, and I tell you that we shall all starve together.” The question reminded Lincoln of an Illinois farmer who offered his neighbor advice on how to feed hogs: “plant plenty of potatoes, and when they are mature, without either digging or housing them, turn the hogs in the field and let them get their own food as they want it.” When the neighbor asked, “how will they do when the winter comes and the ground is hard frozen?” the farmer replied: “let 'em root.” Southern whites, Lincoln said, “can go to work like honest people or starve.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 7 June 1865.

¹⁹⁸ Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 7 June 1865.

¹⁹⁹ Washington correspondence, 22 February, by Van [D. W. Bartlett], Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 25 February 1865. Campbell and Stephens gave versions of this story that made Lincoln’s remarks apply to Southern freedmen. The more contemporary account makes it apply to whites. The latter

Lincoln renewed his proposal to compensate slaveholders, stating “that he would be willing to be taxed to remunerate the Southern people for their slaves. He believed the people of the North were as responsible for slavery as people of the South, and if the war should then cease, with the voluntary abolition of slavery by the States, he should be in favor, individually, of the Government paying a fair indemnity for the loss to their owners. He said he believed this feeling had an extensive existence at the North. He knew some who were in favor of an appropriation as high as four hundred million dollars for this purpose. ‘I could mention persons,’ said he, ‘whose names would astonish you, who are willing to do this if the war shall now cease without further expense, and with the abolition of slavery as stated.’ But on this subject he said he could give no assurance—enter into no stipulation.” When Seward objected to compensating slaveholders, Lincoln replied: “if it was wrong in the South to hold slaves, it was wrong in the North to carry on the slave trade and sell them to the South.”

In frustration, Hunter protested that the Confederacy was being asked to surrender unconditionally. Denying that assertion, Seward said he did not “think that in yielding to the execution of the laws under the Constitution of the United States, with all its guarantees and securities for personal and political rights, as they might be declared to be by the court, could be properly considered as unconditional submission to conquerors, or as having anything humiliating about it.”²⁰⁰ Seward was right. The terms that Lincoln

version seems more plausible, given Lincoln’s well-known attitude toward southern whites’ unwillingness to work and his oft-expressed concern for the well being of freed slaves.

²⁰⁰ Stephens, Constitutional View, 2:617; Hunter, “Peace Commission of 1865,” 495, 497.

offered the South – reunion and emancipation – were far more limited and generous than the demands that the United States imposed on Germany and Japan in 1945.²⁰¹

As the meeting closed, Hunter asked about the U.S. Capitol expansion. Seward described how the dome had been completed and was now crowned by a large statue of Armed Liberty.²⁰² (A few months earlier, Lincoln had said “that there were some people who thought the work on the Capitol ought to stop on account of the war, people who begrudged the expenditure, and the detention of the workmen from the army.” But Lincoln believed that the completion of the Capitol expansion would symbolize the preservation of the Union: “If people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign we intend the Union shall go on.”)²⁰³

The only agreement to emerge from the conference dealt with prisoner exchanges. At Stephens’ suggestion, Lincoln said he would recommend to Grant that a cartel for such exchanges be negotiated with the Confederates. The president also agreed to have Stephens’ nephew released from a Northern prison camp.

The disappointed commissioners relayed Lincoln’s terms to Jefferson Davis and said that “the conference was but a confirmation of the desire for peace upon the part of the United States.” The Confederate chief “looked on the proposition as insulting.” Davis “wished a statement to go before the public that only insulting terms were tendered,” but

²⁰¹ William C. Harris, “Toward Appomattox, Toward Unconditional Surrender?” in The Lincoln Enigma: The Changing Faces of an American Icon, ed. Gabor Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 108-129.

²⁰² Glyndon van Deusen, William Henry Seward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 385-86.

²⁰³ John Eaton, Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen: Reminiscences of the Civil War with Special Reference to the Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley (New York: Longmans, Green, 1907), 89.

the commissioners refused. So only a bland account of the conference was released.²⁰⁴ In public speeches, the Confederate president breathed defiance. He would “teach the insolent enemy who has treated our proposition with contumely in that conference in which he had so plumed himself with arrogance, he was, indeed, talking to his masters.”²⁰⁵ With a sneer, he referred to Lincoln as “His Majesty Abraham the First” and declared that rather than rejoin the Union, “he would be willing to yield up everything he had on earth – if it were possible he would sacrifice a thousand lives.”²⁰⁶ As it turned out, more lives than a thousand were sacrificed because of Davis’s stubborn unwillingness to accept the reality of defeat. As the disappointed Campbell put it a few months later, Davis “became in the closing part of the war an incubus and a mischief” because he was “[s]low, procrastinating, obstructive, filled with petty scruples and doubts, and wanting in a clear, strong, intrepid judgment, a vigorous resolution, and a generous and self-sacrificing nature.”²⁰⁷

Lincoln returned to Washington optimistic that the conference at Hampton Roads would “be likely to tend to peace.”²⁰⁸ He told James W. Singleton: “I have not brought back peace in a lump from the conference, but I am glad I went down, and hope for good results.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 7 June 1865.

²⁰⁵ William J. Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 551.

²⁰⁶ J. B. Jones, A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary at the Confederate States Capital (2 vols.; New York: Old Hickory Bookshop, 1935), 2:411 (entry for 6 February 1865); Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 10:130.

²⁰⁷ John A. Campbell to Benjamin R. Curtis, Fort Pulsaki, Georgia, 20 July 1865, Century Magazine, October 1889, 950.

²⁰⁸ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:236 (entry for 4 February 1865).

²⁰⁹ Singleton interviewed by John E. Wilkie, Chicago Times, 26 December 1885.

Radicals disparaged Lincoln's trip. "The peace fizzle has ended as I supposed it would in national disgrace," remarked Zachariah Chandler. He thought it was bad enough for Seward and Blair to undertake such a fool's errand, but it was "not only disgraceful but ridiculous" for "the President to go 200 miles to meet the representatives of these accursed Rebels & then to come back with a flea in his ear."²¹⁰

On February 6, Lincoln introduced to the cabinet a resolution embodying the proposal he had made at the conference – to offer \$400,000,000 as compensation to slaveholders if the Confederacy would surrender by April 1. Half would be paid upon that surrender and the other half if the Thirteenth Amendment were ratified by July 1. Should Congress pass this resolution, Lincoln pledged that he would fully exercise the power granted him and that "the war will cease, and armies be reduced to a basis of peace; that all political offences will be pardoned; that all property, except slaves, liable to confiscation or forfeiture, will be released therefrom, except in cases of intervening interests of third parties; and that liberality will be recommended to congress upon all points not lying within executive control."²¹¹

In justifying his offer, Lincoln asked the cabinet: "how long has this war lasted, and now long do you suppose it will last? We cannot hope that it will end in less than a hundred days. We are now spending three millions a day, and that will equal the full amount I propose to pay, to say nothing of the lives lost and property destroyed. I look upon it as a measure of strict and simple economy." The cabinet unanimously rejected this pragmatic argument, which Lincoln had used to justify compensated emancipation back in 1862. Secretary of the Interior John P. Usher speculated that Lincoln's "heart was

²¹⁰ Chandler to his wife, Washington, 6, 10 February 1865, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

²¹¹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:260-61.

so fully enlisted in behalf of such a plan that he would have followed it if only a single member of his Cabinet had supported him in the project.” Sadly Lincoln commented, “You are all against me” and dropped the matter.²¹²

Welles recorded in his dairy that Lincoln’s “earnest desire” to “conciliate and effect peace was manifest, but there may be such a thing as so overdoing as to cause a distrust or adverse feeling. In the present temper of Congress the proposed measure, if a wise one, could not be carried successfully.” Welles feared that the Confederates would “misconstrue it” and that if it were openly submitted and rejected, “it would do harm.”²¹³ Secretary Usher was equally anxious, believing that if Lincoln submitted the resolution to Congress, Radicals like Robert C. Schenck “would make it the occasion of a violent assault on the President and perhaps thus weaken his influence to procure men and money to prosecute the war.”²¹⁴ According to the man who was to procure the money, Treasury Secretary Fessenden, the cabinet thought that since the president’s proposal could not be acted on by Congress before its adjournment on March 4, it should not be submitted to that body. In addition, “it was evidently the unanimous opinion of the cabinet that the only way effectively to end the war was by force of arms – and that until the war was thus ended no proposition to pay money should come from us.”²¹⁵

Lincoln evidently intended the \$400,000,000 to revive the South’s blighted economy. It was an enlightened proposal to help restore sectional harmony.

²¹² John M. Palmer Usher interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Washington, 11 October 1877, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 65-66; Alexander K. McClure, Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times (4th ed.; Philadelphia: Times, 1892), 241.

²¹³ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:237 (entry for 6 February 1865).

²¹⁴ John Palmer Usher interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Washington, 11 October 1877, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 66.

²¹⁵ Memo by Fessenden on a summons to a cabinet meeting dated Washington, 5 February 1865, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

When asked by the House for a report on the Hampton Roads conference, Lincoln promptly submitted a document including most of the relevant correspondence. (He omitted the dispatch from Thomas T. Eckert indicating that the commissioners would drop their unconditional demand for independence.) It tersely concluded that on the part of Seward and himself, “the whole substance of the instructions to the Secretary of State . . . was stated and insisted upon, and nothing was said inconsistently therewith; while, by the other party it was not said that, in any event, or on any condition, they ever would consent to re-union, and yet they equally omitted to declare that they never would so consent. They seemed to desire a postponement of that question, and the adoption of some other course first, which, as some of them, seemed to argue, might, or might not, lead to re-union, but which course, we thought, would amount to an indefinite postponement. The conference ended without result.”²¹⁶

As Lincoln’s report was read to the House, members listened breathlessly. When they heard the reference in the president’s letter to Blair about “one common country,” a “low gush of satisfaction broke out.” The three conditions for peace in Seward’s instructions caused a spontaneous outburst, and mirthful laughter greeted the injunction to the secretary of state not to “definitely consummate anything.” A reporter present guessed “that some men were ashamed of themselves when they remembered that they had said that Lincoln had gone to Fortress Monroe for fear that Seward would not make his terms liberal enough.”²¹⁷ At the close of the reading, “an instant and irrepressible

²¹⁶ Message to the House of Representatives, 10 February 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:285.

²¹⁷ Washington correspondence, 12 February, Sacramento Daily Union, 22 March 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 162-63.

storm of applause" erupted, "begun by the members on the floor, and taken up by the people in the gallery." Speaker Colfax "only perfunctorily attempted to quell it."²¹⁸

Originally skeptical about Lincoln's decision to meet with Confederate emissaries, Radicals felt relief at the outcome.²¹⁹ Thaddeus Stevens acknowledged that he and his ideological allies had underestimated the president. The Pennsylvania congressman maintained that no Republicans "desired to sue for peace" with the Confederacy so near collapse. "But the President thought it was best to make the effort, and he has done it in such a masterly style, upon such a firm basis and principle, that I believe [all] who thought his mission there was unwise will accord to him sagacity and patriotism, and applaud his action."²²⁰ Franklin B. Sanborn chided the bitter Radical, Moncure D. Conway, who had just published an especially vitriolic attack on the president. "It is not true that Mr Lincoln was detested by the men who elected him," Sanborn wrote in late February. Rather the president "was distrusted and still is, – witness the alarm which attended his late visit to Fortress Monroe. But even in that affair he seems to have been true to the policy which he has announced, and he is heartily bent on the destruction of slavery. Of this there is now no reason to doubt."²²¹ George Luther Stearns also chastised Conway for criticizing Lincoln. Like Sanborn, Stearns spoke with Wendell Phillips and they decided that it was time to stop agitating about emancipation and instead to focus on advocating black suffrage "with as much zeal and confidence too

²¹⁸ Noah Brooks, Washington, D. C., in Lincoln's Time, ed. Herbert Mitgang (1895; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 206-7.

²¹⁹ Horace Rublee to James R. Doolittle, Madison, Wisconsin, 13 February 1865, Doolittle Papers, Wisconsin, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

²²⁰ Congressional Globe, 38th Congress, 2nd session, 733 (10 February 1865).

²²¹ Franklin B. Sanborn to Moncure D. Conway, Concord, Massachusetts, 19 February 1865, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

that we shall obtain it as we did emancipation last year. These questions are carried forward by their own gravity[.] Mr Lincoln Mr Seward, Mr Garrison or Mr Phillips are only straws on the current which shows the set in their particular locality. We do not care therefore to hold up Mr Lincoln's deficiencies to the public gaze but rather by enlightening the people prepare the way for that perfect day of freedom for all, which we believe is the destiny of our country."²²² Such criticism of Conway, in the view of Samuel J. May, Jr., was too gentle. "His preposterous folly & self-conceit deserved a much more stinging rebuke than it ever got," May confided to a friend.²²³

The Washington Chronicle accurately predicted that the Hampton Roads conference would unify the North, which was made more aware than ever that the war persisted only because of Jefferson Davis's obstinacy. Flagging Confederate patriotism also received a boost, for many in the South regarded Lincoln's terms as unacceptable. "There are no peace men among us now!" exclaimed the Richmond Sentinel.²²⁴

Lincoln's willingness to meet Confederate commissioners and offer generous peace terms was inspired by his desire to end the war swiftly, to restore good will between the sections, to reduce the chances of guerilla warfare breaking out after the cessation of formal hostilities, and to stave off impending anarchy and poverty in the South. Gideon Welles recalled that in early 1865, Lincoln "frequently expressed his opinion that the condition of affairs in the rebel States was deplorable, and did not conceal his apprehension that, unless immediately attended to, they would, in

²²² George L. Stearns to Moncure D. Conway, Boston, 13 March 1865, Conway Papers, Columbia University.

²²³ May to Richard Webb, Boston, 2 January 1865, May Papers, Boston Public Library.

²²⁴ George C. Rable, The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 292.

consequence of their disturbed civil, social, and industrial relations, be worse after the rebellion was suppressed.”²²⁵ According to Alexander K. McClure, as the war drew to a close, Lincoln “feared almost universal anarchy in the South when the shattered armies of the Confederacy should be broken up.” This “grave apprehension” made the president “desire to close the war upon such terms as would make the Southern people and Southern soldiers think somewhat kindly of the Union to which they were brought back by force of arms.”²²⁶

In late February, Lincoln met with Roger A. Pryor of Virginia, who appealed in vain on behalf of the condemned prisoner, John Y. Beall. After explaining that he could not pardon Beall, Lincoln spoke of the Hampton Roads conference. According to Pryor’s wife, the president stated that Jefferson Davis, having turned down generous peace terms, would “be responsible for every drop of blood that should be shed in the further prosecution of the war, a futile and wicked effusion of blood, since it was then obvious to every sane man that the Southern armies must be speedily crushed.” He spoke so warmly and at such great length that Pryor “inferred that he still hoped the people of the South would reverse Mr. Davis’s action, and would renew the negotiations for peace.” He hinted that he wanted Pryor to feel out Southern leaders on the matter. Pryor did so, but was informed that Davis was inflexible.²²⁷

MISGUIDED COTTON-TRADING POLICIES

²²⁵ Gideon Welles, “Lincoln and Johnson: Their Plan of Reconstruction and the Resumption of National Authority,” Galaxy 13 (April 1872), in Albert Mordell, ed., Civil War and Reconstruction: Selected Essays by Gideon Welles (New York: Twayne, 1959), 182.

²²⁶ McClure, Lincoln and Men of War-Times, 243.

²²⁷ Sara Pryor, My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 251-52.

James W. Singleton's mission to Canada involved more than peace-making; he was a businessman eager to purchase cotton, tobacco, and other Southern products. Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, with whom he met in late 1864, hoped to obtain meat for the Confederate army by selling cotton to the North.²²⁸ At that time, Lincoln was hoping to shorten the war by encouraging cotton trading (but not in exchange for meat and other commodities which might help the Confederates militarily). Acting on authority granted by Congress, the president early in the war had forbidden commercial intercourse with the enemy but did allow the treasury department to issue cotton-trading permits to Southern merchants who took a loyalty oath. Those merchants could sell cotton to treasury agents, then buy goods for resale in areas under Union control. Such commerce was designed to encourage Southern Unionists, to provide Northern textile manufacturers with much-needed fiber, to allow some cotton to reach Europe and thus reduce the chance of British or French intervention, and to fill the government's coffers.

In practice, the system worked poorly: soldiers and treasury officials accepted bribes to allow passage of war material through Union lines; merchants who took the oath with mental reservations provided such material to the Confederates; some Northerners paid for cotton with gold, which Rebels used to buy weaponry in the Bahamas. Military commanders, including Grant and Sherman, tried to staunch the flow of illegal cotton, but were only moderately successful. During the war approximately 587,000 bales of Southern cotton made their way overland into the North illicitly, twice the amount that was lawfully traded. (Only 500,000 bales were shipped to Europe.) The proceeds helped

²²⁸ Ludwell Johnson, "Beverly Tucker's Canadian Mission, 1864-1865," Journal of Southern History 29 (1963):88-99.

keep the Confederacy relatively well supplied despite the ever-tightening blockade and the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson.²²⁹

Over the objections of Welles and Stanton, who echoed the views of army and navy commanders, Lincoln moved to liberalize trade with the enemy. Earlier he had generally sided with the military in disputes about trading with the enemy. When Lawrence Weldon asked him one day about a struggle between the army and the treasury over cotton trading, Lincoln replied with a story about a mutual friend of theirs back in Illinois, one Robert Lewis, clerk of the De Witt county court. Lewis had inherited some property in a remote part of Missouri and went out to inspect it, taking along warrants and patents establishing his title. Arriving at his destination, Lewis discovered a lanky, leathery frontiersman in a cabin where a rifle hung above the fireplace. Lewis showed the documents to the gentleman and asked what he might have to prove that the land was his. Pointing to the rifle, Lewis's host said: "That is my title, and if you don't get out of here pretty damned quick you will feel the force of it." Lewis promptly galloped off. "Now," said Lincoln, "the military authorities have the same title against the civil authorities that closed out Bob's . . . title in Missouri."²³⁰

But Lincoln changed his mind in July 1864, when Edward Atkinson, a textile manufacturer from Massachusetts, "impressed him with some very striking facts," most notably "that although the Rebels sold less cotton they received about as much for it in consequence of high prices as when they had more of the article." The president told his

²²⁹ Stanley Lebergott, "Why the South Lost: Commercial Purpose in the Confederacy 1861-1865," Journal of American History 70 (1983): 58-74; Stanley Lebergott, "Through the Blockade: The Profitability and Extent of Cotton Smuggling, 1861-1865," Journal of Economic History 41 (1981): 867-88; David G. Surdam, "Traders or Traitors: Northern Cotton Trading during the Civil War," Business and Economic History 28 (1999): 301-12.

²³⁰ Weldon in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 210-13.

cabinet that he “thought it might be well to take measures to secure the cotton, but was opposed to letting the Rebels have gold.”²³¹

Two months later, the administration revised its trade policy to expedite cotton sales, making it a government monopoly. Treasury agents, not private merchants or brokers, would buy cotton, sell it on the open market, and use the gold it received to redeem greenbacks. The new regulations backfired, for they unintentionally made it easier for speculators to sell contraband to the South.²³² When General Edward R. S. Canby complained about the policy’s effects, Lincoln explained the administration’s thinking: “By the external blockade, the price is made certainly six times as great as it was. And yet the enemy gets through at least one sixth part as much in a given period, say a year, as if there were no blockade, and receives as much for it, as he would for a full crop in time of peace. The effect in substance is, that we give him six ordinary crops, without the trouble of producing any but the first; and at the same time leave his fields and his laborers free to produce provisions. You know how this keeps up his armies at home, and procures supplies from abroad. For other reasons we cannot give up the blockade, and hence it becomes immensely important to us to get the cotton away from him. Better give him guns for it, than let him, as now, get both guns and ammunition for it. But even this only presents part of the public interest to get out cotton. Our finances are greatly involved in the matter. The way cotton goes now carries so much gold out of the country as to leave us paper currency only, and that so far depreciated, as that for every hard dollar's worth of supplies we obtain, we contract to pay two and a half hard

²³¹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:66 (entry for 5 July 1864).

²³² Ludwell Johnson, “Contraband Trade During the Last Year of the Civil War,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 49 (1963):638-39.

dollars hereafter. This is much to be regretted; and while I believe we can live through it at all events, it demands an earnest effort on the part of all to correct it. And if pecuniary greed can be made to aid us in such effort, let us be thankful that so much good can be got out of pecuniary greed.”²³³

Despite Lincoln’s contention, the blockade was no boon to the Confederates, for its ever-tightening grip drove desperate enemy agents to try obtaining supplies from the North in exchange for cotton. In March 1865, when Congress passed a bill to clamp down on illicit trading, Lincoln pocket-vetoed it. An indignant John Murray Forbes wrote to the bill’s author, Edward Atkinson: “You can hardly imagine my disgust . . . at finding that old Abe had pocketed our Grand bill – I could have wrung his long neck! I suppose the cotton speculators around him were too many for him. It is sad to see the impression which this and other things give that whether he gets anything out of it or not, his course is influenced by those who do not. The next best thing now is to try and get him to give an order that all cotton seized shall be certified to the owners, leaving Congress to decide thereafter upon what should be done with the proceeds. As this course would help the cotton speculators and increase the quantity of cotton by encouraging holders to bring it instead of burning it, I should think he would do it if properly moved thereto.”²³⁴

Lincoln’s handling of the cotton trade was one of the least creditable chapters in his administration. In the spring of 1864, New York Senator E. D. Morgan was understandably disgusted because “there has been fraud enough in sending supplies in and bringing cotton out of Rebel States to destroy any administration at any other time.”

²³³ Lincoln to Canby, Washington, 12 December 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:163-64.

²³⁴ John Murray Forbes to Edward Atkinson, 8 March 1865, in Harold Francis Williamson, Edward Atkinson: The Biography of an American Liberal, 1827-1905 (Boston: Old Corner Book Store, 1934), 20.

(Morgan withheld public comment because there was so much congressional criticism of the administration that he did not wish to compound it.)²³⁵ Lincoln issued valuable trading permits to intimates like Leonard Swett, to friends and associates of Ward Hill Lamon, and to political allies with tarnished ethical credentials like Thurlow Weed. As Charles A. Dana observed, “Mr. Lincoln had a vast number of friends who were bent upon making money in various ways, and he was much more willing that they should have favorable opportunities of this sort, than I could have wished.”²³⁶ His policy encouraged a spirit of get-rich-quick greed. More seriously, over the objections of Grant, Sherman, Canby, Welles, Bates, and others, he countenanced a system that prolonged the war needlessly. His reasons for doing so were partly political, rooted in a desire to placate Massachusetts textile manufacturers as well as merchants and politicians in New York, a state which he carried by a razor-thin majority in 1864.²³⁷

Pecuniary greed certainly motivated Singleton and his fellow speculators, who anticipated making enormous profits on the \$7,000,000 worth of cotton and tobacco he had contracted to buy in Richmond. At the White House on February 5, when Singleton asked help in getting these goods through Union lines, Lincoln (according to Browning’s diary) “expressed himself pleased with what was done – said he wanted to get out all [cotton etc.] all he could, and send in all the Green backs he could in exchange, and he would do for us [Singleton, Browning and their associates] all that he could.”²³⁸ Shortly thereafter, Lincoln wrote Grant requesting that Singleton be permitted to bring “a large

²³⁵ Morgan to Weed, Washington, 29 May 1864, Weed Papers, Rochester University.

²³⁶ C. A. Dana to J. S. Pike, Washington, 10 May 1865, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

²³⁷ Surdam, “Traders or Traitors,” 301-12; Ludwell H. Johnson, “Northern Profit and Profiteers: The Cotton Rings of 1864-1865,” Civil War History 12 (1966):101-15.

²³⁸ Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 2:5 (entry for 1 February 1865).

amount of Southern produce” through the lines. “For its bearing on our finance I would be glad for this to be done if it can be without injuriously disturbing your military operations, or supplying the enemy. I wish you to be judge and master on these points.”²³⁹ A month later, Grant balked, alleging that Singleton was carrying out “a deep laid plan for making millions” that might “sacrifice every interest of the country to succeed.”²⁴⁰ Lincoln promptly authorized the commanding general to cancel all trade permits in his department. When the Confederates set fire to Richmond as they abandoned it in early April, all of Singleton’s purchases were destroyed.

As Forbes alleged, some cotton speculators did wield significant political influence with the administration. A conspicuous example was Simeon Draper, collector of customs in New York and a staunch ally of Weed and Seward. After playing a key role in carrying the Empire State for Lincoln in 1864, Draper wished to win appointment as the agent selling the cotton that fell into Union hands when Sherman captured Savannah on December 22. According to David Davis, Draper was given that lucrative commission after paying Mary Lincoln a \$20,000 bribe.²⁴¹ Gideon Welles was “sickened” at “the idea of sending such a man on such a mission,” which, he predicted, “will be a swindle.” The navy secretary felt certain that a “ring will be formed for the purchase of the cotton, regardless of public or private rights.”²⁴²

²³⁹ Lincoln to Grant, Washington, 7 February 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:266.

²⁴⁰ Grant to Sherman, City Point, 8 March 1865, in Simon ed., Grant Papers, 14:113.

²⁴¹ Browning diary, entry for 3 July 1873, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; John Hay diary, entry for 13 February 1867, Brown University. In February 1864, it was reported that Draper had already received \$50,000 from the administration in auction fees. James A. Briggs to Chase, New York, 15 February 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁴² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:220 (entry for 3 January 1865).

(In February 1864, it was reported that Draper had already received \$50,000 from the administration in auction fees. Seven months later, Draper pleaded with Secretary of the Treasury Fessenden to be allowed to continue as the officer in the New York Customs House auctioning consignments of property seized in the South. Mary Lincoln was in touch with Draper, urging him to reinstate a Mr. Martin to a clerkship in the customs house. Draper traveled to Savannah to oversee the auction of cotton there.)²⁴³

In addition to the money she received from Draper, Mrs. Lincoln also obtained funds from an influence-peddling scheme. In January 1865, she arranged to have the long-time doorkeeper of the White House, Edward McManus, replaced by one Cornelius O’Leary. Though McManus was regarded as “good & kind,” and was well liked by the president and his friends, he had evidently angered the First Lady by telling Thurlow Weed that she was romantically linked with a man other than the president.²⁴⁴ When petitioners seeking to have relatives or friends released from prisoner-of-war camps, O’Leary said he could expedite the pardons if they paid him \$50; otherwise they may have to wait a long time before gaining admission to the president’s office. Whatever he received O’Leary divided with the First Lady. When a Democratic newspaper exposed this corrupt arrangement, Lincoln promptly fired O’Leary.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ James A. Briggs to Chase, New York, 15 February 1864, Chase Papers, Library of Congress; Draper to Fessenden, New York, 25, 30 September 1864; Draper to Fessenden, Savannah, 23 January 1865; Draper to Fessenden, New York, 16 November 1864, Fessenden Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society.

²⁴⁴ Leonard Swett to his son, Washington, n.d., David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Michael Burlingame, The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 292. According to Thomas Pendel, in late December 1864, Mrs. Lincoln asked Edward to have a notice of the New Years reception delivered to local newspapers immediately. When half an hour or so later she discovered that he had not yet done so, she fired him. Thomas F. Pendel, Thirty-Six Years in the White House (Washington: Neale, 1902), 37-39.

²⁴⁵ Washington correspondence, 12 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 10 April 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 172-74; New York World, 10 March 1865; Rochester, New York, Union, 11 March 1865.

Mary Lincoln also sought to have John G. Nicolay, who had thwarted various corrupt schemes of hers, replaced as her husband's principal secretary.²⁴⁶

A SACRED EFFORT: THE SECOND INAUGURAL

On March 4, Lincoln's desire for true sectional reconciliation shone through his inaugural address, the greatest of his oratorical masterpieces.²⁴⁷ Though the morning was dark and rainy, well before ten o'clock huge crowds lined Pennsylvania Avenue, hoping to catch a glimpse of the president as he passed by. They were doomed to disappointment, for quite early he had gone to the Capitol to sign bills passed in the final hours of the Thirty-eighth Congress. The presidential carriage, however, did roll down the avenue, conveying Mary and Robert Lincoln as well as Iowa Senator James Harlan, whose daughter would marry Robert in 1868. As it prepared to join the procession, there was some confusion about just where it was to fit in. After waiting twenty minutes, Mrs. Lincoln "became impatient. At last she inquired if a way could not be cleared for the carriage to pass out and on. Being assured that it could be done she gave the order to proceed at once, which was done at a gallop but at the expense and in spite of loud protests from marshals and aids, whose plans and efforts were thus demoralized."²⁴⁸

Nicolay estimated that the crowd which filled the plaza in front of the east portico of the Capitol was twice as large as the one which witnessed the inaugural ceremony four

²⁴⁶ Anson G. Henry to his wife, Washington, 13 March 1865, Anson G. Henry Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁴⁷ For a thoughtful analysis of this document, see William Lee Miller, "Lincoln's Second Inaugural: A Study in Political Ethics" (pamphlet; Bloomington, Indiana: Poynter Center, Indiana University, 1980).

²⁴⁸ George C. Ashmun, "Recollections of a Peculiar Service," in R. Hunter, ed., Sketches of War History: Papers Read before the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, 1886-1888 (3 vols.; Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1888), 2:286.

years earlier.²⁴⁹ As noon approached, “flocks of women streamed around the Capitol, in most wretched, wretched plight; crinoline was smashed, skirts bedaubed, and moiré antique, velvet, laces and such dry good were streaked with mud from end to end.”²⁵⁰ When the doors to the senate gallery were finally opened, women rushed in, taking all the seats. One of them described the chaos below: “The whole thing was confusion itself,” for no one was there “to show the foreign ministers where to go,” and the senate floor was “so filled by people who did not belong there that the members of the house could not get in.”²⁵¹ Gideon Welles called the scene “a jumble.”²⁵² Though the senate was still in session, women in the galleries “chattered and clattered like zephyrs among the reeds of a water-side. The presiding officer in vain tapped with his ivory mallet.”²⁵³ They quieted down when admirals, generals, cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, and the president filed in.

At noon the outgoing vice-president, Hannibal Hamlin, entered with his successor, Andrew Johnson. After the former delivered a brief valedictory, the latter embarrassed all present with a drunken harangue. The night before, Johnson and his friend John W. Forney had consumed several drinks, and the next morning, feeling unwell, he took three glasses of whiskey straight.²⁵⁴ He had been recovering from a debilitating bout of typhoid. In his weakened condition, the liquor was more than he

²⁴⁹ Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 5 March 1865, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 175.

²⁵⁰ Washington correspondence, 12 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 10 April 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 165-67.

²⁵¹ Sally Emerson to Abby Gibbons, 8 March 1865, in Margaret Hope Bacon, Abby Hopper Gibbons: Prison Reformer and Social Activist (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 127.

²⁵² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:251 (entry for 4 March 1865).

²⁵³ Brooks, Washington, D.C. in Lincoln's Time, ed. Mitgang, 210.

²⁵⁴ Hans L. Trefousse, Andrew Johnson: A Biography (New York: Norton, 1989), 189.

could handle. In “a state of manifest intoxication,” he delivered a “maudlin speech” lasting twenty minutes, far longer than his allotted time. When Hamlin nudged him from behind and audibly reminded him “that the hour for the inauguration ceremony had passed,” Johnson paid no attention. What he actually said was difficult to hear over the chatter and giggling of women in the galleries. According to the New York Times, Johnson boasted “that he was a plebeian – he thanked God for it.” He reminded the senators and Supreme Court justices that they owed their exalted positions to the people. Turning to the cabinet, he added: “And I will say to you, Mr. Secretary Seward, and to you, Mr. Secretary Stanton, and to you, Mr. Secretary —” He could not remember Gideon Welles’ name and asked a spectator sotto voce: “Who is Secretary of the Navy?” The whispered reply came, “Mr. Welles.” Johnson continued: “and to you, Mr. Secretary Welles, I would say, you all derive your power from the people.” Indirectly, he bragged about his accomplishments as military governor of Tennessee. Finally he took the oath of office, then grabbed the Bible he had been swearing on and melodramatically declared in a loud voice, “I kiss this Book in the face of my nation of the United States.” He carried out that promise “with a theatrical gesture.” In reciting the long oath of allegiance, he interpolated such phrases as “I can say that with perfect propriety” and gave a five-minute discourse on the oath.²⁵⁵

As he listened to Johnson’s incoherent tirade, Lincoln closed his eyes in embarrassment, “bowed his head with a look of unutterable despondency,” and “seemed to retire into himself as though beset by melancholy reflections.” Others were equally

²⁵⁵ Washington correspondence, 12 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 10 April 1865, Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 166-67; Marquis de Chambrun to his wife, Washington, 7 March 1865, Charles Adolphe de Pineton, Marquis de Chambrun, Impressions of Lincoln and the Civil War: A Foreigner’s Account (New York: Random House, 1952), 37-38; John W. Forney, Anecdotes of Public Men (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873), 177.

dismayed. Attorney General Speed whispered to Welles, “all this is in wretched bad taste” and said that Johnson “is certainly deranged.” Welles in turn told Stanton, who “appeared to be petrified,” that “Johnson is either drunk or crazy.”²⁵⁶ Postmaster General Dennison “was red and white by turns.”²⁵⁷ The speech sent a “violent chill” through Dennison’s secretary, who called it “the most disgraceful exhibition I ever witnessed.”²⁵⁸ The face of Senator Henry Wilson was flushed, and his Massachusetts colleague Charles Sumner “wore a saturnine and sarcastic smile.” Senator Zachariah Chandler wrote his wife about Johnson’s “drunken foolish speech,” saying: “I was never so mortified in my life[;] had I been able to find a small hole I should have dropped through it out of sight.”²⁵⁹ Some of Chandler’s colleagues “turned and twisted in their Senatorial chairs as if in long-drawn agony.” The jaw of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Nelson dropped “in blank horror” until a disapproving glance from the Chief Justice induced him to close his mouth.²⁶⁰ The New York World deplored “the person who defiled our chief council-chamber . . . with the spewings of a drunken boor” and said that compared to Johnson, “even Caligula’s horse was respectable.”²⁶¹

As the scandalized spectators filed out to hear the president’s inaugural address, Lincoln instructed a marshal: “Do not permit Johnson to speak a word during the exercises that are to follow.”²⁶² (Afterwards, Lincoln allegedly palliated the vice-

²⁵⁶ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:252 (entry for 4 March 1865).

²⁵⁷ Brooks, Washington, D.C. in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 212.

²⁵⁸ Diary of William T. Coggeshall, 4 March 1865, in Freda Postle Koch, Colonel Coggeshall: The Man Who Saved Lincoln (Columbus, Ohio: Poko Press, 1985), 72.

²⁵⁹ Chandler to his wife, Washington, 6 March 1865, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶⁰ Brooks, Washington, D.C. in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 212.

²⁶¹ New York World, n.d., in Trefousse, Andrew Johnson, 190.

²⁶² Ervin Chapman, Latest Light on Abraham Lincoln (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1917), 294.

president’s behavior, saying that he “would not lose confidence in him for what he regarded [as] an unfortunate accident.”²⁶³ But while Lincoln was willing to make allowances for Johnson, he shunned him. At City Point a month later, when Johnson and another politician came to visit him, Lincoln became “greatly excited,” “jumped up from his chair” and was “almost frantic” as he exclaimed: “Don’t let those men come into my presence! I won’t see either of them; send them away . . . I won’t see them now, and never want to lay eyes on them. I don’t care what you do with them . . . but don’t let them come near me!” According to Admiral David D. Porter, the agitated chief executive then “sat down in his chair looking like a man it would be dangerous for anyone to anger.” During that sojourn at City Point, Mary Lincoln, who asserted that her husband “hated” his new vice-president, heard him say: “For God’s sake don’t let Johnson dine with us.”²⁶⁴

As the presidential party emerged onto the platform erected for the occasion, many spectators followed. Immediately “the bases of the columns, the statuary groups and every ‘coigne of vantage’ swarmed with people.” The “vast crowds saw the sight to a good advantage from the great steps of the Capitol, which rose behind the platform and from the wings on either side.” Lincoln looked out over “a literal sea of heads, tossing and surging, as far as the eye could reach, among the budding foliage of the park opposite. Cheer upon cheer arose, bands bleated upon the air and flags waved over the

²⁶³ Lincoln told this to John W. Defrees. Defrees to Richard W. Thompson, Washington, 20 April 1865, Thompson Papers, Lincoln Financial Foundation “Lincoln Collection In Indiana” research collection, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne. Others reported Lincoln making similar statements: “It has been a severe lesson for Andy, but I do not think he will do it again” and “I have known Andy Johnson for many years. He made a bad slip the other day, but you need not be scared; Andy ain’t a drunkard.” Forney, Anecdotes, 177; McCulloch, Men and Measures, 373.

²⁶⁴ David D. Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War (New York: D. Appleton, 1885), 287; “Lincoln’s Religion: Answer of William H. Herndon to Mrs. Lincoln,” Springfield, 12 January 1874, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 January 1874.

scene.” As he stood to read his remarks, “a great burst of applause shook the air, and died far away on the outer fringes of the crowd like a sweeping wave upon the shore.” Just before he began speaking, “the sun, which had been obscured all day, burst forth in its unclouded meridian splendor and flooded the spectacle with glory and light.”²⁶⁵

Afterwards, Lincoln told Noah Brooks that “he was just superstitious enough to consider it a happy omen.”²⁶⁶ Some in the crowd interpreted it similarly.

Lincoln’s central aim was to prepare the public mind for a generous Reconstruction policy. Rather than introducing a series of policy recommendations, he sought to exorcise feelings of vindictiveness and self-righteousness. He also wished to share his understanding of the nature of the war and the reasons for its duration. In a private memorandum written earlier, which his secretaries titled “Meditation on the Divine Will,” he had posed a question to himself which, after long reflection, he answered publicly in his inaugural. In the Meditation, he wrote: “The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be wrong. God can not be for, and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party – and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true – that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or

²⁶⁵ Washington correspondence, 12 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 10 April 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 167-68.

²⁶⁶ Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 272.

destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.”²⁶⁷

In September 1864, Lincoln had thanked Mrs. Eliza P. Gurney, a Quaker, for her support: “it has been your purpose to strengthen my reliance on God. I am much indebted to the good christian people of the country for their constant prayers and consolations; and to no one of them, more than to yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.”²⁶⁸

One Sunday afternoon in 1861 at the White House, Lincoln surprised his friend Orville H. Browning by suggesting that the Lord might not be on the Union side. (Often on the Sabbath, Lincoln would invite Browning to attend church services with him and the First Lady; afterwards they would have dinner, then read in the library.)²⁶⁹ “Mr. Lincoln,” said Browning, “we can’t hope for the blessing of God on the efforts of our armies, until we strike a decisive blow at the institution of slavery. This is the great curse

²⁶⁷ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln. The editors date this September 1862, but it was probably written in 1864. Douglas L. Wilson, Lincoln’s Sword: The Presidency and the Power of words (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 255-56, 329-30.

²⁶⁸ Lincoln to Eliza P. Gurney, Washington, 4 September 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:535.

²⁶⁹ Browning to Isaac N. Arnold, Quincy, Illinois, 25 November 1872, Arnold Papers, Chicago History Museum.

of our land, and we must make an effort to remove it before we can hope to receive the help of the Almighty.”

The president, who had been reading the Bible, replied: “Browning, suppose God is against us in our view on the subject of slavery in this country, and our method of dealing with it.” Struck by this observation, Browning recalled that it “indicated to me for the first time that he was thinking deeply about the great events then transpiring.”²⁷⁰

That deep thinking led him to conclusions that he shared with the nation in his unusually brief second inaugural. He began by explaining why no lengthy account of recent events was necessary: “At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.”

Tersely he summarized the events culminating in war: “On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil-war. All dreaded it – all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve

²⁷⁰ Browning interviewed by Nicolay, Springfield, 17 June 1875, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 4.

the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.”

After this succinct description of how the war began, Lincoln explained why it occurred. Slavery caused the war, he maintained: “One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other.”

Invoking a theme which had long been at the core of his antislavery feeling, Lincoln said that it “may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged.” (He had repeatedly denounced slavery as organized, systematized robbery which perverted the word of God, who had decreed that men should eat bread in the sweat of their own brows. A few weeks earlier he had made this point yet again when two women from Tennessee urged him to release their soldier-husbands from prison. One petitioner emphasized that her spouse was religious. Upon granting their

request, the president observed: “You say your husband is a religious man; tell him when you meet him, that I say I am not much of a judge of religion, but that, in my opinion, the religion that sets men to rebel and fight against their government, because, as they think, that government does not sufficiently help some men to eat their bread on the sweat of other men's faces, is not the sort of religion upon which people can get to heaven!” After the women left, Lincoln wrote out these remarks and asked Noah Brooks to have them published in the Washington Chronicle with a headline reading: “THE PRESIDENT'S LAST, SHORTEST, AND BEST SPEECH.”²⁷¹ Brooks called it “one of the shortest, and best ‘political sermons’ ever preached in Washington” and a “good illustration of the practical and common sense view” Lincoln took “of whatever comes under his observation.”²⁷²

At this point the inaugural took an abrupt turn as Lincoln analyzed why the war dragged on and on and on: “The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes.” He then quoted Jesus’ words as recorded by Saint Matthew: “Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” Lincoln somewhat inaccurately applied that scriptural passage to the war. (Subsequent scholarship has interpreted the word that is translated in the King James Bible as offences to mean temptations or stumbling blocks which, in context, is a condemnation of those who tempt small children): “If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued

²⁷¹ Story written for Noah Brooks, [6 December 1864], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:154-55.

²⁷² Washington correspondence, 5 December 1864, Sacramento Daily Union, 7 January 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 149.

through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope – fervently do we pray – that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said ‘the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.’”

This pronouncement might not have sounded out of place in the mouth of a devout abolitionist or a minister preaching a sermon, but for a president to utter it in such an important state paper was astonishing.²⁷³ It rested on a proposition that he had articulated before: that both North and South were complicit in the sin of slavery. But never had he suggested that whites of both sections must suffer death and destruction on a vast scale in order to atone for that sin, and that the war would not end until the scales were evenly balanced. Lincoln offered this as a hypothesis, not a firm conclusion, but if it were true, then the words of the Nineteenth Psalm would have to be recalled: “the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.”

A curious feature of this extraordinary analysis, which resembled late seventeenth-century Puritan election-day jeremiads, is the reference to “the believers in a Living God.” It might be inferred that Lincoln did not count himself among those believers, for he did not say “we believers in a Living God.” But the impersonal manner

²⁷³ Many others had made this argument, among them the pious abolitionist Erastus Wright. See Wright to John P. Hale, Springfield, Illinois, 14 March 1864, Hale Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society.

of presenting his argument recalls the impersonal way in which he wrote his autobiographical sketch in 1860, alluding to himself in the third person. He probably did mean to include himself among the believers, but his instinctive modesty and reserve led him to use such impersonal language.

Lincoln blamed white Americans for the war, not God; the Almighty was merely enforcing the elementary rules of righteous justice.

After this stunning revelation of his understanding about the war's cause and the reason for its bloody continuation, Lincoln closed by shifting the emphasis from justice to mercy. His final paragraph was not the most remarkable one, but it became the most revered and beloved. In it he honored the men who had served in the armed forces and expressed his hope for the future: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."²⁷⁴

After Chief Justice Chase administered the oath of office, Lincoln kissed the Bible and bowed to the audience, whose many cheers were punctuated by booming artillery salvos. During the speech the crowd had listened intently but had for the most part remained silent, save for the many blacks who murmured "bress de Lord" at the close of most sentences.²⁷⁵ Applause interrupted Lincoln after he said: "Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish." The "cheer was injected long enough

²⁷⁴ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:332-33.

²⁷⁵ Washington correspondence, 4 March, New York Herald, 5 March 1865.

to make a pause before he said, ‘and the war came.’”²⁷⁶ The final paragraph brought tears to the eyes of many.

Frederick Douglass, who thought the address “sounded more like a sermon than like a state paper,” admired above all its final two paragraphs. After hearing them, he applauded “in gladness and thanksgiving,” for to him they seemed “to contain more vital substance than I have ever seen compressed into a space so narrow.” Afterwards Douglass joined the crowd moving toward the White House to attend the traditional post-inaugural reception. At the door, two policemen rudely denied him entrance. He told them that he was sure the Lincoln had issued no order banning blacks. (In fact, four black men “of genteel exterior and with the manners of gentlemen” had attended the White House reception on New Years Day 1864 and were presented to Lincoln. A Democratic newspaper asked: “Are not such scenes at the White House disgusting? When will the white people of this country awake to the sense of shame that the dominant party is bringing upon us by the practical establishment of the social equality of the negro?”)²⁷⁷ When his appeal failed to persuade the officers, Douglass asked a passer-by whom he recognized: “Be so kind as to say to Mr. Lincoln that Frederick Douglass is detained by officers at the door.” That gentleman hastened to convey the message, and in less than a minute Douglass was admitted. As he later recalled, “I could not have been more than ten feet from him when Mr. Lincoln saw me; his countenance lighted up, and he said in a voice which was heard all around; ‘Here comes my friend Douglass.’ As I approached him he reached out his hand, gave me a cordial shake, and said: ‘Douglass, I saw you in

²⁷⁶ Washington correspondence, 12 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 10 April 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 168.

²⁷⁷ Washington Chronicle, 2 February 1864; Missouri Republican (St. Louis), n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 January 1865.

the crowd today listening to my inaugural address. There is no man's opinion that I value more than yours; what do you think of it?' I said: 'Mr. Lincoln, I cannot stop here to talk with you, as there are thousands waiting to shake you by the hand'; but he said again: 'What did you think of it?' I said: 'Mr. Lincoln, it was a sacred effort,' and then I walked off. 'I am glad you liked it,' he said."²⁷⁸ According to Elizabeth Keckly, Douglass "was very proud of the manner in which Mr. Lincoln received him. On leaving the White House he came to a friend's house where a reception was being held, and he related the incident with great pleasure to myself and others."²⁷⁹

Like Douglass, James Shepherd Pike, a journalist who was serving as U.S. minister to the Netherlands, thought the inaugural resembled "the tail of an old sermon." It seemed to him "a most curious production," written as if Lincoln "did not exactly know what to say and so he abandoned himself to musing and took down what first came uppermost and printed it." But there was no harm done, because "even his imperfections do not weaken him in the public estimation. His nature is so good and his heart is so sound, that no exhibition he can make of himself discovers any flaw in his moral composition, and none in his tenacity of purpose."²⁸⁰

The inauguration had "passed off well," as General Halleck put it. "Thanks to abundant preventions we had no disturbances, no fires, no raids, or robberies," he noted.

²⁷⁸ Frederick Douglass, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, in Frederick Douglass, Autobiographies (New York: Library of America, 1994), 802-4; Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 322-323. A member of the president's cavalry escort wrote that "I was called inside the house to see what could be done for a gentleman who complained that he had been refused admission to the President by the chief usher. I soon found him to be Mr. Frederick Douglass, and the usher had checked his progress on account of his color. This was in accordance with long-established custom, but was finally compromised by finding a place in which Mr. Douglass could remain until a later hour, which he did, but not without some expression of injured feelings." Ashmun, "Recollections of a Peculiar Service," 288.

²⁷⁹ Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 160.

²⁸⁰ James Shepherd Pike, undated entry, notebook number 17, covering the period 4 February to 30 May 1865, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

“I was on the qui vive all day and night and consequently did not join in the proceedings. There were a large number of rebel deserters here who excited some suspicion of wrong intentions, but they were closely watched. New York and Philadelphia also sent their quotas of roughs and rowdies, but they were completely overawed.”²⁸¹ One of the more sinister onlookers was the famous young actor, John Wilkes Booth, seething with hatred for both blacks and for the man they called the Great Emancipator.

At the inaugural ball things did not go so smoothly. Noah Brooks reported that after “the big wigs had fed and gone,” the crowd “rushed in, pushed the tables from their places, snatched off whole turkeys, pyramids, loaves of cake and things, smashed crockery and glassware, spilled oyster and terrapin on each other’s heads, ruined costly dresses, tore lace furbelows, made the floor all sticky with food, and behaved in the almost invariable shameful manner of a ball-going crowd at supper. The ball was held in the great unoccupied Hall of Patents, Interior Building, and three similar halls were thrown open, making a complete quadrangle of four lighted and decorated halls, a fine sight, but all spoiled by the disgusting greediness of this great American people.”²⁸²

Lincoln was pleased with his inaugural. A week before delivering it, he said there was “[I]ots of wisdom in that document, I suspect.”²⁸³ A woman who admired the religious tone of the address asked a friend in Congress to obtain for her a presidential autograph written with the pen used to compose the inaugural. With emotion, Lincoln replied to the request: “She shall have my signature, and with it she shall have that

²⁸¹ Halleck to Francis Lieber, Washington, 5 March 1865, Lieber Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, in Nevins, War for the Union, 4:216.

²⁸² Washington correspondence, 12 March, Sacramento Daily Union, 10 April 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 169-70.

²⁸³ Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 234.

paragraph. It comforts me to know that my sentiments are supported by the Christian ladies of our country.”²⁸⁴ When Thurlow Weed praised the inaugural, Lincoln responded: “Every one likes a compliment. Thank you for yours on my little notification speech, and on the recent Inaugural Address. I expect the latter to wear as well as – perhaps better than – any thing I have produced; but I believe it is not immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world. It is a truth which I thought needed to be told; and as whatever of humiliation there is in it, falls most directly on myself, I thought others might afford for me to tell it.”²⁸⁵

Among those with whom the address was not popular was a Pennsylvanian who complained that “while the sentiments are noble,” it was “one of the most awkwardly expressed documents I ever read – if it be correctly printed. When he knew it would be read by millions all over the world, why under the heavens did he not make it a little more creditable to American scholarship? . . . Jackson was not too proud to get Van Buren to slick up his state papers. Why could not Mr Seward have prepared the Inaugural so as to save it from the ridicule of a Sophomore in a British University? However, Lincoln[’]s prototype was Oliver Cromwell who was just as able, as true, & as awkward in his scholarship as he.”²⁸⁶ A Connecticut Democrat sneered: “The inaugural of Lincoln

²⁸⁴ J. P. Thompson, sermon delivered in New York, 30 April 1865, in Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln: Voices from the Pulpit of New York and Brooklyn (New York: Tibbals and Whiting, 1865), 202.

²⁸⁵ Lincoln to Weed, Washington, 15 March 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:356.

²⁸⁶ A. B. Bradford to Simon Cameron, Enon Valley, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, 8 March 1865, Cameron Papers, Library of Congress.

is a mixture of Bible quotations made blasphemous in a degree by his use of them & bloody anathemas well suited to the times of corruption & lunacy in which we live.”²⁸⁷

Some newspapers were also critical. The New York Herald complained that Lincoln did not mention the Hampton Roads conference, Mexico, or the Baltimore platform. Dismissively it called the address “a little speech of ‘glittering generalities’ used only to fill in the program” and “an effort to avoid any commitment regarding our domestic or foreign affairs.”²⁸⁸ The Chicago Times sneeringly observed: “We did not conceive it possible that even Mr. Lincoln could produce a paper so slip shod, so loose-jointed, so puerile, not alone in literary construction, but in its ideas, its sentiments, its grasp.”²⁸⁹ The leading Democratic paper in the East, the New York World, compared Lincoln to the pope: “The President’s theology smacks as strong of the dark ages as does Pope Pius’s politics.” The editors expressed regret “that a divided nation should neither be sustained in this crisis of agony by words of wisdom nor cheered with words of hope” and criticized the president for “abandoning all pretense of statesmanship . . . in this strange inaugural” by taking “refuge in piety.” The address was, the World concluded, little more than a “prose parody of John Brown’s Hymn.”²⁹⁰

Republican papers found more to admire. Henry J. Raymond’s New York Times was impressed by the simplicity of the inaugural and its notable lack of platitudes: “He makes no boasts of what he has done, or promises of what he will do. He does not reexpound the principles of the war; does not redeclare the worth of the Union; does not

²⁸⁷ Journal of Richard Harvey Phelps in Kenneth H. Bernard, “Lincoln and the Civil War as Viewed by a Dissenting Yankee of Connecticut,” Lincoln Herald 76 (1974):213.

²⁸⁸ New York Herald in Ronald C. White, Lincoln’s Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 190.

²⁸⁹ Chicago Times, 6 March 1865.

²⁹⁰ New York World, 6 March 1865.

reproclaim that absolute submission to the Constitution is the only peace.” Instead, all “that he does is simply to advert to the cause of the war; and its amazing development; to recognize in the solemn language the righteous judgment of Heaven; and to drop an earnest exhortation that all will now stand by the right and strive for a peace that shall be just and lasting.”²⁹¹ The Boston Evening Transcript called the inaugural “a singular State Paper – made so by the times. No similar document has ever been published to the world. . . . The President was lifted above the level upon which political rulers usually stand, and felt himself ‘in the very presence of the very mystery of Providence.’”²⁹²

Other New Englanders shared this view, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, who allegedly “said he thought it was likely to outlive anything now in print in the English language.”²⁹³ Charles Francis Adams, Jr., told his father: “That rail-splitting lawyer is one of the wonders of the day. . . . This inaugural strikes me in its grand simplicity and directness as being for all time the historic keynote of this war.”²⁹⁴ Another son bearing the name of his politically eminent father, James R. Doolittle, declared that Lincoln “rivals the greatest statesmen of our country; he is surpassed by none, not even by Washington.” The president “is possessed of great dignity,” but not the “selfish, conceited, proud, imperial dignity which Mr. Chase assumes, but is kind, approachable and winning.” Moreover, “he is great mentally, and no less morally.”²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ New York Times, 6 March 1865.

²⁹² Nevins, War for the Union, 4:218.

²⁹³ James Grant Wilson, “Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” New York Independent, 20 February 1913, 397.

²⁹⁴ Charles Francis Adams, Jr., to Charles Francis Adams, Newport, R.I., 7 March 1865, in Worthington C. Ford, ed., A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861-1865 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 2:257.

²⁹⁵ James R. Doolittle to his bother, 4 March 1865, James R. Doolittle Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, in Harris, Lincoln’s Last Months, 137.

Readers in Old as well as New England were appreciative. The Duke of Argyll told Charles Sumner: “It was a noble speech, just, and true, and solemn. I think it has produced a great effect in England.”²⁹⁶ English newspapers offered some of the most thoughtful commentary. A conspicuous example was London’s Saturday Review: “If it had been composed by any other prominent American politician, it would have been boastful, confident, and menacing.” Indeed, one of the striking features of the address was the absence of self-congratulation and braggadocio. “His unshaken purpose of continuing the war until it ends in victory assumes the form of resigned submission to the inscrutable decrees of a superior Power.”²⁹⁷ The London Spectator was equally generous in its praise: “No statesman ever uttered words stamped at once with the seal of so deep a wisdom and so true a simplicity.” The editors also analyzed the president’s growth over the past four years: “Mr. Lincoln has persevered through all, without ever giving way to anger, or despondency, or exultation, or popular arrogance, or sectarian fanaticism, or caste prejudice, visibly growing in force of character, in self-possession, and in magnanimity.” Though he was scorned in 1861 as a rustic attorney, “we can detect no longer the rude and illiterate mould of a village lawyer’s thought, but find it replaced by a grasp of principle, a dignity of manner, and a solemnity of purpose which would have been unworthy neither of Hampden nor of Cromwell, while his gentleness and generosity of feeling towards his foes are almost greater than we should expect from either of them.”²⁹⁸ English statesman William E. Gladstone said: “I am taken captive by so striking an utterance as this. I see in it the effect of sharp trial, when rightly borne, to

²⁹⁶ Duke of Argyll to Sumner, 5 April 1865, in “Letters of the Duke and Duchess of Argyll to Charles Sumner, 1861-1865,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings, 47 (1914):87.

²⁹⁷ London Saturday Review, in Little’s Living Age, 85 (April-June 1865), 87.

²⁹⁸ London Spectator, 25 March 1865.

raise men to a higher level of thought and feeling. It is by cruel suffering that nations are sometimes born to a better life; and so it is with individual men. Mr. Lincoln's words show that upon him anxiety and sorrow have wrought their true effect."²⁹⁹

SUMNER AS NEMESIS: PRESIDENTIAL RECONSTRUCTION BLOCKED

When Congress reconvened in December, Lincoln was predisposed to meet it halfway on the contentious subject of Reconstruction. In his annual message, he acknowledged that his power in that area would decline sharply with the end of the war; that his generous amnesty offer might soon end; and that the legislators, not he, had the power to determine who would be seated in Congress. He also appointed two commissioners to investigate conditions in Louisiana and Arkansas, thus signaling his willingness to rethink the Reconstruction policy that had been followed in those states.

Congress was also predisposed to compromise with Lincoln. The two branches worked together to pass the Thirteenth Amendment as well as a bill establishing an agency to provide newly liberated slaves with legal advice, food, shelter, education, and jobs. Lincoln signed this legislation, known as the Freedmen's Bureau Bill, on March 3, 1865.

A conciliatory House referred measures relating to Reconstruction to the Judiciary Committee rather than the Select Committee on the Rebellious States, headed by Henry Winter Davis. A Massachusetts Representative who had voted for the Wade-Davis bill now urged recognition of the new Louisiana government as the legitimate authority in that state, which should be readmitted without further delay. In mid-December, James

²⁹⁹ On 29 March 1865, Gladstone said this to a Philadelphian, Ellis Yarnall, one of the founders of the Union League, who was visiting England to promote the Northern cause. Yarnall, Wordsworth and the Coleridges, with Other Memories, Literary and Political (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 315-316.

Ashley introduced a bill stipulating that such recognition would be granted if Lincoln would agree that only “loyal male citizens” (presumably including blacks) could vote and serve on juries.³⁰⁰ (Ashley reportedly accepted recognition of Louisiana only after Lincoln threatened to veto the bill otherwise.)³⁰¹

On December 18, the president told Nathaniel P. Banks, who since September had been in Washington lobbying Congress on behalf of the Louisiana government, that he had been reading the legislation with care and “liked it with the exception of one or two things which he thought rather calculated to conceal a feature which might be objectionable to some.” The first feature “was that under the provisions of that bill negroes would be made jurors & voters under the temporary governments.”

Banks, who had evidently discussed the bill with congressmen, said: “Yes, that is to be stricken out and the qualification white male citizens of the U.S. is to be restored. What you refer to would be a fatal objection to the Bill. It would simply throw the Government into the hands of the blacks, as the white people under that arrangement would refuse to vote.” The president was not voicing his own opposition to black voting but expressing the fear that it might be so “objectionable to some” that the bill would be defeated. (For the same reason, the Wade-Davis bill had extended suffrage to whites only.)

Just as he had done with emancipation, Lincoln did not wish to venture far ahead of public opinion on the issue of black voting. And, as William Lloyd Garrison noted in

³⁰⁰ Herman Belz, Reconstructing the Union: Theory and Policy During the Civil War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 244-52.

³⁰¹ Washington correspondence, 16 December, New York Tribune, 17 December 1864.

January, “the primary difficulty lies in the state of public sentiment towards the negro.”³⁰²

Responding to their constituents, members of Congress shied away from black suffrage; they had overwhelmingly rejected black voting rights in the Montana Territory and had refused to enfranchise blacks in the District of Columbia.

In July 1864, Garrison himself had defended Lincoln against Radical criticism of his failure to endorse black suffrage, arguing that the “elective franchise is a conventional, not a natural right.” He explained to an English abolitionist that in the U.S., states rather than the central government determined who could vote. Garrison asked, “when was it ever known that liberation from bondage was accompanied by a recognition of political equality? Chattels personal may be instantly translated from the auction block into freemen; but when were they ever taken at the same time to the ballot-box, and invested with all political rights and immunities?” Premature granting of the suffrage to blacks might provoke a ruinous white backlash, Garrison warned presciently: “submitted to as a necessity at the outset, as soon as the [reconstructed] State was organized and left to manage its own affairs, the white population, with their superior intelligence, wealth and power, would unquestionably alter the franchise in accordance with their prejudices, and exclude those thus summarily brought to the polls.” Black voting rights, he predicted, could eventually be won only “by a struggle on the part of the disfranchised, and a growing conviction of its justice, ‘in the good time coming.’”³⁰³

Lincoln’s second reservation about Ashley’s bill was “the declaration that all persons heretofore held in slavery are declared free.” That did not seem critical, for he

³⁰² Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 120.

³⁰³ Garrison to Francis W. Newman, [22 July 1864], in Walter M. Merrill, ed., The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison (6 vols.; Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971-1981), 5:229.

said it was evidently “not a prohibition of slavery by Congress but a mere assurance of freedom to persons then [free] in accordance with the proclamation of Emancipation. In that point of view it is not objectionable though I think it would have been preferable to so express it.”

Lincoln and Banks “spoke very favorably, with these qualifications[,] of Ashley’s bill.” John Hay, who was present at this interview, recorded that the general “is especially anxious that the Bill may pass and receive the approval of the President. He regards it as merely concurring in the President[’]s own action in the one important case of Louisiana and recommending an observance of the same policy in other cases.” Neither Banks nor Lincoln thought of it “as laying down any cast iron policy in the matter. Louisiana admitted & this bill passed, the President is not estopped by it from recognizing and urging Congress to recognize another state of the south coming in with constitution & conditions entirely dissimilar.” Banks thought Congress wanted the bill passed in order to assert its prerogative in shaping Reconstruction. It was best, he thought, to accept the legislation, even if it was unnecessary, in order to win the readmission of Louisiana.³⁰⁴

Two days later, Ashley accepted amendments designed to meet the president’s objections: slaves would only be freed in the areas already covered by the Emancipation Proclamation, and voting rights would be extended only to blacks serving in the military and to white males. In addition, Louisiana would be readmitted, but Congress would have the power to set terms for the admission of other Confederate States. Action on this compromise measure was postponed until after Christmas.

³⁰⁴ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 253-54 (entry for 18 December 1864).

During the holiday recess, Wendell Phillips visited Washington and reported that “the radical men feel that they are powerless and checkmated.” Henry Winter Davis “told him the game was up – ‘Lincoln with his immense patronage can do what he pleases; the only hope is an appeal to the people.’”³⁰⁵ In January, Phillips made such an appeal at a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He warned that admitting Louisiana under the Banks-Hahn government would set a dangerous precedent. The “principle underlying Louisiana” was, he charged, “a brutal, domineering, infamous overseer spirit.”³⁰⁶ In response to Radical pressure, Ashley significantly modified the compromise bill, virtually eliminating the possibility of admitting Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee under Lincoln’s Reconstruction plan. In effect, the revised measure was the Wade-Davis bill redivivus with black suffrage added. Moderate Republicans rebelled and the measure was tabled. Partly in response to Lincoln’s reelection, the party was backing away from its earlier endorsement of the Wade-Davis approach to Reconstruction and moving toward the president’s plan. Noah Brooks reported that members who had voted in July for the Radical bill “are now willing to admit that the President’s sagacity was greater than theirs.”³⁰⁷ Moderates agreed with Lincoln that no rigid formula should be applied to all eleven Confederate States. As Massachusetts Representative Thomas D. Eliot put it, Congress should lay down the fundamental principles and then let the people of the states “establish their constitution; let it prohibit slavery; let them grant freedom and equality of

³⁰⁵ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Susan B. Anthony, New York, 29 December 1864, in Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences, ed. Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch (2 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1922), 2:104.

³⁰⁶ “The Immediate Issue: A Speech of Wendell Phillips at the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society at Boston” in The Equality of All Men Before the Law: Claimed and Defended (Boston: G. C. Rand & Avery, 1865), 30.

³⁰⁷ Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 184.

rights, and we need nothing else.” It mattered not “how a State shall have brought itself before us, so only that it comes with a constitution that we can recognize.”³⁰⁸

Though the Thirty-eighth Congress would pass no Reconstruction bill, few regarded a postponement of the issue as a misfortune. Noah Brooks predicted that the Confederate States “will come back in different ways, each State acting for itself in some sovereign capacity, and as the people of the States reorganize themselves, they will revive the paralyzed power of the State, and before the present Summer closes there will be some order brought out of the chaotic mess.”³⁰⁹

But in the meantime, would Congress admit Louisiana and Arkansas?³¹⁰ Smarting from their defeat on the Reconstruction bill, Radicals sought revenge. “We hope now to defeat the proposed admission of Louisiana and Arkansas, and if so the whole question will go over to the next Congress,” said Ashley. “In the meantime I hope the nation may be educated up to our demand for universal suffrage.”³¹¹ Most moderate and conservative Republicans, however, disagreed. They wanted Louisiana admitted in part because they thought it would vote to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.

The question arose when senators and congressmen elected from Louisiana asked to be seated. In January, as the senate considered their request, Lincoln tried to frame the debate by suggesting to the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Lyman Trumbull, that the most important question before that body was: “Can Louisiana be brought into proper practical relations with the Union sooner by admitting or by rejecting the proposed

³⁰⁸ Congressional Globe, 38th Congress, 2nd session, 300 (17 January 1865).

³⁰⁹ Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 184.

³¹⁰ Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 244-67; Robert F. Horowitz, The Great Impeacher: A Political Biography of James M. Ashley (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 106-9.

³¹¹ Ashley to the Boston Commonwealth, issue of 4 March 1865, in Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 268.

Senators?"³¹² The committee, which had rejected Arkansas's senators a few months earlier, now recommended that Louisiana's be accepted. That necessarily entailed recognizing the Hahn government, which the committee said "fairly represented a majority of the loyal voters of the State."³¹³ Though a majority of the senate favored acceptance of the committee's recommendation, a few Radicals, led by Charles Sumner, demurred. They objected to the Louisiana constitution's failure to enfranchise blacks and to the Lincoln administration's alleged usurpation of Congressional prerogatives. Sumner vowed to employ "all the instruments . . . in the arsenal of parliamentary warfare" to block the will of the majority. The Hahn government, he charged, was "a mere seven-months' abortion, begotten by the bayonet in criminal conjunction with the spirit of caste, and born before its time, rickety, unformed, unfinished – whose continued existence will be a burden, a reproach, and a wrong."³¹⁴ Conservative Democrats like Kentuckians Garrett Davis and Lazarus Powell, fearing that Louisiana would ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, teamed up with Sumner and other Radicals to conduct a successful filibuster, thus preventing recognition of the Bayou State.

Thomas J. Durant of New Orleans significantly influenced Radical opponents of the Hahn government, which he denounced as illegitimate because it had been elected under the aegis of the military. Some abolitionists regarded Durant's argument skeptically, pointing out that he had participated in the election as a champion of Hahn's opponent and only after his candidate lost did he condemn the proceedings as bogus.³¹⁵

³¹² Lincoln to Trumbull, Washington, 9 January 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:206-7.

³¹³ Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 270.

³¹⁴ Congressional Globe, 38th Congress, 2nd session, 1129 (27 February 1865).

³¹⁵ Washington correspondence, 11 December, National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 17 December 1864.

Moderate Republicans indignantly denounced Sumner. Richard Henry Dana thought the obstructionist Massachusetts senator had behaved “like a madman, in the Louisiana question.” Dana did not object to the delaying tactics or Sumner’s votes, but rather to “the positions he took, the arguments he advanced, and the language he used to the 20 out of 25 Republican Senators who differed from him.” Even such haughty slave-owning senators as James M. Mason, John Slidell, and Jefferson Davis “were never so insolent and overbearing as he was, and his arguments, his answers to questions, were boyish or crazy.” Dana said he would be relieved to learn that Sumner “was out of his head from opium or even N[ew] E[ngland] rum.”³¹⁶ The Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican editorialized that Sumner had lost any claim “to the character of an honorable statesman” by resorting “to the trickery of a pot-house politician.”³¹⁷ That paper’s editor thought the senator’s behavior “perfectly unjustifiable,” “undignified,” and “disgraceful.”³¹⁸

Lincoln too was furious. He told James Ashley that Sumner “hopes to succeed in beating the President so as to change this government from its original form, and making it a strong centralized power.”³¹⁹ William Henry Crook, who joined the White House staff in January 1865, recalled that one day the president’s “intense antipathy” for Sumner led him to forbid the senator admission to the executive mansion. Crook cited Sumner as “the only man, so far as my knowledge goes, to obtain the president’s bitter

³¹⁶ Dana to Charles Francis Adams, Cambridge, 3 March 1865, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³¹⁷ Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, quoted in the Boston Commonwealth, 18 March 1865.

³¹⁸ Bowles to Maria Whitney, Springfield, 12 March 1865, in George S. Merriam, The Life and Times of Samuel Bowles (2 vols.; New York: Century, 1885), 1:419.

³¹⁹ Nicolay, memorandum, 18 January 1865, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 171.

dislike.”³²⁰ It is not hard to understand Lincoln’s aversion to the vain, haughty, pedantic senator. When the press began to speak of a personal rupture between Sumner and himself, however, Lincoln quickly moved to squelch the rumor by magnanimously inviting the senator to join him at the inaugural ball on March 6. Sumner complied and escorted the First Lady into the festivities at the mammoth Patent Office building, following closely behind the president and his escort, House Speaker Schuyler Colfax. The New York Herald inferred that Lincoln now endorsed Sumner’s approach to reconstruction. But Lincoln had not done so. He would postpone for six weeks his formal response to the senate’s action.

Lincoln was angry at the military in Louisiana as well as at Congress for failing to support the Hahn government. In September, he had summoned Banks to Washington and had him lobby Congress on behalf of that government. Taking over Banks’s role in New Orleans were Generals E. R. S. Canby and Stephen Hurlbut, Lincoln’s friend from Illinois. To Hurlbut, the president wrote a blistering letter in November: “Few things, since I have been here, have impressed me more painfully than what, for four or five months past, has appeared as bitter military opposition to the new State Government of Louisiana. I still indulged some hope that I was mistaken in the fact; but copies of a correspondence on the subject, between Gen. Canby and yourself, and shown me to-day, dispel that hope. A very fair proportion of the people of Louisiana have inaugurated a new State Government, making an excellent new constitution – better for the poor black man than we have in Illinois. This was done under military protection, directed by me, in the belief, still sincerely entertained, that with such a nucleus around which to build, we

³²⁰ Crook, “Lincoln as I Knew Him,” Harper’s Magazine 115 (June 1907):45.

could get the State into position again sooner than otherwise. In this belief a general promise of protection and support, applicable alike to Louisiana and other states, was given in the last annual message. During the formation of the new government and constitution, they were supported by nearly every loyal person and opposed by every secessionist. And this support, and this opposition, from the respective stand points of the parties, was perfectly consistent and logical. Every Unionist ought to wish the new government to succeed; and every disunionist must desire it to fail. Its failure would gladden the heart of Slidell in Europe, and of every enemy of the old flag in the world. Every advocate of slavery naturally desires to see blasted, and crushed, the liberty promised the black man by the new constitution. But why Gen. Canby and Gen. Hurlbut should join on the same side is to me incomprehensible. Of course, in the condition of things at New-Orleans, the military must not be thwarted by the civil authority; but when the constitutional convention, for what it deems a breach of privilege, arrests an editor, in no way connected with the military, the military necessity for insulting the Convention, and forcibly discharging the editor, is difficult to perceive. Neither is the military necessity for protecting the people against paying large salaries, fixed by a Legislature of their own choosing, very apparant. Equally difficult to perceive is the military necessity for forcibly interposing to prevent a bank from loaning it's own money to the State. These things, if they have occurred, are, at the best, no better than gratuitous hostility. I wish I could hope that they may be shown to not have occurred. To make assurance against misunderstanding, I repeat that in the existing condition of things in Louisiana, the military must not be thwarted by the civil authority; and I add that on points of difference the commanding general must be judge and master. But I also add that in the exercise of

this judgment and control, a purpose, obvious, and scarcely unavowed, to transcend all military necessity, in order to crush out the civil government, will not be overlooked.”³²¹

On November 29, Hurlbut replied: “I recognize as thoroughly as any man the advance toward the right made by the adoption of the Free Constitution of Louisiana, and have done and shall do all in my power to vindicate its declaration of freedom, and to protect and prepare the emancipated Bondsmen for their new status & condition. The fact has been withheld from you, Mr President, but it still exists that nothing has been done for this purpose since the adoption of the Constitution – except by military authority.”³²²

Dissatisfied with this response, Lincoln ordered Banks to return to Louisiana. He did not write out instructions to the general, but his intentions can be inferred from Banks’s remarks upon arriving in New Orleans. There he addressed a mass meeting of blacks: “To the colored people of this State, I will say that the work I still going on; and by being patient, they will see that the day is not far distant when they will be in the enjoyment of all rights. . . . Abraham Lincoln gave his word that you will be free, and enjoy all the rights invested to citizens.”³²³ Presumably included within those rights was the suffrage.

While lobbying Congress on behalf of the Hahn government, “Lincoln had been earnestly anxious to permit the extension of the right of suffrage to American citizens of African descent in Louisiana,” according to Pennsylvania Representative William D. Kelley. That Radical congressman recalled that it “was not a mere sentiment with Mr. Lincoln. He regarded it as an act of justice to the citizens, and a measure of sound policy

³²¹ Lincoln to Hurlbut, Washington, 14 November 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:106-107.

³²² Hurlbut to Lincoln, New Orleans, 29 November 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³²³ Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 117.

for the States, and doubtless believed that those whom he invested with power were using their influence to promote so desirable an object. Of this he assured me more than once, and in the presence of others to whose memories I may safely appeal.”³²⁴

To demonstrate his sincerity, Lincoln showed congressmen and senators the March 1864 letter he had written to Hahn, suggesting that the governor support black suffrage. Among them was Missouri Senator B. Gratz Brown, a leading supporter of black voting rights. In a letter to his constituents, Brown quoted the president’s missive to Hahn and said that the provision of the Louisiana constitution authorizing the legislature to enfranchise blacks “was prompted by the executive head of our nation himself.”³²⁵ Congressman Thomas D. Eliot of Massachusetts was also assured by “the highest sources” (presumably Lincoln) that the Hahn government would enfranchise blacks.³²⁶

Lincoln also showed the Hahan letter to abolitionists, including J. Miller McKim, who told William Lloyd Garrison: “I . . . have seen some of the correspondence between Mr. Lincoln and New Orleans. It is greatly to Mr. Lincoln’s credit as a friend to the black man. Mr. Lincoln is in advance of his party on the question of negro suffrage. Not in advance of all, but of the majority.”³²⁷

While the president and Banks lobbied Congress, their allies on the ground in Louisiana – including Governor Hahn, B. Rush Plumy, Thomas W. Conway, A. P.

³²⁴ Kelley to S.N.T., n.p., n.d., New Orleans Tribune, 23 May 1865, in Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 118.

³²⁵ Brown to the editor of the Missouri Democrat, 22 December 1864, in Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 129-30.

³²⁶ Congressional Globe, 38th Congress, 2nd session, 300 (17 January 1865).

³²⁷ McKim to Garrison, Washington, 5 May 1864, in Wendell Phillips Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children (4 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 4:122.

Dostie, as well as the editors of the Daily True Delta and the Black Republican – were championing the cause of black suffrage.³²⁸

By April, Lincoln doubtless sensed that Northern support for black suffrage was growing. That month, Frank Sanborn wrote that “the question of Reconstruction on the basis of negro suffrage is coming up for discussion everywhere, and the converts to Phillips’ view are increasing fast.” In February, Charles Slack told Sumner that among Boston businessmen “the idea of negro suffrage in the disloyal states grows daily in favor and advocacy.” As Lydia Maria Child pointed out, the military service of blacks was largely responsible for the change in public opinion.³²⁹ To keep his party together, Lincoln understood that the time was growing ripe to support black voting rights publicly. He had already done so privately to many men.³³⁰ But when should he announce his decision?

VISIT TO THE FRONT

As he mulled over that question, Lincoln was growing weary of the White House grind. So on March 20, when Grant invited him to visit the front for a day or two, he gladly accepted.³³¹ The general had acted at the prompting of his wife, who was disturbed by press reports indicating that the president looked unusually haggard. One such report

³²⁸ Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom, 121-29.

³²⁹ James M. McPherson, The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 310-11.

³³⁰ Belz, Reconstructing the Union, 309-10.

³³¹ “Can you not visit City Point for a day or two? I would like very much to see you and I think the rest would do you good.” Grant to Lincoln, City Point, 20 March 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

appeared in the Chicago Tribune, which noted that at the inauguration, many observers “were painfully impressed with his gaunt, skeleton-like appearance.”³³²

The crushing burden of responsibility had taken a fierce toll on Lincoln, changing his appearance dramatically between the time of his first election and his second inauguration. A life mask made in 1860 showed him to be youthful, vigorous, and healthy; a similar mask executed in 1865 showed him to be such a hollow-cheeked, worn-out old man that one artist assumed it was a death mask. Photographs corroborated the impression. Gideon Welles believed that Lincoln was “much worn down” because he “takes upon himself questions that properly belong to the Departments, often causing derangement and irregularity” and thus “makes his office much more laborious than he should.” In deciding to leave Washington for City Point (at the confluence of the James and Appomattox Rivers), the president sought “to get rid of the throng that is pressing upon him.” Disapprovingly, Welles noted that the more often Lincoln yielded to the crowd’s importunities, “the greater the pressure upon him” grew. “It has now become such that he is compelled to flee.”³³³

(Democrats also criticized Lincoln’s administrative style, charging that he delegated too little authority while trying to serve as “Secretary, Clerk, Scrivener, Joker, Story-teller, Clown, Doctor, Chaplain, the whole in one.” The New York Evening Express sarcastically noted that “[n]o man, it is said, works harder than does this universal genius, Mr. Lincoln. He rises with the sun, and don’t go down with the sun!”)³³⁴

³³² Chicago Tribune, 22 March 1865.

³³³ Beale, ed., Welles Dairy, 2:264 (entry for 23 March 1865).

³³⁴ New York Evening Express, 12 January 1863.

At first Grant hesitated to invite Lincoln to the front, believing that if the president wished to visit, he would do so without any solicitation, but the general relented when Robert Todd Lincoln, then serving on his staff, opined that his father would come if his presence would not be intrusive.³³⁵

After accepting Grant's invitation, Lincoln requested Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox to make travel arrangements. Fox asked Captain John S. Barnes, commander of the U. S. S. Bat, a swift, armed blockade enforcer, if his vessel might be made suitable for the president. Barnes said he thought it could, and Fox took him to the White House to receive instructions. "I'm only a fresh-water sailor and I guess I have to trust you salt-water folks when afloat," Lincoln said, adding that he "wanted no luxuries but only plain, simple food and ordinary comfort." Whatever was good enough for Barnes, he stressed, was sufficient for him.³³⁶

The following day, however, the president told Barnes that more luxurious accommodations would be necessary, for Mrs. Lincoln had decided to join him and would be attended by a maidservant. The captain recalled that in revising his request, Lincoln had "a certain look of embarrassment and a look of sadness which struck me forcibly and rather embarrassed me. He appeared tired and worried." Taken aback, Barnes replied that the Bat was unsuitable for female passengers. Fox and Barnes arranged to charter the River Queen, the side-wheeled passenger ship on which the Hampton Roads conference had taken place the previous month, even though Barnes

³³⁵ John Y. Simon, ed., The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant (New York: Putnam, 1975), 141-42. Mrs. Grant's memoirs suggest that Robert said both his parents would be willing to come down to City Point if invited, but her memory may have been imperfect, for the invitation from Grant says nothing about Mrs. Lincoln.

³³⁶ John S. Barnes, "With Lincoln from Washington to Richmond in 1865," Appleton's Magazine 9 (May 1907):516-17.

“felt that the President was incurring great risk in making the journey and living on board an unarmed, fragile river-boat, so easily assailed and so vulnerable.” Her sister ship had recently been sunk by a bomb made to resemble a lump of coal. Fox warned Barnes to be cautious in protecting Lincoln and said he regretted “that the determination of Mrs. Lincoln to accompany the President had made the Bat an impossible home for him and his family party.” Lincoln, however, felt no concern for his own safety. As for bombs disguised as coal lumps, he “expressed great contempt for cowardly assaults of such nature.” At 1 p.m. on March 23, the president, along with his wife and son Tad, boarded the River Queen and sailed for City Point, escorted by the Bat. Accompanying them were Mrs. Lincoln’s maidservant and army Captain Charles B. Penrose, who had been detailed by Stanton as a presidential bodyguard.³³⁷ During the trip, Lincoln exclaimed: “So long as I am President, no peace shall be made which does not save the Union and keep our promises to the slave!”³³⁸

At 9 p.m. on March 25, the River Queen arrived at City Point, which looked like “some great mart of trade,” as a Massachusetts colonel observed: “Beyond the masts and rigging, and the smoke stacks and the steam of the water craft, were seen groups of tents, long ranges of whitewashed barracks, log-huts and shanties of every shape bearing the

³³⁷ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 518-20; Charles Penrose, diary, 4, 5 April 1865, Century Magazine, June 1890, 307; Wayne C. Temple, “Lincoln’s Travels on the River Queen,” unpublished paper, 2006. William Crook claimed that he accompanied the president, but his memoirs are highly unreliable and no one else in the party mentioned his presence. See William Hanchett, “Persistent Myths of the Lincoln Assassination,” Lincoln Herald 99 (1997):172-79.

³³⁸ Washington correspondence, 8 February, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, n.d., copied in the New York World, 11 February 1865.

signs of sutlers and licensed traders.” This immense base of supplies for the army teemed with soldiers, teamsters, sentries, wagons, ambulances, and other conveyances.³³⁹

When Grant and his wife called to pay their respects, he and the president retired to discuss military affairs. “Coldly” and “rather haughtily,” the First Lady received Mrs. Grant, who committed an act of lèse majesté by sitting down next to her hostess. Mrs. Lincoln imperiously asked: “How dare you be seated until I invite you!”³⁴⁰ The First Lady would make other such scenes over the next few days. (Apparently she had treated Stanton’s wife with the same hauteur, for the war secretary’s wife told one of Grant’s aides: “Understand me, sir, I do not go to the White House. I do not visit Mrs. Lincoln.”)³⁴¹ Mary Lincoln’s sense of entitlement led her to insist that the River Queen be berthed next to the dock, though Grant’s headquarters boat, the Mary Martin, had been assigned that location. The two vessels were placed side by side, but the First Lady refused to cross what became known as “Mrs. Grant’s boat” in order to reach the gangplank. So, according to Captain Barnes, “several times the Martin was pushed out and the Queen in, requiring some work and creating confusion, despite Mr. Lincoln’s expostulations.”³⁴²

The journalist Sylvanus Cadwallader, whose wife was friendly with Mrs. Grant, reported that the First Lady “seemed insanely jealous of every person, and everything,

³³⁹ Francis J. Parker, The Story of the Thirty-second Regiment, Massachusetts Infantry (Boston: C.W. Calkins, 1880), 228-29.

³⁴⁰ Benjamin P. Thomas, ed., Three Years with Grant, as Recalled by War Correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader (New York: Knopf, 1955), 283; Simon, ed., Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant, 142; Adam Badeau, Grant in Peace, From Appomattox to Mount McGregor: A Personal Memoir (Hartford: S.S. Scranton, 1887), 362. Julia Grant’s version of this story is much milder than Badeau’s and Cadwallader’s. Her account was probably sanitized in keeping with her Victorian sense of propriety. Cadwallader’s wife, who was friendly with Mrs. Grant, was probably Cadwallader’s source.

³⁴¹ Badeau, Grant in Peace, 360.

³⁴² Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 524.

which drew him [the president] away from her and monopolized his attention for an hour.” She regularly dispatched Tad to summon his father back to the River Queen. On one occasion the boy, after a vain attempt to deliver such instructions, interrupted the president in the midst of an animated conversation: “Come, come, come now, mama say you must come instantly.” Lincoln’s face fell, he hesitated for a moment, then rose to leave, asking: “My God, will that woman never understand me?” He “meekly, and sadly” returned to the River Queen with Tad.³⁴³

Soon after landing at City Point, Lincoln was asked how long he intended to stay. “Well, I am like the western pioneer who built a log cabin,” he laughingly replied. “When he commenced he didn’t know how much timber he would need, and when he had finished, he didn’t care how much he had used up. So you see I came down among you without any definite plans, and when I go home I shan’t regret a moment I have spent with you.”³⁴⁴ Grant urged him to remain long enough to see the imminent fall of Richmond.³⁴⁵

On the morning March 25, Lincoln’s plans to review the troops were scotched by Lee’s desperate attempt to break through the ever-tightening noose around Petersburg. In a pre-dawn assault, the Confederates punched a hole in the Union line, capturing Fort Stedman and two nearby batteries, but were soon driven back. Though Lincoln described it as “a little rumpus,” in fact the losses were significant; the Federals suffered 2080

³⁴³ Cadwallader, Three Years with Grant, 282.

³⁴⁴ Septima Collis, A Woman’s War Record, 1861-1865 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1889), 60. It is possible that Lincoln originally had planned to spend only a brief time at City Point. Mrs. Lincoln had reserved a box at Ford’s Theatre for March 29 to attend a performance of Verdi’s Ernani. Michael W. Kauffman, American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies (New York: Random House, 2004), 195.

³⁴⁵ Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 180.

casualties and the Rebels 4800 (10% of the Army of Northern Virginia).³⁴⁶ Lincoln had wanted to observe the action, but Grant thought it too dangerous. When the firing stopped, however, the general suggested that they inspect the battle site. Around noon Grant, his staff, Lincoln, Barnes and others boarded a train which took them seven miles to the front.³⁴⁷ Upon detraining, they mounted horses and rode across terrain where the fighting had raged most fiercely. They observed burial squads digging graves for the many corpses scattered about as doctors tended to the wounded Rebels. Lincoln showed great interest in the 1600 ragged, dirty prisoners who had been taken earlier in the day. Though for the most part he “was quiet and observant, making few comments,” he did remark “upon their sad and unhappy condition.” He also “listened to explanations in a cool, collected manner, betraying no excitement, but his whole face showing sympathetic feeling for the suffering about him.”³⁴⁸ While frequently consulting a map, he showed that he knew well the position of various units.³⁴⁹

When Lincoln returned to the train, he observed cars full of wounded men. The “worn and haggard” president remarked “that he had seen enough of the horrors of war, that he hoped this was the beginning of the end, and that there would be no more bloodshed or ruin of homes.” During his visit, he often repeated this hope “with grave earnestness.” He sought to comfort the wounded, including a young boy in a Confederate uniform who was moaning “Mother! Mother!” When asked where he was hurt, the lad turned his head, revealing a ghastly wound, and died. Hearing this sad tale, Lincoln wept

³⁴⁶ Lincoln to Stanton, City Point, 25 March 1865, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:374.

³⁴⁷ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 521-22.

³⁴⁸ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 521-22; Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 406.

³⁴⁹ Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 406.

and with a “voice was choked with emotion” he “repeated the well-known expression about ‘robbing the cradle and the grave.’”³⁵⁰

Upon reaching City Point, Lincoln was rather solemn as he sat by the smoky campfire with Grant and his staff. Initially “his manner was grave and his language much more serious than usual” as he “spoke of the appalling difficulties encountered by the administration, the losses in the field, the perplexing financial problems, and the foreign complications; but said they had all been overcome by the unswerving patriotism of the people, the devotion of the loyal North, and the superb fighting qualities of the troops.” In time, he unwound and entertained his companions “in a most interesting manner about public affairs,” illustrating his points with “incomparable anecdotes.” When Grant asked, “Mr. President, did you at any time doubt the final success of the cause?” he replied swiftly and emphatically: “Never for a moment.”³⁵¹

Worn out by the day’s excitement, Lincoln declined the general’s dinner invitation and returned to the River Queen, where he went to bed earlier than usual.

After a good night’s sleep, Lincoln arose to encouraging bulletins from the front. Though “lamenting the great loss of life and the sufferings of the wounded,” he “expressed the greatest confidence that the war was drawing to a close.” He was especially pleased to learn that General Philip Sheridan, having repeatedly whipped Jubal Early’s army in the Shenandoah Valley, had reached the James River. At Grant’s headquarters he found that diminutive cavalryman along with Admiral David Dixon Porter and Generals E. O. C. Ord and George G. Meade. It was suggested that since the president had been unable to review troops the day before, he might like to watch

³⁵⁰ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 522.

³⁵¹ Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 406-7, 408.

Sheridan's army cross the river and then review both the naval flotilla and Ord's corps.³⁵² He accepted the invitation, but before departing took time to play with three recently orphaned kittens which were "mewing piteously." Lincoln "picked them up, took them on his lap, stroked their soft fur, and murmured: 'Poor little creatures, don't cry; you'll be taken good care of.'" He asked Colonel Theodore Bowers to "see that these poor little motherless waifs are given plenty and milk and treated kindly." According to Horace Porter, during Lincoln's visit to City Point he was often "found fondling these kittens. He would wipe their eyes tenderly with his handkerchief, stroke their smooth coats, and listen to them purring their gratitude to him." Colonel Porter thought it "a curious sight at an army headquarters, upon the eve of a great military crisis in the nation's history, to see the hand which had affixed the signature to the Emancipation Proclamation, and had signed the commissions of all the heroic men who served the cause of the Union, from the general-in-chief to the lowest lieutenant, tenderly caressing three stray kittens."³⁵³

Looking "very care-worn and fatigued," the president sailed downriver to the spot where Sheridan's men were to cross.³⁵⁴ En route he "was in a more gloomy mood than usual," speaking "with much seriousness about the situation." He feared that the Confederates might suddenly move to capture City Point. Uncharacteristically, he told no anecdotes. But upon observing Union soldiers traverse the bridge, he showed great interest and asked several questions of Sheridan.³⁵⁵ He thoroughly enjoyed the bustling

³⁵² Barnes, "With Lincoln," 522.

³⁵³ Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 410. A similar account can be found in Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 286-87.

³⁵⁴ John W. Grattan, Under the Blue Pennant, or, Notes of a Naval Officer, ed. Robert J. Schneller, Jr. (New York: John Wiley, 1999), 193.

³⁵⁵ Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 413; Philip Sheridan, Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan, General United States Army (2 vols.; New York: C. L. Webster, 1888), 2:130-31.

scene. Some cavalry on the banks cheered loudly upon seeing the president, and he met the same reception when the ship passed Porter's flotilla, which he saluted by waving his tall hat. He seemed "happy as a schoolboy." After lunch aboard Porter's flagship, the Malvern, Lincoln proceeded to Aiken's Landing, where Ord's officers were waiting to escort the presidential party to the review. Lincoln rode with Grant and Ord while the First Lady and Julia Grant, along with Grant's aide Adam Badeau, followed in an ambulance. The president "was in high spirits" as he laughed and chatted with the generals. When they arrived at Ord's campsite, Lincoln was dismayed to learn that the troops had been awaiting their arrival for hours and had missed lunch. He therefore urged that the review begin without further delay while the women caught up.

Meanwhile, Badeau tried to make polite conversation with the First Lady and Mrs. Grant. He predicted that a battle would soon take place, for Grant had ordered to the rear all the wives of officers in the Army of the Potomac except Mrs. Charles Griffin, who had received special permission from the president. This news rasped Mary Lincoln. "What do you mean by that, sir?" she asked indignantly. "Do you mean to say that she saw the President alone? Do you know that I never allow the President to see any woman alone?"

Julia Grant tried to rescue poor Badeau, who balked when Mary Lincoln instructed him to order the vehicle to halt so that she could leave it. The First Lady then took matters into her own hands by seizing the driver, but Mrs. Grant persuaded her to remain inside until they had reached the reviewing ground. There General Meade, unaware of the delicacy of the situation, replaced Badeau as the ladies' escort. Upon their return to the carriage, the First Lady glared at Badeau and remarked: "General

Meade is a gentleman, sir. He says it was not the President who gave Mrs. Griffin the permit, but the Secretary of War."

Later that day, a more embarrassing scene occurred when the same party visited the command of General Ord of the Army of the James. His beautiful, vivacious wife, like Mrs. Griffin, had been allowed to remain at the front. On a high-spirited horse she rode alongside of Lincoln while Mary Lincoln's carriage was still making its way to the site. According to Badeau, as "soon as Mrs. Lincoln discovered this her rage was beyond all bounds. 'What does the woman mean,' she exclaimed, 'by riding by the side of the President? and ahead of me? Does she suppose that he wants her by the side of him?' She was in a frenzy of excitement, and language and action both became more extravagant every moment."

Mary Lincoln grew angrier still when Julia Grant once again attempted to soothe her. Haughtily the First Lady asked: "I suppose you think you'll get to the White House yourself, don't you?" Mrs. Grant explained that she was quite content with her current situation, provoking a sharp retort: "Oh! you had better take it if you can get it. 'Tis very nice."

At this awkward moment, an officer approached and innocently remarked: "The President's horse is very gallant, Mrs. Lincoln; he insists on riding by the side of Mrs. Ord."

"What do you mean by that, sir?" she asked indignantly.

The astounded officer slunk away. When the carriage finally reached Ord's headquarters, that general's wife rode up. As Badeau remembered it, Mary Lincoln "positively insulted her, called her vile names in the presence of a crowd of officers,

and asked what she meant by following up the President. The poor woman burst into tears and inquired what she had done, but Mrs. Lincoln refused to be appeased, and stormed till she was tired. Mrs. Grant still tried to stand by her friend, and everybody was shocked and horrified."

At dinner that evening, "Mrs. Lincoln berated General Ord to the President, and urged that he should be removed. He was unfit for his place, she said, to say nothing of his wife." After the meal, at about eleven o'clock, the First Lady had her husband summon Captain Barnes, who had observed the embarrassing events of the afternoon. Already asleep when the message arrived, Barnes arose, dressed quickly, and went to the president, who, he recalled, "seemed weary and greatly distressed, with an expression of sadness that seemed the accentuation of the shadow of melancholy which at times so marked his features." Mary Lincoln did most of the talking. She "objected very strenuously to the presence of other ladies at the review that day, and had thought that Mrs. Ord had been too prominent in it, that the troops were led to think that she was the wife of the President, who had distinguished her with too much attention." Lincoln "very gently suggested that he had hardly remarked the presence of the lady, but Mrs. Lincoln was hardly to be pacified and appealed to me to support her views." The mortified Barnes, who could scarcely be expected to mediate this disagreement, strove to remain neutral, simply recounting what he had seen.

Badeau recalled that over the next few days, Mary Lincoln "repeatedly attacked her husband in the presence of officers because of Mrs. Griffin and Mrs. Ord." The spectacle dismayed Badeau, who later wrote: "I never suffered greater humiliation and pain . . . than when I saw the Head of State, the man who carried all the cares of the nation

at such a crisis – subjected to this inexpressible public mortification." Lincoln "bore it as Christ might have done; with an expression of pain and sadness that cut one to the heart, but with supreme calmness and dignity." With "old-time plainness" he called his wife "mother." He also "pleaded with eyes and tones, and endeavored to explain or palliate the offenses of others, till she turned on him like a tigress; and then he walked away, hiding that noble, ugly face that we might not catch the full expression of its misery."³⁵⁶

On April 1, Mary Lincoln returned to Washington, accompanied by Carl Schurz. In the manuscript version of his autobiography, that general explained that he had "misgivings" about accepting the invitation to join her: "I had not come into contact with Mrs. Lincoln frequently, but whenever I did, she had treated me with friendly politeness. She had even on some occasions spoken to me about others with a sort of confidential and not at all conventional freedom of tongue, which had embarrassed me not a little. But now, when I was substantially her sole social companion on that steamboat, with no means of escape, she overwhelmed me with a flood of gossip about the various members of the cabinet and leading men in Congress who in some way had incurred her displeasure – gossip so reckless, that I was not only embarrassed as to what to say in reply, but actually began to fear for the soundness of her mind. . . . While this giddy talk was rattling on almost without interruption from City Point to Washington, save sleeping time, I had the pathetic figure of tender-hearted Abraham Lincoln constantly before my eyes as he was sorely harassed not only by public care but also secretly by domestic torment."³⁵⁷ Elsewhere, Schurz allegedly "set down verbatim a conversation on her part

³⁵⁶ Badeau, Grant in Peace, 358-360.

³⁵⁷ Schurz, manuscript of his Reminiscences, Schurz Papers, Library of Congress. This passage does not appear in the published version of the memoirs.

so vulgar and venomous that it can be fairly described as outrageous.”³⁵⁸ (As noted above, Schurz believed that “the greatest tragedy of Mr. Lincoln’s existence” was his marriage.)³⁵⁹

Mary Lincoln sailed back to City Point five days later and indulged in hysterics once again. She came with an entourage consisting of her confidante-cum-dressmaker Elizabeth Keckly, James Speed, Senator Charles Sumner and his young French friend Charles A. Pineton (the Marquis de Chambrun), Assistant Secretary of the Interior William T. Otto, Iowa Senator James Harlan with his wife and daughter Mary, who was the object of Robert Lincoln’s affections. (They were wed three years after the war.) The First Lady, sorely disappointed that she had not been able to accompany her husband on his entry into Richmond two days earlier, was eager to tour that city. So while Lincoln attended to business, she and her friends headed up the James for the Confederate capital.

Upon her return the following day, she expressed a desire to visit Petersburg. Lincoln reluctantly agreed to join her. She put a damper on the event with behavior similar to her conduct two weeks earlier. Just as she had then snapped at Mrs. Grant for daring to sit down in her presence without permission, she now scolded Mrs. Harlan for a similar breach of etiquette. Making matters worse, she exploded in anger at Admiral Porter for inviting his wife as well as Mrs. Harlan and other ladies to join the excursion. According to Porter, she threw herself on the ground and tore her hair. Later she upbraided him in a “very sharp letter.” Porter laconically noted that Mrs. Lincoln had “an extremely jealous disposition.”³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Ellery Sedgwick, The Happy Profession (Boston: Little, Brown, 1946), 163.

³⁵⁹ Carl Schurz, interview with Ida Tarbell, 6 November 1897, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

³⁶⁰ Porter told this to Benson Lossing. Lossing, diary fragment, 25 April 1865, University of Virginia.

MARY LINCOLN'S JEALOUSY

Such jealous behavior by Mary Lincoln was not unprecedented. She had manifested keen jealousy of generals' wives during visits that she and her husband had made earlier to the Army of the Potomac. In 1863, Lincoln called at the headquarters of the Third Corps and was besieged by several officers' spouses (among them the beautiful Princess Salm-Salm) who wanted to give him a kiss. After securing the approval of General Daniel Sickles, the women launched their friendly assault. Upon learning of this, Mary Lincoln became furious.

"But, mother, hear me," Lincoln pleaded.

"Don't mother me," came the indignant rejoinder, "and as for General Sickles, he will hear what I think of him and his lady guests. It was well for him that I was not there at the time."

Relations between the general and the First Lady remained quite chilly until Lincoln helped thaw them out with an ingenious pun: "Sickles, I never knew you were such a pious man . . . they tell me you are more than a psalmist – they tell me you are a Salm-Salmist."³⁶¹

On another occasion, Mary Lincoln became enraged at a tall, beautiful Connecticut woman who called on the president late one night to discuss a claim. She fell to her knees, wrapped her arms around Lincoln's legs, and was pleading her case when Mrs. Lincoln came in and "jumped at conclusions. 'Out of the room, you baggage,' she cried, and going into the hall she shouted to Edward, one of the household

³⁶¹ Julia Lorrillard Butterfield, ed., A Biographical Memorial of General Daniel Butterfield (New York: Grafton Press, 1904), 160-62.

servants, 'Put this woman out and never admit her again.'" The president instructed Congressman Henry C. Deming of Hartford: "Send that long-legged woman back to Connecticut and keep her there."³⁶²

In July 1861, when Lincoln attempted to aid a poor Irish widow gain a pension, he remarked that "Mrs. Lincoln is getting a little jealous."³⁶³

The First Lady was more than a little jealous. Her friend Elizabeth Keckly, who thought her "extremely jealous," observed that "if a lady desired to court her displeasure, she could select no surer way to do it than to pay marked attention to the President. These little jealous freaks often were a source of perplexity to Mr. Lincoln." Mrs. Keckly recalled that one evening, as the First Couple were dressing for a reception, the president asked: "Well, mother, who must I talk with to-night – shall it be Mrs. D.?"

"That deceitful woman! No, you shall not listen to her flattery."

"Well, then, what do you say to Miss C.? She is too young and handsome to practise deceit."

"Young and handsome, you call her! You should not judge beauty for me. No, she is in league with Mrs. D., and you shall not talk with her."

"Well, mother, I must talk with some one. Is there any one that you do not object to?"

"I don't know as it is necessary that you should talk to anybody in particular. You know well enough, Mr. Lincoln, that I do not approve of your flirtations with silly women, just as if you were a beardless boy, fresh from school."

³⁶² Reminiscences of Congressman Augustus Brandagee in the New London, Connecticut, Day, 8 February 1894.

³⁶³ Reminiscences of Schuyler Hamilton, New York Tribune, 24 March 1889.

"But, mother, I insist that I must talk with somebody. I can't stand around like a simpleton, and say nothing. If you will not tell me who I may talk with, please tell me who I may not talk with."

"There is Mrs. D. and Miss C. in particular. I detest them both. Mrs. B. also will come around you, but you need not listen to her flattery. These are the ones in particular."

"Very well, mother; now that we have settled the question to your satisfaction, we will go down-stairs."³⁶⁴

Miss C. was the beautiful, accomplished Kate Chase, daughter of the treasury secretary. Mary Lincoln was especially jealous of her. In January 1864, the First Lady struck from the invitation list for a cabinet dinner that belle, along with her father and her husband, William Sprague. When the president learned of this, he overruled his wife, and, as John G. Nicolay reported, "There soon arose such a rampage as the House hasn't seen for a year." Mary Lincoln's rage made White House secretary William O. Stoddard cower "at the volume of the storm." Nicolay too was buffeted by it. As he told John Hay, "after having compelled Her S[atantic] Majesty to invite the Spragues I was taboo, and she made up her mind resolutely not to have me at the dinner."³⁶⁵

Mary Lincoln declined an invitation to attend Kate Chase's wedding and urged her husband to boycott that event, the highlight of the social season. According to a

³⁶⁴ Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 124-125.

³⁶⁵ Nicolay to John Hay, Washington, 29 January 1864, Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 125.

woman who was in Washington at the time, the Lincolns argued about the matter, "and the music of her voice penetrated the utmost end of the house."³⁶⁶

White House tradition dictated that at receptions the president choose a woman to lead the promenade with him. "This custom is an absurd one," Mary Lincoln told Mrs. Keckly. "On such occasions our guests recognize the position of the President as first of all; consequently, he takes the lead in everything; well, now, if they recognize his position they should also recognize mine. I am his wife, and should lead with him. And yet he offers his arm to any other lady in the room, making her first with him and placing me second. The custom is an absurd one, and I mean to abolish it. The dignity I owe to my position, as Mrs. President, demands that I should not hesitate any longer to act."³⁶⁷

How often an enraged, jealous Mary Lincoln attacked her husband is impossible to say, but Mrs. Keckly reported that when "in one of her wayward impulsive moods, she was apt to say and do things that wounded him deeply," and she "often wounded him in unguarded moments."³⁶⁸ Mrs. Lincoln herself acknowledged after his death that, during their courtship, "I doubtless trespassed, many times & oft, upon his great tenderness & amiability of character."³⁶⁹ That pattern continued throughout the marriage.

Mary Lincoln had few compunctions about berating her husband in the presence of others. Oregon Congressman George H. Williams recalled riding in a carriage with the president and the First Lady and "being treated the entire ride with upbraiding and a

³⁶⁶ "Presidential Domestic Squabbles," Washington correspondence, n.d., Rochester Union, unidentified clipping, Judd Stewart Collection, Lincoln Scrapbooks, 5:44, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

³⁶⁷ Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 144.

³⁶⁸ Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 146.

³⁶⁹ Mary Lincoln to Josiah G. Holland, Chicago, 4 December 1865, in Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 293.

tirade from Mrs. Lincoln,” throughout which Lincoln sat “with tired, worn, patient face, saying not a word.”³⁷⁰ On February 22, 1864, while attending a fair to benefit the Christian Commission, the crowd's demand for a speech surprised Lincoln. According to General Richard J. Oglesby, who had prevailed upon him to attend the meeting only by promising that he would not have to speak, Lincoln reluctantly delivered a few remarks. Afterward, while the Lincolns and Oglesby awaited their carriage, the First Lady allegedly said to her husband: “That was the worst speech I ever listened to in my life. How any man could get up and deliver such remarks to an audience is more than I can understand. I wanted the earth to sink and let me go through.” The president made no reply. He, his wife, and the general rode back to the White House in silence.³⁷¹

FINAL DAYS AT CITY POINT

On his way back from reviewing Ord’s corps, Lincoln’s spirits revived. Horace Porter speculated that “the manifestation of strength on the part of the splendid Army of the James which he had witnessed at the review had served to cheer him up.”³⁷² Colonel Theodore Lyman of General Meade’s staff reported that as Lincoln “rode down the ranks, plucking off his hat gracefully by the hinder part of the brim, the troops cheered quite loudly.” The colonel unflatteringly described his commander-in-chief as “the ugliest man I ever put my eyes on,” with “an expression of plebeian vulgarity in his face that is offensive (you recognize the recounter of coarse stories).” But, Lyman added, the president had “the look of sense and wonderful shrewdness, while the heavy eyelids give

³⁷⁰ Multnomah, Oregon, Bar Association, In Memoriam: The Honorable George H. Williams, 1823-1910, (Portland: Multnomah Bar Association, 1910), 23.

³⁷¹ Carl Sandburg, Mary Lincoln: Wife and Widow (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 112. Oglesby told this Joseph Fifer, who in turn told it to Sandburg.

³⁷² Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 414.

him a mark almost of genius,” and all in all, he seemed like “a very honest and kindly man” with “no trace of low passions in his face.” In sum, “he is such a mixture of all sorts, as only America brings forth” and “is as much like a highly intellectual and benevolent Satyr as anything I can think of.” Lyman was “well content to have him at the head of affairs.”³⁷³

The next morning, Captain Barnes as usual reported to the River Queen, where Lincoln received him cordially and told him that Mrs. Lincoln was unwell. The two men then visited Grant’s headquarters, where the general sat rather silent while Lincoln and Admiral Porter discussed news from the front. The president laughed at one of Porter’s tales and said: “Admiral, I like your sea stories; I never heard them before.” After lunch, Robert Todd Lincoln visited the Bat and invited Barnes to join the First Family’s excursion to the Point of Rocks on the Appomattox River. The captain accepted and returned with Robert to the River Queen, where Lincoln received him with customary warmth. Mrs. Lincoln, however, made it clear that she found Barnes’ presence offensive, so he did not accompany the presidential party on its stroll through the woods.³⁷⁴

That night, General Sherman arrived from North Carolina, where his 80,000-man army was being resupplied. Over the next two days he, along with Admiral Porter and Grant, conferred with Lincoln aboard the River Queen. The president initially “looked haggard & careworn” to Sherman, who recalled that as the discussion progressed, “he warmed up and looked more like himself.” The after-cabin had no tables or maps. “We

³⁷³ Lyman to his wife, 26 March 1865, in George R. Agassiz, ed., Meade’s Headquarters, 1863-1865: Letters of Colonel Theodore Lyman from the Wilderness to Appomattox (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1922), 325.

³⁷⁴ John S. Barnes, “With Lincoln from Washington to Richmond in 1865,” Appleton’s Magazine 9 (May 1907): 742-43.

merely sat at our ease in such chairs as happened to be there,” Sherman wrote three years later.³⁷⁵

As the president listened anxiously, Grant explained how Sheridan’s men would soon swing around Lee’s flank and cut his supply lines. Grant’s only concern was that before Sheridan would be able to do so, Lee might abandon Petersburg and Richmond and try to join Joseph E. Johnston. If the Confederates made such a move, they would be pursued hotly. The president took great interest in this scenario. Grant assured him that he could prevent Lee’s breakout, for Sheridan’s cavalry were just then moving on Lee’s communications. Sherman remarked that even if the Army of Northern Virginia did break out, he could fend off both Johnston and Lee until Grant caught up and placed the Confederates in a fatal vise. When Lincoln expressed fear that, in Sherman’s absence, Johnston might escape southward by rail, the general replied: “I have him where he cannot move without breaking up his army, which, once disbanded, can never again be got together.”

In response to the president’s questions about the march from Georgia to North Carolina, Sherman regaled him with amusing tales about his troops, known informally as “bummers.” The president, Sherman wrote, “laughed at my former troubles with the Sanitary Commission & Christian Commission & told an apt illustration of the confusion their super philanthropy had sometimes occasioned.” According to Sherman, Lincoln’s “face brightened wonderfully” in “lively conversation,” and he became “the very impersonation of good-humor and fellowship.” But if the conversation flagged, his face “assumed a sad, and sorrowful expression.” The president exclaimed: “Must more blood

³⁷⁵ Sherman to G. P. A. Healey, Washington, 13 January 1868, Library of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point (courtesy of Susan Lintemann, Curator of Manuscripts).

be shed! Cannot this last bloody battle be avoided!” The generals pointed out that it was up to the Confederates.³⁷⁶

Shortly after the second discussion broke up around noon on March 28, Lincoln encountered a journalist who had just arrived from a sojourn in Savannah and Charleston. “How do the people down there like being back in the Union again?” the president asked. “I think some of them are reconciled to it,” came the reply, “if we may draw conclusions from the action of one planter, who, while I was there, came down the Savannah River with his whole family wife, children, negro woman and her children, of whom he was father – and with his crop of cotton, which he was anxious to sell at the highest price.” Lincoln's eyes sparkled as he remarked laughingly: “I see; patriarchal times once more; Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael, all in one boat! I reckon they'll accept the situation now that they can sell their cotton at a price never dreamed of before the war.”³⁷⁷

Sherman returned to North Carolina that afternoon, and the following day Grant left City Point to launch his final offensive. Before departing for the front, the commanding general bade farewell to Lincoln. While doing so, he told the president of the clever but impractical advice he regularly received. “The last plan proposed was to supply our men with bayonets just a foot longer than those of the enemy, and then charge

³⁷⁶ Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 423-24; Sherman to G. P. A. Healey, Washington, 13 January 1868, Library of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point (courtesy of Susan Lintelmann, Curator of Manuscripts); Sherman to Isaac Arnold, 28 November 1872, Arnold Papers, Chicago History Museum; Sherman to John W. Draper, St. Louis, 27 November 1868, Draper Papers, Library of Congress, in Stanley P. Hirshson, The White Tecumseh: A Biography of General William T. Sherman (New York: J. Wiley, 1997), 301; “Admiral Porter's Account of the Interview with Mr. Lincoln,” 1866, in William T. Sherman, Memoirs of Gen. W. T. Sherman (2 vols.; New York: C. L. Webster, 1891-1892), 2:325-327.

³⁷⁷ Coffin in Rice, Reminiscences of Lincoln, 179-181; Charles Carleton Coffin, Abraham Lincoln (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), 193, based on the author's notebook entry.

them. When they met, our bayonets would go clear through the enemy, while theirs would not reach far enough to touch our men, and the war would be ended.”

With a chuckle, Lincoln replied: “Well, there is a good deal of terror in cold steel. I had a chance to test it once myself. When I was a young man, I was walking along a back street in Louisville one night about twelve o’clock, when a very tough-looking citizen sprang out of an alleyway, reached up to the back of his neck, pulled out a bowie-knife that seemed to my stimulated imagination about three feet long, and planted himself square across my path. For two or three minutes he flourished his weapon in front of my face, appearing to try to see just how near he could come to cutting my nose off without quite doing it. He could see in the moonlight that I was taking a good deal of interest in the proceeding, and finally he yelled out, as he steadied the knife close to my throat: ‘Stranger, kin you lend me five dollars on that?’ I never reached in my pocket and got out money so fast in all my life. I handed him a bank-note, and said: ‘There’s ten, neighbor; now put up your scythe.’”

As they strolled to train depot, Lincoln seemed to Horace Porter “more serious than at any other time since he had visited headquarters. The lines in his face seemed deeper, and the rings under his eyes were of a darker hue. It was plain that the weight of responsibility was oppressing him.” He cordially shook hands with Grant and his staff and “said in a voice broken by an emotion he could not conceal: ‘Good-by, gentlemen. God bless you all! Remember, your success is my success.’”³⁷⁸

During the next few days, Lincoln spent much time in the telegraph office, reading and sending messages. He also toured hospitals. “Time hung wearily with the

³⁷⁸ Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 423-25.

President,” an officer recalled, “and as he walked through the hospitals or rode amid the tents, his rueful countenance bore sad evidence of the anxiety and anguish which possessed him.”³⁷⁹ Sometimes he took excursions with Admiral Porter on the river and carriage rides around the countryside. He carried a detailed map of the area showing the location of all the forces and would often explain to Porter how he would act if he were the commander in charge.³⁸⁰ One day they visited a deserted fort overlooking the Union army’s works. After Porter described the difficulties the troops had encountered in constructing them under enemy fire and the hardships they endured throughout the harsh winter, Lincoln remarked: “The country can never repay these men for what they have suffered and endured.”³⁸¹

On April 1, when the journalist Sylvanus Cadwallader handed him battle flags captured earlier that day by Sheridan’s men at the decisive engagement of Five Forks, Lincoln with “the joy of a schoolboy” exclaimed: “Here is something material – something I can see, feel, and understand. This means victory. This is victory.” With the aid of Cadwallader, he updated maps into which he had stuck red-headed and black-headed pins indicating the position of both armies.³⁸²

The following day, Union forces punched through the Confederate lines, forcing Lee to abandon Petersburg. A jubilant Lincoln telegraphed Grant: “Allow me to tender to you, and all with you, the nation[’]s grateful thanks for this additional, and magnificent

³⁷⁹ Charles H. T. Collis, “Lincoln’s Magnanimity,” in Collis, A Woman’s War Record, 61-62.

³⁸⁰ Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 282, 291-92.

³⁸¹ Frank Rauscher, Music on the March, 1862-’65: With the Army of the Potomac, 114th Regt. P.V., Collis’ Zouaves (Philadelphia: W. F. Fell, 1892), 226.

³⁸² Cadwallader, Three Years with Grant, 307.

success.”³⁸³ On April 3, at the general’s invitation Lincoln hastened to inspect the fallen city. En route, his train halted as thousands of Rebel prisoners crossed the tracks. Most of them were youngsters wearing nothing but rags and lacking blankets, shoes, and headgear. The sight moved the president to exclaim: “Poor boys! poor boys! If they only knew what we are trying to do for them they would not have fought us, and they would not look as they do.”³⁸⁴

Upon arrival in Petersburg, Lincoln along with his son Tad and Admiral Porter quickly rode down the largely deserted streets to Grant’s headquarters. The president’s face was “radiant and joyful” as he grabbed the general’s hand, which he shook for a long while as he poured from his overflowing heart profound thanks and congratulations. It was one of the happiest moments of his life. “The scene was singularly affecting, and one never to be forgotten,” recalled one of Grant’s aides.

Lincoln said: “Do you know, general, I had a sort of sneaking idea all along that you intended to do something like this; but I thought some time ago that you would so maneuver as to have Sherman come up and be near enough to cooperate with you.”

“Yes,” replied Grant, “I thought at one time that Sherman’s army might advance far enough to be in supporting distance of the Eastern armies when the spring campaign against Lee opened; but I had a feeling that it would be better to let Lee’s old antagonists give his army the final blow, and finish up the job. If the Western troops were even to put in an appearance against Lee’s army, it might give some of our politicians a chance to stir up sectional feeling in claiming everything for the troops from their own section of the

³⁸³ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:383.

³⁸⁴ William Burnett Wright, article in The Congregationalist, vol. 40, no. 22, in Coffin, Abraham Lincoln, 498-99.

country. The Western armies have been very successful in their campaigns, and it is due to the Eastern armies to let them vanquish their old enemy single-handed.”

“I see, I see,” Lincoln remarked, “but I never thought of it in that light. In fact, my anxiety has been so great that I didn’t care where the help came from, so that the work was perfectly done.”

“Oh, I do not suppose it would have given rise to much of the bickering I mentioned, and perhaps the idea would not have occurred to any one else. I feel sure there would have been no such feeling among the soldiers. Of course I would not have risked the result of the campaign on account of any mere sentiment of this kind. I have always felt confident that our troops here were amply able to handle Lee.” Lincoln then discussed postwar political arrangements, emphasizing, as he had done with Sherman, that he wished the Rebels treated leniently. After about an hour and a half, Grant returned to the front.³⁸⁵

En route back to the train station, Lincoln passed by numerous houses demolished by artillery fire. He paused before the remains of the Dunlop Mansion, which had been struck over 100 times, and shook his head.³⁸⁶ Blacks and soldiers had broken into warehouses and were helping themselves to the abundant tobacco. The president and Admiral Porter each strapped a bale onto their horses’ backs. As they rode along, troops greeted Lincoln jocularly, shouting out, “How are you, Abe?” and “Hello, Abe!”³⁸⁷ Upon

³⁸⁵ Coffin, Lincoln, 506; Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 450-51.

³⁸⁶ Charles A. Clark to Ida Tarbell, Petersburg, 28 April 1898, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

³⁸⁷ Porter, “Journal of Occurrences during the War of the Rebellion,” 2:48, Porter Papers, Library of Congress.

returning to City Point, he was refreshed and energized, happily convinced that the war would soon end.³⁸⁸

That evening aboard the Malvern, he asked Admiral Porter: “Can't the navy do something at this particular moment to make history?”

“Not much,” replied Porter; “the navy is doing its best just now holding in utter uselessness the rebel navy, consisting of four heavy ironclads. If those should get down to City Point they would commit great havoc. . . . In consequence, we filled up the river with stones so that no vessels can pass either way. It enables us to 'hold the fort' with a very small force, but quite sufficient to prevent any one from removing obstructions. Therefore the rebels' ironclads are useless to them.”

“But can't we make a noise?” asked Lincoln; “that would be refreshing.”

Porter obligingly had rapid broadsides fired from several ships, lighting up the night sky. Lincoln acknowledged “that the noise was a very respectable one.”

Suddenly a distant huge explosion rocked the Malvern, prompting Lincoln to leap up and exclaim: “I hope to Heaven one of them has not blown up!”

Porter assured him that no Union vessel had been harmed but rather that the Confederates were destroying their ironclads.

“Well,” Lincoln remarked, “our noise has done some good; that's a cheap way of getting rid of ironclads. I am certain Richmond is being evacuated, and that Lee has surrendered, or those fellows would not blow up their ironclads.” Shortly thereafter, three more such explosions announced the destruction of the remaining ironclads. To clear the

³⁸⁸ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 745.

river, Porter ordered the immediate removal of all obstructions. By the morning, that task had been accomplished, and boats began sweeping the James for mines.³⁸⁹

VISITING RICHMOND

April 4 was the most remarkable day of Lincoln's presidency. Learning that Union troops were entering Richmond, he exclaimed: "Thank God I have lived to see this! It seems to me that I have been dreaming a horrid dream for four years, and now the nightmare is gone. I want to see Richmond."³⁹⁰ At 9 a.m. he and Tad, along with his bodyguard (Army Captain Charles B. Penrose), Naval Captain A. H. Adams, and Lieutenant W. W. Clemens of the Signal Corps, set sail for the Confederate capital aboard the River Queen, escorted by the Bat, the Malvern, and the Columbus, which carried the presidential cavalry escort and carriage. The captain of the River Queen, fearful that his vessel might strike a mine, had Lincoln ride on the upper deck, where he was less likely to be injured in such an eventuality.³⁹¹

The flotilla soon shrank. The Bat, unable to pass the first line of remaining obstructions at Aikens's Landing, was left behind. At the second such line, by Drewry's Bluff, the River Queen and the Malvern ran aground as they approached an imposing array of huge mines, sunken vessels, and rock-filled crates. Lincoln, Porter, Penrose, Clemens, and Tad transferred to the admiral's elaborate barge, propelled by twelve stalwart oarsmen. Lincoln wryly told Porter, "this brings to mind a fellow who once came to me to ask for an appointment as minister abroad. Finding he could not get that, he came down to some more modest position. Finally he asked to be made a tide-waiter.

³⁸⁹ Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 293.

³⁹⁰ Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 294.

³⁹¹ "Lincoln's Visit to Richmond," Century Magazine, June 1890, 307.

When he saw he could not get that, he asked me for an old pair of trousers. But it is well to be humble.”³⁹²

As the party tried to pass the U.S.S. Perry, which was stuck fast, Lincoln and the others nearly lost their lives. The barge headed toward a stretch of deep water between the Perry and the shore, but it was evident that it was not wide enough for the oarsmen to row through. So it was decided to try to approach the passage rapidly and glide by the ship. As the barge moved forward, it encountered a strong current which sent her directly under the steamer’s giant paddle wheel. At that moment, the engineer began to turn the wheel, inadvertently threatening to demolish the barge. Lincoln and Porter hallooed, and the captain rushed to the engine room and stopped the wheel in the nick of time, for one more rotation would have smashed the small vessel.³⁹³ As they forged ahead, Lincoln seemed exceptionally happy, though he looked askance at the ugly mines that had been hauled to the riverbanks.

After proceeding seven more miles, the party reached a landing spot near Richmond’s notorious Libby prison. No reception committee greeted them, for even though General Godfrey Weitzel, whose black troops had been among the first to enter the city, had been alerted, Lincoln arrived earlier than expected. As Porter later wrote, it “was not a model style for the President of the United States to enter the capital of a conquered country, yet there was a moral in it all which had more effect than if he had come surrounded with great armies and heralded by the booming of cannon.”³⁹⁴

³⁹² Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 294-295.

³⁹³ Reminiscences of O. E. Pierce, signal officer of the U.S.S. Perry, in William H. Beach, The First New York (Lincoln) Cavalry (New York: Lincoln Cavalry Association, 1902), 492 (courtesy of Mike Gorman and Bob Krick of National Park Service, Richmond).

³⁹⁴ Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 299.

As Lincoln and his companions stepped ashore, the journalist Charles C. Coffin pointed them out to some nearby blacks, who shouted “Hallelujah!” and “Glory! Glory! Glory!” Dozens of them raced to the landing, yelling and screaming “Hurrah! Hurrah! President Linkum hab come!” Hearing the commotion, more blacks – men, women, and children – poured into the streets, crying “Bress de Lord! Bress de Lord!” One woman with tears in her eyes exclaimed, “I thank you, dear Jesus, that I behold President Linkum!” Poor whites also flocked to see the eminent visitor. Coffin informed readers of the Boston Journal that “no written page or illuminated canvas can give the reality of the event – the blacks and poor whites who have suffered untold horrors during the war, their demonstrations of pleasure, the shouting, dancing, the thanksgiving to God, the mention of the name of Jesus – as if President Lincoln were next to the son of God in their affections – the jubilant cries, the countenances beaming with unspeakable joy, the tossing up of caps, the swinging of arms of a motley crowd – some in rags, some bare foot, some wearing pants of Union blue and coat of Confederate gray, ragamuffins in dress through the hardships of war, but yet of stately bearing.”³⁹⁵

A black newsman reported that as soon as the president landed, some blacks, “feeling themselves free to act like men, shouted that the President had arrived.” Other blacks, mistakenly assuming that this was an allusion to Jefferson Davis, cried out: “Hang him!” “Hang him!” “Show him no quarter!” Upon realizing that it was Lincoln, “their joy knew no bounds.”³⁹⁶ When some of them knelt before Lincoln, he replied:

³⁹⁵ Coffin in Rice, Reminiscences of Lincoln, 179-181; Coffin, Lincoln, 193; Richmond correspondence by Coffin in the Boston Journal, n.d., Littell’s Living Age, 85:138 (8 April 1865).

³⁹⁶ Richmond correspondence, 6 April 1865, in R. J. M. Blackett, ed., Thomas Morris Chester, Black Civil War Correspondent: His Dispatches from the Virginia Front (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 294.

“Don’t kneel to me. That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy.”³⁹⁷

When Lincoln asked directions to General Weitzel’s headquarters, a black man offered to show the way.³⁹⁸ Half a dozen sailors from the barge, armed with carbines, led the presidential party; another six sailors brought up the rear. Between them Lincoln walked along, holding Tad’s hand. Flanking them were Porter, Adams, Penrose, and Clemens. Blacks surrounded the little group, shouting, clapping, dancing, throwing hats into the air, waving bonnets and handkerchiefs, and applauding loudly. They stirred up great clouds of dust which, combined with the smoke from smoldering buildings set ablaze by the retreating Confederates, made the warm atmosphere quite oppressive. Lincoln, with his long overcoat, was perspiring freely and fanning himself to cool off.³⁹⁹

Because of the heat, and because Tad had trouble keeping up, the little party stopped to rest. At that point, according to Coffin, “an old negro, wearing a few rags, whose white, crisp hair appeared through his crownless straw hat, lifted the hat from his head, kneeled upon the ground, clasped his hands, and said, ‘May de good Lord bress and keep you safe, Massa President Linkum.’” The president “lifted his own hat and bowed to the old man.”⁴⁰⁰ Lincoln’s gesture was, Coffin thought, “a bow which upset the forms, laws, customs, and ceremonies of centuries. It was a death-shock to chivalry, and a mortal wound to caste.” A white woman observing this scene turned away “with

³⁹⁷ Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 295.

³⁹⁸ Coffin, Lincoln, 505; Richmond correspondence by Coffin in the Boston Journal, n.d., Littell’s Living Age, 85:138 (8 April 1865).

³⁹⁹ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 748; diary of Lelian Cook, 4 April 1865, Richmond News Leader, 3 April 1935, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁰ Coffin in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 182; Richmond correspondence by Coffin in the Boston Journal, n.d., Littell’s Living Age, 85:138 (8 April 1865).

unspeakable contempt.”⁴⁰¹ To Coffin, the most impressive feature of the day “was the respect which Lincoln showed to the poor creatures when he removed his hat, while the old negro prayed God to bless him.”⁴⁰² The “tears almost came to his eyes as he heard the thanksgivings to God and Jesus, and the blessings uttered for him from thankful hearts.”⁴⁰³

As the procession made its way slowly up the street, it paused once again at Libby prison, where captive Union officers had been incarcerated in especially grim conditions. When someone suggested that it be torn down, Lincoln objected, saying it should be preserved as a monument. A white man in shirtsleeves rushed from the sidewalk toward the president and shouted, “Abraham Lincoln, God bless you! You are the poor man’s friend!” Then a beautiful white teen-aged girl pushed through the crowd to hand the president a bouquet of roses with a card bearing a simple message: “From Eva to the Liberator of the slaves.”⁴⁰⁴ Eventually word reached Weitzel that the president had arrived, and he dispatched a squad of cavalry to escort the party to his headquarters in the Confederate White House.⁴⁰⁵

There Lincoln, looking “pale and haggard” and “utterly worn out with fatigue and the excitement of the past hour,” sat down in Jefferson Davis’s chair and softly requested a glass of water. Captain Barnes, who had finally caught up with the presidential

⁴⁰¹ Coffin, “Late Scenes in Richmond,” Atlantic Monthly, June 1865, 755; Coffin, Four Years of Fighting: A Volume of Personal Observation with the Army and Navy, from the First Battle of Bull Run to the Fall of Richmond (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 512.

⁴⁰² Charles Carleton Coffin to Thomas Nast, 19 July 1866, reprinted in The Moorsfield Antiquarian, vol. 1 (May 1937):26-28.

⁴⁰³ Richmond correspondence by Coffin in the Boston Journal, n.d., Littell’s Living Age, 85:138 (8 April 1865).

⁴⁰⁴ Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 298-300.

⁴⁰⁵ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 748; Richmond correspondence by Coffin in the Boston Journal, n.d., Littell’s Living Age, 85:138 (8 April 1865).

entourage, recalled that there “was no triumph in his gesture or attitude. He lay back in the chair like a tired man whose nerves had carried him beyond his strength.”⁴⁰⁶ He wore a “look of unutterable weariness, as if his spirit, energy and animating force were wholly exhausted,” Coffin reported.⁴⁰⁷ So tired was he that when he stepped onto the balcony to acknowledge the cheering crowd in the street, he merely bowed rather than speaking.⁴⁰⁸

Soon General Weitzel arrived, along with General George F. Shepley, the military governor of Virginia. After congratulating them, Lincoln met privately with some Confederate leaders who had requested an interview. Among them were General Joseph R. Anderson and former Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court John A. Campbell, who looked “pale,” “care-worn,” and “agitated.” Campbell gave Lincoln a very low bow, and the president received him “with dignity, yet cordially.”⁴⁰⁹ Campbell, who explained that that he had no authorization to negotiate on behalf of the Confederacy or Virginia, recommended a lenient peace. He stated that the war for all intents and purposes was over, that the Army of Northern Virginia could not be held together, and that leading Virginians (like William C. Rives, John Letcher, R. M. T. Hunter, John Baldwin, Allen T. Caperton, and James Philemon Holcombe) would help restore the Union. Weitzel, whom the president invited to sit in on the discussion, recalled that Lincoln “insisted that he could not treat with any Rebels until they had laid down their arms and surrendered, and that if this were first done he would go as far as he possibly could to prevent the shedding of another drop of blood, and that he and the good people of the North were

⁴⁰⁶ Barnes, “With Lincoln,” 748-49.

⁴⁰⁷ Coffin in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 183.

⁴⁰⁸ Grattan, Under the Blue Pennant, 199.

⁴⁰⁹ Coffin, Four Years of Fighting, 513-14.

surfeited with this thing and wanted it to end as soon as possible.” Lincoln said he would consider Campbell’s suggestions, invited him to a consultation the following day, and asked that he bring along any citizens who might prove useful.⁴¹⁰

After this conversation, Lincoln joined Weitzel and Shepley for a tour of Richmond. As they rode along in an ordinary two-seat buggy, hundreds of the city’s blacks in a frenzy of exultation shouted out expressions of gratitude and joy, sang songs of deliverance, wept, and threw their hands in the air. A black correspondent told readers of the Philadelphia Press that there was “no describing the scene along the route. The colored population was wild with enthusiasm. Old men thanked God in a very boisterous manner, and old women shouted upon the pavement as high as they had ever done at religious revival.”⁴¹¹ One celebrant declared: “Jeff Davis did not wait to see his master but he had come at last.”⁴¹² Others exclaimed: “thank God, Jesus Christ has come at last” and “God Bless Abum Linkum, bless his heart, I give him the last thing I got in the world.”⁴¹³ According to Shepley, Lincoln “looked at it all attentively, with a face expressive only of a sort of pathetic wonder. Occasionally its sadness would alternate with one of his peculiar smiles, and he would remark on the great proportion of those whose color indicated a mixed lineage from the white master and the black slave; and

⁴¹⁰ John A. Campbell to Joseph R. Anderson and others, Richmond, 7 April 1865, Southern Historical Society Papers 24 (1896):351-53; John A. Campbell to Benjamin R. Curtis, Fort Pulaski, Georgia, 20 July 1865, Century Magazine, October 1889, 950; Henry G. Connor, John Archibald Campbell: Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, 1853-1861 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 175-77; John A. Campbell, Recollections of the Evacuation of Richmond, April 2d, 1865 (Baltimore: J. Murphy, 1880), 8-9.

⁴¹¹ Richmond correspondence, 6 April 1865, in Blackett, ed., Thomas Morris Chester, 295.

⁴¹² Diary of Mrs. Thomas Walker Doswell (Mrs. Francis Anne Sutton), entry for 4 April 1865, library.thinkquest.org/J0113361/diary.htm.

⁴¹³ Samuel Henry Roberts to Harvey Roberts, Headquarters of the 3rd brigade, 2nd division, 24th Army Corps, Richmond, 16 April 1865, photocopy in the Samuel Henry Roberts Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

that reminded him of some little story of his life in Kentucky, which he would smilingly tell.”⁴¹⁴ A white woman who observed the president said he “seemed tired and old.”⁴¹⁵

At Capitol Square, Lincoln allegedly addressed a huge, mostly black crowd. According to David Porter’s account, the president said: “My poor friends, you are free – free as air. You can cast off the name of slave and trample upon it; it will come to you no more. Liberty is your birthright. God gave it to you as he gave it to others, and it is a sin that you have been deprived of it for so many years. But you must try to deserve this priceless boon. Let the world see that you merit it, and are able to maintain it by your good works. Don’t let your joy carry you into excesses. Learn the laws and obey them; obey God’s commandments and thank him for giving you liberty, for to him you owe all things. There, now, let me pass on; I have but little time to spare. I want to see the capital, and must return at once to Washington to secure to you that liberty which you seem to prize so highly.”⁴¹⁶ He toured the capitol, which the legislators had precipitously abandoned two days earlier. Overturned desks, bundles of Confederate money, and random government documents were strewn about haphazardly. En route back to the landing site, the presidential entourage rolled past the notorious prisons, Libby and Castle Thunder, both overflowing with captured Rebels. At the wharf, as Lincoln boarded a

⁴¹⁴ Shepley, “Incidents of the Capture of Richmond,” Atlantic Monthly 46 (July 1880):128.

⁴¹⁵ Sara Agnes Pryor, letter of 5 April 1865, in Pryor, Reminiscences, 357.

⁴¹⁶ Porter, Incidents and Anecdotes, 295. Some sources suggest that he did not address the crowd, but Lelian Cook, a seventeen-year-old girl living at the home of the Rev. Mr. Moses D. Hoge, recorded in her diary for 4 April 1865 that after visiting Jefferson Davis’s residence, “Lincoln appeared on the square, accompanied by an escort of colored troops. He was in a carriage-and-four. I heard he made an address to the colored people, telling them they were free, and had no master now but God.” Richmond News Leader, 3 April 1935, p. 2. Porter’s version of Lincoln’s remarks sounds like the president’s address to the blacks who called at the White House in November 1864.

cutter which would take him back to the Malvern, an elderly black woman cried out: “Don’t drown, Massa Abe, for God’s sake!”⁴¹⁷

The next morning, General Edward Hastings Ripley warned Lincoln of a plot against his life and recommended steps to guard against it. “No, General Ripley, it is impossible for me to adopt and follow your suggestions,” he replied. “I deeply appreciate the feeling which has led you to urge them on me, but I must go on as I have begun in the course marked out for me; for I cannot bring myself to believe that any human being lives who would do me any harm.”⁴¹⁸ (Soon thereafter, while describing his experiences in Richmond, Lincoln played down the chances that he could be assassinated in Washington: “I walked alone on the street, and anyone could have shot me from a second-story window.”)⁴¹⁹

LET 'EM UP EASY: DEALING WITH THE DEFEATED REBELS

The president met again with Campbell, who brought with him an eminent Richmond attorney, Gustavus Myers. Lincoln began by reading a memo reiterating the three preconditions for peace that he had presented at the Hampton Roads conference. He added that that it seemed futile “to be more specific with those who will not say they are ready for the indispensable terms, even on conditions to be named by themselves. If there be any who are ready for those indispensable terms, on any conditions whatever, let them say so, and state their conditions, so that such conditions can be distinctly known, and considered.”

⁴¹⁷ Richmond correspondence, 6 April 1865, Blackett, ed., Thomas Morris Chester, 297.

⁴¹⁸ Otto Eisenschiml, ed., Vermont General: The Unusual War Experiences of Edward Hastings Ripley, 1862-1865 (New York: Devin-Adair, 1960), 307-308.

⁴¹⁹ Chapman, Latest Light on Lincoln, 2:500.

To encourage die-hards to surrender, Lincoln offered a practical inducement: “the remission of confiscations being within the executive power, if the war be now further persisted in, by those opposing the government, the making of confiscated property at the least to bear the additional cost, will be insisted on; but that confiscations (except in cases of third party intervening interests) will be remitted to the people of any State which shall now promptly, and in good faith, withdraw it's troops and other support, from further resistance to the government. What is now said as to remission of confiscations has no reference to supposed property in slaves.”

According to Myers, Lincoln provided a running commentary on this document: “In reference to the confiscation of property, the Prest said that that was in his power, and he should be disposed to exercise that power in the spirit of true liberality.” He also “professed himself really desirous to see an end of the struggle, and said he hoped in the Providence of God that there never would be another” and “that he was thinking over a plan by which the Virginia Legislature might be brought to hold their meeting in the Capitol in Richmond, – for the purpose of seeing whether they desired to take any action on behalf of the States in view of the existing state of affairs, and informed Genl Weitzel that he would write to him from City point on that subject in a day or two. The outline of his plan being, that safe conduct should be given to the members to come hither, and that after a reasonable time were allowed them to deliberate, should they arrive at no conclusion, they would have safe conduct afforded them to leave Richmond.”

The three men then discussed loyalty oaths. Myers, who was alarmed by rumors that such an oath would be demanded of city residents, remarked “that the conciliatory course pursued by the Federal forces since their arrival in Richmond, had had a powerful

effect in allaying the apprehension and producing kindly feelings on the part of the Citizens” and that “the opinion that the adoption of any other course on the part of the Federal authorities would be productive of irritation and conducive to no good result.” Lincoln replied “that he had never attached much importance to the oath of allegiance being required,” but would defer to Weitzel. The general said he was not disposed to require it. “Other conversation occurred, in which the President declared his disposition to be lenient towards all persons, however prominent, who had taken part in the struggle, and certainly no exhibition was made by him of any feeling of vindictiveness or exultation.”⁴²⁰

Campbell had a slightly different recollection: the president “with emphasis and gesture” declared “that he had said nothing in the paper as to pains and penalties. That he supposed, that it would not be proper to offer a pardon to Mr. Davis, whom we familiarly call Jeff Davis – who says he won’t have one. But that most anyone can have most anything of the kind for the asking.” Lincoln added “that he had been thinking of a plan for calling the Virginia Legislature, that had been sitting in Richmond, together, and to get them [to] vote for the restoration of Virginia to the Union. That he had not arranged the matter to his satisfaction and would not decide upon it until after his return to City Point, and he would communicate with Genl. Weitzell. He said: ‘He deemed it important that [the] ‘very legislature’ that had been sitting in Richmond should vote upon the question. That he had a government in Northern Virginia – the Pierpont Government – but it had but a small margin, and he did not desire to enlarge it.’ He said: ‘That the Virginia

⁴²⁰ Myers, manuscript memoranda, Virginia Historical Society.

Legislature was in the condition of a tenant between two contending landlords and that it should attorn to the party that had established the better claim.”⁴²¹

Campbell then read Lincoln a paper suggesting that Grant be authorized to establish an armistice which would lead to permanent peace; that no loyalty oaths be required; that no property be confiscated; and that modes be spelled out for negotiating with Confederate officials.⁴²² Lincoln rejected the proposed armistice: “We will not negotiate with men as long as they are fighting against us. The last election established this as the deliberate determination of the country.”⁴²³ He did, however, ask for a copy of the statement, which he said he would take under advisement. The interview was civil, and the participants were in a good humor.⁴²⁴

Around noon, Lincoln called at Weitzel’s headquarters and told him that he would consider the issues carefully and send instructions the following day. As they discussed the best way to treat the defeated enemy, Lincoln said that he was reluctant to issue orders on the matter but he did advise the general: “If I were in your place I’d let ’em up easy – let ’em up easy.”⁴²⁵ Then he steamed back to City Point aboard the Malvern.

⁴²¹ Campbell to Benjamin R. Curtis, Fort Pulsaki, Georgia, 20 July 1865, Century Magazine, October 1889, 953; Campbell to James S. Speed, 31 August 1865, Southern Historical Society Papers, new series, 4:68-69; Richmond correspondence, n.d., New York Herald, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 12 July 1865. Cf. Campbell, Recollections of the Evacuation of Richmond, 11-13.

⁴²² Campbell’s April 5 proposal to Lincoln, Campbell Papers, SC 240, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴²³ Washington correspondence, 20 April, New York Tribune, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 26 April 1865.

⁴²⁴ Myers, manuscript memoranda, Virginia Historical Society; Campbell to James S. Speed, 31 August 1865, Southern Historical Society Papers, new series, 4:68-69; Richmond correspondence, n.d., New York Herald, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 12 July 1865.

⁴²⁵ Thomas Thatcher Graves in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (4 vols.; New York: Century, 1887-1888), 4:728.

When General Shepley, an accomplished lawyer, learned of Lincoln's decision to authorize the members of the Virginia legislature to reconvene, he predicted that it would be wildly unpopular, that the cabinet would disapprove, and that Weitzel might well be blamed unless he had the presidential order in writing. Shepley explained his thinking: "By this shrewd move of Judge Campbell the rebel legislature, assembled under the new constitution recognizing the Confederacy, will covertly gain recognition as a legal and valid legislature, and creep into the Union with all its rebel legislation in force, thus preserving all the peculiar rebel institutions, including slavery; and they will get, as the price of defeat, all they hoped to achieve as the fruits of victory. The thing is monstrous."⁴²⁶

On April 6, anticipating that Weitzel might be unfairly blamed for the decision, Lincoln sent him a formal order confirming his earlier verbal instructions: "It has been intimated to me that the gentlemen who have acted as the Legislature of Virginia, in support of the rebellion, may now desire to assemble at Richmond, and take measures to withdraw the Virginia troops, and other support from resistance to the General government. If they attempt it, give them permission and protection, until, if at all, they attempt some action hostile to the United States, in which case you will notify them and give them reasonable time to leave; & at the end of which time, arrest any who may remain." Weitzel was to regard this as private but was authorized to show it to Campbell.⁴²⁷

"The drafting of that order, though so short, gave me more perplexity than any other paper I ever drew up," Lincoln told Governor Francis Pierpont. He worked on it for

⁴²⁶ Shepley, "Incidents of the Capture of Richmond," 27.

⁴²⁷ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:389.

hours that night, trying to make clear that the men who had been serving in the legislature were to reassemble for the sole purpose of withdrawing the army from the field. “But if I had known that General Lee would surrender so soon I would not have issued the proclamation,” he added. In stark contrast to what Campbell reported, Lincoln (according to Pierpont) said: “your government at Alexandria was fully in my mind, and I intended to recognize the restored government, of which you were head, as the rightful government of Virginia.”⁴²⁸

As Shepley predicted, Lincoln’s order sparked a firestorm of protest, and the cabinet disapproved of the plan. Stanton was, as he later said, “vehemently opposed” to the scheme and held “several very earnest conversations” with the president, advising him “that any effort to reorganize the Government should be under Federal authority solely, treating the rebel organizations and government as absolutely null and void.”⁴²⁹ Welles, Dennison, and Speed also objected.⁴³⁰ When Senator Wade learned of Lincoln’s plan, he reportedly said in furious tones “that there had been much talk about the assassination of Lincoln – that if he authorized the approval of that paper . . . by God, the sooner he was assassinated the better.”⁴³¹ His fellow Radical George W. Julian said he had never seen “such force and fitness in Ben Wade’s swearing.”⁴³²

The legislators remaining in Richmond did meet and grossly overstepped the limits that Lincoln had placed on their authority. They acted as though they were the

⁴²⁸ Charles H. Ambler, Francis H. Pierpont: Union War Governor of Virginia and Father of West Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 256-57.

⁴²⁹ Stanton’s testimony before a congressional committee, in Flower, Stanton, 271.

⁴³⁰ Welles, “Lincoln and Johnson,” 186-87.

⁴³¹ Hans L. Trefousse, Benjamin Franklin Wade: Radical Republican from Ohio (New York: Twayne, 1963), 246, citing an undated memo by B. B. French in the French Papers, New-York Historical Society.

⁴³² George W. Julian, Political Recollections, 1840 to 1872 (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, 1884), 252-254.

legitimate government of the commonwealth, empowered to negotiate peace terms. On April 9, Lee surrendered and thus made Campbell's armistice scheme unnecessary.

Lincoln was, according to Pierpont, "justly indignant," and three days later revoked the order he had given Weitzel.⁴³³ When the press blamed that general for the action of the legislature and condemned him as a Rebel sympathizer, he refuted the charge by citing the Lincoln's text. To the cabinet, Lincoln explained that he thought "the members of the legislature, being the prominent and influential men of their respective counties, had better come together and undo their own work." The president said he "felt assured they would do this" and believed their action would prove to be "a good one. Civil government must be reestablished as soon as possible. There must be courts and law and order, or society would be broken up, the disbanded armies would turn into robber bands and guerrillas."⁴³⁴

ENDGAME

Events were rapidly overtaking the peacemakers. As Union cavalry pursued the Confederates fleeing westward, Lincoln remarked that "Sheridan seemed to be getting Virginia soldiers out of the war faster than this legislature could think."⁴³⁵ He made a similar observation in a message to Grant describing the instruction he had given to Weitzel regarding the Virginia legislature: "I do not think it very probable that anything will come of this," he said, "but I have thought best to notify you, so that if you should see signs, you may understand them. From your recent despatches it seems that you are

⁴³³ Pierpont interview, manuscript, Pierpont Papers, West Virginia University; Campbell, Recollections of the Evacuation of Richmond, 14-17, 23-27.

⁴³⁴ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:279-280 (entry for 13 April 1865); Welles, "Lincoln and Johnson," 187-188.

⁴³⁵ Charles A. Dana to Stanton, Richmond, 7 April 1865, OR, I, 46, 3:619.

pretty effectually withdrawing the Virginia troops from opposition to the government. Nothing I have done, or probably shall do, is to delay, hinder, or interfere with you in your work.”⁴³⁶

The Army of Northern Virginia was indeed dwindling as more and more troops deserted. In desperation, the Confederate Congress authorized the enlistment of blacks, and Jefferson Davis reluctantly assented. When told that the Rebels might resort to such a measure, Lincoln remarked that “when they had reached that stage the cause of the war would cease and hostilities with it. The evil would cure itself.”⁴³⁷

At City Point, a Confederate prisoner of war, General Rufus Barringer, asked to see Lincoln, who expressed keen interest in meeting him. “I have never seen a live rebel general in full uniform,” he remarked. When the captive identified himself as a brother of Daniel Barringer, whom the president had befriended when they both served in Congress, Lincoln relaxed and joyfully reminisced about his days as a U.S. Representative. After a long conversation, he innocently asked Barringer: “Do you think I can be of any service to you?” Everyone within earshot laughed heartily at such a quaint question. Realizing how naïve he sounded, Lincoln quickly began writing a note to Stanton. As he did so, he told Barringer: “I suppose they will send you to Washington, and there I have no doubt they will put you in the old Capitol prison. I am told it isn’t a nice sort of a place, and I am afraid you won’t find it a very comfortable tavern; but I have a powerful friend in Washington – he’s the biggest man in the country, – and I believe I have some influence with him when I don’t ask too much. Now I want you to send this card of introduction to him, and if he takes the notion he may put you on your parole, or let up on you that way

⁴³⁶ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:388.

⁴³⁷ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:222 (entry for 6 January 1865).

or some other way. Anyhow, it's worth trying." The note asked Stanton to make Barringer's "detention in Washington as comfortable as possible." Speechless at this display of presidential magnanimity, Barringer left the tent and burst into tears. He was paroled three months later.⁴³⁸

On April 7, Lincoln and his guests toured Petersburg. Some curious black servants aboard the River Queen wished to accompany them. The Marquis de Chambrun reported that Lincoln, who "was blinded by no prejudices against race or color" and who "had not what can be termed false dignity," invited them to sit with the presidential party.⁴³⁹ In Petersburg, the president got off one of his better puns. At a house which George L. Hartsuff had commandeered as his headquarters, the general explained that its owner was demanding rent. Pointing to a hole in the wall punched by a Union artillery shell, Lincoln quipped: "I think our batteries have given him rents enough without asking for more."⁴⁴⁰ That morning he also sent Grant a telegram which succinctly expressed the iron determination which characterized his leadership throughout the war: "Gen. Sheridan says 'If the thing is pressed I think that Lee will surrender.' Let the thing be pressed."⁴⁴¹

As the visitors toured Petersburg, where most houses were closed and most shops either abandoned or vandalized, blacks crowded the streets to cheer their liberator while whites hastily sought refuge to avoid having to look upon him. After consulting with Hartsuff, Lincoln reported to his companions that "[a]nimosity in the town is abating, the

⁴³⁸ Charles H. T. Collis, "Lincoln's Magnanimity," in Collis, A Woman's War Record, 62-69.

⁴³⁹ Chambrun, "Personal Recollections of Mr. Lincoln," Scribner's Magazine, January 1893, 28.

⁴⁴⁰ Benson Lossing, diary fragment, 25 April 1865, University of Virginia.

⁴⁴¹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:392.

inhabitants now accept accomplished facts, the final downfall of the Confederacy, and the abolition of slavery. There still remains much for us to do, but every day brings new reason for confidence in the future.” On his way back to City Point, he ordered the carriage to halt before a tall tree, whose beauty he analyzed. Like a botany teacher lecturing students, he pointed out its strong trunk and elaborate branches, comparing it to an oak and striving to make his fellow passengers appreciate the distinctive character of different types of trees.⁴⁴²

FAREWELL TO CITY POINT: HOSPITAL VISITS

The next night, Lincoln returned to Washington, where Seward had recently been injured in a carriage accident. Before departing, he spent five hours visiting the hospitals of each corps, even though doctors warned him that greeting thousands of men would be more than he could endure. When the physicians spoke proudly of the hospital facilities, he replied: “Gentlemen, you know better than I how to conduct these hospitals, but I came here to take by the hand the men who have achieved our glorious victories.”⁴⁴³ And so he began shaking hands with the wounded. Private Wilbur Fisk noted that the president “appeared to take delight in it. I believe he had almost as much pleasure in honoring the boys, as the boys did in receiving the honor from him. It was an unexpected honor, coming from the man upon whom the world is looking with so much interest, and the boys were pleased with it beyond measure. Everything passed off in a very quiet manner; there was no crowding or disorder of any kind.” The patients who were not

⁴⁴² Chambrun, “Personal Recollections of Mr. Lincoln,” 29; Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 167-70.

⁴⁴³ Nellie Hancock to Cornelia Hancock, [City Point], 11 April 1865, in Henrietta Stratton Jaquette, ed., South after Gettysburg: Letters of Cornelia Hancock from the Army of the Potomac, 1863-1865 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937), 170.

bedridden formed a line which Lincoln passed along, speaking to every one as he shook hands:

“Are you well, sir?”

“How do you do to-day?”

“How are you, sir?”

Then he entered the stockades and tents to greet those too weak to join the line. Private Fisk commented that “Mr. Lincoln presides over millions of people, and each individual share of his attention must necessarily be very small, and yet he wouldn’t slight the humblest of them all. . . . The men not only reverence and admire Mr. Lincoln, but they love him.”⁴⁴⁴

After shaking the hands of Union soldiers, he turned to enter tents housing Confederate wounded.

“Mr. President, you do not want to go in there!” exclaimed a doctor.

“Why not, my boy?” he asked.

“Why, sir, they are sick rebel prisoners.”

“That is just where I do want to go,” he said and shook the hands of many surprised Confederates.⁴⁴⁵

Nearly every Union soldier asked the president about the military and political situation. They smiled with happiness when Lincoln said: “Success all along the line.” He assured them that the war would end within six weeks.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ Chambrun, “Personal Recollections of Mr. Lincoln,” 29; Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt, eds., Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 322-23 (dispatches dated 6th Corps Hospital, City Point, 9, 20 April 1865).

⁴⁴⁵ Adelaide W. Smith, Reminiscences of an Army Nurse During the Civil War (New York: Greaves, 1911), 223-24.

Lincoln's mood in his final days at the front oscillated between hearty bonhomie and sad introspection. Chambrun recalled that "it was rare to converse with him a while without feeling something poignant. . . . Mr. Lincoln was quite humorous, although one could always detect a bit of irony in his humor. He would relate anecdotes, seeking always to bring the point out clearly. He willingly laughed either at what was being said to him, or at what he said himself. But all of a sudden he would retire within himself; then he would close his eyes, and all his features would at once bespeak a kind of sadness as indescribable as it was deep. After a while, as though it were by an effort of his will, he would shake off this mysterious weight under which he seemed bowed; his generous and open disposition would again reappear. In one evening I happened to count over twenty of these alternations and contrasts." This pattern had been observed by Lincoln's friends for decades.

In discussing peace plans, Lincoln emphasized the need to show mercy and clemency to the defeated foe. Told that the suffering of Union soldiers in Libby prison should trump the claims of mercy, he twice repeated the Biblical injunction: "Let us judge not, that we be not judged." When Chambrun alluded to the possibility of war between France and the U.S. over Napoleon III's intervention in Mexico, Lincoln remarked: "There has been war enough. I know what the American people want, but, thank God, I count for something, and during my second term there will be no more fighting."

In the afternoon, Lincoln asked a military band to play "La Marseillaise," saying "he had a great liking for that tune." To Chambrun he noted the irony of the situation:

⁴⁴⁶ Chambrun to his wife, Washington, 10 April 1865, in Chambrun, Impressions of Lincoln, 79; Nellie Hancock to Cornelia Hancock, [City Point], 11 April 1865, in Jaquette, ed., South after Gettysburg, 170.

“You must come over to America to hear it.” (Napoleon III had banned the playing of revolutionary anthem.) Upon learning that Chambrun was unfamiliar with the song “Dixie,” he requested the band to strike it up, much to the musicians’ surprise. “That tune is now Federal property; it belongs to us, and, at any rate, it is good to show the rebels that with us they will be free to hear it again.”⁴⁴⁷

At 10 p.m., the River Queen weighed anchor and headed for Washington. As it pulled away, Lincoln, lost in thought, stood at the rail gazing at the distant hills. He continued to meditate long after they disappeared from view. It is hard to imagine the profound thoughts that ran through his mind that night. He probably reviewed the entire course of the war, from the shelling of Fort Sumter through the capture of Richmond. He may have thought of all the blood shed by the 620,000 troops, North and South, who had died over the past four years, including friends like Elmer Ellsworth, Ben Hardin Helm, and Edward D. Baker; all the wounded, many of whom he had spoken to that day; all the mourning widows and orphans; all the vast destruction of property, so vividly apparent amid the ruins of Petersburg and Richmond. Counterbalancing those grim reflections, he probably derived immense satisfaction recalling the joy of the liberated slaves who thronged about him in those two cities. How could justice for those people be secured while simultaneously granting mercy to their former masters? Long ago, while immersed in the study of geometry, he had tried to square the circle. Now he would, metaphorically speaking, try once again to do the same thing.

Lincoln and Congress both addressed the problem of Reconstruction and had reached an impasse. He had stuck by his Ten Percent Plan and the Radicals had countered

⁴⁴⁷ Chambrun, “Personal Recollections of Mr. Lincoln,” 32-34. Cf. Chambrun to his wife, Washington, 16-18 April 1865, in Chambrun, Impressions of Lincoln, 100.

with the Wade-Davis bill. He had stymied them with his veto; they had thwarted him by refusing to recognize the Louisiana government and seat its congressmen and senators. His principal motive in framing Reconstruction policy had been to induce the Confederates to surrender. Now that the war was virtually over, should he compromise with the Radicals?