

LINCOLN LORE

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THE FAR WEST—LAST THOUGHTS OF LINCOLN

The last spoken word used by Abraham Lincoln in business conversation was "San Francisco," and the Golden Gate City was the first metropolis to honor Lincoln's name, after his death, by the erection of a heroic statue in his likeness. This statue by Pietro Mezzaro was destroyed by the great fire which swept the city on April 18, 1906, but it has recently been replaced by an excellent bronze statue of Lincoln by Haig Patigan.

To Schuyler Colfax was given the privilege of having the earliest as well as the latest interview with the President at the White House on the fatal fourteenth of April, 1865. While Lincoln was at breakfast, it was announced that Colfax had arrived; and, when the carriage drew away from the White House for Ford's Theatre that evening, it was Colfax to whom Lincoln was speaking. The subject of the conversation on both of these visits had to do with the Far West.

Colfax, as chairman of the Committee on Post Office and Post Roads, had been instrumental to a large extent in securing the Overland Mail and Telegraph to the Pacific coast. In recognition of this service he was invited to make a western trip and expected to go in 1861, but the war interrupted. With the close of the war plans for the trip were again made and he was scheduled to leave Washington April 15, 1865.

There were many things he wished to talk over with the President before leaving, so we find him at the White House bright and early the morning of April 14. Mr. Lincoln and Speaker Colfax were in conference for about an hour and policies of reconstruction were discussed, among them the part the Far West was to play in the program.

It was this phase of the discussion which caused Lincoln to suggest that Colfax on his western trip convey a message to the miners of Colorado, Nevada, and California. It is very fortunate indeed that Mr. Colfax took occasion to write down the message he had received from Mr. Lincoln, and it is so seldom seen in print that it should comprise a part of this monograph. It follows as recorded by Mr. Colfax:

MESSAGE TO THE MINERS OF THE WEST BY ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"I have very large ideas of the mineral wealth of our nation. I believe it practically inexhaustible. It abounds all over the Western country from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, and its development has scarcely commenced. During the war, when we were adding a couple of millions of dollars every day to our national debt, I did not care about encouraging the increase in the volumes of our precious metals. We had the country to save first. But now that the rebellion is overthrown, and we know pretty nearly the amount of our national debt, the more gold and silver we mine, makes the payment of that debt so much easier. Now I am going to encourage that in every possible way. We shall have hundreds of thousands of disbanded soldiers, and many have feared that their return home in such great numbers might paralyze industry by furnishing suddenly a greater supply of labor than there will be demand for. I am going to try to attract them to the hidden wealth of our mountain ranges where there is room enough for all. Immigration, which even the war has not stopped, will land upon our shores hundreds of thousands more per year from over-crowded Europe. I intend to point them to the gold and silver that waits for them in the West. Tell the miners, from me, that I shall promote their interests to the utmost of my ability, because their prosperity is the prosperity of the nation; and we shall prove in a very few years that we are indeed the TREASURY OF THE WORLD."

At the request of the President, Colfax was back at the White House again for a further interview in the evening, and Mr. George Ashmun of Massachusetts was also with him. It will be recalled that this is the same Ashmun who presided over the Chicago Convention and who was chairman of the committee to notify Lincoln of his nomination in 1860.

During the conversation President Lincoln mentioned that one of his friends had the gavel used by the Confederate Congress at Richmond and told Colfax that he insisted it be presented to him as Speaker. "Tell him from me to hand it over," he said. The mention of the gavel caused Mr. Ashmun to remark that he still had the gavel used at the Chicago Convention.

Although Lincoln was an hour late in starting for the theatre performance, he was still reluctant to go. He stated that as General Grant had not been able to attend, as already announced, he felt obliged to go, as he did not want the people to be disappointed inasmuch as it was announced that they would both be there.

Just before entering the carriage Mr. Lincoln said, "Colfax, do not forget to tell the people in the mining regions as you pass through them, what I told you this morning about the development when peace comes." After he had entered the carriage, according to one authority, he called back, "I will telegraph you, Colfax, at San Francisco." These were his last words in business conversation.

The people of the West had known of the President's interest in the development of the western country, and to them Speaker Colfax delivered what might be called the last public message authorized by Abraham Lincoln.

Accompanying Colfax on this overland trip were Mr. Bowles of the *Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican*, Mr. Richardson of the *New York Tribune*, and Lt. Governor Bross of the *Chicago Tribune*.

The tour of these distinguished people, coming just at the time of Lincoln's assassination, seemed to take the form of a public mission and great numbers along the route traversed heard Lincoln's last message to the people delivered by Colfax.