

LINCOLN LORE

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THE AFTERMATH OF LINCOLN'S ELECTION

So little attention appears to have been paid to the fact that November 6, just past, marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency that it seems wise to call further attention to this event by noting some incidents occurring during the aftermath of his successful campaign.

The days immediately following Lincoln's election to the presidency were probably the most trying ones of his career. The fact that he wrote and said very little gave immediate assurance that he would move with great caution and refrain from any demonstration which would invite hostilities and widen the breach made by his election.

His Policy of Silence

The few notes he did write indicate that he was deluged with letters which attempted to lead him into open discussion. To Hon. Truman Smith he wrote, "It is with the most profound appreciation of your motive, and highest respect for your judgment, too, that I feel constrained, for the present at least, to make no declaration for the public."

Lincoln's reply to another correspondent who attempted to draw him out indicates the type of many letters he received: "I could say nothing which I have not already said, and which is in print, and accessible to the public. Please pardon me for suggesting that if the papers like yours, which heretofore have persistently garbled and misrepresented what I have said, will now fully and fairly place it before their readers, there can be no further misunderstanding."

Another editor, a very prominent one, Hon. Henry J. Raymond, sounded him out on the possibility of getting a statement. Lincoln took occasion to point out to Raymond the reaction towards a speech made by one of Lincoln's friends which was greatly exaggerated by the editors of various hostile papers. He referred to the incident in these words: "This is just as I expected, and just what would happen with any declaration I could make. These political fiends are not half sick enough yet. Party malice, and not public good, possesses them entirely. 'They seek a sign, and no sign shall be given them.' At least such is my present feeling and purpose."

The First Post Election Letter

After the results of his successful canvass had been ascertained apparently the first letter which he wrote was to his running mate, Hannibal Hamlin of Maine. The letter is dated November 8 and is here printed in full:

"Springfield, Illinois, November 8, 1860.

"Hon. Hannibal Hamlin.

"My Dear Sir: I am anxious for a personal interview with you at as early a day as possible. Can you, without much inconvenience, meet me at Chicago? If you can, please name as early a day as you conveniently can, and telegraph me, unless there be sufficient time before the day named to communicate by mail.

"Yours very truly,

"A. LINCOLN."

The contents of this correspondence reveal how considerate Lincoln was in allowing Hamlin to set the date of the conference, and he was equally anxious to avoid the unnecessary expense of sending a telegram if a letter would answer the purpose.

First Address as President-Elect

On November 20, the citizens of Springfield, Illinois, gathered to celebrate the election of President Lincoln, and he was urged to say something. Little attention has been given to this first address made by Lincoln as president-elect. If one will read carefully his brief remarks which are here printed in full, it will be observed that the same spirit which permeated a famous address near the close of his career also found expression here. "With malice towards none, with charity for all" was but the sequel to this maiden presidential effort:

"Please excuse me on this occasion from making a speech. I thank you in common with all those who have thought fit by their votes to endorse the Republican cause. I rejoice with you in the success which has thus far attended that cause. Yet in all our rejoicings, let us neither express nor cherish any hard feelings toward any citizen who by his vote has differed with us. Let us at all times remember that all American citizens are brothers of a common country, and should dwell together in the bonds of fraternal feeling. Let me again beg you to accept my thanks, and to excuse me from further speaking at this time."

Two Brief Talks

The date for the conference of Lincoln and Hamlin at Chicago had been set for November 21 and enroute from Springfield to Chicago Lincoln made brief talks at both the towns of Lincoln and Bloomington. At these places he also explained his policy of silence with respect to political issues. He said at Lincoln, "I am not in the habit of making speeches now;" and at Bloomington he told a story which illustrated the statement, "So I think of the whole of this nation—they will ever do well if well done by."

Old Friends

Another class of correspondence which called for Lincoln's personal attention was the letters from old friends of the Lincoln family who had known them in the Kentucky and Indiana days. These messages of good will were welcomed by Lincoln and helped to relieve the tension under which he worked. In an answer to a letter from David Turnham of Spencer County, Indiana, he wrote, "I would much like to visit the old home, and old friends of my boyhood, but I fear the chance for doing so is not very good."

Cabinet Making

The one task confronting Lincoln in the days following his election, which outweighed in importance all other efforts, was the selection of a cabinet. Two days after the election he wrote to a friend seeking information about a prospective cabinet member and urged that he receive a reply "by return mail." As late as January 7, however, he was suggesting, in a letter to Lyman Trumbull marked "Very Confidential," that "Gen. C. has not been offered the Treasury and I think will not be. It seems to me not only highly proper but a necessity that Gov. Chase shall take that place. His ability, firmness, and purity of character produce this propriety."