

LINCOLN LORE

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN RICHMOND

Abraham Lincoln first entered the surrendered city of Richmond on April 4, 1865, within thirty-six hours after it had ceased to be the capital of the Southern Confederacy. Here there was witnessed one of the strangest triumphant processions that has ever crowned the climax of a great struggle. "The President manifested no signs of exultation . . . his countenance was one of indescribable sadness." This is a reflection written down by an observer who walked beside Abraham Lincoln through the streets of Richmond.

The steamship "River Queen", on which the President came up the James River, had been delayed by obstructions near Drewry's Bluff. Attached to Admiral Porter's ship, the "Malvern", a barge, manned by twelve sailors took Mr. Lincoln and his son, "Tad", aboard and with Admiral Porter and four other officers started for shore.

There was no reception committee on hand to greet the President when he came to the landing at a place called Rockett's near Libby Prison. A correspondent of a newspaper was present when the barge, rowed by the twelve sailors, came to the wharf and Mr. Lincoln recognized the reporter and inquired if he could direct them to the headquarters of General Weitzel. Then started one of the strangest entries to a conquered city by a victorious country's highest military authority, that has ever occurred in the annals of the nations.

The brief description of the procession, as it was written down that evening by Charles C. Coffin, the correspondent who walked beside Lincoln and his boy, is here presented in part:

"A colored man acted as guide; six sailors, wearing their round blue caps, short jackets, and bagging pants, with navy carbines, were the advance guard. Then came the President and Admiral Porter, flanked by the officers accompanying him, and the correspondent of the Boston "Journal"; then six more sailors—twenty of us all told—amid a surging mass of men, women, and children, black, white, and yellow, running, shouting, dancing, swinging their caps, bonnets, and handkerchiefs. Soldiers saw the President, and swelled the increasing crowd, cheering with wild enthusiasm. One colored woman, standing in a doorway as the President passed along the sidewalk, shouted: 'Thank you, dear Jesus, for this! Thank you, Jesus!' Another by her side was clapping her hands and shouting 'Bress de Lord!' A colored woman snatched her bonnet from her head, whirled it in the air, screaming, 'God bress you, Mars Linkum!' A few white women looking out from the houses waved their handkerchiefs. One lady, in a large and elegant building, looked and turned away as if from a disgusting exhibition. President Lincoln walked in silence, acknowledging the salutations of officers, soldiers, and citizens, black and white, alike. It was the man of the people among the people. It was the great deliverer meeting the delivered. Yesterday morning the majority of the thousands who crowded the streets and hindered our advance were slaves. Now they were free, beholding him who had given them liberty.

"The procession advanced at a rapid pace. The President manifested weariness, and halted for a moment near the railroad station on Broad Street. He was wearing his overcoat. The sun was shining from a cloudless sky. Cavalrymen with gleaming sabres were clattering down the hill from the Capitol, having been informed that the President was on his way. While thus halting, an aged negro without a coat, his tattered garments made from cotton bagging, whose crisp hair appeared through his

almost crownless straw hat, half kneeling, invoked God's blessing upon the man who had given him freedom: 'May de good Lord bress and keep you safe, Mars Linkum!'

"The President lifted his own hat from his head, bowed, wiped the gathering moisture from his eyes, and then the procession moved on to the mansion from which Jefferson Davis had taken his departure on Sunday evening. The sailors formed in two lines, presented arms, and the President and party entered the building. Mr. Lincoln dropped wearily into a chair, before which stood a writing-table—a chair often occupied by the Confederate President."

Abraham Lincoln and his boy, "Tad", had walked for a mile and a half through the crowded city before reaching their destination. There had been no carriage waiting for them, no military escort over the greater part of the way, no music of any kind, except the shouts of the people. Yet the tall figure of the President had loomed above those who pressed about him so that at all times he was visible to those who crowded the streets through which he walked. It will ever be to the credit of the citizens of Richmond that this unguarded leader of the Union, unarmed and without military protection, walked unmolested for over one hour in plain view of the people, through the center of the very city which but two days before had been the capital and stronghold of the enemy forces.

Great clouds of smoke were still rising from many of the buildings which had been burned by the retreating army and citizens as they evacuated the city, adding much to the gloom hovering over the metropolis which still remained the state capital of Virginia.

Upon the completion of the informal march through the city and after relaxing in the chair, until recently occupied by Jefferson Davis, Mr. Lincoln made one request, he said, "I wonder if I could get a drink of water?" An eye witness, in referring to the President's behavior in Richmond wrote, "There was no evidence of triumph in gesture or attitude." After Mr. Lincoln was somewhat rested, General Weitzel had his own vehicle made ready and with the President, Admiral Porter, and General Shepley, rode for a short time through the city.

The first visitors to call on the President after his arrival at Richmond was the mayor of the city and Judge Campbell, one of the Confederate commissioners who had conferred with Lincoln at Hampden Roads. The conference was brief but Mr. Lincoln decided to remain in Richmond until the next morning when Mr. Campbell was invited to bring with him other citizens of the city to talk over plans for reorganizing the national authority in Virginia. We have Mr. Campbell's own words with reference to this conference. He wrote, "Mr. Lincoln's expressions and plan of settlement were generous, conciliatory and just. They met the precise conditions of the case. I was willing to co-operate with him on his basis to any limit."

The secretary of the Southern Historical Society in commenting on the conference between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Campbell, with copies of the proceedings before him, made this statement in Volume 36 of the societies papers published at Richmond in 1908: "The true noble devotion of Judge Campbell must command undying admiration, whilst the character of the 'martyred president' as exhibited, must appeal to the sensibility of every one, even the most rancorous."

There is no episode in the career of Abraham Lincoln which reveals more truly the real character of the man than his behavior in Richmond.