

LINCOLN LORE

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AN EVENING WITH LINCOLN

By editorial correspondent of *The Utica Morning Herald*, letter dated Springfield, Illinois, June 21, 1860, and reprinted in the *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune* of July 6, 1860, under the caption, "An Evening with Lincoln." Ed.

An Evening With Lincoln

I have an instinctive aversion to dogging the footsteps of distinguished men. Nothing was farther from my thoughts four days ago than a visit to Abraham Lincoln. Nothing seemed more impossible than that I should ever—before or after his election to the Presidency—join the great mob of those who should 'pay him their respects' . . .

I had little difficulty in finding the place of my destination. A modest-looking two-story brown frame house, with the name 'A. Lincoln' on the door plate, told me that my pilgrimage was ended. I was met at the door by a servant, who ushered me into the parlor, and carried my note to Mr. Lincoln, who was up stairs. The house was neatly without being extravagantly furnished. An air of quiet refinement pervaded the place. You would have known instantly that she who presided over that modest household was a true type of American lady. There were flowers upon the table; there were pictures upon the walls. The adornments were few, but chastely appropriate; everything was in its place, and ministered to the general effect. The hand of the domestic artist was everywhere visible. The thought that involuntarily blossomed into speech was, 'What a pleasant home Abe Lincoln has.'

Presently I heard footsteps on the stairs, and a tall, arrowy, angular gentleman, with a profusion of wavy hair 'lying around loose' about his head, and a pair of eyes that seemed to say 'make yourself at home,' and a forehead remarkably broad and capacious, and arms that were somewhat too long and lank for a statue of Apollo, made his appearance. The lips were full of character, the nose strongly aquiline, the cheek bones high and prominent, and the whole face indicative at once of goodness and resoluteness. In repose, it had something of rigidity, but when in play, it was one of the most eloquent I have ever seen. None of his pictures do him the slightest justice. His presence is commanding—his manner winning to a marked degree. After you have been five minutes in his company you cease to think that he is either homely or awkward. You recognize in him a high-toned, unassuming, chivalrous-minded gentleman, fully posted in all the essential amenities of social life, and sustained by the infallible monitor of common sense.

He approached, extended his hand, and gave mine a grasp such as only a warm-hearted man knows how to give. He sat down beside me on the sofa, and commenced talking about political affairs in my own State with a knowledge of details which surprised me. . . . I asked him if he was not very much bored with calls and correspondence. He replied that he liked to see his friends, and as to the letters, he took good care not to answer them. He referred playfully to the various 'attempts upon his life,' and the poor success that attended some of them. His greatest grievance were the artists; he tried in vain to recognize himself in some 'Abraham Lincolns' of the pictorials.

I asked him if he continued his professional business since his nomination. He said he had attempted it, but pitied his clients. He had been arguing a case the day before, but said the demands of his position made him an indifferent lawyer. He spoke with great freedom of corruption in high places. He regarded it as the bane of our American politics, and said he would not respect, either as a man or a politician one who bribed or was bribed. He said he was glad to know the people of Illinois had

not yet learned the art of being venal. The whole expense of his campaign with Douglas did not exceed a few hundred dollars. I wish the thousands of people of my own State who loathe corrupt practices could have heard and seen Mr. Lincoln's indignant denunciation of venality in high places. I can now understand how the epithet of 'Honest Abraham Lincoln' has come to be so universally applied to him by the Great West.

He related many pleasant incidents connected with his contest with Douglas. He told me that he spoke in all sixty-four times, nine or ten times face to face with his antagonist. His estimate of the 'Little Giant' is generous. He concedes to him great hardihood, pertinacity and magnetic power. Of all men he has ever seen, says Mr. L., he has the most audacity in maintaining an untenable position. Thus, in endeavoring to reconcile Popular Sovereignty and the Dred Scott decision, his argument, stripped of sophistry, is: 'Is it legal to expel Slavery from a territory where it legally exists!' And yet he has bamboozled thousands into believing him.

I asked Mr. Lincoln if he saw much of the Democratic papers. He said some of his friends were kind enough to let him see the most abusive of them. He should judge that the line of tactics which they intended to pursue, was that of personal ridicule. *The Chicago Times* tried that in '58, and helped him (Lincoln) amazingly. He was inclined to believe that the present efforts of his enemies would be attended with like happy results.

I was fortunate in finding Mr. Lincoln alone and disengaged. My visit, which I intended should be ten minutes, was nearly two hours long. More than once I rose to leave, but he was kind enough to assure me that he did not regard my call as a bore. I found him to be one of the most companionable men I have ever met. Frank, hearty, and unassuming, one feels irresistibly drawn toward him. In his conversation and bearing he reflects the gentleman. Hardly a trace of the rough schooling of his earlier days remains. You may be impressed by his angularity of character, but it never occurs to you that he lacks culture. If his manner is at times somewhat unusual, it never strikes you as in the least degree uncouth. In the essentials of good breeding, Mr. L. is infinitely superior to the generality of Americans. I find him far more refined, far more subdued in manner, exhibiting far more the effects of social attrition, than I had expected.

I was greatly impressed with the practical character of his mind. No man living has less of the visionary. He is evidently a 'good hater' of cloud-capped theories. The grasp of his mind is strong and tenacious. He talks like one who thinks clearly and profoundly. He has all the marks of a mind that scans closely, canvasses thoroughly, concludes deliberately, and holds to such conclusions unflinchingly. He seems to me to be really gifted with the faculty of remaining faithful to his convictions of right in the face of difficulties and discouragements. I shall be mistaken if he does not prove as firm as he is acknowledged to be honest. Another characteristic that impresses me is his eminent truthfulness. I do not believe that any earthly power can drive Mr. Lincoln into the commission of a mean action. I am sure that he would far prefer being right to being President.

I heard but one expression of unqualified praise of Mr. Lincoln among his neighbors. No man living is more profoundly respected and more ardently beloved among those who know him best. All parties and interests join in paying tribute to his private virtues. Everywhere I heard him spoken of as the best of husbands, the kindest of parents, the most irreproachable of citizens.