

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 897

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 17, 1946

LINCOLN'S APPARITION AND DREAMS

The New York Mail published in 1887 a feature article on Abraham Lincoln by Ward H. Lamon with the subtitle "Strange Presentiments—Curious Dreams." The introduction encouraged one to anticipate a compilation of "the dreams of his (Lincoln's) childhood, of his youthful days, and of his maturer years."

Before the author reached the beginning of his argument he qualified his scope of interest by stating "it is my purpose in this paper to confine myself to the strange dreams and presentiments which Mr. Lincoln had while occupying the White House." While this greatly reduced his field of observation, yet still one had a keen interest in what Mr. Lamon would present, especially so, because he stated he would relate Lincoln's presentiments and dreams as "I heard them from his own lips."

The only apparition mentioned, the old Janus story, did not take place during the White House days, but back in the Lincoln Home at Springfield, Illinois, in November, 1860. The only dreams related were the "Victory" and the "Funeral" dreams, likewise known to most students of Lincolniana.

The fact that the apparition and the two dreams, constituted all that Lamon had to offer in this 3,000 word essay which started out with so much promise, makes a person wonder if the whole realm of superstition and mystery which is supposed to have so greatly influenced Lincoln is not very much of a hoax itself. It is true that in the White House the same "Victory" dream may have been experienced on many occasions before major military enterprises, but to classify Lincoln as a perpetual dreamer who was guided or greatly influenced by optical illusions or by subconscious visions is far from factual.

THE JANUS APPARITION

Noah Brooks who did some secretarial work for Lincoln contributed an article to Harper's Magazine for July, 1865, which gives one of the earlier versions of the Springfield apparition. Brooks states that he is using as far as possible "Lincoln's own words," although they differ considerably from Lamon's version. This is the Brooks account:

"It was just after my election in 1860, when the news had been coming in thick and fast all day, and there had been a great 'Hurrah, boys!' so that I was well tired out, and went home to rest, throwing myself down on a lounge in my chamber. Opposite where I lay was a bureau, with a swinging-glass upon it"—(and here he got up and placed furniture to illustrate the position)—"and, looking in that glass, I saw myself reflected, nearly at full length; but my face, I noticed, had two separate and distinct images, the tip of the nose of one being about three inches from the other. I was a little bothered, perhaps startled and got up and looked in the glass, but the illusion vanished. On lying down again I saw it a second time—plainer if possible, than before; and then I noticed that one of the faces was a little paler say five shades, than the other. I got up and the thing melted away and I went off and, in the excitement of the hour, forgot all about it—nearly, but not quite, for the thing would once in a while come up, and give me a little pang, as though something uncomfortable had happened."

Lincoln is supposed to have made this comment on Mrs. Lincoln's reaction to this dream: "I was to be elected to a second term of office and that the paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I should not see life through that term."

VICTORY DREAM

This most familiar of the Lincoln dreams may be called the Victory Dream, but apparently he had the same dream when the results were not so favorable. Possibly the most accurate account of the dream is found in the *Diary of Gideon Welles*, Secretary of the Navy, who states he wrote it down three days after it had been related. It was mentioned at a cabinet meeting the day of Lincoln's assassination and Welles asked the President what the remarkable dream could be:

"He said it related to your (my) element, the water; that he seemed to be in some singular, indescribable vessel, and that he was moving with great rapidity towards an indefinite shore; that he had this dream preceding Sumter, Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, Stone River, Vicksburg, Wilmington, etc. General Grant said Stone River was certainly no victory, and he knew of no great results which followed from it. The President said however that might be, his dream preceded that fight.

"I had," the President remarked, "this strange dream again last night, and we shall, judging from the past, have great news very soon. I think it must be from Sherman. My thoughts are in that direction, as are most of yours."

Lamon's version of the dream which Lincoln always saw before a victory was quite different but apparently the same victory dream. He claims Lincoln saw:

"A ship sailing away rapidly, badly damaged, and our victorious vessels in close pursuit. He also saw the close of a battle on land, the enemy routed and our forces in possession of the vantage ground of incalculable importance." Lamon claims Lincoln had this dream before the battle of Antietam, Gettysburg and other signal engagements.

FUNERAL DREAM

The dream told by Lamon in which Lincoln visualizes his own funeral is also well-known and the Lamon reminiscence of it is used here:

"I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a death-like stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible. I went from room to room. No living person was in sight, but the same mournful sounds of distress met me as I passed along. It was light in all the rooms; every object was familiar to me; but where were all the people who were grieving as if their hearts would break? I was puzzled and alarmed. What could be the meaning of all this? Determined to find the cause of a state of things so mysterious and so shocking I kept on until I arrived at the 'East Room' which I entered. There I met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards, and there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered; others weeping pitifully. 'Who is dead in the White House?' I demanded of one of the soldiers. 'The President,' was the answer. 'He was killed by an assassin.' Then came a loud burst of grief from the crowd which awoke me from my dream. I slept no more that night; and although it was only a dream, I have been strangely annoyed by it ever since."

Lincoln mentioned a dream about a pistol in possession of "Tad," and Herndon claims that Mrs. Lincoln recalled that one time the President dreamed that the White House was on fire. Aside from these two, and the three others presented above one would be at a loss to find recorded many more presentiments or dreams recalled by the President.