

LINCOLN LORE

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EDWIN McMASTERS STANTON

This series of brief sketches on President Lincoln's Cabinet members has been confined, primarily, to a few human interest stories of the incidents which caused them to be considered for the different portfolios they occupied. Among all the episodes recorded, none offers such dramatic possibilities as the first meeting of Lincoln and Stanton. It is very difficult, however, to learn for a certainty just what took place at Cincinnati, Ohio, in September, 1855, when they were first introduced in connection with the McCormick vs. Manny Reaper Case. Statements available differ widely as to what actually happened, but all are agreed on the point that Lincoln was treated with great disrespect by Stanton.

If we can believe Herndon who wrote down in 1887 what he remembered about the incident which occurred thirty-two years before, Lincoln overheard Stanton say to Manny, the defendant in the suit, "What did you bring that d---d long-armed ape up here for? He does not know anything that can do you any good."

One of the attorneys associated with Stanton and Lincoln, is responsible for the recording of this incident which took place in the Willard Hotel, while Lincoln was stopping there at the time of the inauguration. The attorney in question claimed that he was staying in the same hotel, and Lincoln invited him to the presidential suite and spoke as follows:

"I am about to do that for which I seem to owe an explanation to all the people of the United States. I can make it to no one but you. Mr. Stanton, as you know, has been serving conspicuously in the cabinet of Mr. Buchanan, faithful among the faithless. There is a common appreciation of his ability and fidelity, and a common expectation that I will take him into my cabinet, but you know that I could not possibly, consistently with my self-respect, pursue that course in view of his personal treatment of me at Cincinnati."

This same attorney met Lincoln about a year later in Washington and claimed the President addressed him as follows, "I am about to do an act for which I owe no explanation to any man, woman or child in the United States except you. You know the War Department has demonstrated the great necessity for a Secretary of Mr. Stanton's great ability. I have made up my mind to sit down on all my pride, it may be a portion of my self-respect, and appoint him to the place."

This is Ward H. Lamon's version of how Lincoln happened to appoint Stanton: "Secretary Chase talked with Lincoln about the Trent affair and Lincoln asked if any prominent Democrat had expressed opinion on this issue. Chase said Stanton had sup-

ported Lincoln's actions Tell Stanton I would like to see him."

When the nomination of Mr. Stanton was sent to the Senate for confirmation there was general dissatisfaction that a life-long Democrat should be recommended for the important post. It appears to have been Senator Sumner who took the initiative in approving the appointment with these words, "I urge that confirmation. Mr. Stanton, within my knowledge, is one of us."

Stanton wrote to Buchanan on May 8, 1862, explaining his elevation to Lincoln's cabinet in these words, "I hold my present position at the request of the President, who knew me personally, but to whom I had not spoken from the 4th day of March 1861, until the day he handed me my commission."

Most of the stories relating to the association of Lincoln and Stanton during the war show them in disagreement or in controversy. One little

EDWIN McMASTERS STANTON
Born, Steubenville, Ohio, December 19, 1814
Managed a book store
Withdrew from Kenyon College when a junior
Entered law partnership with Chauncey Dewey at Cadiz, Ohio, 1836
Elected Prosecuting Attorney of Harrison County, Ohio, on Democratic ticket, 1837
Delegate to National Democratic Convention in 1840
Ohio Supreme Court Reporter, 1842-1845
Supported the Free Soil presidential candidate, 1848
Appointed Attorney General in Buchanan's cabinet, Dec. 20, 1860
Called by Lincoln to head War Department, Jan. 15, 1862.

scene not often mentioned may indicate there were times when they were in accord.

Possibly the most informal meeting of Lincoln and Stanton occurred in the White House on the night the victory at Gettysburg was announced. Lincoln had been in the telegraph office at the War Department all day and Stanton, observing his near exhaustion, told him he would have immediate information if anything of significance was communicated. About midnight came one of the most important dispatches of the war. Meade had won at Gettysburg. Stanton hurried to the President's House, rushed up the stairs to Lincoln's room and rapped. This is what took place, as A. A. Brandejes recorded Stanton's recital of the incident; "Who is there?" He heard in the voice of Mr. Lincoln, 'Stanton.' The door was opened and Mr. Lincoln appeared with a light in his hand peering through the door in the shortest night

dress and the longest legs as Stanton said he ever saw on a human being. Before Stanton, who was out of breath could say a word, the President, who had caught with unerring instinct the expression of his face, gave a shout of exultation, grabbed him with both arms around the waist, and danced him around the chamber until they were both exhausted."

How successfully Stanton conducted his office may be a matter of speculation for the modern biographer, but there was no doubt in the minds of most of Stanton's contemporaries about the type of service he rendered to the country. A letter written on July 26, 1865, by John Hay, one of Lincoln's secretaries, to Stanton, contains this interesting commendation of the Secretary of War.

"If any human names are to have the glory of this victory, it belongs to you among the very few who stood by the side of him who has gone to his better reward, and never faltered in his trust in God and the people.

"Not every one knows as I do how close you stood to our lost leader, how he loved you and trusted you, and how vain all the efforts to shake that trust and confidence not lightly given and never withdrawn, and this will be known sometime of course to his honor and yours."

Charles F. Benjamin, a clerk in the War Department who had occasion to observe many Lincoln and Stanton contacts during the last few months of the war, made this statement, "For Mr. Lincoln the Secretary had an esteem and affection that put their relations entirely apart from those which he formed or maintained with any other man of the period."

A short article appeared in *Harper's Weekly* for October 1872, which gives a significant tribute to Stanton's integrity: "Honest he was, for the bitterest enemy never changed him with private speculations or with being pecuniarily benefited by the power of his office. As Secretary of War, his endorsements disbursed millions; beyond his salary, he was never benefited a cent. Patriotic he was, for his public record shows the greatest possible devotion to his country."

The abuse of Stanton has by no means been confined to historians of more recent years. An editorial in the *Albany Evening Journal* for July 21, 1865, states, "Secretary Stanton is, by all odds, the best abused man in the Republic. He has, from time to time, been accused of almost every crime in the calendar and held responsible for every misfortune which has befallen the country and the army from the beginning of the war to the present moment. It has been of no avail that every accusation has been speedily followed by a complete vindication."