

LINCOLN LORE

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AN OUTDATED SYMBOL OF PERSECUTION

A current newspaper dispatch stated that a zoological collection had recently been increased by the addition of an *Equus caballus*—an ordinary horse—in order that the children visiting the zoo might get some idea of the habits of this rapidly disappearing mammal. Although racetrack and tanbark environments will probably guarantee the survival of the steed its status as an economic factor in rural or city business enterprises has greatly diminished. With the passing of the horse there has also disappeared the accessories which were necessary to get the most work out of the beast, and among them the horsewhip or persuader as it was sometimes called.

The season now approaching for the annual agricultural and livestock fairs featuring fakers and midway attractions also contributes to an atmosphere that makes the Lincoln episode to be related, timely at least. At the beginning of this century the whip hawkers operating successfully at the county fairs vied with the dispenser of patent medicine for the easy money that could be tricked out of the unsuspecting rural visitors. The sound of the crack of the whip in the hand of the huckster was almost as familiar as the bleating, mooring, and neighing which emanated from the stock sheds.

In horse and buggy days all vehicles were equipped with a whip socket where the horsewhip, often very beautifully decorated, reposed when it was not in use. At least one of the carriages owned by the Lincolns while in Washington has been preserved, and the President is known to have had a span of beautiful black horses to draw it. And now we know that he was presented on one occasion with a magnificent horsewhip, too fine possibly to be serviceable, but apparently given to him as a symbol of persecution. The whip was made by a Massachusetts whip factory. It was a highly decorated creation of unusual length. "Its handle was wrought in ivory and ornamented with a medallion of the President and other beautiful devices; and along its whole length there was a succession of gold bands and ferrules." It was also encased in a box of a decorative nature made especially for it.

A rather distinguished group of Bostonians led by a member of Congress from the Bay state were in attendance at the Executive Mansion for the presentation of the whip. The delegation included Maj. Ben Perley Poore, correspondent for the *Boston Journal* and Nathaniel Hawthorne who wrote down an account of the proceedings. It would appear that there was a subtle purpose in the selection of the gift for the President, which it was hoped would draw Lincoln out on the question of policy in dealing with the rebellious south. The written presentation address closed with the hint "that the gift was a suggestive and emblematic one, and that the President would recognize the use to which such an instrument should be put." The reaction of Mr. Lincoln to this proposition is so well related by Hawthorne that his reminiscence of the occasion is copied verbatim from the *American Historical Magazine* for November 1909.

"This suggestion gave Uncle Abe rather a delicate task in his reply, because, slight as the matter seemed,

it apparently called for some declaration or intimation, or faint foreshadowing of policy in reference to the conduct of the war, and the final treatment of the Rebels. But the President's Yankee aptness and not-to-be-caughtness stood him in good stead, and he jerked or wiggled himself out of the dilemma with an uncouth dexterity that was entirely in character; although, without his jesticulation of eye and mouth,—and especially the flourish of the whip, with which he imagined himself touching up a pair of fat horses,—I doubt whether his words would be worth recording, even if I could remember them. The gist of the reply was, that he accepted the whip as an emblem of peace, not punishment; and, this great affair over, we retired out of the presence in high good-humor."

The history of the whip in the punishment of both man and beast is as ancient as the story of human cruelty and the severity of a crime committed determined the number of lashes the guilty subject was to receive. Three hundred years ago this very year one of Abraham Lincoln's forebears received thirty stripes, administered at Boston Common, for "the preaching of doctrines contrary to the belief of the established church."

There was no instrument so often used as a symbol of the mistreatment of slaves as the whip. Lincoln, in what many consider to be his most remarkable address used figures of speech which are suggested by this medium of punishment. He prayed that: "this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled up by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.'"

It does not seem possible that as late as the beginning of Abraham Lincoln's administration the whip was an authorized instrument of punishment in military discipline in America. *The Revised United States Army Regulations of 1861 with an Appendix* contained "changes and laws affecting army regulations and articles of war to June 25, 1863." This order appears in section one of the Appendix:

"Article 87. No person shall be sentenced to suffer death but by the concurrence of two-thirds of the members of a general court-martial, nor except in the cases herein expressly mentioned; nor shall more than fifty lashes be inflicted on any offender, at the discretion of a court-martial; and no officer, non-commissioned officer, soldier, or follower of the army, shall be tried a second time for the same offense."

A footnote in the Appendix states that this act was repealed in 1812 but the repealing act was repealed in 1833 "so far as it applied to the crime of desertion which, of course, revived the punishment by lashes for that offense." Flogging was totally abolished in 1861 and the whip as a symbol of persecution was outdated by Abraham Lincoln at that time.