

LINCOLN LORE

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SCHURZ NETTLES LINCOLN

The Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress promise to retouch the portraits of many contemporaries of Abraham Lincoln and reveal them in their actual likeness when subjected to the light of documentary evidence. Maj. Gen. Carl Schurz in his published reminiscences makes an interesting comment on his participation in the political campaign of 1864. It offers a fine illustration of the inadequacy of autobiographies or reminiscences in presenting objective stories of episodes in which others aside from the writer may be introduced. The following statement is excerpted from *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, Vol. III, p. 101:

"It occurred to me that I might perhaps render better service by entering the political campaign as a speaker, than by superintending the training of new troops in my camp near Nashville, for the uncertain contingency of their ever firing a cartridge. I received various letters suggesting the same thing. . . . Finally I concluded that I ought to do so. I wrote to Mr. Lincoln, informing him of my purpose. In his reply he observed that if I did so, it would be at the risk of my active employment in the army. I was willing to take the risk unconditionally, and asked, through the regular military channels, to be relieved of my present duties. This relief was granted, and I promptly gave up my command of the camp and journeyed to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where my family were at that time, and asked for permission to visit Washington—military officers being at that time forbidden to visit Washington without special permission from the War Department. I wished to confer with Mr. Lincoln on the political situation, and more particularly to get his view of the exigencies of the campaign. The official permit for a visit to Washington arrived promptly."

The compilation of correspondence in part which passed between Schurz and the President during the period to which the major general alludes in his reminiscences above set forth is herewith presented with no comment necessary to reveal how Schurz nettled the President and how difficult it would be to document the author's printed story with his own holograph writings.

SCHURZ TO LINCOLN, FEB. 29, 1864

"I should be glad to have a conversation with you about political matters. . . . An arrangement might perhaps be made which might render it profitable for me to take an active part in the presidential canvass."

SCHURZ TO LINCOLN, MARCH 8, 1864

"Several days ago, I think it was on the 29th of February I wrote you a few lines for the purpose of bringing about an interview with you at which we might exchange our views on pending political questions. . . . Waiting for a few words in reply in vain I have come to the conclusion that either you did not receive my letter or do not desire me to visit Washington. If the latter should be the case you would oblige me by simply advising me of it. I should be sorry, very sorry indeed not to have the opportunity to speak to you about certain political matters of some importance."

LINCOLN TO SCHURZ, MARCH 13, 1864

"Yours of February 29 reached me only four days ago; but the delay was of little consequence, because I found, on feeling around, I could not invite you here without a difficulty which at least would be unpleasant, and perhaps would be detrimental to the public service. Allow me to suggest that if you wish to remain in the military service, it is very dangerous for you to get temporarily out of it; because, with a major-general once out, it is next to impossible for even the President to get him in again. With my appreciation of your ability and correct principle, of course I would be very glad to have your

service for the country in the approaching political canvass; but I fear we cannot properly have it without separating you from the military."

SCHURZ TO LINCOLN, MARCH 19, 1864

"Mr. Willman of this city who delivered my last letter to you was informed at the White House that you had written to me in reply but as I have received no letter whatever from you, there must be some mistake about it. . . . If I can take an active part in the political contest consistently with my position in the army, I shall be glad to do so, expecting nothing for myself but to resume my old position and command after the election."

SCHURZ TO LINCOLN, MARCH 21, 1864

"At last I have received your letter of the 13th. It was not directed to my hotel and I did therefore not hear of it until it was advertised in the paper. . . . I believed that a full exchange of views might be desirable not only to me but to you. It seems I was mistaken. While a number of generals are permitted to visit Washington it is difficult for me to understand how my presence there would be attended with unpleasant difficulties or even be detrimental to the public service. I might perhaps claim a right to know what particular unpleasant difficulty or what detriment to the service is meant, but I apprehend I have to submit not only to an incomprehensible refusal but also to a mysterious hint as to the cause of that refusal. I approached you with the feelings of a friend not to ask for something but to offer something and I find myself turned off very much like an enemy or a suspicious character."

LINCOLN TO SCHURZ, MARCH 23, 1864

"The letter, of which the above is a copy (Letter of March 13), was sent to you before Mr. Willman saw me, and now yours of the 19th tells me you did not receive it. I do not wish to be more specific about the difficulty of your coming to Washington. I think you can easily conjecture it.

I perceive no objection to your making a political speech when you are where one is to be made; but quite surely speaking in the North and fighting in the South at the same time are not possible; nor could I be justified to detail any officer to the political campaign during its continuance and then return him to the army."

SCHURZ TO LINCOLN, JUNE 8, 1864

"I wrote to you two letters several weeks ago neither of which you answered. Today I wish to ask for nothing but a piece of information. In several newspapers I find the allusion to the prospective mustering out on July 1st of all general officers who are out of command in consequence of the passing of Schenck's bill. If that is so I shall fall under the operation of that bill."

SCHURZ TO LINCOLN, AUG. 8, 1864

"I wrote a private letter to Maj. Hay requesting him to let me know what my chances of obtaining employment might be. To this letter as well as to others previously directed to Mr. Nicolay I never received a reply, a circumstance which could but appear strangely to me. . . . If, as on previous occasions anybody near you should object to my visiting Washington I should for adverse reasons regard that circumstance as an additional motive for refusing my request. I have had to submit to a great many strange things but this kind of banishment from the capital would be for me too strange a thing to submit to without at least making an effort to get at the true causes of it."

HAY TO SCHURZ, AUGUST 11, 1864

"The President directs me to request that you will proceed at once to Washington, and report to him in person."

John Hay, Asst. Adjutant General