

LITERATURE.

REVIEW OF NEW BOOKS.

SIX MONTHS AT THE WHITE HOUSE WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN. By F. B. Carpenter, Hurd & Houghton.

We had formed high expectations of this work of Mr. Carpenter, as he had ample opportunity by personal contact for compiling a full and spicy record of the daily life of the lamented Lincoln. In some respects he has fulfilled our expectations, and in some he has failed. We are led to believe that Mr. Carpenter was not in near so intimate personal relations with the President as newspaper paragraphs had caused us to believe.

The work is a vast compilation of anecdotes, many of them old, some of them new, and a very large proportion of them were detailed by Mr. Carpenter from hearsay, and not from personal contact with his Excellency.

We will give a few extracts in order to illustrate the style of the book:—

The 25th of April, Burnside's command marched through Washington, on the way from Annapolis, to reinforce the Army of the Potomac. The President reviewed the troops from the top of the eastern portico at Willard's Hotel, standing with uncovered head, and in the center thirty thousand men filed through Fourteenth street. Of course the passage of so large a body of troops through the city—presaging as it did the opening of the campaign—drew out a numerous concourse of spectators, and the coming movement was everywhere the absorbing topic of conversation.

I took this opportunity to get at the truth concerning a newspaper story which went the rounds a year ago, purporting to be an account of a meeting of the loyal Governors in Washington, early in the war. It was stated that the President laid the condition of the country before such a council, convened at the White House, and minutely reviewed the result. An oppressive silence followed. Curtin was represented as having been standing, looking out of one of the windows, drumming unconsciously upon a pane of glass. Mr. Lincoln, at length addressing him personally said:—“Andy, what is Pennsylvania going to do?”

“She is going to send twenty thousand men to start with, and will double it, if necessary.” This noble response (quoted from memory) overwhelmed the President, and lifted the dead weight which seemed to have paralyzed all present.

I repeated this account substantially as here given; but both parties smiled and shook their heads. “It is a pity to spoil so good a story,” replied the President, but, unfortunately, it is not a word of truth in it. I believe the only convocation of Governors that has taken place during the war,” he added, looking at Curtin. “Was that at Altoona—was it not?”

Subsequently to the two gentlemen proposed to visit my room, and Mr. Lincoln accompanied them. Sitting down under the chandelier on the edge of the long table, which ran the whole length of the apartment, swinging back and forth his long legs, passing his hand occasionally over his brow and through his rough hair (his appearance and manner came back to me most vividly, as I write), he listened abstractedly to my brief explanation of the design of the picture. When I ceased, he took up the record in his own hand, and said:—“You see, Curtin, was brought to the conclusion that there was no dodging this negro question any longer. We had reached the point where it seemed that we must avail ourselves of this element, or in all probability go under. He then went over the circumstances attending the step, in much the same language he had used upon the occasion of my first interview with him. Governor Curtin remarked that the impression prevailed in some quarters, that Secretary Seward was the policy. “That is not true,” replied Mr. Lincoln; “the advised postponement at the first meeting, which seemed to me sound. It was Seward's persistence which resulted in the insertion of the word ‘maintain,’ which I feared, under the circumstances, was more than it was quite probable we could carry out.”

The bill empowering the Secretary of the Treasury to sell the surplus gold had recently passed, and Mr. Chase was then in New York, giving his attention personally to the experiment. Governor Curtin referred to this, saying:—“I see by the quotations that Chase's money has already knocked gold down several per cent.” This gave occasion for the strongest expression I ever heard from the lips of Mr. Lincoln. Knitting his face in the intensity of his feeling, he said:—“Curtin, what do you think of those fellows in Wall street, who are gambling in gold at such a time as this? ‘They are a set of sharks,’ returned Curtin. ‘For my part,’ continued the President, bringing his etched hand down upon the table, ‘I wish every one of them had his deathly head shot off!’”

On the morning of Mr. Lincoln's arrival in Washington, just before his inauguration, it will be remembered that the Peace Convention was in session. Among those who were present to call upon him was a gentleman from Pennsylvania, who had been in Congress with him, and who was a member of the Peace Convention. He at once commenced playing the President's cards with regard to the compromising matters in dispute, saying:—“It must be done sooner or later, and that that seemed the propitious moment.” Listening attentively to all that was said, Mr. Lincoln finally replied:—“Perhaps your reasons for compromising the alleged difficulties are correct, and that that is the favorable time to do it; still, if I remember correctly, that is not what I was elected for!”

The same day, at Willard's Hotel, a gentleman from Connecticut was introduced, who said he wanted nothing but to take the incoming President by the hand. Mr. Lincoln surveyed him from head to foot, and giving him a cordial grasp, replied:—“You are a rare man.” During the brief period that the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher was editor-in-chief of the Independent, in the second year of his life, he left

called upon to pass some severe strictures upon the course of the Administration. For several weeks the successive leaders of the editorial page were like bugle-blasts, waiting the echoes throughout the country, somebody out these editorials out of the different numbers of the paper, and mailed them all to the President in one envelope. One day, however, he took them from his drawer, and read them through to the very last word. One or two of the articles were in Mr. Beecher's strongest style, and criticized the President in no measured terms. As Mr. Lincoln finished reading them, his face flushed up with indignation. Dashing the package to the floor, he exclaimed:—“I'll try to get a dog, that he should do this thing!”

The excitement, however, soon passed off, leaving no trace behind, and beyond Mr. Beecher, and the impression made upon his mind by the criticism was lasting and excellent in its effects.

Mr. Lincoln's popularity with the soldiers and the people is well illustrated in the following incident:— Just after the Presidential nominations had been made in 1864, a discussion arose in a certain regiment of the Army of the Potomac as to the merits of the two candidates. Various opinions had been warmly expressed, when at length a German spoke. “I coos,” said he, “for Fader Abraham. Fader Abraham, he likes the soldier-boy. Ven he serves free years he gives him a hundred dollars, and ven he comes home, we no Fader Abraham, he serve four years. We re-enlist him four years more, and make von a veteran of him.”

The night following the election, a clergyman in Middlebury, Conn., at a religious dinner, exhibited a transparency over his door, with a quotation from Genesis xxii, 15:—“The angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven a second time.”

It is of interest to know of Mr. Lincoln's religious feelings, and of these Mr. Carpenter speaks from personal knowledge:— Much has been said and written, since Mr. Lincoln's death, in regard to his religious experience and character. Two or three stories have been published, bearing upon this subject, which I have never been able to trace to a reliable source; and I feel compelled to state my belief that the facts in the case—if there were such—have received in some way an unwarranted embellishment. Of all men of our time, the late President was the most unselfish and truthful. He rarely or never used language loosely or carelessly, or for the sake of compliment. He was the most indifferent to the effect he was producing, either upon official representatives or the common people, of any man ever in public position.

In the ordinary acceptance of the term, I would scarcely have called Mr. Lincoln a religious man, and yet I believe him to have been a sincere Christian. A constitutional tendency to dwell upon sacred things, an emotional nature which finds ready expression in religious conversation and revival meetings, the culture and development of the devotional element till the expression of such thoughts and feelings becomes habitual, were not among his characteristics. Doubtless he felt as deeply upon the great questions of the soul and eternity as any other thoughtful man; but the very tenderness and delicacy of his nature, and the long exposure of his most conviction, except upon the rarest occasions, and to his most intimate friends. And yet, aside from emotional expression, I believe no man had a more abiding sense of his dependence upon God, or of the divine government, and in the power and ultimate triumph of truth and right in the world. The Rev. J. P. Thompson, of New York, in an admirable discourse upon the life and character of the departed, justly observed:—“It is not necessary to appeal to apocryphal stories—which illustrate as much the assurance of his visitors as the simplicity of his faith—for proof of Mr. Lincoln's Christian character. If it is daily life and every public address and writings do not show this, surely nothing can demonstrate it.”

Fortunately there is sufficient material before the public upon which to form a judgment in this respect, without resorting to apocryphal sources. The Rev. Mr. Willets, of Brooklyn, gave me an account of a conversation with Mr. Lincoln, on the part of a lady of his acquaintance, connected with the “Christian Commission,” who had prosecuted the department of his interviews with him. The President, it seemed, had been much impressed with the devotion and earnestness of purpose manifested by the lady, and on one occasion, after she had discharged the object of her visit, he had to her:—“Mrs. —, I have formed a high opinion of your Christian character, and now, as we are alone, I have a mind to ask you to give me, in brief, your idea of what constitutes a true religious experience.” The lady replied at some length, stating that in her judgment it consisted of a conviction of one's own sinfulness and weakness, and personal need of the Saviour for strength and support; that views of mere doctrine might and would differ, but when one was really brought to the point of divine help, and to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance, it was satisfactory evidence of his having been born again. This was the substance of her reply. When she had concluded, Mr. Lincoln was very much interested, and he asked her to repeat it a few moments. He at length said, very earnestly:—“If what you have told me is really a correct view of this great subject, I think I can say with sincerity that I hope I am a Christian. I had lived,” he continued, “and my wife had died, without realizing fully these things. That blow overwhelmed me. It showed me my weakness as I had never felt it before, and if I can take what you have stated as a test, I think I can safely say that I know something of that change of which you speak; and I will further add, that it has been my intention for some time, at a suitable opportunity, to make a public religious profession.”

Mr. Noah Brooks, in some “reminiscences,” already quoted from in these pages, gives the following upon this subject:— “Just after the last Presidential election he said:—‘Being only mortal, after all, I should have been a little mortified if I had been beaten in this canvass; but that sting would have been more than compensated by the thought that the people had notified me that all my official responsibilities were soon to be lifted off my back.’ In reply to the remark that he might remember that in all these cases he was daily remembered by those who prayed, he said:—‘I wish no man had ever before been remembered, he caught at the homely phrase, and said:—‘Yes, I like that phrase, ‘not to be heard of men,’ and guess it is generally true as you say; at least, I have been helped by just that thought.’ Then he solemnly and slowly added:—‘I should be the most presumptuous blockhead upon this foot-stool, if I for one day thought that I could discharge the duties of this office, without the aid and enlightenment of One who is stronger and wiser than all others.’”

“At another time he said cheerfully:—‘I am very sure that if I do not go away from here a wiser man, I shall at least have been a better man, for having learned here what a very poor sort of a man I am.’ Afterwards, referring to what he called a change of heart, he said he did not remember any precise time when he passed through any special change of purpose, or of heart; but he would say, that his own election to office, and the crisis immediately following, influentially determined him in what he called a ‘process of crystallization,’ then going on in his mind. ‘Rubbish,’ not was, and shy of discussing much of his own mental exercises,

these few utterances now have a value with those who know him, when his dying words would scarcely have possessed it. “On Thursday of a certain week, two ladies, from Tennessee, came before the President, asking the release of their husbands, held as prisoners of war at Johnson's Island. They were present on Friday, when they came again, and were again put off until Saturday. At each of the interviews one of the ladies urged that her husband was a religious man, on Saturday, when the President's release of the captives of war, he said to this lady:—‘You say your husband is a religious man; tell him, when you meet him, that I say I am not much of a judge of religion, but that in my opinion the religion which sets men to rebel and fight against their Government, because, as they think, the Government does not sufficiently help some men to end their bread in the sweat of other men's face, is not the sort of religion upon which people can get to heaven.’”

“‘What motto shall I never forget,’ says the Hon. H. C. Deming, of Connecticut, ‘the conversation turned upon religious subjects, and Mr. Lincoln made this impressive remark:—‘I have never united myself to any church, because I could find difficulty in giving up, as sent, without mental reservation, to the long, complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterize their articles of belief and confessions of faith. When any church will include in its articles, and its next-door neighbor, membership,’ he continued, ‘the Saviour's condensed statement of the substance of both law and gospel:—‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself; that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul.’”

At a dinner-party in Washington, composed mainly of opponents of the war and the Administration, the subject of religious observance, usual with this class, the subject of church-membership, this had gone on for some time, when one of the company, who had taken no part in the discussion, asked the privilege of saying a few words. “Gentlemen,” said he, “you may talk as you please about Mr. Lincoln's capacity; I don't believe him to be the ablest statesman in America, by any means, and I voted against him on both occasions of his candidacy. But I happened to go out to hear, something and wonderful, that convinced me that, however deficient he may be in the head, he is all right in the heart. I was up at the White House, having called to see the President on business. I was shown into the office of his private secretary, and there Mr. Lincoln was busy just then, but would be discharged in a short time. While waiting, I heard a very earnest prayer being uttered in a loud female voice in the adjoining room. I inquired what it meant, and was told that an old Quaker lady, a friend of the President's, had called that afternoon, and taken tea at the White House, and that she was then praying with Mr. Lincoln. After the lapse of a few minutes the prayer ceased, and the President, accompanied by Quakeresses not less than thirty years old, entered the room where I was sitting. I made up my mind then, gentlemen, that Mr. Lincoln was not a bad man; and I don't think it will be easy to efface the impression that the scene I witnessed and the voice I heard made on my mind.”

Upon the betrothal of the Prince of Wales to the Princess Alexandra, Queen Victoria sent a letter to each of her Grandchildren, and one addressed to President Lincoln, announcing the fact. Lord Lyons, her ambassador at Washington—a “bachelor,” by the way—requested an audience of Mr. Lincoln, that he might present this important document in person. At the time appointed he was received at the White House, in company with Mr. Seward.

“‘May I please your Excellency,’ said Lord Lyons, ‘I hold in my hand an autograph letter from my royal mistress, Queen Victoria, which she has deigned to sign in your honor, and your Excellency. In it she informs your Excellency that her son, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, is about to contract a matrimonial alliance with her Royal Highness the Princess Alexandra of Denmark.’”

After continuing in this strain for a few minutes, Lord Lyons tendered the letter to the President and awaited his reply. It was short, simple, and expressive, and consisted simply of these words:— “‘Lord Lyons, go thou and do likewise.’” It is doubtful if an English ambassador was ever addressed in this manner before, and it would be interesting to learn what success he met with in trying to bring in diplomatic language when he reported it to her Majesty.

The antagonism between the Northern and Southern sections of the Democratic party, which culminated in the nomination of two separate tickets in 1860, was a subject to draw out one of Mr. Lincoln's hardest hits. “I once knew,” said he, “a sound churchman by the name of Brown, who was a member of a very solemn and conservative church, and who had the reputation of being a very good man. Several architects tailed, and at last Brown said he had a friend named Jones, who had built several bridges, and undoubtedly could build this bridge. The architect inquired of him:—‘Can you build this bridge?’ Inquired the committee. ‘Yes,’ replied Jones, ‘or any other. I could build a bridge to the infernal regions, if necessary!’ The committee were shocked, and Brown felt called upon to defend his friend. ‘I know Jones so well,’ he said, ‘that I can tell you he is not a dishonest man and so good an architect, that if he states soberly and positively that he can build a bridge to—why, I believe it; but I feel bound to say that I have my doubts about the ability of the architect. I could build a bridge to the infernal regions, if necessary.’”

“‘But, Mr. Lincoln,’ returned the lady, ‘I think you have earned that.’ ‘No, no,’ he responded, handing it back to her:—‘that would not be right. I can't take pay for doing my duty.’”

“‘Judge Baldwin, of California, being in Washington, called one day on General Halleck, and, pressing upon a familiar acquaintance in California a few years before, solicited the aid of our him to see a brother in Virginia, not thinking that he would meet with a refusal, as both his brother and himself were good Union men. ‘We have been deceived too often,’ said Mr. Lincoln, ‘and I have had some ground to judge Baldwin then went to Stanton, and was very briefly disposed of with the same result. Finally, he obtained an interview with Mr. Lincoln, and stated his case. ‘Have you applied to Halleck?’ inquired the President. ‘Yes, and met with a flat refusal,’ said Judge Baldwin. ‘Then you must see Stanton,’ continued the President. ‘I have, and with the same result,’ was the reply. ‘Well, then,’ said Mr. Lincoln, ‘I have done nothing; for you must know that I have very little influence with this Administration.’”

“‘Mr. Colfax told me of a gentleman's going to the President, one day, with a bitter denunciation of Secretary Stanton, and his management of the War Department. ‘Go to home, my friend,’ interrupted Mr. Lincoln. ‘And read attentively the tenth verse of the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs.’”

“‘A lieutenant, whom debts compelled to leave his inheritance and service, succeeded in being admitted to President Lincoln, and, by reason

of his commendable and winning deportment and intelligent appearance, was promised a lieutenant's commission in a cavalry regiment. He was so enraptured with his success, that he deemed it a duty to inform the President that he belonged to one of the oldest noble houses in Germany. ‘Oh, never mind that,’ said Mr. Lincoln; ‘you will not mind that to be an obstacle to your advancement.’”

“‘We think we have quoted enough to show the style of the work. It is a pleasant gossiping work, of no special literary merit, yet it will be read with interest by thousands who look rather to the matter than the style. It is for sale by

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