

# INTIMATE PICTURES OF LINCOLN

*Editor's Note: It is unusual in these days of multitudinous biographers to meet with anything new in the field of Lincolnian reminiscence. The following narrative, however, presenting personal recollections of the great civil war President, reveals the motives for many of Lincoln's official acts in the troublous '60's. The memories were those of John A. Bingham, of Ohio, who was the judge advocate presiding over the trials of the plotters who brought about Lincoln's assassination. They were specially compiled by J. L. Conwell, of this city, and now, years after Mr. Bingham's death, are published for the first time.*

As a member of Congress from the old Sixteenth district of Ohio, I first saw President Lincoln in the City of Washington in the House of Representatives in February, 1861. He was brought there by Secretary of State Seward and presented to the members of the House, and I was fortunate enough to have a short talk with him at that time. Lincoln impressed me as a blunt man of great mental strength and thorough honesty. The impression I never shall forget. A few days after this I met him in his room at the Willard Hotel. I called on him in person, and on that occasion as a return of his call on the House of Representatives, and to add my recommendation with others for the appointment of Solomon P. Chase as Secretary of the Treasury. Ever afterwards the President received me with the utmost cordiality and kindness. Mr. Lincoln previously conferred with me about matters of personal concern, and, I am grateful to say, manifested his confidence in me on many questions of public importance.

In January, 1862, a conference was held in his private office at the White House, and Mr. Lincoln said to me, "Mr. Simon Cameron, the present Secretary of War, is about to go abroad, and I have been thinking of making an appointment of a man from your State, Edwin M. Stanton, who was in President Buchanan's Cabinet, as you well know. Now, I want to know, Mr. Bingham, what you know of this man and what you think of him for Secretary of War." I made the following statement to the President:

That I had known Mr. Stanton from his early manhood. He was born in the district which I represent. He resided for some time in the town of my residence, Cadiz, Ohio. I have tried cases with him at the bar both in Jefferson and Harrison counties. I have had intimate relations with him and I consider him eminently qualified for the position of Secretary of War, and doubt whether you could obtain a man better fitted for the place. If appointed he will discharge the duties of the office with the highest ability and with the utmost integrity. Mr. President, you will be fortunate if you can get him to accept the appointment for I know personally from him that he encountered great conflicts and troubles in the Cabinet of President Buchanan.

STANTON resided at that time in Washington and practiced law in the Supreme Court. It has been asked of me if it has not been known that Mr. Stanton was a Democrat and how it happened that when a great Republican like Mr. Cameron retired from the office of Secretary of War at such a time, I should suggest to the President to call to one of the most important offices in the nation a man who has been in the Cabinet of James Buchanan. I have already stated that the suggestion did not come from me but from Mr. Lincoln. I thought it proper to make response as I have stated, relative to his fitness to the office and his integrity. It has always been known that Mr. Stanton was a Democrat, but he was a patriot. It is impossible for me to know what suggested to Mr. Lincoln the idea of calling Mr. Stanton to the position of Secretary of War, further than that it was doubtless known to Mr. Lincoln, as it was to the public generally, that Mr. Stanton, in the Cabinet of President Buchanan, when members thereof had struck hands with treason, resisted them openly, firmly and to the end. This is what he did. He could not, and would not, be made a traitor to his flag. I think it was very probable that Mr. Lincoln knew of the part taken by Mr. Stanton in preserving the peace and protecting the new President from assassination upon and after his arrival at Washington for his first inauguration.

In the year 1837, Mr. Stanton and I both lived in the county seat, the town of Cadiz, Ohio. I had just come out of Franklin College when Mr. Stanton came to Cadiz from Steubenville as a practicing lawyer, although he had taught school in the counties of Harrison and Jefferson. He was my senior in years and in the practice of law, but occasionally I met him while I was up from Franklin College and conversed with him and he impressed me very much with his general intelligence.

Afterwards in 840 I met him on the stump in political debates. Older citizens can well remember that we had several famous trials of strength in this country in the campaign of 1840. I thus had a thorough knowledge of him as to the troubles encountered in Mr. Buchanan's Cabinet. I was apprehensive that he might refuse the offer of the position of Secretary of War. Therefore, promptly after quitting Mr. Lincoln's presence, I addressed a confidential

note to him stating that I inferred from the interview I had had that morning from the President that he would be tendered the portfolio of Secretary of War, and I added, "You owe to yourself and your country to accept it." Very soon Mr. Stanton was invited by Mr. Lincoln to take the position and he accepted it. I do not believe that Mr. Lincoln had been persuaded by anyone as to this appointment except in a general way. Men may have spoken to him about Mr. Stanton's qualifications for the place but that was all. I say this, that Mr. Lincoln was not an office broker. He made this appointment in the interest of the country. That was the sort of a man he was and he made no mistake in this selection for his Secretary of War. As I have heard many veterans of the war in after years say, the master mind of Stanton equals Napoleon's, and he was the Napoleon of the civil war.

I HAD a number of private conversations with Mr. Lincoln which I esteemed confidential. Early in the first year of his administration, Gen. McClellan was appointed to the command of the army of the Potomac. He was in command of the grand army, which was wholly employed on dress parade, when suddenly the rebel forces took possession of the hill overlooking the city now known as Fort Myer and planted what seemed to me to be field guns, and displayed the rebel flag daily in sight of the White House and Capitol.

At this time Stanton, not having been made Secretary of War as yet, I met him on the street and I said, "Mr. Stanton, what is the sense of our hero (for he was a great friend of McClellan's at that

it, to take an entrenched army you ought to have at least a twofold number." I replied, "I venture to say we have fivefold their number, for they have no means of transportation and the country is sparsely settled to Centerville, and they could not get to such a force the necessary supplies. The country is rugged and hilly and thinly settled and poor."

Well he dropped back into his usual reflection and while we do not know the conversation, very shortly afterwards it was announced through the press that Mr. Lincoln had ordered Gen. McClellan to make a reconnaissance in force over those hills. McClellan obeyed orders, moved far enough to discover that the supposed field guns which had been terrifying Washington for many days were merely large pieces of timber sawed off and painted around the ends with black lines to indicate muzzles of the guns. This I remember, and it was reported that he pushed his reconnaissance as far as Centerville in the immediate vicinity of the first Battle of Bull Run and discovered the camp deserted and the indications were that there never had been a force there exceeding 20,000 men.

MC CLELLAN reported the result of the reconnaissance to Secretary of War Stanton and to the President and was soon afterwards ordered to move upon the enemy in force. One bright morning soon after the order was given, I was standing on the porch of the Capitol when I saw the grand army moving across the Long Bridge at Washington, toward the hills of Virginia. Marching up the heights of Arlington with their field batteries and their cavalry and the infantry, and soon they marched back again and had another dress parade. All was quiet on the Potomac.

I have been frequently questioned as to the personal relations between Secretary Chase and the President and I knew that there was some friction between them as I had an occasion once to call on Mr. Lincoln when he addressed me, saying, "Mr. Bingham, do you know the handwriting of Mr. Chase?" and I said, "I think I do. I have corresponded with him and I know his handwriting perfectly well." Mr. Lincoln handed me a circular, and I read it, urging the nomination of Mr. Chase for President. He then said, "You can read the morning papers wherein Mr. Chase declines any participation in the movement to make him President and expresses his thanks to his friends who had seen fit to urge him as the nominee." Then he handed me an official note and said, "Look at that. Do you think that is Mr. Chase's handwriting?" and I said, "Of course it is."

The note was addressed to the President and to the effect:

"If you still decline to make the appointment I ask for you will please consider this letter as a tender of my resignation of the office of the Secretary of the Treasury, signed Solomon P. Chase." Then Mr. Lincoln said, "Turn that over as I thought the best place for an answer to that was on the back of it." I turned the letter over and read as follows:

"Hon. Solomon P. Chase,  
Secretary of the Treasury,  
Dear Sir:

"Your letter of current date was received in which you tender your resignation as Secretary of the Treasury of the United States. I have to inform you that your resignation is accepted. You will turn over the Treasury Department and all its contents to the first assistant Secretary tomorrow morning. Signed, A. Lincoln."

ON the following morning Mr. Chase stepped down and out, but when the vacancy on the Supreme Court bench occurred, Mr. Lincoln, a man who always kept his promise, appointed Solomon P. Chase his Chief Justice on the Supreme Court bench of the United States. I merely relate this fact to show the greatness of the character of Abraham Lincoln, and that he would not let such conduct as opposing him for the President kept him from fulfilling his promise.

In the month of April, 1861, I had an appointment with the President at sunrise. I arose to keep the appointment and met the newsboys on the street with some Baltimore papers. I bought one and saw a brief statement to this effect:

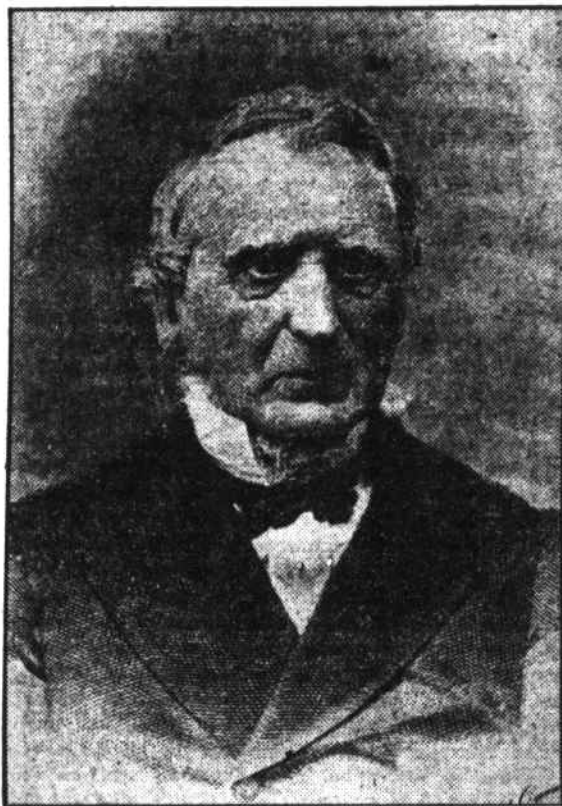
"Mr. Jefferson Davis, President of the Southern Confederacy, has concluded to grant Lincoln's request that he be permitted to send food to his garrison at Fort Sumter, now under siege."

When I reached the private office of Mr. Lincoln with the morning paper in my hands, he was taking his usual cup of coffee before he began his early morning's work, being an early riser, and he greeted me with great kindness, saying, "Mr. Bingham, what is the latest news?" I said, "Mr. President, I don't know whether it can be called news or not." And there, while sitting at his desk, I read what I had seen in the morning paper.

He got up and it was the only time I ever saw him especially disturbed, except on the morning of his second inauguration. He walked up to me and said, "Well, that may do some good." He walked to

(CONTINUED ON PAGE TEN.)

## CLOSE TO LINCOLN



*John A. Bingham*

JOHN A. BINGHAM, an Ohioan, was an outstanding figure in civil war times. He gained his chief fame through presiding as judge advocate over the trials of conspirators in the assassination plot against President Lincoln. He was privy to the ear of the President, and several of Lincoln's most important political and military appointments were made largely on account of Bingham's recommendations.

(time) lying here through the finest weather that ever shone upon an army 100,000 strong, allowing a handful of rebels to insult us in this style?" Stanton said he did not understand it himself. I replied that I proposed to understand it, and then we parted. I called upon Mr. Lincoln very soon afterwards and said to him that in my mind this indignity should not have been shown the Capital, floating the rebel flag daily in our faces, if Gen. McClellan had done his duty, and I thought he ought to be discharged from his post. Mr. Lincoln reflected a moment as was his habit, and said, "Mr. Bingham, do you know the force of the enemy across the river on the hills of Virginia?" "No, sir," said I, "I have no reliable knowledge of the extent of the force of the enemy, but I have been over there before and from appearances, I venture to say that there is no considerable force as compared with this magnificent army of ours lying here in idleness for three months or more."

"Well," said he, "Mr. Bingham, supposing they were equal to us in numbers. We will assume that they are thoroughly entrenched. Am I to understand