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IN OBSERVANCE OF THE NINETY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BIRTH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

BY

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S "ILLUSION"

AN "illusion" which appeared to Abraham Lincoln has never been explained upon rational grounds, so far as my observations go.

J. S. C. Abbott cites a quotation as coming from President Lincoln, in which the time of this "illusion" is given as occurring just after his nomination at Chicago, but Dr. J. G. Holland quotes from an article which appeared in *Harper's Magazine* for July, 1865, written by John Hay, now Secretary of State, placing the time just after his first election. In answer to my letter stating these facts, the Secretary of State writes me that Noah Brooks of Castine, Maine, at one time a private secretary of President Lincoln, is the authority for this statement. Mr. Brooks is out of the country, so his statement, at the present time as to the time of its occurrence, cannot be given. According to the latter authority, President Lincoln is reported to have said:

"It was just after my election in 1860, when the news had been coming in thick and fast all day, and there had been a great 'hurrah boys!' so that I was well tired out and went home to rest, throwing myself upon a lounge in my chamber. Opposite to where I lay was a bureau with a swinging glass upon it; and looking into that glass, I saw myself reflected nearly at full length; but my face, I noticed, had two separate and distinct images, the tip of the nose of one being about three inches from the tip of the other. I was a little bothered, perhaps startled, and got up and looked in the glass, but the illusion vanished. On lying down again, I saw it a second time, plainer, if possible, than before, and then I noticed that one of the faces was a little paler—say five shades—than the other. I got up and the thing melted away, and I went off, and, in the excitement of the hour forgot all about it,—nearly, but not quite, for the thing would once in a while come up, and give me a little pang as though something uncomfortable had happened. When I went home, I told my wife about it, and a few days after I tried the experiment again, when, sure enough, the thing came back again; but I never succeeded in bringing the ghost back after that, though I once tried very industriously to show it to my wife, who was worried about it somewhat. She thought it was a 'sign' that I was to be elected to a second term of office, and that the paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I should not see life through the last term."

Now this "illusion," like others that haunt people, as this did Abraham Lincoln, can be explained upon rational grounds when all the facts are known and rightly interpreted.

With the rapidly changing scenes in political events constantly presenting themselves for his consideration and action, after he was nominated and elected President, it seems cruel that he should have had the annoyance from this "illusion" added to his burdens, when it could have been explained upon rational grounds and set his mind at rest.

It was the beginning of the most momentous time in the history of this republic since its foundation, and Abraham Lincoln was the central figure to whom all loyal eyes were turned as a pilot to guide the Ship of State through the storm that was sure to come.

After participating in the joyful scenes that signalized his success in the campaign, Mr. Lincoln, said:

"There is a little woman who has some interest in this matter,"

and thither he wended his way to meet the companion of his life who was to participate in his future eventful career.

After breaking the news to her, he retired to his chamber to obtain some needed rest from the work and excitement connected with the campaign in which he had been elected President of the United States.

As he lay there upon the couch, every muscle became relaxed as never before. Little did he dream of the years of weary toil, care, and anxiety that were to be his lot and the tragic death that was to take him off in the zenith of his career, a career that has fixed upon him the eyes of the whole civilized world, and has given him a place in the affections of the American people, unsurpassed in the history of this republic. In this relaxed condition, in a pensive mood, and in an effort to recuperate the energies of a wearied mind, his eyes fell upon the mirror in which he could see himself at full length, reclining upon the couch. All the muscles that direct, control, and keep the two eyes together were relaxed; the eyes were allowed to separate, and each eye saw a separate and

distinct image by itself. The relaxation was so complete, for the time being, that the two eyes were not brought together, as is usual by the action of the converging muscles, hence the counterpart presentment of himself. He would have seen two images of everything else had he looked for them, but he was so startled by the ghostly appearance that he felt a "little pang as though something uncomfortable had happened," and obtained but little rest. What a solace to his wearied mind it would have been, if some one could have explained this "illusion" upon rational grounds.

We see by his own statement that it was destined to haunt him, for long after it had taken place, he says he "tried very industriously to show it" to Mrs. Lincoln, but without result. The failure of attempts to reproduce this "illusion" undoubtedly disturbed him still more, and added not a little to his troubled mind.

The reason why this "illusion" did not appear again, notwithstanding the constantly increasing cares and responsibilities thrust upon him, was because his nervous system had become accustomed to the strain put upon it, and he had recuperating powers enough to sustain the eyes in their normal relations to each other.

This incident of his life made an impression that never left me, especially after he fell by the hand of the assassin, thus verifying the prediction put upon it by Mrs. Lincoln.

I never questioned, however, but that a rational explanation would be found for this "illusion," and when it came after waiting more than fifteen years, during which time I had come to consider constantly the conditions which give rise to such troubles, I felt what a great relief it would have been to President Lincoln, had the explanation been made to him at that time.

The factors which enter into the solution of this problem of double vision, have to be considered in the elucidation of the causes that produce weak eyes, headaches, and other various ner-

vous disturbances. Muscular and mental fatigue often produce disturbances in the function of seeing, and visions are projected which are real to the person thus affected, and lead him to interpret them for good or evil.

Dr. Edward H. Clark, one of the renowned physicians of New England, during his last illness, while he was suffering constantly from a fatal disease, wrote a book on visions, dividing false visions, according to causes, into those due to disturbances of the brain, those due to disturbances of the eyes, and those due to disturbances of the rays of light before they enter the eyes. President Lincoln's "illusion" was due to a disturbance of the eyes, a complete relaxation of the muscles that keep the two eyes together and enable them, in the normal state, to see everything single.

This was a temporary condition, due to the fatigue from the intense work and excitement which had been going on from the time of his nomination until after his election as President of the United States.

There are conditions, however, which are born with the eyes, that may be developed enough by over-using them to produce headaches, and other manifestations of disorders of the nervous system, which may be accompanied with double vision. By the advancements in modern ophthalmology, a large number of these cases can be relieved which were formerly considered to be incurable.

Mr. Lincoln was before and after his nomination for the Presidency, under a great physical and mental strain, which increased until his election in November, when it continued constantly to go on until his death in April, 1865. The wonder is, that he did not have repeated "illusions" due to derangements of the nervous system from performing the great amount of work thrust upon him, and from the cares and responsibilities in consequence of the "irrepressible conflict" which burst forth into one of the bloodiest wars that the world has ever witnessed.

It may be said, however, that every incident in one's life has some value when philosophically considered, and the evil omen assigned to this "illusion" by Mrs. Lincoln may have had its value in making the President more cautious of himself than he otherwise would have been had it not occurred, and of preventing his death earlier in his career before he had performed services to his country unsurpassed by any individual in the history of this republic.

Abraham Lincoln was not only a good, but he was a brave man. To advocate the principles which he did was to jeopardize his life. Listen to what he said in a speech against the extension of slavery before he was nominated for the Presidency: tall, erect, earnest, his eyes flashing with animation, his countenance wrapped in intense emotion as he poured forth his eloquence against the crime of a liberty-loving people; sentiments similar to those of his "lost speech" which entranced the reporters and captivated his audience, making him the acknowledged leader of leaders against the extension of slavery into the free soil of Kansas and Nebraska:

"Broken by it, I, too, may be; bow to it, I never will. The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause which I deem to be just; and it shall not deter me. If ever I feel the soul within me elevate and expand to those dimensions not wholly unworthy of the Almighty Architect, it is when I contemplate the cause of my country, deserted by all the world besides, and I, standing up boldly and alone, and hurling defiance at her victorious oppressors. Here, without contemplating consequences, before high Heaven, and in the face of the world, I swear eternal fidelity to the just cause, as I deem it, of all the land of my life, my liberty and my love."

Within a month after his election, the Southern states began to secede from the Union, and declared themselves free, sovereign and independent states.

The air was filled with rumors that the President would be assassinated on his journey to Washington, yet he exposed himself in many cities, and only after it had been shown to him that attempts had been made to throw the train off of the track, and blow it to pieces, did he heed and take an earlier night train, through

Baltimore, in order to arrive in Washington in safety. There is no doubt that this "illusion" had some influence in deciding him to take this train to Washington, and thus his invaluable services were spared to the country.

The week of his first inauguration was one of greatest peril and anxiety to the nation, and was only exceeded by the fear and consternation that followed his second inauguration, when the extensive plot to assassinate all the leading officers of the Government and of the Army was revealed, but which failed in every instance except that of the best beloved of all Presidents, Abraham Lincoln.

General Scott, in his autobiography, says:

"The inauguration of President Lincoln, was perhaps the most critical and hazardous event with which I have ever been connected. In the preceding two months I had received more than fifty letters, many from points distant from each other, some earnestly dissuading me from being present at the event, and others distinctly threatening assassination if, I dared to protect the ceremony by military forces."

Strange-looking men thronged the streets, armed for the most desperate deeds, and there were sharpshooters who, from a distance, could fire a bullet into his heart, but he stood before the many thousands and delivered his most impressive inaugural address in a clear, penetrating voice that was heard by the multitude before him.

Returning to the White House, he was asked if he felt any alarm during the ceremony, and his reply was that he had often experienced greater fear in speaking to a dozen Western men on the subject of temperance.

This was bravery of the highest type, for he was a conspicuous figure in any assembly, and could easily be made a sure target for the assassin. Contrary to his own estimate of himself, he was a most courageous man; yet the interpretation by Mrs. Lincoln of this "illusion" was never erased from his mind; nevertheless he regarded it philosophically, and went about unaccompanied, ex-

posing himself, as it seemed to those who were near and dear to him, in a most reckless manner.

Once when he was out riding a horse, with only one accompanying him, at near twilight, he had a bullet pass through the top of his tall hat. He begged his companion to say nothing about it, as it would create alarm in his family, and among his friends.

We see him entering Richmond, unaccompanied by any one except his little boy "Tad"; the city swarming with desperate men, and enveloped in flames from the torch of the retreating foe.

Abraham Lincoln appealed more forcibly to the sympathies of more American youths than any other man that ever graced the Presidential chair.

His early life was one of hardship and privations. It created a bond of sympathy for the "plain people" which could only have been developed under such circumstances into that bond of love for them which ever manifested itself in his daily life.

As a boy in a country store, I made two scrap books; in one I collected an account of the things which he did and said and the good things said about him, while in the other I put what his opponents said about him. In the latter book, I remember distinctly a sentence from the "silver tongued orator of the Kennebec,"* in which speaking of Mr. Lincoln's fame, he said "it would shine and stink, and stink and shine like a rotten mackerel by moonlight." But those days have gone forever, and we doubt not if the same person were living today, he would use his eloquence to praise Abraham Lincoln as much as he did to condemn him then.

Abraham Lincoln was remarkable for his fund of anecdotes and stories which were so simple that a child could understand them. They served as a safety valve to his overworked brain, and also to illustrate points and conditions better than any amount

*James G. Blaine.

of explanation, and therefore contained a resistless argument in the most condensed form possible. This was one of the most conspicuous qualities which created such a close sympathy between him and the American youth of his time, for young people like stories, and can become interested in a subject when it is made clear by a good story.

His reply after he had listened patiently to a delegation from the West, who had come with bitter complaints against the Administration, was characteristic of the man. It created a good feeling and they went away satisfied. He said:

"Gentlemen, suppose all the property you were worth was in gold, and you had put it into the hands of Blondin to carry across the Niagara River on a rope, would you shake the cable, or keep shouting out to him, 'Blondin, stand up a little straighter; Blondin, stoop a little more; go a little faster; lean a little more to the North; lean a little more to the South?' No: you would hold your breath as well as your tongue, and keep your hands off until he was safe over. The Government are carrying an immense weight, untold treasures are in their hands. They are doing the very best they can. Don't badger them. Keep silence and we'll get you safely across."

Every child that could read understood perfectly well what he would do with Jefferson Davis, when the Southern Confederacy was crumbling into ruins, and this question was asked him and he replied:

"There was a boy in Springfield who bought a coon, which, after the novelty wore off, became a great nuisance. He was one day leading him through the streets, and had his hands full to keep clear of the little vixen, which had torn his clothes half off of him. At length, he sat down on the curbstone completely fagged out. A man passing, was stopped by the disconsolate appearance and asked the matter, 'Oh,' was the reply, 'the coon is such a trouble to me!' 'Why don't you get rid of it, then, said the gentleman. 'Hush!' said the boy, 'Don't you see he is gnawing his rope off? I am going to let him do it; and then I will go home and tell the folks that he got away from me.'"

Think of the President of the United States—the foremost country of the world—telling a coon story to illustrate how he would deal with one of the most serious, complex, and complicated questions ever presented to man, and so simply that a child could understand just what he would do. Is it any wonder that the youth of the country had such unlimited sympathy for him?

His speeches and addresses have furnished material for declamations unsurpassed in excellence even by those of Daniel Webster, whose eloquent utterances entitled him to rank among the great orators of the world.

Without consultation, he wrote the Emancipation Proclamation, which created intense excitement and marked him still more conspicuously than ever for the hand of the assassin; yet, with the interpretation of this "illusion" ever present in his mind, he still put off issuing this document which was to be the "central act" of his administration "and the great event of the nineteenth century."

Perhaps the most sublime occasion of his life, was when he presented this immortal document to his Cabinet, and he prefaced this act by reading a chapter from *Artemus Ward*. Every American youth, north of Mason and Dixon's line who had read this book, was brought at once into sympathy with him for diverting his mind with such frivolous drollery, for it was common ground upon which they could meet and more fully appreciate each other.

At length, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, and took effect as the noblest political document known to history.

Four years of civil war were slowly coming to a close, and those who were opposed to the President and the war rallied in great strength, but Abraham Lincoln was again triumphantly elected President of the United States. His second inaugural address was characteristic of the man, for it was one of the noblest utterances that ever fell from the lips of man.

Finally he began to see the fruits of his labors, and the end of the bloodiest war known in the history of the world.

As he reluctantly consented to attend Ford's theatre on the evening of the 14th of April, 1865, his mind was preoccupied in an effort to devise a just method of reuniting his misguided country-

men in the bonds of the Union. As he sat there with his devoted family and friends in the peaceful repose of an admiring people, his mind diverted by the play going on before him, without a thought, perhaps, of the "illusion" whose attributed evil omen was to be fulfilled, then John Wilkes Booth, the assassin, fired a bullet into his brain, and he was no more.

We had been celebrating victories, and, flushed with the anticipation of a speedy ending of the war, all were looking forward to a restoration of peace and a reunited country.

But the fell destroyer came through the hand of the assassin, and plunged the nation into the deepest mourning ever known in the history of the world. Strong men all over the land met and wept like children.

He had more sincere, devoted mourners than any man that ever lived, and he deserved them all by the universal sympathy which he manifested for his fellow man in every deed of his life.

It was certainly a singular coincidence that Mrs. Lincoln should have attributed an evil omen to this "illusion," and should have predicted so nearly what actually came to pass, but in the light of a knowledge of the conditions which produced it in him, and which not infrequently produce similar occurrences in others, we must regard it as one out of thousands which transpire as predicted, and which therefore must be considered only as an incident in his unique life.

A verse of a poem* which was a great favorite with him, and which he frequently quoted, shows how his mind reverted to the thoughts therein expressed:

"Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift-fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passeth from life to the rest of the grave."

*By William Knox given in full in EXTRA No. 34.

We doubt if there ever was created a being in this world, or in the worlds, if there be such, of the countless millions of fixed stars, whose sympathies for his fellow creatures were greater, or who performed his duties with a higher sense of honor and justice as a ruler, than Abraham Lincoln.

His name and fame will last as long as the earth revolves upon its axis in sweeping through space around the eternal sun, and thither to the tomb of our martyred President, will the people of the whole civilized world ever make their pilgrimage, to pay homage and reverence to Abraham Lincoln—the foremost man of the nineteenth century.

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