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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

MEMORIAL MEETING

FEBRUARY 14 1917

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Commandery of the State of Pennsylvania

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 4, 1861, TO APRIL 15, 1865

Born February 12, 1809, in Hardin (La Rue) Co., Kentucky
Assassinated April 14, 1865; died April 15, 1865, at Washington, D. C.
Enrolled by Special Resolution April 16, 1865

*“How the Secessionists Secured the Election of Abraham Lincoln
as President of the United States”*

COMPANION CHAPLAIN BENJAMIN L. AGNEW, D.D., LL. D.

“How the Secessionists Secured the Election of
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
as President of the United States.”

BY COMPANION CHAPLAIN BENJAMIN L. AGNEW, D.D., LL. D.

This paper might appropriately be entitled, A Revelation of the Doings of the Secession Propaganda of Beaufort, South Carolina, before the Civil War.

The 76th Rgt. Pa. Vol., of which I was Chaplain, was stationed at the Post at Hilton Head, S. C., during the first year of the War. When our troops had taken possession of Beaufort, I was very anxious to visit the town, and Surgeon Scholl and I obtained leave of absence for 48 hours for that purpose.

On the afternoon of Jan. 7, 1862, we sailed up the water ways to the captured town, 8 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, on the Steamer Boston, and we arrived there about dusk. It was rather significant that a steamer of the name of the capital of Massachusetts should take us to what we found to be the Headquarters of the Whole Secession Movement!

On Wednesday morning we found the city patrolled by a guard who had orders to arrest every person found on the streets. I obtained passes for us from Gen. Stevens to visit Beaufort, and Dr. Scholl, Mr. Harding (a refugee), and myself took an interesting stroll through the captured town.

The houses were surrounded with a great variety of trees and bushes, such as the orange, the magnolia, the oleanthus, and the finest variety of flowers.

There were no hotels in the town, but the houses of the wealthy residents were large and roomy, and nearly every house seemed to have its wine-cellar, and the residents were evidently prepared to afford their many visitors the most lavish entertainment.

As I was familiar with the name of Barnwell Rhett, as a leading Secessionist, I inquired for his home, and when shown where he lived, I went through the house and came upon a most extraordinary find.

There, on the floor of a small room on the second story, was a pile of documents and papers that would about fill a bushel basket. The drawers of a secretary and a book-case had been broken open, supposedly by slaves, and these

BENJAMIN LASHHELLS AGNEW

Chaplain 76th Pennsylvania Infantry November 18, 1861; resigned and honorably discharged May 23, 1862.

papers had been thrown out into the middle of the room, as those who had opened the drawers had probably been in search of money or other valuables. Curiosity prompted me to examine the documents and I was amazed beyond measure to find that I was evidently at the Headquarters of a most important Secession Organization.

I spent the afternoon there examining the documents, and I found papers, some written and some printed, dated 30 years before the war, discussing the Constitutionality and the right and expediency of the Southern States seceding from the Union.

I found the whole Secession Propaganda seriously considered by the most prominent politicians of the Southern States, members of Congress both of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, members of different presidential Cabinets, governors of States and other great leaders of the South.

They had four classes of Southern people to deal with. One class favored Secession from the Union and the establishment of an aristocratic Kingdom in the South with slavery as its chief foundation stone; another class wanted to perpetuate slavery, but did not think it advisable to secede from the Union as long as the Northern States would return their fugitive slaves; another class wanted to remain in the Union and to secure the Constitutional right to carry their slaves into United States Territories and into New States to be thereafter organized; and another party wanted to stay in the Union no matter what became of slavery.

Their Secession Propaganda, therefore, involved tremendous manipulations to enable the leaders to prepare the people for severing their relations with the United States government.

They saw the failure of the Old Line Whigs to elect Henry Clay President of the United States, and the gradual decline and final dissolution of the Whig Party; and they heard the roll of deep thunder all through the North, increasing as the days went by, against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the settlement of 1820; they saw the efforts to extend slavery into the territories bitterly opposed by the Free Soilers, and they saw the organization of the Republican Party in 1854, which they believed to be an Abolition Party; and then they became more desperate, and at a meeting in Barnwell Rhett's house they discussed the whole situation most elaborately. They then fully determined to break up the Democratic Convention to be held in Charleston, S. C., in 1860, as they declared, to prevent the nomination of any man by that party who could be elected President of the United States, and thereby clear the way for the election of the man who would be nominated by the new and vigorous Republican Party which they hated with a perfect hatred; and then, they said, the Southern States would be willing to secede from the Union, for they thought that after 30 years they had the South fully prepared for such decided action.

Their papers showed, furthermore, that they believed the North would not attempt to coerce the slaveholding states to remain in the Union, and that there would consequently be no war between the two sections of the country.

I regret exceedingly that I did not take possession of the Minute Book of the Secession Propaganda at Beaufort, but Gen. Viele had ordered all books taken from the family dwellings and deposited in the Public Library building for safe

keeping until the close of the war, when the families would return to their homes and want their books, and I felt that I had no right, therefore, to take possession of the Minute Book or other documents.

The last time I saw Gen. Sherman was at Gen. Grant's funeral. I had been invited to take part in the religious services at the funeral of Gen. Grant at Mt. McGregor, where he died, and in coming down to New York in the train with the family, I was seated with Gen. Sherman, and in talking over the war I asked him if he had ever seen the documents to which I have just referred and he said he had never heard of them. "Why," said he, "that is the most interesting thing I have ever heard in connection with the whole Secession movement. When I go back to Washington I will search for them among the archives and if I find them I will write to you." I never heard from him, and I have no idea what became of the documents. If any one knows where they are, he should give the world a full and accurate account of all that occurred in Barnwell Rhett's house, in Beaufort, to complete the history of the Secession propaganda.

II

We come now to consider the great strategic movement to carry out the pre-determined plan to break up the Democratic Convention to be held at Charleston.

The Democratic Convention met at Charleston, on the 25th of April, 1860. There were Delegates present from fifteen northern states and from seventeen proslavery states. Cushing was elected presiding officer and at once there began a hot discussion, which became more and more violent, as the business proceeded for the next ten days, and Browne says, Cushing "presided over the most disorderly meetings, ever gathered, for any kind of business on the Continent."

It was said that sometimes fifty people would be on the floor at once, clamoring to be heard. The Secessionists found that they could not control the convention; and after ten stormy days, the delegates from seven southern states, namely: Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, Florida, Texas and Arkansas, withdrew from the body. The Convention then adjourned, to meet in Baltimore, on the 18th of June, two days after the Republican Convention had arranged to meet in Chicago. The Southern Delegates, who had withdrawn from the Democratic Convention in Charleston, also went to Baltimore, to exert as strong an influence as possible upon the Convention in session there, and after five more stormy days, they induced the delegates from six more southern states to withdraw from that body, namely, from Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Delaware, Maryland and Kentucky.

The remaining delegates nominated Douglas for President and Johnson for Vice-President. The delegates from the South who had withdrawn from the Democratic Convention, under the leadership of Jefferson Davis, met at Richmond, Va., and nominated Breckinridge for President, and Lane for Vice-President.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL UNION PARTY

Some Old Line Whigs had held a Convention at Baltimore, on the 9th of May, 1860, and organized "The Constitutional Union Party," and nominated Bell and Everett as their standard bearers at the next Presidential election. Bell was very popular and strongly opposed to secession. This did not suit the

Secessionists, and for that reason, they placed Breckinridge and Lane before the country, to draw away as many votes as possible from the Union Party and also from the Democratic Party.

THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION

This convention met at Chicago on the 16th of May, 1860, and unanimously nominated Abraham Lincoln for President and Hannibal Hamlin for Vice-President, just what the Secessionists wanted.

The war was then practically on.

The Southerners were taught to believe that Mr. Lincoln was the very blackest of all Black Abolitionists, and the fires of Secession were kindled anew and they burned with a fiercer flame than ever.

THE ELECTORAL VOTE

The Presidential election in November, 1860, resulted as follows:

Douglas received 12 electoral votes.

Bell received 39 electoral votes.

Breckinridge received 72 electoral votes.

Lincoln received 180 electoral votes, making 57 of a majority of all the electoral votes for Mr. Lincoln.

According to prearrangement at the Headquarters at Beaufort, S. C., as soon as there was a hope that a Republican candidate could, or would be elected President, they began working to get every official in the government and every man of influence possible to do everything in his power to help on the Secession movement.

The Southern States began to collect all the arms, ammunition, etc., that were to be found in the United States and take them to Southern forts and Navy yards, and they took possession of nearly all our means of defense and offense in the United States. The Secretary of War sent guns of all descriptions in possession of the government to the South, and our war vessels were sent by the Secretary of the Navy to far away places where they could not be used against the South.

These men did not care what the President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, had to say for he simply looked on and did nothing, and seemed to care nothing about what they were doing, and they cared nothing about what he thought, for he was simply a blooming, bungling, back-boneless old blunderer, who let them do as they pleased to carry out their plan of seceding from the Union.

The people of the South very generally believed that the men of the North would never fight to keep the South from dissolving the Union. The aristocrats of the South called us "Northern Menials and Greasy Mechanics," and they believed that, if we did fight, they could easily whip the whole northern host of plebeians with one-tenth of our number. It is said that they had already 150,000 young men under arms.

One of the prisoners that we captured near their headquarters in S. C., a captain in their Army who was wounded, said just before he died, "there must be something very wrong somewhere in the South about this war, for I never expected you would treat me so kindly as you have done, nor did I expect to find such noble, fine-looking intelligent men in the Northern Army."

III

What kind of a man was it that the Secessionists Secured to Occupy the Presidential chair in the non-seceding States?

There never was a man in all the United States who was so desperately and unreasonably hated, nor so devotedly and genuinely beloved as Abraham Lincoln.

Leonard Swett, who knew Mr. Lincoln intimately, said, "No one who knew him ever knew another man like him." His enemies have said everything conceivable against him. They despised him because "he was born in a cabin in the wilds of the mountains of Kentucky." But, listen! Does not a canary bird, born in a cabin in the Hartz Mountains, sing as sweetly as a bird born in the palace of the Emperor? Men have derided the Model Man of all nations, the Redeemer of a lost race, because he was born in a stable and cradled in a manger!

But Lincoln, they said, "was not of noble birth." But in his developed character he proved himself to be a man of true nobility, and of superlative dignity of soul, a Prince among men. True, he was without the trappings and trimmings of so called royalty, but no man born of royal blood ever displayed more royal grandeur in his great life-work than did this President of the United States. His despisers said, "He was one of the mudsills of the North who had to make his living by manual labor." Yes, his father gave him an axe when but seven years of age with which to begin even then to make a living. With that axe he helped to make his own mother's coffin! That axe was not adorned with gems and jewels either, but with that axe he learned to hew timber and split rails, and also to hew his way through all the difficulties of life, and to hew a place for himself that was unique in all respects. There, in the place he hewed out for himself, let him stand, with no man in all the land, in all respects his equal, to stand beside him.

Mr. Lincoln was a man who had good common sense. He was indeed the very personification of the common people. He thoroughly understood them, and knew exactly what they wanted, and was thereby well prepared to serve them.

People said, "he was uncouth and had no æsthetic taste." They grievously misunderstood that man from the mountains of Kentucky. He was refined in his feelings and he transfigured the common things of life into flowers and gems of distinguished beauty.

Lincoln once said to his friend, Speed, "Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower when I thought a flower would grow."

"But," said his foes, "he was an ignorant, illiterate man unfit for any position of prominence. He was only a shyster lawyer of a backwoods town." How dreadfully they were mistaken! He proved himself to be a man with a mind sagacious, clear-visioned, penetrative, keen-scented and of sound judgment.

"But," said his foes, "he was no statesman." Ah! he was one of the brainiest of all our brainy men.

Horace Greely, certainly one of our strongest-minded editors, said of Mr. Lincoln's address at Cooper Union in New York, February 27, 1860, that "It was the very best address to which I have ever listened, and," he added, "I have heard some of Webster's grandest."

Lincoln was a man who could not be driven into a corner and kept there. This was amusingly illustrated when he was a young Captain in the Black Hawk War. Lincoln's knowledge of military tactics was naturally slight. Marching with a front of over 20 men he wished to go through a gate. "I could not," he says himself, "remember the proper word of command for getting my company endwise, so that it could get through the gate; so, as we came near the gate, I shouted, this company is dismissed for two minutes, when it will fall in again on the other side of the gate."

Mr. Lincoln was a leader always found ready for any and every emergency.

His opponents said, "He was no statesman, no politician."

What is politics? It is the science of government, and the art of governing. In that fundamental idea of politics Lincoln was one of our profoundest statesmen, one of the most skilful politicians that was ever elected to the presidency of this great country.

James G. Blaine was a most consummate statesman, and he said of Mr. Lincoln that he "did not seek to say merely the thing that was for the day's debate, but the thing which would stand the test of time and square itself with eternal justice."

Gen. Grant says of Lincoln: "He was a man of great ability, pure patriotism, unselfish nature, full of forgiveness to his enemies, bearing malice toward none, he proved to be the man above all others for the struggle through which the nation had to pass, to place itself among the greatest in the family of nations."

The Secessionists secured the election of this most wonderful man as President with the confident belief that the South would at once secede from the North and then establish a government that would forever conserve slavery; but he was the man above all others who could attach to himself the people of the North and the brave soldiers and sailors of the country and have them stand by him in all he undertook, and in the third year of the war, New Year's Day, 1863, he issued his immortal Emancipation Proclamation which was ultimately to banish slavery from the entire land. Before his election as President, Mr. Lincoln proclaimed distinctly that he did not wish to interfere with slavery in the States where it existed, but he held irrevocably to the decision of the Wilmot Proviso that Slavery was to be prohibited in all territory thereafter to be acquired, and that there was to be no extension of slavery beyond the boundary of the states in which it then had an existence.

After he was elected President he said positively that he did not want war with the Southern States.

In his inaugural address Mr. Lincoln said to the Southerners: "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no con-

flict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it."

From this historic review we learn THREE IMPERISHABLE LESSONS:

1. It has been definitely settled that no party need even try to induce any aggregation of men to attempt to secede from this great government when such a long-prepared-for plan, by such eminently skilful politicians and statesmen as were engaged in the Secession Movement, ended in such an inglorious failure.

2. Many doubts had existed among the nations of the earth as to whether a republican or democratic form of government, wherein the people could enjoy a complete civil and religious liberty, having the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience, could possibly be perpetuated. That great question has been definitely settled for all time. And,

3. We are led to believe that, as the God of our fathers raised up Abraham Lincoln in a great emergency, so he will always have a chosen leader to pilot this nation through all our national perils.

As far back as 1384 we find in the preface to Wycliffe's English translation of the Bible this peculiar expression: "The Bible is for the government of the people, by the people, and of the people." This expression has passed through many modifications until we have the immortal statement by Mr. Lincoln in his famous speech at Gettysburg at the dedication of the National Cemetery when he solemnly declared: "That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

COMPANIONS,

We of the Northland have learned to respect the bravery of the men of the Southland, and the men of the Southland have learned to respect the bravery of the men of the Northland, and the whole land had been reconstructed, reconsecrated, and re-immortalized, and it must forever stand before all nations, in a peculiar and holy sense, as "The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave."

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