

HARRY'S HERO

Ethel Bowen White

*“With malice toward none, with
charity for all, with firmness in
the right, as God gives us to see
the right, let us strive on to finish
the work we are in.”*

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

HARRY'S HERO

Harry's father was the editor of a New York weekly magazine. Harry's home was in Brooklyn and he liked nothing better than to cross the ferry over to New York City early in the morning and to



enter the big office building with his father. Still the New York office buildings were not as tall in 1859 as they are in this year of 1919, and it is of a day in 1859 that I want to tell you.

Harry strode up the flight of stairs.

trying to look and act as much like father as possible. Harry was thirteen years old and dressed in his Sunday clothes. Always it was an occasion when father invited him at breakfast to visit the office, but on this special morning father said:

“Harry, I should like to invite you to drive over to New York with me. It is Saturday; therefore, you will miss no school. I like to have you know my friends; today I want you to meet a young lawyer whom I have invited up from Illinois.”

Harry wore a suit very unlike the suits boys wear today. His coat was of velvet and buttoned tightly from his neck to his waist with white pearl buttons. His tie was of striped black and white silk. About his neck was a stiff, white turn-over collar and his trousers were—long!

Very neat, very carefully dressed was Harry upon this Saturday morning. His blue eyes shone brightly, his fair hair was freshly parted. Today he brushed it a little harder than usual for was he not to meet a gentleman from Illinois? A lawyer!

When Harry entered the office he hung his hat and overcoat upon a hook while father busied himself at his desk. After a time he turned to Harry, saying,

"I find I must go out. I shan't be gone long. I know I am leaving things in *good hands!*"

A little later Harry heard a knock at the door. In a flash he remembered the manners mother had so carefully taught him. His eyes swept gladly over the neatly brushed Sunday clothes. He stood ready to bow to the gentleman from Illinois.

But when the door opened such a tall, strange looking man entered! A man wrapped in a gray plaid shawl! A man wearing a high, silk hat! A man with huge high boots and carrying a *carpet* bag! Harry gasped.

"Oh, I thought it was going to be the gentleman from Illinois!"

Suddenly the tall, ungainly man smiled a kind, friendly smile. Harry forgot the shawl, the carpet bag and the boots. Almost he forgot the untidy, unbrushed coat, for such a soft voice questioned,

"Is your father at liberty?"

After Harry explained his father's absence the stranger caused Harry to gasp anew. Without any explanation whatsoever, the silk hat was placed upon the floor, while the tall figure disposed itself upon the stiff, black, horsehair sofa.

When Harry's father returned there was a great deal of talk and for a time Harry was forgotten, yet he listened to every word and although he could not understand all that was said there are certain things he heard that day which he has never forgotten.

A second knock at the door made Harry whisper, "Father, that *must* be the gentleman from Illinois, the lawyer!"

Father replied, "Son, I had altogether forgotten you. Allow me to introduce the Gentleman from Illinois. It was you who welcomed him, not I."

This time a sudden light twinkled not only in the stranger's eyes but in father's.

Harry made a deep bow and extended his hand, but before he had reseated himself he saw he was again forgotten. Father and the stranger talked of personal matters, then of Congress and of a certain recent debate with Congressman Stephen A. Douglas. Father ended by saying,

"I have arranged all the details for your address to be delivered in Cooper Institute Monday evening. I shall be glad to have you accompany me tomorrow to Plymouth Church. I think you will enjoy one of Mr. Beecher's sermons."

The stranger rose slowly from the sofa, replaced the shawl about his shoulders and extended his great hand first to Harry, then to father.

The following day found Harry seated close beside the stranger in church. He studied the great towering figure critically. When the sermon ended Mr. Beecher stepped down from the pulpit and walked straight to father's pew. Without waiting for an introduction he grasped the stranger's hand and again the conversation became hard for Harry to follow. When the talk ended Harry walked silently home between father and the tall stranger, listening to every word and wondering many things.

That night Harry stood before father asking, "*Who* is this man?"

Father replied, "He is my lawyer, and a congressman from Illinois and likely to be named for our next Vice-President. Tomorrow night he delivers a lecture at Cooper Institute and all the political leaders and editors will be present. Your friend, Mr. Greeley, the editor of the *Tribune*, will surely be there. Tuesday you can read all about it in his paper."

That was the first of the three times that Harry was to see Abraham Lincoln.

The next day, not only the papers, but the entire country, were filled with the words and thoughts of the congressman from Illinois.

Always from that time Harry listened when father spoke of the congressman. Soon after the visit Mr. Lincoln was chosen for President of the United States.

One bright Sunday morning Harry overheard father talking to a group of friends as they stood outside of Plymouth Church. Father and his friends were laughing, yet all father said was,

“I asked Mr. Lincoln why he invited his rivals, Mr. William H. Seward, Mr. Salmon P. Chase and Mr. Stanton into his cabinet? And Mr. Lincoln replied, ‘Just to keep my fingers on them.’”

The second time Harry saw Abraham Lincoln he was in a carriage riding down Broadway to the Astor House in New York City. On this day Harry did not receive him, instead he only stood, a rather small boy, in a tremendous, pressing, pushing crowd. As the cheers rose higher and higher something inside of Harry seemed to grow very big. When Mr. Lincoln stood up in his carriage and took off that same tall silk hat, Harry found it hard to breathe.

Mr. Lincoln entered the Astor House and from a balcony over the doorway he delivered a few words to the multitude below. They listened attentively to the congressman from Illinois who was now passing through New York on his way to Washington to become the President of the United States.

The third and last time Harry saw his President he didn't really see him at all, for the Great Soul had gone Home. Only his tired, wounded body lay in the New York City Hall. One of the largest military processions ever remembered in New York City escorted the casket to the Hudson River Station. This time the crowd which had cheered so gladly was silent and the entire city was draped in mourning.

Harry walked through the Bowery clinging to father's hand, feeling he had lost a personal friend. He was shocked when he discovered a white banner over a very small, insignificant shop bearing these words:

“The three benefactors of mankind—
A. Lincoln, G. Washington and J. Christ.”

But as Harry grew older he realized that while the writer of those words was

crude and irreverent, in his heart he had weighed the great soul of Abraham Lincoln and found that it was moulded in the image of his Creator.

With every good

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Adel Bowen White

