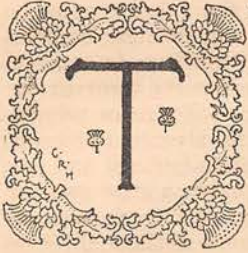


## LIFE IN THE WHITE HOUSE IN THE TIME OF LINCOLN.



HE daily life of the White House during the momentous years of Lincoln's presidency had a character of its own, different from that of any previous or subsequent time. In the first days after the

inauguration there was the unprecedented rush of office-seekers, inspired by a strange mixture of enthusiasm and greed, pushed by motives which were perhaps at bottom selfish, but which had nevertheless a curious touch of that deep emotion which had stirred the heart of the nation in the late election. They were not all ignoble; among that dense crowd that swarmed in the staircases and the corridors there were many well-to-do men who were seeking office to their own evident damage, simply because they wished to be a part, however humble, of a government which they had aided to put in power and to which they were sincerely devoted. Many of the visitors who presented so piteous a figure in those early days of 1861 afterwards marched, with the independent dignity of a private soldier, in the ranks of the Union Army, or rode at the head of their regiments like men born to command. There were few who had not a story worth listening to, if there were time and opportunity. But the numbers were so great, the competition was so keen, that they ceased for the moment to be regarded as individuals, drowned as they were in the general sea of solicitation.

Few of them received office; when, after weeks of waiting, one of them got access to the President, he was received with kindness by a tall, melancholy-looking man sitting at a desk with his back to a window which opened upon a fair view of the Potomac, who heard his story with a gentle patience, took his papers and referred them to one of the Departments, and that was all; the fatal pigeon-holes devoured them. As time wore on and the offices were filled the throng of eager aspirants diminished and faded away. When the war burst out an immediate transformation took place. The house was again invaded and overrun by a different class of visitors — youths who wanted commissions in the regulars; men who wished

to raise irregular regiments or battalions without regard to their State authorities; men who wanted to furnish stores to the army; inventors full of great ideas and in despair at the apathy of the world; later, an endless stream of officers in search of promotion or desirable assignments. And from first to last there were the politicians and statesmen in Congress and out, each of whom felt that he had the right by virtue of his representative capacity to as much of the President's time as he chose, and who never considered that he and his kind were many and that the President was but one.

It would be hard to imagine a state of things less conducive to serious and effective work, yet in one way or another the work was done. In the midst of a crowd of visitors who began to arrive early in the morning and who were put out, grumbling, by the servants who closed the doors at midnight, the President pursued those labors which will carry his name to distant ages. There was little order or system about it; those around him strove from beginning to end to erect barriers to defend him against constant interruption, but the President himself was always the first to break them down. He disliked anything that kept people from him who wanted to see him, and although the continual contact with importunity which he could not satisfy, and with distress which he could not always relieve, wore terribly upon him and made him an old man before his time, he would never take the necessary measures to defend himself. He continued to the end receiving these swarms of visitors, every one of whom, even the most welcome, took something from him in the way of wasted nervous force. Henry Wilson once remonstrated with him about it: "You will wear yourself out." He replied, with one of those smiles in which there was so much of sadness, "They don't want much; they get but little, and I must see them." In most cases he could do them no good, and it afflicted him to see he could not make them understand the impossibility of granting their requests. One hot afternoon a private soldier who had somehow got access to him persisted, after repeated explanations that his case was one to be settled by his immediate superiors, in begging that the President would give it his personal attention. Lincoln at last burst out: "Now, my man, go away! I cannot attend



to all these details. I could as easily bail out the Potomac with a spoon."

Of course it was not all pure waste; Mr. Lincoln gained much of information, something of cheer and encouragement, from these visits. He particularly enjoyed conversing with officers of the army and navy, newly arrived from the field or from sea. He listened with the eagerness of a child over a fairy tale to Garfield's graphic account of the battle of Chickamauga; he was always delighted with the wise and witty sailor talk of John A. Dahlgren, Gustavus V. Fox, and Commander Henry A. Wise. Sometimes a word fitly spoken had its results. When R. B. Ayres called on him in company with Senator Harris, and was introduced as a captain of artillery who had taken part in a recent unsuccessful engagement, he asked, "How many guns did you take in?" "Six," Ayres answered. "How many did you bring out?" the President asked, maliciously. "Eight." This unexpected reply did much to gain Ayres his merited promotion.

The President rose early, as his sleep was light and capricious. In the summer, when he lived at the Soldiers' Home, he would take his frugal breakfast and ride into town in time to be at his desk at eight o'clock. He began to receive visits nominally at ten o'clock, but long before that hour struck the doors were besieged by anxious crowds, through whom the people of importance, senators and members of congress, elbowed their way after the fashion which still survives. On days when the Cabinet met, Tuesdays and Fridays, the hour of noon closed the interviews of the morning. On other days it was the President's custom, at about that hour, to order the doors to be opened and all who were waiting to be admitted. The crowd would rush in, thronging the narrow room, and one by one would make their wants known. Some came merely to shake hands, to wish him God-speed; their errand was soon done. Others came asking help or mercy; they usually pressed forward, careless, in their pain, as to what ears should overhear their prayer. But there were many who lingered in the rear and leaned against the wall, hoping each to be the last, that they might in tête-à-tête unfold their schemes for their own advantage or their neighbors' hurt. These were often disconcerted by the President's loud and hearty, "Well, friend, what can I do for you?" which compelled them to speak, or retire and wait for a more convenient season.

The inventors were more a source of amusement than annoyance. They were usually men of some originality of character, not infrequently carried to eccentricity. Lincoln had

a quick comprehension of mechanical principles, and often detected a flaw in an invention which the contriver had overlooked. He would sometimes go out into the waste fields that then lay south of the Executive Mansion to test an experimental gun or torpedo. He used to quote with much merriment the solemn dictum of one rural inventor that "a gun ought not to rekyle; if it rekyled at all, it ought to rekyle a little forrid." He was particularly interested in the first rude attempts at the afterwards famous mitrailleuses; on one occasion he worked one with his own hands at the Arsenal, and sent forth peals of Homeric laughter as the balls, which had not power to penetrate the target set up at a little distance, came bounding back among the shins of the bystanders. He accompanied Colonel Hiram Berdan one day to the camp of his sharpshooters and there practised in the trenches his long-disused skill with the rifle. A few fortunate shots from his own gun and his pleasure at the still better marksmanship of Berdan led to the arming of that admirable regiment with breech-loaders.

At luncheon time he had literally to run the gantlet through the crowds who filled the corridors between his office and the rooms at the west end of the house occupied by the family. The afternoon wore away in much the same manner as the morning; late in the day he usually drove out for an hour's airing; at six o'clock he dined. He was one of the most abstemious of men; the pleasures of the table had few attractions for him. His breakfast was an egg and a cup of coffee; at luncheon he rarely took more than a biscuit and a glass of milk, a plate of fruit in its season; at dinner he ate sparingly of one or two courses. He drank little or no wine; not that he remained always on principle a total abstainer, as he was during a part of his early life in the fervor of the "Washingtonian" reform; but he never cared for wine or liquors of any sort, and never used tobacco.

There was little gaiety in the Executive house during his time. It was an epoch, if not of gloom, at least of a seriousness too intense to leave room for much mirth. There were the usual formal entertainments, the traditional state dinners and receptions, conducted very much as they have been ever since. The great public receptions, with their vast rushing multitudes pouring past him to shake hands, he rather enjoyed; they were not a disagreeable task to him, and he seemed surprised when people commiserated him upon them. He would shake hands with thousands of people, seemingly unconscious of what he was doing, murmuring some monotonous salutation as they went by, his eye dim, his thoughts far



withdrawn; then suddenly he would see some familiar face,—his memory for faces was very good,—and his eye would brighten and his whole form grow attentive; he would greet the visitor with a hearty grasp and a ringing word and dismiss him with a cheery laugh that filled the Blue Room with infectious good nature. Many people armed themselves with an appropriate speech to be delivered on these occasions, but unless it was compressed into the smallest possible space it never got utterance; the crowd would jostle the peroration out of shape. If it were brief enough and hit the President's fancy, it generally received a swift answer. One night an elderly gentleman from Buffalo said, "Up our way, we believe in God and Abraham Lincoln," to which the President replied, shoving him along the line, "My friend, you are more than half right."

During the first year of the administration the house was made lively by the games and pranks of Mr. Lincoln's two younger children, William and Thomas: Robert, the eldest, was away at Harvard, only coming home for short vacations. The two little boys, aged eight and ten, with their Western independence and enterprise, kept the house in an uproar. They drove their tutor wild with their good-natured disobedience; they organized a minstrel show in the attic; they made acquaintance with the office-seekers and became the hot champions of the distressed. William was, with all his boyish frolic, a child of great promise, capable of close application and study. He had a fancy for drawing up railway time-tables, and would conduct an imaginary train from Chicago to New York with perfect precision. He wrote childish verses, which sometimes attained the unmerited honors of print. But this bright, gentle, studious child sickened and died in February, 1862. His father was profoundly moved by his death, though he gave no outward sign of his trouble, but kept about his work the same as ever. His bereaved heart seemed afterwards to pour out its fullness on his youngest child. "Tad" was a merry, warm-blooded, kindly little boy, perfectly lawless, and full of odd fancies and inventions, the "chartered libertine" of the Executive Mansion. He ran continually in and out of his father's cabinet, interrupting his gravest labors and conversations with his bright, rapid, and very imperfect speech — for he had an impediment which made his articulation almost unintelligible until he was nearly grown. He would perch upon his father's knee, and sometimes even on his shoulder, while the most weighty conferences were going on. Sometimes escaping from the domestic authorities, he would take refuge in that sanctuary for the whole evening, dropping to sleep at last on the floor,

when the President would pick him up and carry him tenderly to bed.

Mr. Lincoln's life was almost devoid of recreation. He sometimes went to the theater, and was particularly fond of a play of Shakspeare well acted. He was so delighted with Hackett in *Falstaff* that he wrote him a letter of warm congratulation which pleased the veteran actor so much that he gave it to the "New York Herald," which printed it with abusive comments. Hackett was greatly mortified and made suitable apologies; upon which the President wrote to him again in the kindest manner, saying:

Give yourself no uneasiness on the subject. . . . I certainly did not expect to see my note in print; yet I have not been much shocked by the comments upon it. They are a fair specimen of what has occurred to me through life. I have endured a great deal of ridicule, without much malice; and have received a great deal of kindness, not quite free from ridicule. I am used to it.

This incident had the usual sequel: the veteran comedian asked for an office, which the President was not able to give him, and the pleasant acquaintance ceased. A hundred times this experience was repeated: a man whose disposition and talk were agreeable would be introduced to the President; he took pleasure in his conversation for two or three interviews, and then this congenial person would ask some favor impossible to grant, and go away in bitterness of spirit. It is a cross that every President must bear.

Mr. Lincoln spent most of his evenings in his office, though occasionally he remained in the drawing-room after dinner, conversing with visitors or listening to music, for which he had an especial liking, though he was not versed in the science, and preferred simple ballads to more elaborate compositions. In his office he was not often suffered to be alone; he frequently passed the evening there with a few friends in frank and free conversation. If the company was all of one sort he was at his best; his wit and rich humor had free play; he was once more the Lincoln of the Eighth Circuit, the cheeriest of talkers, the riskiest of story tellers; but if a stranger came in he put on in an instant his whole armor of dignity and reserve. He had a singular discernment of men; he would talk of the most important political and military concerns with a freedom which often amazed his intimates, but we do not recall an instance in which this confidence was misplaced.

Where only one or two were present he was fond of reading aloud. He passed many of the summer evenings in this way when occupying his cottage at the Soldiers' Home. He



would there read Shakspeare for hours with a single secretary for audience. The plays he most affected were "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and the series of Histories; among these he never tired of "Richard the Second." The terrible outburst of grief and despair into which *Richard* falls in the third act had a peculiar fascination for him. I have heard him read it at Springfield, at the White House, and at the Soldiers' Home.

For heaven's sake, let us sit upon the ground,  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:—  
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,  
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed;  
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed;  
All murdered:—For within the hollow crown  
That rounds the mortal temples of a king  
Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,  
Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp,—  
Allowing him a breath, a little scene  
To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks;  
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,—  
As if this flesh, which walls about our life,  
Were brass impregnable,—and humored thus,  
Comes at the last, and with a little pin  
Bores through his castle walls and—farewell, King!

He read Shakspeare more than all other writers together. He made no attempt to keep pace with the ordinary literature of the day. Sometimes he read a scientific work with keen appreciation, but he pursued no systematic course. He owed less to reading than most men. He delighted in Burns; he said one day after reading those exquisite lines to Glencairn, beginning, "The bridegroom may forget the bride," that "Burns never touched a sentiment without carrying it to its ultimate expression and leaving nothing further to be said." Of Thomas Hood he was also excessively fond. He often read aloud "The Haunted House." He would go to bed with a volume of Hood in his hands, and would sometimes rise at midnight and traversing the long halls of the Executive Mansion in his night clothes would come to his secretary's room and read aloud something that especially pleased him. He wanted to share his enjoyment of the writer; it was dull pleasure to him to laugh alone. He read Bryant and Whittier with appreciation; there were many poems of Holmes's that he read with intense relish. "The Last Leaf" was one of his favorites; he knew it by heart, and used often to repeat with deep feeling:

The mossy marbles rest  
On the lips that he has pressed  
In their bloom,  
And the names he loved to hear  
Have been carved for many a year  
On the tomb;

giving the marked Southwestern pronunciation of the words "hear" and "year." A poem by William Knox, "Oh, why should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud?" he learned by heart in his youth, and used to repeat all his life.

Upon all but two classes the President made the impression of unusual power as well as of unusual goodness. He failed only in the case of those who judged men by a purely conventional standard of breeding, and upon those so poisoned by political hostility that the testimony of their own eyes and ears became untrustworthy. He excited no emotion but one of contempt in the finely tempered mind of Hawthorne; several English tourists have given the most distorted pictures of his speech and his manners. Some Southern writers who met him in the first days of 1861 spoke of him as a drunken, brawling boor, whose mouth dripped with oaths and tobacco, when in truth whisky and tobacco were as alien to his lips as profanity. There is a story current in England, as on the authority of the late Lord Lyons, of the coarse jocularity with which he once received a formal diplomatic communication; but as Lord Lyons told the story there was nothing objectionable about it. The British Minister called at the White House to announce the marriage of the Prince of Wales. He made the formal speech appropriate to the occasion; the President replied in the usual conventional manner. The requisite formalities having thus been executed, the President took the bachelor diplomatist by the hand, saying, "And now, Lord Lyons, go thou and do likewise."

The evidence of all the men admitted to his intimacy is that he maintained, without the least effort or assumption, a singular dignity and reserve in the midst of his easiest conversation. Charles A. Dana says, "Even in his freest moments one always felt the presence of a will and an intellectual power which maintained the ascendancy of the President." In his relations to his Cabinet "it was always plain that he was the master and they were the subordinates. They constantly had to yield to his will, and if he ever yielded to them it was because they convinced him that the course they advised was judicious and appropriate." While men of the highest culture and position thus recognized his intellectual primacy there was no man so humble as to feel abashed before him. Frederick Douglass beautifully expressed the sentiment of the plain people in his company: "I felt as though I was in the presence of a big brother and that there was safety in his atmosphere."

As time wore on and the war held its terrible course, upon no one of all those who lived through it was its effect more apparent than



upon the President. He bore the sorrows of the nation in his own heart; he suffered deeply not only from disappointments, from treachery, from hope deferred, from the open assaults of enemies, and from the sincere anger of discontented friends, but also from the world-wide distress and affliction which flowed from the great conflict in which he was engaged and which he could not evade. One of the most tender and compassionate of men, he was forced to give orders which cost thousands of lives; by nature a man of order and thrift, he saw the daily spectacle of unutterable waste and destruction which he could not prevent. The cry of the widow and the orphan was always in his ears; the awful responsibility resting upon him as the protector of an imperiled republic kept him true to his duty, but could not make him unmindful of the intimate details of that vast sum of human misery involved in a civil war.

Under this frightful ordeal his demeanor and disposition changed—so gradually that it would be impossible to say when the change began; but he was in mind, body, and nerves a very different man at the second inauguration from the one who had taken the oath in 1861. He continued always the same kindly, genial, and cordial spirit he had been at first; but the boisterous laughter became less fre-

quent year by year; the eye grew veiled by constant meditation on momentous subjects; the air of reserve and detachment from his surroundings increased. He aged with great rapidity.

This change is shown with startling distinctness by two life-masks—the one made by Leonard W. Volk in Chicago, April, 1860, the other by Clark Mills in Washington, in the spring of 1865. The first is of a man of fifty-one, and young for his years. The face has a clean, firm outline; it is free from fat, but the muscles are hard and full; the large mobile mouth is ready to speak, to shout, or laugh; the bold, curved nose is broad and substantial, with spreading nostrils; it is a face full of life, of energy, of vivid aspiration. The other is so sad and peaceful in its infinite repose that the famous sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens insisted, when he first saw it, that it was a death-mask. The lines are set, as if the living face, like the copy, had been in bronze; the nose is thin, and lengthened by the emaciation of the cheeks; the mouth is fixed like that of an archaic statue; a look as of one on whom sorrow and care had done their worst without victory is on all the features; the whole expression is of unspeakable sadness and all-sufficing strength. Yet the peace is not the dreadful peace of death; it is the peace that passeth understanding.

*John Hay.*

## THE COURAGEOUS ACTION OF LUCIA RICHMOND.

(Manuscript found in a chest in the garret over the left wing of the old Richmond House.)



WHEN my dear Miss Silence died I was twenty, and it was then that I went back to the old house whence she took me, when I was two years old, from my dying mother's arms.

Miss Silence was my mother's old teacher and her dearest friend. For sixty years she taught school, and had made pens enough in that time, she herself said, to have written all the books in the English language. She had such a knack at a nib, soft but not too soft, fine but not too fine, that even Priest Ransom and 'Squire Amasa used to send in their quills for her to make. And this they would not have condescended to do to another woman in the parish, and not to Miss Silence if she had not been a maid; for the priest taught and the 'squire believed that a married woman should be in subjection to her husband, and it would be

unbecoming in her to set up to make so much as a quill pen on her own responsibility.

Miss Silence kept a school for girls, for girls were not taught at the public expense. To do that would have been considered a waste of money; yea, more than a waste, for it would have been putting woman where God in his providence had not intended her to be put. Priest Ransom's own mother could only make her mark, and he considered learning a dangerous thing for a woman to meddle with. A woman if she wanted to know anything must ask her husband. And if she had no husband, as is the misfortune of many women, why, there was always the minister of the parish, whose solemn duty it was to look after the weaklings of his flock.

Miss Silence herself was a learned woman. That Priest Ransom admitted. She was taught by her father, who had no son. He was a minister, and fitted young men for college in his family. Miss Silence, who had a great hunger





ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRADY.

LINCOLN AND HIS SON "TAD."