

# THE PERSONAL SIDE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A. Y. H.

By WALDON FAWCETT



MOST CHARACTERISTIC PORTRAIT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND HIS SON

NOT only was Abraham Lincoln the greatest story-teller who ever lived, but he was the hero of more good stories than any other man in America's gallery of heroes. Admittedly, nothing so effectively throws the spotlight upon the private and public career of any celebrity as the little anecdotes and incidents which are seldom a matter of official or historic record. Quite naturally, therefore, the biography of any man prominently in the public eye is certain to be raked with a fine-tooth comb for these minor happenings that disclose so much more regarding his real character than any array of dates and data.

Only too often the anecdotes that are unearthed regarding a popular idol are sadly disappointing. The points made are obscure or the humor is seemingly forced, and altogether the gossip is not very convincing. Not so in the case of Lincoln, however. One of the one-hand Lincoln was famous for his pungent, witty and practical stories drawn from an apparently inexhaustible source and always available on every occasion. On the other hand, the civil war president was himself the central figure in hundreds of good stories that were illuminating in their disclosures of his dry humor, kindly sympathy and keen insight into human nature.

Lincoln delighted to tell of the high price which he as a small boy paid for a copy of Weems' "Life of Washington." He had borrowed the book from a neighboring farmer, and was so unfortunate as to leave it near an open window, where a drenching rain seriously damaged it. He went over to the owner and made a clean breast of the matter, whereupon the magnanimous old farmer said: "Well, Abe, so long as it is you, I won't be hard on you. Just come over and pull fodder for me for a couple of days, and I will call it square."

The martyr president was known as a man who preferred peace whenever possible, but he could fight upon provo-

cation. On one occasion during his boyhood the town "bully" entered the store where he was employed as clerk and read a disturbance, brooding the clerk's requests that he behave himself. "Well," said Abe, finally, "if you must be whipped, I suppose I may as well whip you as any other man," and he not only proceeded to give the ill-behaved visitor a thorough thrashing, but rubbed "smartweed" into his eyes until the fellow bellowed with pain.

This recalls the fact that when, in later years, after his memorable duel with General Shields, Lincoln was asked by a friend why he had chosen broadsword as weapons instead of the customary pistols, he remarked: "I did not want to kill Shields, and felt sure I could disarm him, having had about a month to learn broadsword exercise; furthermore, I didn't want the darned fellow to kill me, which I rather think he would have done if I had selected pistols."

It was while Lincoln was clerk in the store above mentioned that he resolved the nickname of "Honest Abe." On one occasion, after closing the store at night, he walked four miles to refund a few cents to a woman whom he had unintentionally overcharged for a purchase. History has given great prominence to the fact that as a young man Lincoln split rails for the necessities of life, but is silent as to the terms upon which he performed this arduous work. The rallopping was the means of securing not only bed and board, but also clothing. At one time the hard-working young man made a bargain with Mrs. Nancy Miller to split 40 rails for every yard of brown jeans dyed with white walnut bark, required to make a pair of trousers—no small contract, since the rallsplitter was tall and ungainly.

Lincoln was appointed a postmaster by President Jackson, and inasmuch as he did not want to be tied down by the duties of the office, he hit upon the



ABRAHAM LINCOLN ON THE BATTLEFIELD

novel expedient of converting himself into a portable postoffice. Whenever he had occasion to go about he carried all undelivered letters in his hat, and any patron of the office who wanted his mail had only to locate the postmaster in order to secure it immediately. The first political speech made by Lincoln was delivered in 1832, when he was 22 years of age. It was on the occasion of a debate, and his opponent, the rival candidate, had wearied the audience, so Lincoln contented himself with the following:

"Gentlemen, Fellow-Citizens: I presume you know who I am. I am humble Abe Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the legislature. My politics can be briefly stated. I am in favor of the internal improvement system and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected I shall be thankful. If not, it will be all the same."

After Lincoln entered the state legis-

lature his fellow-members had no end of fun with him. They teased him unmercifully about his large feet, and once when he complained of cold a quick-witted confere remarked that it was no wonder he was cold—"there is so much of him on the ground." However, Lincoln had a way of turning the joke on the other fellow in the most unexpected manner. Once when he had agreed to trade horses "tight unseem" with a brother lawyer he showed up at the appointed time with a sawhorse on his shoulders.

The witty statesman was always willing to join in a laugh at his own expense. He never tired of gleefully recounting an experience when traveling when a fellow-passenger on the train gravely informed Lincoln that he had something that belonged to him. When the future president inquired what it was his new acquaintance produced a pocketknife and said: "This knife was given to me some years ago with the injunction that I keep it until I found

a man more homely than myself. Now I think you are entitled to the property."

During the civil war a committee appeared before President Lincoln and demanded the removal of General Grant because, as the spokesman put it, "He drinks too much whiskey." "By the way, gentlemen," dryly remarked Lincoln, "can any of you tell me where General Grant procures his whiskey, because if I can find out I will send a barrel of it to every general in the field." For all that Lincoln was broad-minded, he was personally most temperate. On one occasion when he entertained a party of politicians who plainly expected some liquid refreshment he had a huge old china pitcher brought in and announced: "Gentlemen, we must pledge our mutual health in the most healthy beverage which God has given to man. It is the only beverage I have ever used, and I cannot conscientiously depart from it on the present occasion—it is pure Adam's ale from the spring."



A RARE PORTRAIT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

When Lord Lyons, who was during the Lincoln administration British envoy at Washington, called at the White House to announce the betrothal of the present king and queen of England, the president listened attentively, and then remarked in all seriousness to the bachelor diplomat: "Lord Lyons, do thou go and do likewise." In receiving the thousands of callers who visited the White House Lincoln evidenced a remarkable memory. Greeting at a public reception a man named Flood, whom he had met casually 12 years before, the president said: "I am glad to see that the Flood flows on."

A visitor from Nebraska referred to a place in his state which bore as its name the Indian equivalent of "weeping water," but could not recall the name. "Well," said Lincoln, "according to Longfellow, laughing water is Minnehaha, so that I suppose this must be Minnehoboo."

At another time when a delegation of weak-kneed financiers had descended upon the White House with expressions of misgivings as to the way the administration was conducting things Lincoln met their dire forebodings with the statement: "Now, gentlemen, suppose all the property you were worth was in gold and you had put it in the hands of Blondin to carry across the Niagara river on a rope, would you continually shake the cable or would you hold your breath? The government is carrying an immense weight. Keep silence and we will get you safe across."

Lincoln's fondness for children was repeatedly illustrated, but in no manner more forcefully than by his love for

his son Tad. Not even Tad's prank of waving a confederate flag from a second-story window of the White House while his father was making a speech to union veterans directly below, seriously ruffled the patient president. At one of the White House receptions a little shaver as soon as he entered the main door shouted lustily "Hurrah for Lincoln." The president made no sign that he had observed the incident, but when the movement of the long line of callers finally brought the youngster before the president, Lincoln tossed his diminutive guest toward the ceiling and shouted out "Hurrah for you!"

The marvelous skill and versatility of Lincoln in story-telling was largely an acquired art. He, early in his public career, came to appreciate the value of a good story well told, and was wonderfully adept in summoning at a moment's notice witty incidents the recital of which clinched his statements more effectively than a world of argument. All his life he got rid of troublesome friends and troublesome enemies by telling stories. One of Lincoln's favorite stories concerned Daniel Webster. Webster, according to Lincoln's version of the incident, was, when a schoolboy, one day called before the teacher for some infraction of the rules. Told to hold out his right hand for "furling," the lad reluctantly put forth a decidedly grimy paw. "Daniel," said the disgusted pedagogue, "if you will find in this schoolroom another hand as filthy as that I will let you off this time." Instantly from behind the lad's back came his left hand. "Here it is, sir," was the ready response of the future orator.

# The Valentines of Olden Times

By WALDON FAWCETT

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CUPID DISARMED A VALENTINE OF A CENTURY AGO

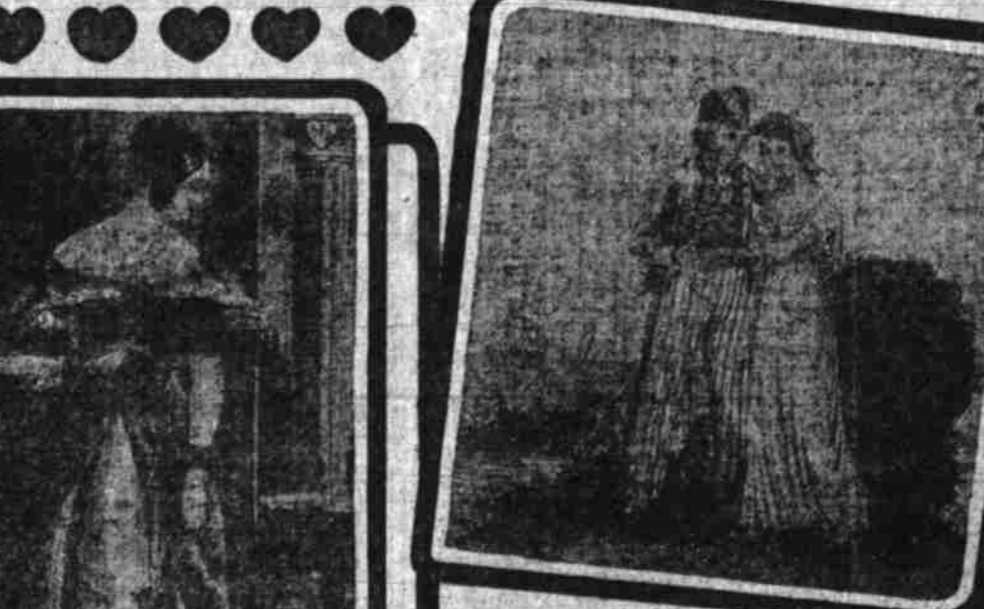
THE manufactured valentine which, in one form or another, has become the currency of love and ridicule, and as such has circulation millions strong every mid-February is an institution little more than a century old, yet the festival which these mischievous commemorations is an ancient one. Indeed, it had its origin in the old Roman custom of celebrating in February the Lupercalia in honor of Juno and Pan, at which time each young citizen of the empire chose a companion of the opposite sex with whom to honor these gods. When the fathers of the early church found that the people clung tenaciously to this festival of bonking hearts the Christian priests made of the pagan holiday a tribute to good St. Valentine.

For all that love's celebration, by mere chance, fell upon the day that the church had set apart as sacred to St. Valentine the old priest had nothing whatever to do with the sentiment of practice which has caused this festival of love to endure for all time. On the contrary, instead of being a beloved promoter of tender and romantic feelings, Valentine was regarded as a malefactor by the Roman authorities and was martyred in Rome in the third century, being clubbed to death and then beheaded in the colosseum.



A VALENTINE OF OLD GRANDMOTHER'S DAY

day an equal number of belles and bachelors assembled at some appointed rendezvous and each wrote his name upon a billet, which was rolled up and placed with others of its kind in a basket. Then occurred a drawing of lots, the maids taking the men's billets and the men the maids, so that each of the young men had designated by fate a girl whom he called his valentine, and to each young lady was delegated an escort whom she called hers. The plan had the disadvantage that each person in the company really had two valentines, but this problem was in a measure solved by the unwritten law that each man should be more loyal to the valentine that had fallen to him than to the valentine to whom he had fallen. After love's letters had thus divided the company into couples, the valentines gave balls, provided treats of one kind or another for their mistresses and wore their billets on their sleeves for several



THE SAILORS RETURN A SAILOR'S VALENTINE (1805)

days. As was to be expected, such temptations of fate frequently fostered romances that ended in marriage. Merry England was also the country in which the practice of sending valentines in the form of love-laden messages found earliest favor. One explanation advanced for this was that the British swain, though quite as amative as his cousin on the continent, did not possess the agile tongue of the southern races nor the boldness of the Latins in verses penned in colored ink and accompanied in many instances by a crude drawing designed to typify the devotion of the artist.

Ever long the poets of the United Kingdom came to the aid of lovers' young people, and the market began to be flooded with booklets of "appropriate rhymes" for lovers and sweethearts of all ages and stations in life. The first of these aids to the sentimentally inclined appeared about 1780, and thereafter they continued in vogue with no less of popularity until about 1830. Some of these booklets were issued annually, like almanacs, each new edition stored with the very latest productions of the postmasters.

The choice rhetoric and lofty sentiment that abounded in these little volumes of "gems" for valentine senders was in a measure reflected in the titles of the volumes. Witness, for instance, "The Annual and Universal Valentine Writer," "Cupid's Festival," "Cupid's Budget," "Cupid's Cabinet and Court of Love," "Polite Valentine Writer," "Rhapsodies and Pastimes," "Select Verses for Belles and Bucks Who Thrive to Hymen's Court," "Cupid's Annual Chariot," "The School of Love," "Ladies' Polite Valentine Writer," "The Bower of Cupid" and others in the same strain.

Not all of these works of ready reference were intended, however, for those fond beings for whom the courses of love was seemingly running smoothly. For those disappointed and revengeful creatures who made this significant day an occasion for venting their spite because of rejected affection there were such volumes as "Quintessential and Satirical Valentine Writer" and that yet more famous source of poisoned shafts, "Hymen's Revenge Against Old Maids, Old Bachelors and Impertinent Coxcombs," being, as the subtitle explained, a choice collection of valentines, humorous and satirical, chiefly original. The valentines versemakers even went further in their specializing and provided special verses for the various classes of trades-people, some telling of love in the approved fashion, but others derisively advertising the sender's business.



THE CHATTERBOX A CONIC VALENTINE OF EARLY 19TH CENTURY

specimens and is without a peer anywhere in the world. The oldest specimens of valentines in this famous collection date from the latter part of the eighteenth century and are, of course, home-made and of what is known as the cut-paper variety. Such valentines, invariably delicately cut with sawtooth edges, were found when opened, to be filled with written sentiments. The sheets of paper employed in making one of these valentines was about as large as a pocket handkerchief, but it was folded and refolded until it was reduced to an area of not more than four square inches. The unfolding of such a valentine treated the recipient to a continual succession of surprises. For instance, in the collection is a valentine sent to Sarah Brett in 1795, and upon the outside of which is penned: "When you, dear, this harts behold, 'Twill break as you these lines unfold. The power of envy cannot pretend To say I have false verses send. For in the inside, Sweet Turtle Dove, I've wrote the morals of my love. Thou art the maid and only maid That hast my honest harts trapped." When the seal was broken the favored young lady found a representation of two little pink hearts and the words: "My dearest dear, and blest divine, I have pictured here your heart and mine." So the plaintive appeal continues on various layers of the valentine until at the last unfolding the fair Sarah finds in the handwriting of her poetic admirer the words: "If you refuse with me, to wed, 'Twill bring destruction to my head. Pale death at last shall stand my Friend And bring my sorrow to an end." (Continued on Following Page.)