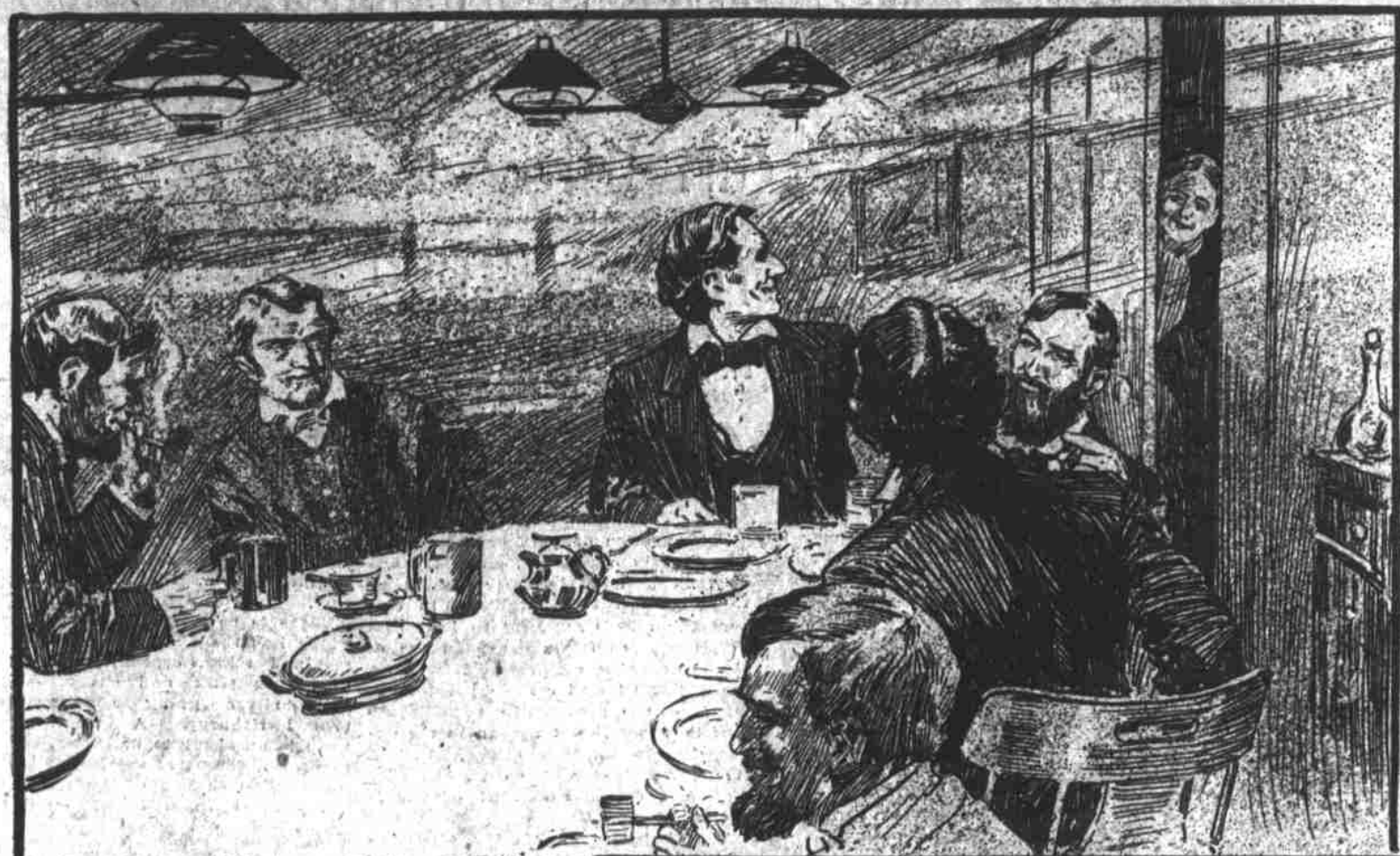


ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S FIRST LOVE STORY



His first glimpse of Ann Rutledge in the Salem Tavern.

How Beautiful Ann Rutledge Won His Heart and Died

GREAT souls love and suffer deeply. Great tragedies lie buried in the hearts of great benefactors of mankind. Affections of the noblest men have ended often in sorrow; have been written in tears, and bound in the immortal book of pain.

Some say, had not Abraham Lincoln lost Ann Rutledge the country would not have had its "Great Emancipator"; that Lincoln might not have become the greatest and most heroic figure of the nineteenth century.

Lincoln's love for this beautiful girl must take its place among the great romances of history; this great passion of his life, which has in it all the elements of Greek tragedy, became, in the terrible days of sorrow, the fire in which was forged his sad and magnificent destiny.

Had she lived, his biographers say, he would doubtless have settled down, become a happy and contented farmer or practicing lawyer, and might never have thought of entering the troublous arena of public life. But Fate, in which Lincoln implicitly believed, predestined a different career; Ann Rutledge died, and, declares his partner, Herndon, "the love and death of this girl shattered Lincoln's purpose and tendencies; he threw off his infinite sorrow by leaping wildly into the political arena." Declared another, "He needed whip and spur to save him from despair."

OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S first romance historians tell us little. In fact, historians tell us little of the grand passions of history, perhaps because they feel the sacredness of these inner shrines of the heart and realize that these stories—rich, after all, are the same with all men—can be realized by all who know, and not by those who have never felt the thrill, the joy of possession and the bitterness of loss, although time after time they are related.

Ann Rutledge was 18, in the full bloom of her virginal beauty, when she came into Lincoln's life, a vision haloed by morning sunshine. Of her personal appearance we know little, save that her hair was pale golden and that she was distinguished from the other girls of the village of New Salem by her unusual beauty and an innate refinement and timidity of bearing.

Lincoln began the summer of 1830 by splitting rails for a pair of jeans trousers. He was poor, and his only means of livelihood were his axe, his great strength and his captivating wit and personality. The winter of 1830-31 was a hard one, "the winter of deep snow," nearly all the wolves and game in the district of New Salem—a village of twenty log houses and shops—were killed by the hungry settlers.

Lincoln did odd jobs and gained a meager livelihood. Yet he had won the affection of the rude settlers, so that when he decided to start on a flatboat expedition to New Orleans the men decided that he should be given a feast. And a feast it was!

FEASTING LEADS TO LOVE

The tavern was a great building of hewn logs, eight rooms, and owned by James Rutledge. There, one day in April, 1831, gathered the farmers and shopkeepers of the district, and a feast was given to the young, raw-boned, witty "Abe." There were great plates of river fish, roast pork, succulent and juicy; corn bread, fresh from the oven; maple sugar, honey and great pitchers of mulled cider. The great room rang with laughter as Abe told his favorite stories and jokes, for which he had already become famous the country around—jokes which have since become known all over the world.

While he told them, from behind the door peeped a young girl, one of a number of children, too shy to venture among the men. For the first time Lincoln saw Ann Rutledge. After the feast, amid laughter and well wishes, the gaunt, lumbering youth left the tavern and trudged down to the banks of the Sangamon, where he boarded a flatboat to go down the river to New Orleans. Women and girls of the village followed, for already "Abe" Lincoln had made himself loved. There was a final hearty shaking of hands; the boat pushed off—and the young man waved their handkerchiefs. Then, overcoming her timidity, a young girl stepped forward, waving her kerchief more vigorously than the rest, her face wreathed with smiles, her eyes kindling with good will. It was Ann Rutledge, daughter of the tavernkeeper. "Abe" Lincoln, leaning on the side of the boat, watched her intently.

Lincoln did not remain long in the South. He took a steamboat up the river to St. Louis and traveled by foot to a farm his father was clearing in the eastern part of the state. This overland journey was more than 100 miles. But he did not remain long at home; a magnet was drawing, drawing him, and in July he made his way down the Sangamon river to New Salem.

During these months Lincoln visited the tavern of the Rutledges, where he often met Ann. But few words passed between them; the girl was shy and retiring. Lincoln felt a sense of his uncouthness and unpre-



Hours when life was sweet to both.

sentable appearance; besides—alas! what pains this knowledge must have given the young lover—Ann was engaged to another.

At the tavern boarded a young man from New York, one John McNeill, who owned the best store in the village, and some rich farming lands. McNeill's manners were those of a gentleman. His English was

impeccable. He was handsome and gallant. Besides, he dressed well. People gasped at the report that he was worth \$12,000. What could poor "Abe" Lincoln, with little money, no graves of manner and no fine clothes, do against such a rival?

In those days Lincoln, burning with a desire for learning, would attend the weekly "spell-downs" on

Fridays in the village school. Ann was always there. In line both would stand as Mentor Graham, the Scotch schoolmaster, would call out the words. Lincoln was avid of learning; he studied hard and often passed up ahead. Sometimes he misspelled words—who knows but when he did so it was because his mind was set on the slim, golden-haired girl, not yet 18, who stood near him and whose shy glance made the blood gallop in his veins and flush his cheeks and set his heart whirling!

Old Mentor Graham helped Lincoln in his studies, and under his guidance he took up the study of mathematics. One evening, after a school debate, the schoolmaster went up to "Abe" and laid his hand on his shoulder. "You're going to make a great speaker," he said, "but your speech is inaccurate and rude. Why don't you study grammar?"

"Where can I get one?" asked the young man, eagerly.

The schoolmaster thought deeply. "I know of a farmer who has one—he lives seven miles away."

Lincoln did not sleep that night. Before dawn the following morning he was up, tramping across the country. He walked along, his pockets filled with corn-cobs. He bought the grammar, paying for it by work, and, radiant, he returned to New Salem, where he studied it by the glow of the embers in the cooper's shop.

A year later, when he went to board at Rutledge's tavern, after returning from an Indian campaign, he presented the precious book to Ann. And in it he wrote: "Ann M. Rutledge is now learning grammar."

For a year and a half Lincoln lived at the tavern. He saw Ann daily. By and by their timidity and bashfulness were away, and they became the closest of friends. But of love Lincoln never spoke. She was betrothed to another, and Lincoln remained silent.

One corner of the room by the fireplace was reserved for her. There she sat spinning wheel and sewing table. And there Lincoln would sit—when John McNeill was not there.

Yet in the hours given him—all too meager, all too short—Lincoln must have lived as all the young lovers of the world lived, in a heaven of ecstasy, made all the more poignant by the knowledge that his beloved was pledged to another. And it must have caused him a pang when, in 1833, James Rutledge sold the tavern



She was his companion at Spelling Bees.

and moved to a farmhouse. So Lincoln changed his boarding place and moved to a farm a mile out from the village, owned by Squire Bowling Green.

In the meantime, while he lived a life of love and despair, Lincoln had been defeated as a candidate for the Assembly and had bought a partnership in a New Salem store. Unfortunately, his partner was a drunkard, a reckless squanderer of money, and while he ran the business to failure, Lincoln was too interested in his studies to devote enough attention to save it. For Lincoln had bought a copy of Blackstone for half a dollar, and during the entire summer of 1833 spent his leisure time devouring it.

Before the firm was dissolved Lincoln had become village postmaster, a perquisite of which job was to read all the papers that came. To distribute the mail he took long tramps; the newspapers he devoured voraciously. When his business failed he remained postmaster, and instead of trying to beat his creditors he, who was afterward known as "Honest Abe," agreed to pay his debts, aggregating more than \$1000, by the money he could save from his earnings.

In 1834 Lincoln was elected to the Legislature, doubling his vote of 1832, but he was so poor that when he went to attend the sessions at the Vandalla Court-house he had to borrow \$200 from a friend to buy clothes and "make a decent appearance."

In the spring of that year Ann Rutledge's fiancé, John McNeill, sold his store suddenly, packed his saddle bags and left New Salem for the East. He would come back, he said, and he and Ann would be married. He would bring his father and mother back with him, and then he would buy a farm and make a home for Ann.

As the days passed Ann wrote her lover many letters, which were given into the hands of the tall postmaster. Day after day passed, and week after week, and the time drifted into months; letters were sent by Ann—but no letter came for her.

People began to talk. They always do in such small communities. They said that he was a fugitive from justice, that he had deserted a wife in the East to whom he returned, and some even hinted that he was a murderer. But Ann bravely defended him, every assertion she indignantly denied. And then a fear began to grow in her heart—perhaps McNeill was dead. There were floods along the river and the valleys were filled with malaria. Possibly he had died. One day Ann learned that her lover had not died for the long-expected missive came.

CRUELY DECEIVED

No one ever learned what was in that letter. Ann told her father, as a dutiful daughter, that she had not known her lover under his right name, and that he did not speak of returning. But what he told her, with what cruel words he rejected her—these were written in her heart as by a fiery brand. But of the long missive Ann lay under the covers, none knew, none guessed, perhaps, but the postmaster.

Autumn came, and then another rumor spread about the gossiping village. What did they think of it? Abraham Lincoln was paying court to Ann Rutledge! Abraham Lincoln, the hero of the countryside, who would go to the Assembly in December!

He spent all his leisure time with her. Almost any day they could be seen wandering by the Sangamon, gathering goldenrod and the flowers of autumn; and afternoons they might be found under a great sycamore, Lincoln lying on the ground, reading Blackstone, or Ann reading Shakespeare to him.

The color returned to Ann's face, the luster to her eyes. Her golden laughter began again to ring, and at evenings from her home could be heard her voice, as sweet as music, singing to her new lover.

Lincoln did not ask Ann to be his wife until the following spring, when he returned from Vandalla, but was the girl blind—did she not read his love in his eyes? It was during that autumn that Ann sang to him the sad verses which begin:

Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift fleeing meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passed from life to his rest in the grave.

Those verses remained Lincoln's favorite ones during the rest of his life.

With high heart Lincoln returned from the session of his first term in the Assembly in the spring of 1835. From Springfield he made the journey on a hired horse. He had with him his luggage of law books, a hundred dollars of money—a fraction of the debt he had to pay and an inexhaustible saddle bag of optimism and great hopes. He was going to ask Ann Rutledge to be his wife.

Lincoln was now 26, unhandsome and ungainly; even at this age his skin was shriveled and yellow; he was long and lanky. When he presented himself to Ann Rutledge he wore baggy buckskin breeches, not mending his rough shawl by several inches and showing his lean shinbones; a linsey-woolsey shirt and a cap of conk. But he did not remain long at Squire Green's farmhouse that afternoon; directly he went to the Rutledge farm and took a walk with Ann.

SUCCESSFUL IN HIS SUIT

During the summer their walks continued; on warm afternoons they sat beneath the sycamore on the banks of the blue Sangamon; Lincoln studied law, Ann read Burns and Shakespeare. These were happy, happy days, for Ann had decided to become the wife of Lincoln. The young student soared through the days as though he were on clouds. He was to continue his studies. Ann was to go to the Jacksonville Academy, and they were to be married when Lincoln was admitted to the bar. These were their plans.

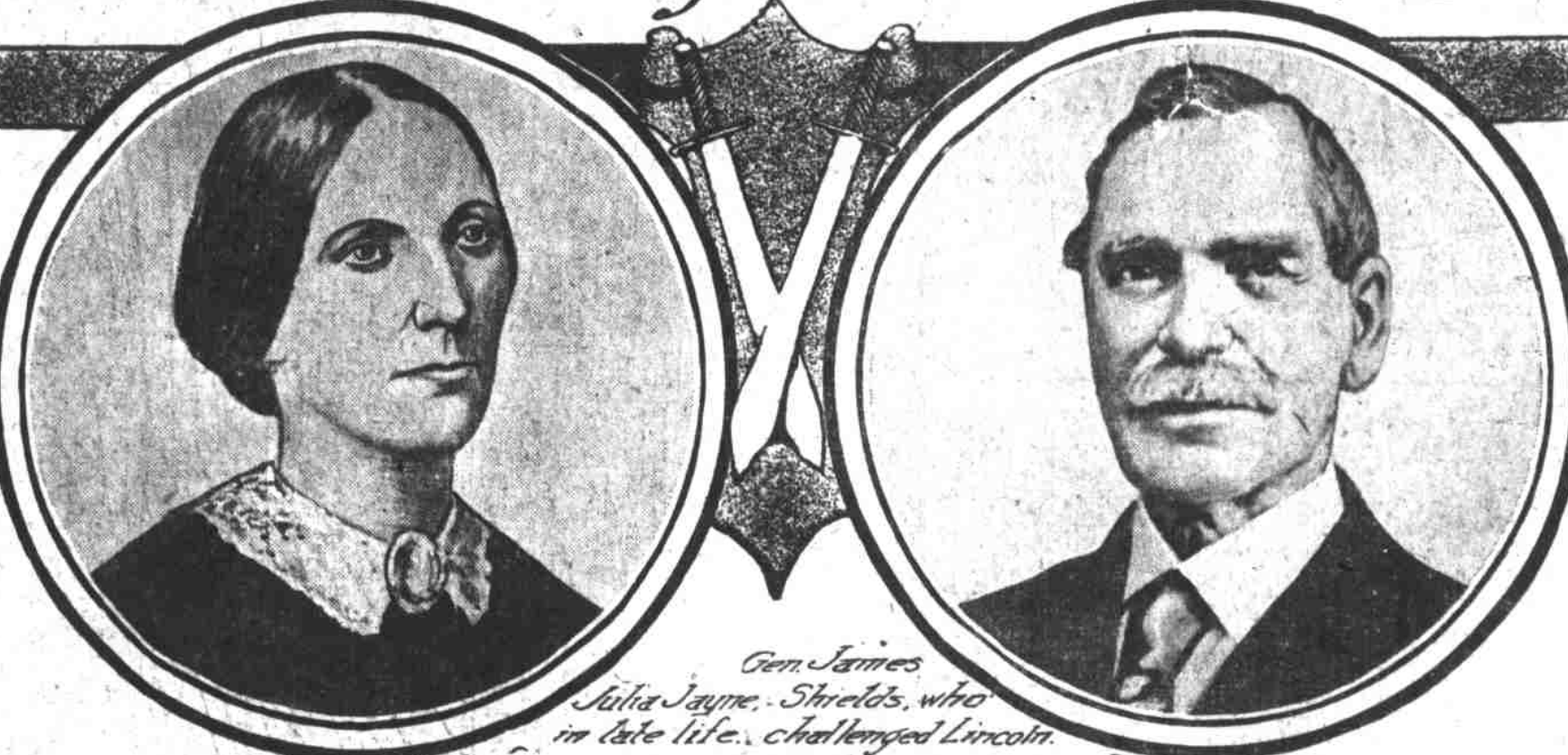
With her great new love there arose in the soul of Ann a vague trouble, which she confided to no one. It was a fear that McNeill should come back. On the days that Lincoln was away she sat alone and brooded; her face became wan, circles appeared under her eyes, and then came a slow rumor spread of McNeill's return.

Ann's frail nature gave way, and when Lincoln returned to New Salem one day he learned she lay delirious with fever.

Like a madman he rushed to her farm. The family sat about and talked in hushed whispers. The beautiful girl was unconscious, and the fever, distracted and wild with sorrow, waited. One day she recovered consciousness. Lincoln stepped into the plain room and found her sitting up. He kissed her forehead. She broke down and wept. The family withdrew. When Lincoln was alone he muttered unintelligible things, and his friends had to care for him. He obeyed Aunt Nancy's commands, chopped wood, picked fruit and did chores mechanically. For months his mind did not clear. He would sit alone and brood. Often he would wander away, and those seeking him knew where to find him—over the green mound he would lay his hand buried in the turf. His eyes drew his sorrow was too great for tears.

Gradually his mind cleared, the mists passed away, and again he took up his studies with fervent zeal. But his face began to change; his eyes sank, his mouth assumed the lines of melancholy, so that today when one looks upon the marble head one sees the face of a "man of sorrow, acquainted with grief." When Lincoln died not sympathize, children and grown-up people loved with the ingenious affection of a child; no ruler was ever so moved by women's pleadings as during the days of the war. He became known by a new title—the "man of mercy." Because he always was learned from the book of tears which he found in pain.

The Duel Challenge that Lincoln accepted



Gen. James Shields, who in late life, challenged Lincoln.

EARLY in the autumn of 1842 Lincoln was already a "beau" of the popular and vivacious Mary Todd in Springfield, Ill.

The state auditor, James Shields, had behind him a career made up of those sudden, astonishing flights into prominence and emolument which often turn the head of a candidate. He was a professed dandy and a devoted, if indiscriminate, gallant. As the responsible fiduciary agent of the state, he bore the major responsibility of the administration when it refused to accept state bank notes in payment of state taxes, a measure unavoidable under conditions existing temporarily, yet as obviously inconsistent with governmental rectitude as it was eminently expedient.

Shields, on all sides, was as vulnerable as an oyster out of the shell. Lincoln, his sense of humor stirred by the burlesque of that situation, would have as soon thought of declaring political war on a rabbit; but he could not resist the temptation to prod Shields a little. The pages of the Springfield Journal were always Lincoln's for any purpose he preferred; he used them to flick the auditor with the whip of satire.

A letter from the "Lost Townships" of Illinois, written by Lincoln in the vein of roving farce, common to the district and the era, was published over the signature of an imaginary "Aunt Rebecca," who declared she had plenty of state bank notes and his party would not let her pay them on her taxes. Incidentally, Aunt Rebecca charged Mr. Shields a little about his gallantry to the ladies and his passion for splendidous habitation.

The town and the state roared with derision of its Beau Brummel auditor. Lincoln, at the time a suitor of Miss Todd, had found his inspiration for the joke during a talk with her and her friend, Miss Julia M. Payne. The

two girls had agreed to help him. They did, with a vengeance.

Shields, breathing fire and fury over the affront to his dignity—for he was courageous enough—tried in vain to learn the identity of "Aunt Rebecca." The next week brought forth another letter from her—written this time by Miss Todd and Miss Payne—telling of the terror his wrath had inspired in her and offering to marry him! The girls supplied, too, some poetry that deplored his loss to love and society, while it wished him joy of his aged and impassioned bride.

The girls' letter practically ignored the political issue on which Lincoln based the original communication, and addressed itself exclusively to Shields' personal vanities. Where Lincoln had flicked, the girls author fairly blistered. Shields demanded of the Journal's editor the name of the author of the "Aunt Rebecca" papers. General John D. Whiteside was the bearer of the demand, and it was of such a nature that Lincoln had to be informed of it.

He told the editor to give his name as the responsible author and on no account to mention the name of either Miss Todd or Miss Payne. His instructions, carried out, elicited an immediate demand for an apology from Lincoln, together with a full retraction of all the offensive allusions. Several sharp letters were exchanged.

As the quarrel approached a climax there was pronounced popular interest, amounting nearly to excitement, in Springfield, although the earlier negotiations had been conducted at the town of Tremont, where Lincoln was attending court. Both General Whiteside and Dr. Merryman, Lincoln's second, were anxious to prevent a fight if they could find a way out. If, however, this could not be found, then Lincoln's seconds must demand:

First. The weapons must be cavalry broadswords of the largest size, such as were used by a cavalry company existing at the town of Jacksonville.

Second. A plank 10 feet long and 3 to 12 inches in breadth must be firmly fixed on edge on the starting ground as the line between the duellists. Neither might pass his foot over it on forfeit of his life.

Then a line should be drawn on the ground on either side of the plank and parallel with it, each line being at a distance from the plank the whole length of the sword and three feet additional. The passing of his feet over the line was to be considered the right should be deemed the surrender of the contest.

The place was to be within three miles of Alton, on the Missouri side of the river, the seconds to agree on the particular spot.

Dr. Merryman, when General Whiteside called on him, read to him these instructions from Lincoln. General Whiteside made an endeavor to effect peace upon other terms, failed, and consented to meet Lincoln and his seconds at Alton, the Lincoln seconds to procure the broadswords at Jacksonville.

So said, so done. The swords were obtained, and all the parties directly concerned assembled in Alton.

There, however, General John J. Hardin and Dr. R. W. English, gentlemen who deplored the popular excitement that had arisen and were, moreover, anxious to prevent the death of either Lincoln or Shields, intercepted as friends of both principals, with the proposal that the whole quarrel be submitted to four or more gentlemen who should report upon its merits.

General Whiteside agreed to it without demur. Dr. Merryman refused to consider it until he consulted with Mr. Lincoln.

"Since the other side has accepted it I will do so," said Lincoln. "But no terms are to be made other than those which I have given you."

Later, full explanations were made, and the troubled skies cleared. There was no duel.