

Lincoln's Love Affairs

By Ward Hill Lamon,
Lincoln's Friend and Biographer

And His Early Experiences as a Lawmaker

Springfield, Feb. 25, 1842.

Dear Speed—I received yours of the 12th, written the day you went down to William's place some days since, but delayed answering it till I should receive the promised one of the 15th, which came last night. I opened the letter with intense anxiety and rejoiced much that it, although it turned out better than I expected, I have hardly yet, at the distance of ten hours, become calm.

I tell you, Speed, our forebodings (for which you and I are pecuniarily responsible) were not without foundation. From the time I received your letter of Saturday that the one of Wednesday was never to come, and yet it did come, and, what is more, it is perfectly clear to me that it is the only one that you were much happier or, if you think the term preferable, less miserable, when you wrote it than when you wrote the last one before. You had so obviously improved as to have written me in a more cheerful and less gloomy mood than you had done before. You say that something indescribably horrible and alarming still haunts you. You will not say that three months ago, now, I will venture, when your nerves once got steady, now the whole trouble will be over forever. Nor should you become impatient at their being even very slow in becoming steady. Again, you say you much fear that that Elysium of which you have dreamed so much is never to be realized. Well, if it shall not, I dare swear it will not be the fault of her who is now your wife. I now have no doubt that it is the peculiar misfortune of both you and me to dream dreams of Elysium far exceeding all that anything earthly can realize. Far short of your dreams as you may be, no woman could do more to realize them than that same black-eyed Fanny, if you could but contemplate her through my imagination it would appear ridiculous to you that any one should for a moment think of being unhappy with her. My old father used to say that "if you make a bad bargain hug it all the tighter," and it occurs to me that if the bargain you have just closed can possibly be called a bad one, it is certainly the most pleasant one for applying that maxim to which my fancy can by any effort picture.

I write another letter, inclosing this, which you can show her if she desires it. I do this because she would not so strangely perhaps should you tell her that you received no letters from me or, telling her you do, refuse to let her see them. I close this, entertaining the confident hope that every successive letter that shall have from you (which I here pray may not be few nor far between) may show you possessing a more steady hand and cheerful heart than the last preceding it. As ever, your friend,
LINCOLN.

Springfield, March 27, 1842.

Dear Speed—Yours of the 10th inst. was received three of four days since. You know I am a man of no great capacity for pleasure its contents gave me was and is inexpressible. As to your farm matter, I have no sympathy with you. I have no farm, nor ever expect to have, and consequently have no interest in it, and am not enough to be much interested with it. I can only say that I am glad you are satisfied and pleased with it.

But on that other subject, to me of the most intense interest, I tell you with sorrow. I never had the power to withhold my sympathy from you. It cannot be told how it now thrills me with joy to hear you say you are "far happier than you ever were before." I think I know I know is enough. I know you too well to suppose your expectations were not at least sometimes extravagant, and, if the reality exceeds them all, I say, "Enough, dear Lord, I am not going beyond the truth when I tell you that the short space it took me to read your last letter gave me more pleasure than the total sum of all I have enjoyed since that fatal 1st of January, when since then it seems to me I should have been entirely happy but for the never absent idea that there is one still unhappy whom I have contributed to make so. That still kills my soul. I cannot but reproach myself for even wishing to be happy while she is otherwise. She accompanied a large party on the railroad cars to Jacksonville last Monday and on her return spoke, so that I heard of it, of having enjoyed the trip exceedingly. God be praised for that!

You know with what sleepless vigilance I have watched you ever since the commencement of your affair, and, although I am almost confident it is useless, I cannot forbear once more to say that I think it is not yet too late for you to step down and leave your miserable wife, they should, don't fail to remember that they cannot long remain so. One thing I can tell you which I know you will be glad to hear, and that is that I have seen—and scrutinized her feelings as well as I could and am fully convinced she is far happier now than she has been for the last fifteen months past.

You will see by the last Sangamon Journal that I have made a temperance speech on the 23d of February, which I claim that Fanny and you shall read as an act of charity to me, for I cannot learn that anybody else has read it or is likely to. Fortunately it is not very long, and I shall deem it a sufficient compliance with my request if one of you listens while the other reads it.

As to your Lockridge matter, it is only necessary to say that there has been no court since you left and that the next commences tomorrow morning, during which I suppose we cannot fail to get a judgment.

I wish you would learn of Everett what he would take over and above a discharge for all the trouble we have been at to take his business out of our hands and give it to somebody else. It is impossible to collect money on that, or any other claim here now, and although you know I am not a very patient man, I declare I am almost out of patience with Mr. Everett's endless importunity. It seems like he not only writes all the letters he can himself, but gets somebody else in Louisville and vicinity to be constantly writing to us about his claim. I have always said that Mr. Everett is a very clever fellow, and I am very sorry he cannot be obliged, but it does seem to me he ought to know we are interested to collect his claim and therefore would do it if we could.

I am neither joking nor in a pet when I say we would thank him to transfer his business to some other, without any compensation for what we have done, provided he will see the court cost paid, for which we are security.

The sweet violet you inclosed came safely to hand, but it was so dry and mashed so flat that it crumbled to dust at the first attempt to handle it. The

me, and I will understand. You'd have been the husband of a lovely woman nearly eight months. That you are happier now than the day you married her, I well know, for without you could not be living. But I have your word for it, too, and the returning elasticity of spirits which is manifested in your letters. But I want to ask a close question, "Are you now in feeling, as well as judgment, glad you are married as you are?" From anybody but me this would be an impudent question not to be tolerated, but I know you will pardon it in me. Please answer it quickly, as I am impatient to know.

I have sent my love to your Fanny so often I fear she is getting tired of it. However, I will venture to tender it again. Yours forever,
LINCOLN.

CHAPTER XIV. Lincoln Willing to Fight a Duel For Gallantry.

IN the last of these letters Mr. Lincoln refers to his duel with Shields. That was another of the disagreeable consequences which flowed from his fatal entanglement with Mary. Not content with managing a timid, although half frantic and refractory lover, her restless spirit led her into new fields of adventure. Her pen was too keen to be idle in the political controversies of the time. As a



MRS. NINIAN W. EDWARDS.

satirical vent she had no rival of either sex at Springfield and few, we venture to say, anywhere else. But that is a dangerous talent. The temptations to use it unfairly are numerous and strong. It inflicts so much pain and almost necessarily so much injustice upon those against whom it is directed that its possessor rarely, if ever, escapes from a controversy without suffering from the desperation it provokes. Mary Todd was not disposed to let her genius rust for want of use, and, finding no other victim handy, she turned her attention to James Shields, auditor. [James Shields later had a distinguished and remarkable career. He volunteered in the Mexican war, became a brigadier general and for gallantry at Cerro Gordo was brevetted major general. At both Cerro Gordo and Chapultepec he was severely wounded. President Polk appointed him the first territorial governor of Oregon, but before he started for that territory he was elected United States senator from Illinois. Later he served in the senate from Minnesota by election and from Missouri by appointment, thus representing three states in that body. Shields was operating a mine in Mexico when the civil war began. He went to Washington in August, 1861, and was appointed a brigadier general by President Lincoln, his old opponent. General Shields defeated Stonewall Jackson at Winchester, Va., but was defeated by the Confederate leader a few months later at Port Republic. He died June 1, 1870, at Ottumwa, Ia.—Editor.] She had a friend, one Miss Jayne, afterward Mrs. Trumbull, who helped to keep her literary secrets and assisted as much as she could in worrying the choleric Irishman. Mr. Francis, the editor, knew very well that Shields was "a fighting man," but the "pieces" sent him by the wicked ladies were so uncommonly rich in point and humor that he yielded to a natural inclination and printed them one and all, the articles purporting to be letters from "Aunt Becca."

It is by no means a subject of wonder that these publications threw Mr. James Shields into a state of wrath. A thin skinned, sensitive, high minded and high tempered man, tender of his honor, and an Irishman besides, it would have been strange indeed if he had not felt like snuffing blood. But his rage only afforded new delights to his tormentors, and when it reached its height Aunt Becca transformed herself to Cathleen and broke out in rhymes, which Miss Jayne's brother Bill kindly consented to "drop" for the amiable ladies.

It was too bad. Mr. Shields could stand it no longer. He sent General Whiteside to Mr. Francis to demand the name of the person who wrote the letters from the "Lost Townships," and Mr. Francis told him it was A. Lincoln. This information led to a challenge, a sudden scamping off of parties and friends to Missouri, a meeting, an explanation and a peaceful return.

Abraham Lincoln in the field of honor, sword in hand, maneuvered by a second learned in the duello, would be an attractive spectacle under any circumstances, but with a celebrated man for an antagonist and a lady's humor for the occasion the scene is one of transcendent interest, and the documents which describe it are well entitled to a place in his history. The letter of Mr. Shields' second, being first in date, is first in order.

Springfield, Oct. 3, 1842.

To the Editor of the Sangamon Journal:—To prevent misrepresentation of the recent affair between Messrs. Shields and Lincoln, I think it proper to give a brief narrative of the facts of the case as they came within my knowledge. As the truth

of which I hold myself responsible, and request you to give the same publication. An offensive article in relation to Mr. Shields appeared in the Sangamon Journal of the 23d September last, and on demanding the author Mr. Lincoln was given up by the editor. Mr. Shields previous to this demand made arrangements to go to Quincy on public business, and before his return Mr. Lincoln had left for Tremont to attend case with the intention of remaining of remaining on circuit several weeks. Mr. Shields on his return requested me to accompany him to Tremont, and on arriving there we found that Dr. Merryman and Mr. Butler had passed us in the night and had been before us. We arrived in Tremont on the 17th ult., and Mr. Shields addressed a note to Mr. Lincoln immediately. Informing him that he was glad to add the name of some article that appeared in the Sangamon Journal (one more over the signature having made its appearance at this time) and requesting him to retract the offensive article contained in said article in relation to his private character. Mr. Shields handed this note to me to deliver to Mr. Lincoln and directed me at the same time not to enter into any verbal explanation, as such were always liable to misapprehension. This note was delivered by me to Mr. Lincoln, stating at the same time that I would call at his residence in the evening of the same day handed me a letter addressed to Mr. Shields. In this he gave or offered no explanation, but stated therein that he could not submit to answer further on the ground that Shields' note contained an assumption of facts and also a menace. Mr. Shields then addressed him another note, in which he disavowed all intention to menace or menace, and requested to know whether he (Mr. Lincoln) was the author of either of the articles which appeared in the Journal headed "Lost Townships" and signed "Rebecca," and, if so, he repeated his request of a retraction of the offensive matter in relation to his private character; if not, his denial would be held sufficient. This letter was returned to Mr. Shields unanswered, with a verbal statement "that there could be no further negotiation between them until the first note was withdrawn." Mr. Shields thereupon sent a note designating me as his friend, to which Mr. Lincoln replied by designating Dr. Merryman. These three last notes passed on Monday morning, the 19th. Dr. Merryman handed me Mr. Lincoln's last note when by ourselves. I remarked to Dr. Merryman that the matter was now submitted to us and that we should proceed to answer it, if we should pledge our words of honor to each other to try to agree upon terms of amicable arrangement and compel our principals to accept of them. To this he readily assented, and we shook hands and agreed that we should adjourn to Springfield and there prosecute the matter for the purpose of effecting the secret arrangement between him and myself. All this kept concealed from Mr. Shields. Our horse had got a little lame in going to Tremont, and Dr. Merryman invited me to take a seat in his buggy. I accepted the invitation the more readily as I had no other horse. Mr. Shields' horse most until his horse would be in better condition to travel would facilitate the private agreement between Dr. Merryman and myself. I traveled to Springfield on Monday night, and on Tuesday, to my surprise, I found that Mr. Lincoln had met in Missouri, within three miles of Alton, on the next Thursday; the weapons, cavalry broadswords of the largest size; the parties to stand on each side of a barrier, no post and make a position. As I had not been consulted at all on the subject and considering the private understanding between Dr. Merryman and myself and it being known that Mr. Shields was left in Tremont, such an option took me by surprise. However, being determined not to violate the laws of the state, I declined agreeing upon the terms until we should meet in Missouri. Mr. Shields called upon Dr. Merryman and withdrew the pledge of honor between him and myself in relation to a secret agreement. I started after this to meet Mr. Shields and met him about eight miles from Springfield. It was on Tuesday night when we both reached the city and learned that Dr. Merryman had left for Missouri, Mr. Lincoln having left before the proposition was made, as Dr. Merryman had himself informed me. The time and place made it necessary to start at once. We left Springfield at 11 o'clock on Tuesday night, traveled all night and arrived in Hillsborough on Wednesday morning, where we were met by General Ewing and Dr. Hope and withdrew the pledge of honor between him and myself in relation to a secret agreement. I started after this to meet Mr. Shields and met him about eight miles from Springfield. It was on Tuesday night when we both reached the city and learned that Dr. Merryman had left for Missouri, Mr. Lincoln having left before the proposition was made, as Dr. Merryman had himself informed me. The time and place made it necessary to start at once. 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