

# Lincoln and the Question of Slavery

By GEORGE H. PICARD

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Lincoln at Time of Douglas Debate

SOON after reaching his majority Abraham Lincoln made two voyages down the Mississippi river as far as New Orleans in a flatboat. Ten years later, when his faculty of critical observation must have become considerably more acute, he made a third visit to the gulf states. It has been found convenient by some of his biographers and not a few post-bellum historians to date Mr. Lincoln's conversation to the then novel and proscribed doctrine of antislavery for that period. Specious as this hypothesis may seem, there is no authentic record that Lincoln himself ever confirmed it. With a mentality capable of absorbing the gist of the literary hoardings of the centuries, but denied all opportunity until long after the period at which most students have mastered the essentials of a college education, Abraham Lincoln, omnivorous reader and logical reasoner, in the long interval between his southern journeys and his election to congress, transformed himself into the foremost sociologist of his age.

Before he was elected to congress Mr. Lincoln served for several terms in the Illinois state legislature, but did not refer, even incidentally, to the subject of slavery in his speeches. When he was sent to congress he proclaimed himself the militant apostle of the antislavery agitation. Strong men had arrayed themselves against the slave trade, and fervid enthusiasts had proclaimed their willingness to yield their lives for its abolition. The new congressman from the Sangamon district of Illinois announced his intention to propose the emancipation of the slaves in the District of Columbia. Such was the prevailing temper of the time that congress declined absolutely to consider the proposition, but Mr. Lincoln had sounded the keynote of a mighty apostolate. He had shown his colors and a willingness to follow them to the end. He was not invited to become a candidate for re-election. His political friends admired his courage and his intellect, but shied at his radicalism.

This hesitancy on the part of his constituency could not prevent Mr. Lincoln from becoming the most influential exponent of the principles of the Whig party in the state. After his return from congress he was in great demand as an orator in every campaign. He became better known than any other man in the state except Stephen A. Douglas, and in the course of time he settled down to a very large and lucrative law practice. The repeal of the Missouri compromise awakened all the apparently dormant energies of his nature. He forsook his exacting business and at once assumed the leadership of the new party which arose in the west to battle against the scheme of the slave trade to organize the new territories under proslavery auspices. The designs of the proslavery leaders were not congenial to the people of the west, but they had a powerful advocate in the eloquent Douglas, and public sentiment was in a state of fecklessness. A new senator was to be chosen in Illinois, and it happened that the legislature elected during the heat of the discussion contained a majority in favor



LINCOLN'S CHALLENGE TO DOUGLAS, "TEAR OR NAY?"

of the principles which Lincoln had been advocating. The ardent reformer was the unanimous choice of the members of his party, but four men with Democratic proclivities, but opposed to slavery, would not support him, and he prevailed upon the majority to unite on Lyman Trumbull. It was a moral victory for Lincoln, and it made him the leader of the antislavery movement.

This was the actual beginning of the Republican party, an organization committed to the antislavery movement and having for its leader the man who

had been foremost in creating it. When Mr. Douglas returned to Illinois to secure his re-election to the senate the Republicans with one consent proclaimed Lincoln as his antagonist. Nothing loath, the great debater entered the arena. He challenged the "Little Giant" to become his opponent in a series of joint discussions. The challenge was accepted without a moment's hesitation, and there followed the most remarkable oratorical duel ever witnessed by the citizens of any state. All that eventful summer of 1858 Mr. Douglas, adroit and convincing orator that he was, defended his thesis of nonintervention with slavery in the territories, and Mr. Lincoln, with equal ability and superior moral insight, exposed its fallacies.

The interest excited by this titanic combat of words was not confined to Illinois or even to the west. There was



HE SAT AT HIS DESK AND WROTE AND REWROTE.

not a corner in the entire Union too remote or too obscure to share it. For the first time in his political career Mr. Lincoln burned his bridges and committed himself unreservedly to the cause whose mightiest champion he had become. The fears of his friends and the denunciations of his enemies were equally powerless to deter him.

Mr. Douglas was re-elected, but his victory was but the prelude of coming defeat for the cause which he had advocated so nobly. As it was, he could not have been returned to the senate if his opponent's penetrating insistence had not compelled him publicly to qualify his proslavery utterances and attach a proviso to his political creed. That was indeed a critical moment in the talented Douglas's political career—that summer afternoon in the little prairie city of Freeport when the great emancipator, his gaunt form erect and his long forefinger extended with persuasive earnestness, demanded of the now hesitating Democratic candidate, "Is there any lawful way by which the people of a territory, against the wish of any citizen of the United States, may exclude slavery from its limit prior to the formation of a state constitution?" Here at last was the supreme dilemma. Upon the categorical "yes" or "no" which he must utter hung the fate of Douglas's political future. His feeble "yes" sent him to the senate, but cost him the support of the south and made his position in the north untenable.

This final debate, followed by a speech at Cooper Union, New York, in which he contended that slavery was incompatible with a republican form of government, gave Mr. Lincoln the Republican nomination for the presidency in 1860. His election and the outbreak of the civil war were practically coincident. In his inaugural address he showed the country that he was not the radical fanatic which inflated pre-election oratory had declared him to be. He had much to say concerning secession, but nothing about slavery. He chose a safe middle course and persisted in it until time and the progress of events should provide him with the opportunity for which his freedom loving soul longed so ardently. With almost preternatural foresight he knew that the time was not far distant when that which he so greatly desired to accomplish could be brought about through the medium of political expediency. He had no love for the spectacular; he hid his time.

He made no secret of his ultimate intention to act. He did not hesitate; he was waiting. All the united radical element of his party cried out at his delay. He sat at his desk and wrote and rewrote the magic formula. Finally when he saw that it was ready to play its part in the preservation of the Union he launched the emancipation proclamation.

# Mount Vernon the American Mecca

Love of Care of The Nation

Few Changes in Washington's Home

Few changes are perceptible at Mount Vernon from year to year. Every sign of decay is obliterated as soon as it appears, and the places in which it is expected to show are kept under constant surveillance. All the changes that occur are for the better. Of course the natural beauty of the historic spot increases as time moves on, and every tender aid that can contribute anything to the process is freely given. Every year the trees which Washington planted gain a trifle in girth and stature, and the shadows beneath their compact greenery become denser and more far reaching. The four giant sentinels which guard the west entrance were put there by the hand of Washington about a century ago. Two of them are ash and two are poplar, and each is a perfect specimen of its kind.

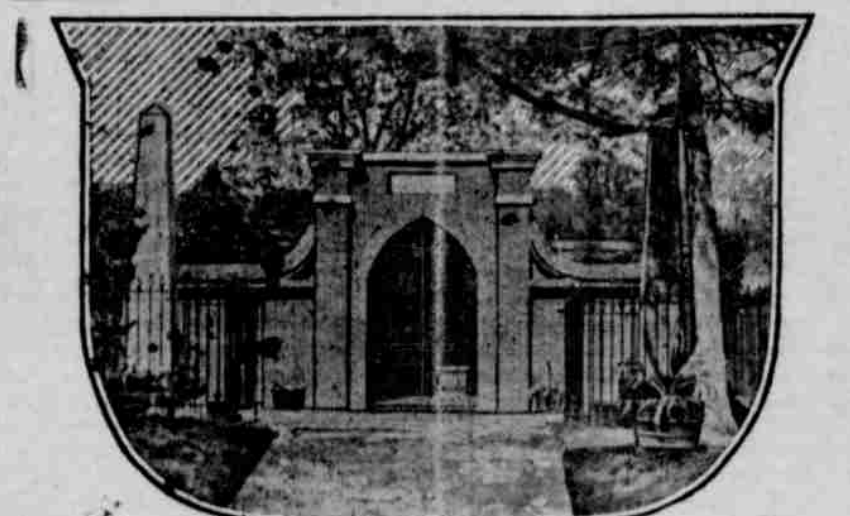
It is a fact that Mount Vernon is becoming more and more the great American Mecca. Increased facilities for reaching it have no doubt contributed to its growing popularity, but even were it beyond a Sahara there would be no end to pilgrimage. It is the one shrine toward which loyal hearts are always turning, and that sentiment is constantly growing stronger. Multifarious as the attractions of the capital undoubtedly are, they are insufficient to delay the pilgrim on his way to Mount Vernon. Formerly the visitor to the estate went by water, and the sail consumed the better part of a day. Now one may take an electric car and be landed at the entrance to the grounds within an hour.

Within the last few years there have been a number of renovations and improvements. They have been effected so quietly and so gradually that they were scarcely noticed by a frequent visitor, but one who had returned after a long absence would be gratified to discover many indications that the nation was not growing weary of

visitors from abroad were not sparing in their criticism of American lukewarmness.

After the association obtained possession of Mount Vernon matters continued to look very dark for awhile. The civil war broke out, and it was impossible to interest anybody in so important a subject even as the restoration of Mount Vernon. The women of the association had raised the \$200,000 required to purchase the estate with comparative facility. Edward Everett alone having contributed \$70,000, which he had earned by his pen and lectures. To this generous gift Massachusetts added \$30,000, making half of the sum demanded, and the remainder was secured in smaller contributions from states and individuals, the most liberal being New York and Alabama. The property was in such a run down condition that it would require a large sum to rehabilitate it. In the state of affairs which supervened nothing whatever could be done. The first gleam of hope came in a peculiar way. By some unaccountable blunder a small boat belonging to the association was confiscated by the government. When the matter was adjudicated the association was awarded \$7,000 damages. This sum, trifling as it was, was put to good use in checking some of the most ruinous features of the decay, and when the war was ended contributions were forthcoming in satisfactory sums. The expense of keeping the estate in order is now met largely by the admission fees. Since about 100,000 persons visit Mount Vernon annually, it will be seen that these fees amount to a large sum.

No matter how often one has visited the spot, it never ceases to be interesting. There are hundreds of pilgrims who appear annually, and they always find something to repay them. There is an indescribable fascination in wandering through the halls and chambers where walked, ate, slept and drank the



THE TOMB OF WASHINGTON AT MOUNT VERNON.

the loving perpetuation of its noblest memory. For one thing, a complete system of hot water heating has been introduced. This not only warms the mansion, but also the outbuildings and conservatories. The boiler room, which is at least 400 feet from the house, is entirely subterranean, and so are the pipes. For the old mansion itself indirect radiation is employed, the heat being carried from the cellar through grills in the fireplaces to the rooms above. In this way the heating process is concealed, and there is no suggestion of modern improvement to conflict with the colonial atmosphere of the spot.

A few years ago the state of Texas erected a handsome gateway and lodge at the north entrance to the estate, and the condition of the park is being improved constantly. One of the most interesting restorations of recent years has been that of the old family kitchen, which is now precisely as it was in the days when Mrs. Washington maintained such a rigid oversight of its management. It is a quaint apartment with a brick floor and unplastered walls and ceiling, and it is connected with the mansion by a covered colonnade. The entire east side of the room is occupied by a great fireplace, which is fitted with an antiquated revolving spit which is worked with a chain and windlass. Several pieces of kitchen ware which were in service when Mrs. Washington gave her famous dinners have been found in collections and restored to their former habitat.

As time has demonstrated, the most fortunate thing that ever happened to the precious old relic was the guardianship assumed by the Mount Vernon Ladies' association. It is not agreeable to speculate upon the fate which might have befallen the property had its rescue been delayed. Lacking the thrift and energy of their illustrious ancestor, Washington's descendants were permitting the estate to revert to a condition of primitive disorder. The land was untilled, the mansion and other buildings were falling into decay, and the owner, John Augustine Washington, gave all of his time to the apparently hopeless task of persuading congress or the state of Virginia to purchase the property and maintain it as a national or state museum. At this present time it is not easy to account for the hesitation either of congress or of the state of Virginia. It was certainly not because either of them was ignorant of the wretched state of neglect into which the property had been suffered to fall, for that was patent to the entire country, and distinguished

great central personality concerned in the evolution of the republic. According to modern requirements, measured by the tastes which the present generation has developed, Mount Vernon would be an exceedingly uncomfortable dwelling place, and one cannot avoid suspecting that the Washingtons may have found it so. The mansion is roomy, but the interior is most awkwardly subdivided. The rooms of Washington and his wife were in the south end of the building. They were reached by a side hall on the east. To enter the bedrooms on the north it was necessary to pass through the rooms opening from the main hall, and that must have been rather embarrassing when the house was filled with guests, which was so frequently the case. The kitchen was remote from the dining room, and there were no devices to insure warm food and prompt service. If the furniture now exhibited at Mount Vernon is a fair sample of the kind used by its original owners it needs no further explanation when it is related that the Washingtons kept very early hours. It is neither beautiful nor comfortable. The huge mahogany bedsteads were so lofty that they were provided with a pair of steps, and it required both care and skill to reach one's pillow at night and to leave it in the morning. The small attic chamber in which Martha Washington breathed her last is almost pitiful in its lack of creature comfort. It is said that she refused to occupy a more comfortable sleeping room because from the little dormer window of the attic chamber she could see the first tomb of her illustrious husband.

GEORGE F. CARD.

## Washington and the Negro.

Washington, like almost every other landed proprietor in the early days of the republic, was a slave owner, but he was always a kind and considerate master. He publicly sympathized with the antislavery agitation of 1790, expressing his desire to see the system extinguished by some just and equitable method. At the time of his death Washington possessed 124 slaves, whom he directed in his will should be emancipated upon the death of his wife. Washington's will also contained an injunction upon his heirs to care for such of the manumitted slaves as were old or decrepit as long as they should live and to look out for the orphaned until they should be able to look out for themselves. To one slave, his "mulatto man," William Lee, he gave immediate freedom, with an annuity for life of \$30.

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