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PLASTERING, BRICK AND CONCRETE WORK

1809—The Lincoln Centenary—1909

Lincoln as a Story Teller

Part First—Lincoln Taught Lessons, Gave Mental Medicine and Spread Sunshine by Means of Stories

By James A. Edgerton

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"I DID NOT COME TO HEAR STORIES."

SOME poet—was it Goethe?—once remarked that when trouble assailed him he got rid of it by writing a poem. If I believed this of some poets, I might have more charity for them. The methods of men to assuage grief are as variable as their temperaments. Some take to work, some to play. One prays, another blasphemes. This man drinks, and that one commits suicide.

Abraham Lincoln's way was better and saner than most of these methods, possibly than all of them. He told stories.

Mr. Lincoln once expressed this idea to an important congressman that called full of business. The president began some innocent story, just by way of saying "Good morning." Thereupon the congressman puffed himself up. "Mr. President," he said, "I did not come here this morning to hear stories. It is too serious a time."

The smile faded from the president's face. Lincoln was ever gentle, truly a gentle man. Dividing that word defines it. But for this quality he would have terminated the interview with the bore then and there. As it was, he asked him quietly to sit down. "I respect you as an earnest, sincere man," he said to the congressman. "You cannot be more anxious than I have been constantly since the beginning of the war, and I say to you now that were it not for this occasional vent I should die."

The president had another object in giving way to the anecdote habit. Everybody else did it, or tried to, and he was so companionable a man that he wanted to be like other people. Telling stories was a national dissipation. Lincoln naturally fell into it, only he did it better than others. He raised it into an art.

It was his pastime. He did not drink or play cards. As for automobiling, affinities and buying legislatures, these diversions had not been invented, at least under these names. If they had been, Lincoln would not have had anything to do with them. They are the pastimes of the rich, and he was always poor. He had no vices, with the possible exception of talking politics. So his sport was telling stories. It beguiled his own hours and made other people happy. It was his method of teaching lessons, giving mental medicine and spreading sunshine.

The beauty of a Lincoln narrative is that it invariably has a point. In this it does not resemble all latter day humor. A collection of individuals one day visited the White House, and one grew rather familiar and asked the president to tell a story. Lincoln turned his back on the fellow and quietly remarked to the rest of the group that he never told stories just for the sake of telling stories. Throughout his life, whatever the reports might be, he had always told stories to illustrate a truth or enforce an argument.

Lincoln often put more into a story or into a pat phrase than some men put into a sermon—more, indeed, than some authors put into a book. For example, when one editor made a great outcry against the administration without adducing any facts to back it up Mr. Lincoln was reminded of a story:

A man traveling through Kansas on horseback was overtaken by a terrific thunderstorm. To make matters worse, night came on, there was no house seemingly in miles, and the traveler lost his way. As the storm grew more violent he dismounted and led his horse, stumbling along in the mud, the rain and the increasing din of the thunder. It was now the blackness of darkness except for intermittent flashes of lightning, and the traveler became terrified by the fact that he could not find the road. Suddenly a tremendous thunder crash brought him to his knees in this frightened prayer:

"O Lord, if it's all the same to you, give me a little more light and a little less noise."

A farmer once came to the president with the complaint that the soldiers had stolen his horse and he wanted the government to pay him at once. Lincoln replied that if he attended to each case like this he would have enough work for twenty presidents. This recalled a steamboat pilot story:

In one portion of his journey this pilot had to steer the boat through a most perilous stretch of rapids. One day while right in the middle of this boiling stretch of water he felt a tug at his coattail. "Hey, mister," piped a small boy, "stop your boat a minute. I've lost my apple overboard."

This recalls the time that the president turned on one committee of high-browed knockers who came to complain of the way he was running the government. After listening to them in patience he said:

Gentlemen, suppose all the property you were worth was in gold and you had put it into the hands of Blondin to carry across the Niagara river on a rope, would you shake the cable or keep shouting at him: "Blondin, stand up a little straighter!" "Blondin, stoop a little more!" "Go a little faster!" "Lean a little more to the north!" "Lean a little more to the south!" No, you would hold your breath as well as your tongue and keep your hands off until he was safe over. The government is carrying an enormous weight, untold treasure in its hands; it is doing the very best it can. Don't badger it; keep silence, and it will get you safe across.

After complimenting a young attorney one day on his remarkable flow of language Mr. Lincoln told the jury a story:

My young friend's gift of words has one serious drawback, which you, gentlemen, have witnessed in this case. It interrupts the action of his mind. When his tongue works, his brain quits. He reminds me of a little steamboat that used to run on the Sangamon river. It had a three foot boiler and a five foot whistle, and every time it whistled it had to stop.

Every collection of Lincoln stories must contain a number familiar to the reader, as they have all been published to the ends of the earth. Though old, they are worth repeating, however, because they are Lincoln's.

Apropos of nothing in particular or of nothing that can be recalled, Mr. Lincoln told this tale of the Massachusetts Puritans:

When the redskins were troubling the colonists up there considerably the Puritans one Thanksgiving made up their minds that things had gone far enough. So after the services Thanksgiving at that time being a season of fasting and prayer, they just reorganized and held a business meeting. All they did was to pass three resolutions as follows:

"First, Resolved, That the earth and the fullness thereof belong to God.

"Second, That God gave the earth to his saints.

"Third, That we are the saints."

Then they went and slew every redskin in sight.

A visitor at the White House one day complimented the president on the fact that he had no vices, as he neither drank nor smoked. Lincoln showed at once that there was about him none of the holier than thou by retorting:

That is a doubtful compliment. I recollect once being outside a stagecoach in Illinois, and a man sitting by me offered me a cigar. I told him I had no vices. He said nothing, but smoked for some time and then growled out, "It's my experience that folks who have no vices have generally very few virtues."

Not infrequently if the president had a rebuke to give he sugar coated it with a story. When it was felt that his life was in especial danger the servants and a guard were stationed in the White House and were supposed to keep moving about in different parts of the house. Contrary to this, one night they were all congregated in the dining room when Lincoln came in quietly in his stocking feet. The servants looked cheap, and the president told a story.

"Do you know what I'm like?" he said. When no one answered he resumed:

A little friend found forty-three eggs one day. He put them under one hen. When he had told his mother what he had done she asked him why. "She can't cover them all," said the lad's mother.

"That's all right," said Johnnie. "I just wanted to see how far she could spread herself."

"I just wanted to see," continued the president, "how far you had spread yourselves."

The coachman who told the story said they kept themselves spread out after that and that the rebuke was better than a tongue lashing.

"I WANTED TO SEE HOW FAR YOU HAD SPREAD YOURSELVES."

Here is a tale Mr. Lincoln told often. It related to a Tennessee lawyer, of course called judge. When one day trying a case the other side produced a witness that swore him completely out of court. After the trial a friend came to him and said, "Why didn't you get that fellow to sw'ar on your side?" "I didn't know anything about him," replied the lawyer. "I might have told you," said the friend, "for he would sw'ar for you jest as hard as he'd sw'ar for the other side. That's his business. Judge, that fellow takes in sw'arin' for a livin'."

After the emancipation proclamation there was doubt expressed of the colored troops that had been enlisted. But they acquitted themselves in a manner to call forth general praise. Shortly afterward Lincoln was with General Grant when there was a review of the troops, the black fellows among the rest. The president told Grant that at such a time it was well to be a little color blind.

I think, general, that we can say of the colored boys what a country fellow who was an old time abolitionist said when he went to a theater in Chicago and heard Forrest play Othello. He was not up in Shakespeare and didn't know that the tragedian was blacked up for the purpose. After the play was over the folks who invited him to attend the show wanted to know what he thought of the actors, and he said. "Waal, laying all sectional prejudices aside and any partiality I may have for the race, derned if I don't think the colored fellow held his own with any of 'em."

CUSTER'S LAST FIGHT

BY BUFFALO BILL

FROM "TRUE TALES OF THE PLAINS"

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ANY series of stories of Indian war would be incomplete without giving an account of the campaign of 1876 against the northern Sioux and their allies from the south, the Sioux and Cheyennes, an affair known as the Custer campaign. The catastrophe that overwhelmed the gallant General Custer and his brave command was an episode that will live forever in Indian history.

In the summer of 1874 General Sheridan sent two expeditions into what was known as the northern country. He sent General Custer with the Seventh cavalry from Fort Abraham Lincoln to scout in the north and northwest to the Black Hills and to return through the Black Hills back to his post. At the same time he sent Colonel Anson Mills from the department of the Platte, leaving the Union Pacific railroad at Rawlins, Wyo., on an expedition to scout the Sweetwater country, the Big Horn basin and Big Horn mountain country and to return by way of the Powder river country back to his department. I was sent to guide Colonel Anson Mills' expedition. The two commands, one under Custer and one under Mills, came within communicating distance in eastern Wyoming, on the Powder river, the two commanding officers and scouts meeting and holding a consultation. This country was then comparatively unknown, except to the scouts, hunters and trappers.

Mills marched from Rawlins to Independence Rock, on the Sweetwater river, where he made a supply camp and left his wagons. General Custer continued on through the Black Hills, exploring it in every hole and corner, and then returned to Fort Abraham Lincoln. This meeting of the two commanders was the last time I ever saw the general. It was on Custer's expedition through the Black Hills that the old timers' assertions of its wealth in gold were confirmed and practically demonstrated. Therefore, although the government's intention was to keep out invaders of this section (many of the first being arrested by the military), the efforts were a failure, for the rush became so great as to render it impracticable to arrest it. This brought about irritation on the part of the Indians. During '75 and '76 the whole Dakota nation, the most powerful Indians and their allies, listened to the harangues of Sitting Bull and other medicine men to prepare to go on the warpath, to gather their best horses and secure all the ammunition and long range rifles they could.

General Sheridan, in view of the situation and the gathering of warriors in the northwest, commenced massing the United States troops in

The scouts reported to General Custer that they had seen tepees.

the different departments adjacent. General Alfred Terry, who was in command of the department of Dakota and the station at Fort Snelling, was to send the troops in his department to Fort Abraham Lincoln, to take the field from there under the command of General George A. Custer. General John Gibbon, who was in command of the department of Montana, was to take command of the troops in his department, move down the Yellowstone and form a junction with them. General George A. Crook, in command of the department of the Platte, was ordered to take the troops from his department and proceed north by the way of Fort Laramie, Fort Fetterman, old Fort Reno, old Fort Phil Kearny. This latter command was the one I accompanied. It might be mentioned here that during the preparations certain scandals in the construction department of the government, both for army and Indian supplies, had attracted congressional attention and national interest, threatening to besmirch personages closely connected with the powers existing. The investigation coming on, Custer was ordered to Washington to give testimony. This testimony adhered so strictly to the truth that it brought him into disfavor, and when he returned to his post he found that the command of the main expedition was taken from him and that he was assigned to his own regiment simply, while General Terry was ordered to take supreme command. To a soldier with his record, to a man of his sensitiveness, this humiliation was deeply felt, and, no doubt, was one of the many causes that warped his judgment at a time when it was most needed. General Terry showed his sympathy and confidence in him after the Indian trail was discovered, when he ordered him to take his regiment, with ten days' rations, ammunition and private scouts, along with Charlie Reynolds, Bloody Knife and others, and take the trail and follow it. He struck the trail and followed it at a rapid pace on the 23d and 24th of July. At this point the trail left the Rosebud and headed toward the Little Big Horn. As the march had been very rapid, the horses were tired and camp was made, while preparations to start by 2 o'clock in the morning to cross the divide which separated the two streams was determined on.

At 2 o'clock the regiment was again on the move, with the scouts ahead, and by daylight they had crossed the ridge. The command was keeping in the ravine or canyons out of sight and moving as quietly as possible. The scouts in advance came back and reported to General Custer that they had seen tepees, or Indian lodges, which was true; but, as it afterward turned out, the tepees which the scouts had seen were three or four tepees that had been put up for smallpox patients away from the main Indian village.

General Custer divided his command into three parts, taking five companies himself, Major Reno with five companies and Colonel Benteen with two companies, to bring up the rear with the pack train. Major Reno was ordered to march straight on to the Little Big Horn, while Custer would move obliquely off to the right, making a detour of some seven or eight miles and striking the Little Big Horn at what he supposed would be the lower end of the Indian village, while Reno was to strike it from the upper end. Custer was to work up the river and Reno down, while Reno was to keep on coming down the river until he joined with Custer, and Benteen was to follow up with the pack train.

As near as we know, Reno struck the Indians a little before Custer did, and, of course, he, as well as Custer, was surprised at the immense size of the village. There were ten times more Indians in this village than was indicated by the Indian trail which they had been following up the Rosebud. It is a fact that the Indians whom they were following had just at this point and at this time joined the main band of Indians in camp on the Little Big Horn. The principal chiefs among the Indians, of course, were Sitting Bull, Gall, Crazy Horse, Rain-in-the-Face, Little Big Man, Grass and many others.

At first the Indians were taken completely by surprise, for they were so numerous that they had failed to keep scouts out at the usual distance, and Reno's attack was the first that they saw of the soldiers. Reno, instead of charging, held back when he saw the immense numbers in front—his heart, indeed, failed him, and, abandoning audacity, which is the true motto of the cavalryman, though he failed to recognize it at this time, he dismounted to fight on foot. In his first charge he was repulsed, and, as near as I have been able to learn, it was only a weak one, not on account of his officers or men, but it was the lack of faith and confidence in himself that took away the vim and dash that the charge should have had.

Reno, in looking over the situation, preferred defense in preference to attack. He recrossed the Little Big Horn and took up a position on a hill, where he dilly dallied around until the Indians, taking courage at his apparent weakness, made the fight on him all the fiercer. Most of the men that he lost were lost while crossing the Little Big Horn in retreat, so as to get into the bluffs on the east side.

Major Reno, although having a good civil war record, through his indecision in the emergency on this occasion seemed to have completely lost soldierly intelligence. The Indians, as was afterward learned, were completely taken by surprise, and the great war chief, Gall, personally directed the attack on Reno and was making preparations to surround him on the hill, evidently unaware of Custer's proximity on the other side of the village. This shows what could have been done had Reno charged onward and kept this greatest of the war chiefs occupied instead of thus permitting him to leave a few men to threaten Reno, while he concentrated his warriors on the other side of the village against Custer. A messenger to Benteen from Custer, ordering him to "come on quick and bring the packs," had caused that gallant officer to hasten, but, overtaking Reno, who outranked him, he was ordered to join his demoralized forces and was compelled to obey. The latter thought that the two commands combined, which numbered 400 men, would soon take measures to get into action. But the appeals of such officers as Benteen, Weir, French and others to lead on were without avail.

The last seen of Custer as he started into the ever to be remembered battle of the Little Big Horn was when he went over the ridge and waved his hat in salute to the other commands. Custer, making a wide detour to fall on the rear of the village, or what he thought was the rear, immediately struck a very strong band of Indians led by Chief Gall.

They had crossed the river at a point where they were concealed by a large ravine and got on Custer's flank, and so astute had been Chief Gall's arrangements that he found himself attacked in front and on all sides. Custer's first charge was successful until he saw the immensity of the village. He saw that it was a city instead of a village. There being a high hill a half

They all died in the proper military formation.

mile back from the Little Big Horn, Custer decided to take this as a standpoint. He sounded the recall and tried to make this hill. He had to turn his back while doing so. The Indians are never so brave as when they get any one's back to them. On their retreat to the hill half of his men were killed. The rest took up positions, but the Indians, being so elated at killing so many of his men from the Little Big Horn up to the hill and the failure of Reno to attract the Indians continually coming down the Little Big Horn, almost all the fighting Indians concentrated on Custer and fought him to death.

Fighting desperately to gain a point higher up, no doubt, he was, however, compelled to dismount his men and act on the defensive. Unable to advance or retreat and probably unwilling to do so, he must have based his actions on the diversion that the other commands would make. Steadfastly believing this from later Indian accounts, they fought coolly, hoping and expecting for re-enforcements which never came, but succeeded in keeping up the fight for some time. The Indians, well armed and in overwhelming numbers, circling and riding at speed, kept up a continuous and effective fire, while skirmishers and marksmen crawled through the grass, picking off officers. In the meanwhile Reno was still lying on the hill, although they could hear the reports of firearms below, and notwithstanding that Benteen, Weir, French and others continued their appeals and that the echoing volleys cried for assistance he remained there until all was silent, the Indians eventually killing Custer and every one of his gallant band. Reno was kept annoyed by the savages until the arrival of General Terry and Gibbon's command, while on the second day the Indians set fire to the grasses to cover their movements with smoke and drew off. Afterward a visit to the battle scene told the story of Custer's last battle, showing that every one had at least done his duty and, though defeated, was not disgraced. They all died in the proper military formation, every officer at his post and every man in line. Custer's body was found, and, although all the others were mutilated or scalped, his body seemed to have been untouched except by his death wounds, this being a tribute from the savage foe to his courage and gallantry. His brother, Captain Tom, and his brother-in-law, Captain Calhoun, with a nephew, were among the slain, making an unusual family affliction. The bodies of all the officers were found, with the exception of Dr. Lord, Lieutenants Porter, Harrington and Sturgies and some ten men. The latter's fate has never been known—whether they were captured and tortured or whether their bodies had been thrown into the quicksands near the bed of the Little Big Horn, it is not clear, the only certainty being that they were dead. Two hundred and twelve bodies were buried on the hill, the losses to the regiment being in two days 265 killed and 52 wounded, 50 per cent of the command!

OLD TIME TURKEY EAT

A Once Popular Feast In the Pennsylvania Mountains.

GONE WITH THE WOODSMEN.

The People, Traditions and Associations That Made It Possible Are No More, and It Joins In Oblivion the Apple Cut and Quilting Bee.

"It isn't because there is no more material in the Blue mountain region of Pennsylvania to provide a turkey eat that we have had the last of those famous festivities," said a former dweller of the district described, "for there are still wild turkeys a-plenty.

"The turkey eat has gone out with the passing of the people whose homes, traditions and manner of life made it possible and with the occupation that was once theirs.

"In the days when the turkey eat was the great winter festivity in the mountain districts between the Schuylkill and the Juniata watersheds the sparse population was chiefly of rude and rugged woodmen and their families, many of them descendants of pure Pennsylvania Dutch stock. Scores of them depended almost entirely on their skill with gun and trap for their food supply.

"The cabins of these mountaineers were built of logs, the chinks between which were filled in with clay. A huge stone chimney rose at one end of the cabin outside, covering that entire end, while on the inside it opened on a broad fireplace across that end of the room.

"The cabin was banked all around with earth, against which hemlock and pine boughs were heaped. Sometimes rows of cord wood were piled up almost to the eaves, the better to keep out the cold, which is always intense during winter on those wind swept hills.

"There was rarely a cabin with more than one room. The walls were dark and smoky, and from rafter of beam hung plentifully strips of jerked venison and chunks of smoked bear meat, along with hams and bacon from the family pigs fattened in the woods and almost as wild as the bear and the deer. But the choicest and best beloved thing of the cabin's larder was the fat and well frozen wild turkey.

"While the woodsman's cabin was always prepared for a turkey eat, it never knew when it was coming. A turkey eat began with the making up of a party in a neighboring village or settlement. Taking along a fiddler, they would appear at this, that or the other woodsman's cabin of a winter evening, and the woodsman and his family did the rest.

"Instantly the birch wood pail of cider came forth. While the cabin's guests drank cider the host prepared and spitted the turkey over the hickory coals in the fireplace to roast for the feast. When it was ready for the table it was placed before the guests on a big tin platter. Each one carved for himself, the plates being squares of birch bark.

"The turkey eat was not complete, though, without a liberal supply of 'paan haas' and head cheese, and with it went the sweetest of rye bread and butter. Paan haas is a strictly Pennsylvania Dutch creation.

"It is made from the rich juices left after boiling the ingredients for head cheese, these being thickened to a stiff paste with buckwheat flour. This paste is pressed in forms until cold and is served in slices. It is a dull blue in color, very rich and very good.

"After the feast the turkey eat was rounded out by a night of jollity superinduced by the fiddle and maintained by it in its music for the old fashioned cotillon figures and reels, which were danced until the gray of morning.

"But most of those old time woodsmen have passed away, and on those who are still dwellers in the mountains the game laws have forced a situation that leaves them with their ancient occupation gone, and the hunt being no longer a source of maintenance its traditions have departed with it. The newer generation of these people is of other tastes and associations, so while the wild turkey is yet in proximity in that Blue mountain region to supply the material for the festive turkey eat the traditions and associations that made it possible are no more, and it is gone, like the apple cut, the quilting bee, the pig killing frolic and others of the old time rural pastimes that are now but a memory."—New York Sun.

Hot Stuff.

The great editor looked up impatiently.

"Boy," he said, "what is that rustling in the wastebasket—a mouse?"

The boy after examining the basket answered:

"No, sir; it's one o' them poems o' passion throbbin'."

"Well, pour some water on it and then drop it out of the window," said the editor. "The building isn't insured."—Kansas Independent.

Cheap Riding.

Uncle Zeke (back from the city)—You talk about cheap ridin'! I rode twenty miles on a street k'yar, an' all it cost me was a nickel.

Uncle Jed—Gosh! That ain't nothin'. When I was thar last year I rode to the top of the tallest buildin' in town, an' it didn't cost me a blamed cent!—Chicago Tribune.

He who has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another than he whom you yourself have obliged.—Holmes.