

HISTORIC EPISODE IN ILLINOIS POLITICS.

POPULAR beliefs in regard to the historic Lincoln-Douglas debates are about to be shattered. A new searchlight penetrates the shade of days long past and sheds its rays on occurrences of that tumultuous period. These rays give a little different aspect to the character of Lincoln and of Douglas. They reveal the "little giant" of the emancipation of being lacking in acumen and ability and life from the first martyr President the charges of having uttered certain expressions that seem in conflict with sound sense and political sagacity.

The whole question is raised by Clark E. Carr, former minister to Denmark. History, tradition and personal reminiscences are refuted by Mr. Carr. His contention centers upon the famous "little giant" of the emancipation of being lacking in acumen and ability and life from the first martyr President the charges of having uttered certain expressions that seem in conflict with sound sense and political sagacity.

The principal question was as to the power of the people of a United States territory in a lawful way to exclude slavery from its limits. The Carr, after a careful scrutiny of the records of the great campaign, reaches the conclusion that no such question could have been considered at that time. He shows that while the Freepress meeting was held on Aug. 27, 1858, Senator Douglas had already fully answered the proposed question at that conference. He also shows that the consideration of the question at a Freepress caucus and the committee of Lincoln thereon are mythical and imaginary.

One of two histories, it is therefore contended, are inaccurate with regard to the Freepress meeting, and a recent novel that deals largely with Illinois politics of that day and early '50s is also shown to have no authority for a dramatic chapter.

Mr. Carr is satisfied that there was no "cornering" of Senator Douglas in the affair, and that he was not forced to make a disagreeable answer—one that menaced his political future. He is also assured that the replies and comments credited to Lincoln in his sagacious grasp of affairs were never uttered.

But let Mr. Carr relate the story in his own words and place a new aspect on a momentous episode in the politics of Illinois and the nation.

At the second of the Lincoln and Douglas joint debates, which was held at Freeport, Ill., on the 27th of August, 1858, Mr. Lincoln propounded to Senator Douglas four questions, the second of which was as follows:

"Can the people of a United States territory, in any lawful way, exclude the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a state constitution?"

It is not proposed in this article to consider the legal proposition involved in this question. This was fully done in this question. It is simply at this time proposed to consider what has seemed to be throughout the country a general misapprehension in regard to the circumstances of propounding this question, which does great injustice to Senator Douglas.

FALLACIES ARE ALLEGED.

It is understood that by propounding this question Mr. Lincoln forced the senator into a position which he reluctantly found himself from him a reply which was loath to give. It is further understood that Mr. Lincoln, in propounding the question, could only surmise what position the senator would take, but that he believed the senator would be driven to answer the question in the affirmative in order to keep his hold upon people of Illinois and retain his seat for the Senate, and that for the purpose of forcing the senator to this position Mr. Lincoln deliberately placed in jeopardy his own chances of election.

It is believed that Mr. Lincoln was prearranged with his political friends against asking this question, but that he persisted in his determination to do so (although, by so doing, he imperiled his own chances of being elected to the Senate) with the deliberate purpose of forcing Senator Douglas, as the only hope of his being re-elected to the Senate, into a position that would defeat him for the Freepress.

This view of this matter is supported by so much authority and so generally accepted as to make it seem like prearrangement to question its correctness. In the affirmative in order to keep his hold upon people of Illinois and retain his seat for the Senate, and that for the purpose of forcing the senator to this position Mr. Lincoln deliberately placed in jeopardy his own chances of election.

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should argue strongly from the Dred Scott decision, which Douglas endorsed, that the people of the territories could not lawfully exclude slavery prior to the formation of a state constitution, but that he should not force Douglas to say yes or no. They believed that the latter would let the subject alone as much as possible, in order not to offend the South, unless driven into a corner. Mr. Lincoln replied that to draw an affirmative answer from Douglas on this question was exactly what he wanted, and that his object was to make it impossible for Douglas to get the vote of the southern states in the next presidential election.

In the same article, near its close, Mr. White says: "Perhaps the Charles Scholm would have taken place, even if Douglas had not been driven to a corner at Freepress and compelled to proclaim the doctrine of 'unfriendly legislation,' but it is more likely that the break would have been postponed a few years longer."

MOMENTOUS NIGHT CAUCUS.

Nicholas and Hay, in their exhaustive history of Abraham Lincoln, make the following statement:

"There is a tradition that on the night preceding the Freepress debate Lincoln was catching a few hours' rest at a railroad center named Mendota, to which place the converging trains brought, after midnight, a number of excited Republican leaders on their way to attend the great meeting at the neighboring town of Freeport. Notwithstanding the late hour, Mr. Lincoln's bedroom was invaded by an impromptu caucus, and the ominous question was once more brought under consideration."

"The whole drift of advice ran against putting the interrogatory to Douglas, but Lincoln persisted in his determination to force him to answer it."

"Finally his friends in a chorus cried: 'If you do you can never be elected.' 'Gentlemen,' replied Lincoln, 'I am killing larger game. I am going to win the battle of 1860 is worth a hundred of this.'"

These quotations from writers of the highest character, might be supplemented by many similar quotations from the truth of these statements, so far as the writer knows, has never heretofore been questioned.

NEW STORY OF THE AFFAIR.

A novel by Winston Churchill, entitled "The Crisis," which has recently been published, attempts to give an account of the alleged interview between Mr. Lincoln and his friends on the eve of the Freepress debate.

In this account the interview is assumed to have taken place on a railway train, and the parties, as stated, were Mr. Lincoln, Joseph Medill, Norman B. Judd and Hitt. (The latter was a prominent leader of the anti-slavery cause, and the hero of the story.)

The writer tells of Mr. Lincoln reading to the gentlemen the four questions he intended to propound at Freepress, and proceeds with his account of the interview as follows:

"We don't care about any of the others," answered Mr. Medill. "But I tell you this, if you ask that second one, you will never see the United States Senate."

"And the Republican party of this state will have a blow from which it cannot recover," added Mr. Judd, chairman of the committee.

Mr. Lincoln did not appear to hear them. His eyes were far away over the wet prairie.

"Stephen held his breath, but neither he nor Medill nor Judd guessed at the meaning of that moment. How were they to know that the fate of the United States of America was concealed in that question—to be decided that day on a rough wooden platform at Freeport, Ill.?"

After some further rhapsodies of the author of this story, he makes "Abe and Joe and Judd" continue the conversation in a similar strain, and Mr. Lincoln reads to them the question under consideration:

"Can the people of a United States territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a state constitution?"

This evoked, according to the author of "The Crisis," more warnings and protests from "Joe and Judd," to which Mr. Lincoln offered a reply, in the course of which he is made to say:

"I tell you what, I'm in this campaign to carry the White House in 1860; to save this country of ours. Joe, he's sick."

"Suppose he answers yes—that slavery can be excluded?" questioned Mr. Judd.

"Then," said Mr. Lincoln, "then Douglas loses the vote of the great slaveholders, the vote of the solid South, that he has been fostering ever since he has had the itch to be President. Without the solid South, the little giant will never live in the White House. And unless I'm mighty mis-taken Steve Douglas has had his eye as far ahead as 1860 for some time."

Not satisfied with all this, the author in commenting upon the question and answer as they were heard at Freeport, exclaims:

"What a man amongst those who heard and stirred might say that these minutes, even now lasting into eternity, held the crisis of a nation. Not you, Judge, but he who sits there smiling. Consideration is a stranger in your heart."

—but answer that question if you can, out of many nooses—as yet. Can you not guess that your reply will make or mar the fortunes of your country?"

With all that has been said and much more, for which we have not space, leaving the same understanding of the matter under consideration. It may, as has been said, seem presumptuous to question the correctness of views so generally accepted. It is important, however, that the truth be

known. This is due to the memory of Senator Douglas, to that of Mr. Lincoln, and of all the others whose names have been mentioned, and, if there has been a mistake, it ought to be corrected. We are convinced that there has been a mistake—that injustice has been done, and therefore we ask that the matter be reconsidered.

WHAT DOUGLAS SAID.

The answer of Senator Douglas at Freeport, to the question under consideration, after repeating it, as follows:

"I answer emphatically, as Mr. Lincoln has heard me answer a hundred times from every stump in Illinois, that, in my opinion, a territory can, by lawful means, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a state constitution. Mr. Lincoln knew that I had answered that question over and over again. He heard me argue the Nebraska bill on that issue in 1854, in 1855, in 1856, and he has no excuse for pretending to be ignorant of my position on that question. It matters not what the Supreme court may hereafter decide, as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not exist in a territory, until the constitution, the people have the lawful means to introduce it or exclude it as they please, for the reason that slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere unless it is supported by local police regulations."

LOCAL POWER EXERTED.

"Those police regulations can only be established by the local legislature, and if the people are opposed to slavery they will elect members to that body who will, by unfriendly legislation, effectually prevent the introduction of it in their midst. If, on the contrary, they are for it, then legislation will favor its extension. Hence, no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be upon that abstract question, still the right of the people to make a slave or a free territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska bill."

Thus we see that the senator answered, as it is claimed was predicted by Mr. Lincoln's friends, at the alleged conference held at Mendota and Dixon, and on his way to Freeport, that he would be observed that in this reply the senator says:

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NO NEW DOCTRINE.

This of itself should have satisfied everyone that ever knew Senator Douglas that in replying to the question he had enunciated no new doctrine, but the same he had proclaimed many times before. It is true that Senator Douglas knew that he was incapable of making that statement unless it had been substantially true. In the three years that had elapsed, he had probably enunciated the doctrine more than a hundred times—certainly many times.

Fortunately we are not left to rely upon the senator's unsupported statement in regard to this matter. We have—I will not say that we have the same doctrine in the same campaign, six weeks before the question was asked him at Freeport, Senator Douglas, in the presence of Mr. Lincoln and a large audience, proclaimed the same doctrine. It is shown by my votes and speeches in Congress.

"But, he it as it may, the question is an abstract question, inviting no practical results, and whether slavery shall exist in any territory or in any state or territory, it will depend upon whether the people are for or against it, and whichever way they shall decide it in any territory or in any state will be entirely their own doing."

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It must be apparent to every candid person who has before him these two speeches by Senator Douglas at Bloomington and Springfield, that there has been some mistake about Senator Douglas having been at Freeport, six weeks afterward, "forced" or "driven" into a corner and "compelled" to proclaim the doctrine of "unfriendly legislation."

INJUSTICE IS ALLEGED.

With the speeches of Senator Douglas at Bloomington and Springfield before us, it is not apparent to every candid mind that the senator's reply at Freeport was not a new doctrine, but a repetition of what he had said many times before.

Let us see what Senator Douglas said upon the question under consideration six weeks before it was propounded to him at Freeport in the presence of Mr. Lincoln and a large audience at Bloomington, and the next day at Springfield.

"Mr. Lincoln is alarmed for fear that will go into all the territories of the United States. I have to say that, with or without that decision, slavery will go just where the people want it, and not one inch further. You have had experience upon that subject in the case of Kansas. You have been told that when the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed, down to last winter, that slavery was sustained and supported in Kansas by the law, and that they call a 'bogus' legislature. And how many slaves were there in the territory at the end of last winter? Not as many as at the end of that period as there were on the day the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed. There was quite a number of slaves in Kansas, taken there under the Missouri compromise, and in spite

of that, before the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed, and now it is asserted that there were before the passage of the bill, not a single slave in Kansas. This is a ridiculous statement, and it is a pity that Mr. Lincoln should be so easily deceived."

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POWER OF THE PEOPLE.

"Why has not slavery obtained a foothold in Kansas under these circumstances? Simply because there was a majority of the people opposed to slavery, and every slaveholder knew that if he took his slaves there the moment that majority got possession of the ballot box, and a fair election was held, that moment slavery would be abolished and he would lose them. For that reason, those owners who took their slaves there brought them back to Missouri, fearing that if they remained they would be emancipated."

"Thus you see that under the principle of popular sovereignty, slavery has been kept out of Kansas, notwithstanding the fact that for the first time a fair election has been held in that territory favorable to it."

"I tell you my friends, it is impossible for our institutions to force slavery upon an unwilling people. If it is principle of popular sovereignty asserted, the Nebraska bill will be fairly carried out, by letting the people decide the question for themselves, by a fair vote, at a fair election, and with every returning slaveholder, who will vote one day or one hour in any territory against the unfriendly legislation of a friendly people."

NEEDS LEGAL SUPPORT.

"I care not how the Dred Scott decision may have settled the abstract question, so far as the practical result is concerned, for to use the language of an eminent southern senator, on this very subject:

"I do not care a fig which way the decision shall be, but it is of no particular consequence: slavery cannot exist a day or an hour, in any territory, unless it is supported by local police regulations, and sustaining and supporting it, furnish police regulations and remedies, and an omission to furnish them would be as fatal as a constitutional provision. If we have no local police regulations in our favor, slavery could not exist any longer than a new-born infant could survive under the heat of the sun, on a barren rock, without protection."

"He heard me argue the Nebraska bill on that principle all over the state in 1854, in 1855, in 1856," etc.

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"Mr. Lincoln is alarmed for fear that will go into all the territories of the United States. I have to say that, with or without that decision, slavery will go just where the people want it, and not one inch further. You have had experience upon that subject in the case of Kansas. You have been told that when the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed, down to last winter, that slavery was sustained and supported in Kansas by the law, and that they call a 'bogus' legislature. And how many slaves were there in the territory at the end of last winter? Not as many as at the end of that period as there were on the day the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed. There was quite a number of slaves in Kansas, taken there under the Missouri compromise, and in spite

of that, before the Kansas-Nebraska bill passed, and now it is asserted that there were before the passage of the bill, not a single slave in Kansas. This is a ridiculous statement, and it is a pity that Mr. Lincoln should be so easily deceived."

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