

ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN 1848

By JAMES SIDNEY ALLEN

IT has often been said that Abraham Lincoln was unknown as a leader before the debate with Douglas in 1858. I copy from Taunton papers of September, 1848, interesting notices and a review of his address in that city in the Taylor and Fillmore campaign, twelve years before he became President.

The fact is, he had then shown such marvellous power of public speech before the people and in Congress during his single term that the Whig National Committee secured his services on the stump in Massachusetts, then feared to be a doubtful state. He spoke in Tremont Temple, Boston, in Lowell, and other places—men now alive remember parts of his speeches.

There were three political parties. The Whigs had nominated General Zachary Taylor, a slaveholder, for President. Lewis Cass was candidate of the pro-slavery Democrats. Ex-President Martin Van Buren headed the new Free Soil Party, whose leading issue was embodied in the Wilmot Proviso forbidding extension of slavery into the territories and new states. General Taylor, wholly of military experience, was non-committal on all the issues between the parties.

Abraham Lincoln supported and trusted him and used his wonderful powers of logic and ridicule against the Free Soil Party. He was opposed to slavery extension but not ready to form party lines on that issue until 1856 when the Free Soil developed into the Republican Party—which made him President of the United States.

(From *American Whig*, Taunton, September 21, 1848)

"Honorable Abraham Lincoln, M. C., from Illinois, delivered an address before the Whigs of Taunton, last evening. This distinguished gentleman has visited a number of our most populous towns at the solicitation of our Whig friends, and he has met with a most cordial reception. He was warmly received last

evening. He is from the Democratic State of Illinois and is a champion of Free Soil and Free Speech, and afforded us the pleasure of a specimen of Western eloquence in favor of Taylor and Fillmore. He spoke in Chelsea on Tuesday evening, and the *Evening Journal* says: 'The Hon. Abraham Lincoln of Illinois delivered one of his argumentative and spirit-stirring addresses, which was listened to with much interest and with ardent manifestations of concurrence in the views advanced.'"

Deacon Edward W. Porter, East Taunton, says Lincoln spoke in Union Hall in his shirt sleeves, it being a very hot evening.

(From *Bristol County Democrat*, Taunton, Friday, September 20, 1848)

"The Taylor men were well entertained Wednesday evening, the 20th inst., at Union Hall, by an address from the Hon. Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. The address as well as the speaker was such as to give unlimited satisfaction to the disheartened Taylorites. Such a treat it is indeed seldom their good luck to get, and they were in ecstasies! At former meetings their spirits were too low for a good hearty cheer, but on this occasion 'the steam was up.' It was reviving to hear a man speak as if he believed what he was saying and had a grain or two of feeling mixed up with it; one who could not only speak highly of Taylor, but could occasionally swell with indignation or burst in hatred on the Free Soilers. When political spite runs high nothing can be too pungent or severe, and the speaker is appreciated in proportion as his statements are rash and unscrupulous. So it was on this occasion. The speaker was far inferior as a reasoner to others who hold the same views, but then he was more unscrupulous, more facetious and with his sneers he mixed up a good

deal of humor. His awkward gesticulations, the ludicrous management of his voice and the comical expression of his countenance, all conspired to make his hearers laugh at the mere anticipation of the joke before it appeared. But enough concerning the speaker; let us examine his arguments.

"General Taylor, he argued, *has* principles, though he has not given expression to them on the Tariff, Bank and other questions of policy. This, however, is in direct contradiction of Taylor, himself, who in his letter to Delany writes, 'As regards the second and third inquiries (about a bank and tariff), I am not prepared to answer them. *I could only do so after investigating them.* I am no politician; near forty years of my life have been passed on the Western frontier and in the Indian country.' The speaker next discussed the veto question and said that Taylor was the first Whig candidate that had come fully up to the Whig platform in this point, because unlike all other candidates before him he had not even claimed the right to advise Congress on matters of policy. The proper limitation of the veto, he contended, was the Whig platform itself, and General Taylor by his equivocal silence had come up to it better than the great parent of Whig principles—Henry Clay. He did not know that General Taylor had professed that he would *not* veto the Wilmot proviso, but *believed* that he would not, because General Taylor had promised not to veto any measure unless it was unconstitutional or passed in haste and acknowledged that to be constitutional which had been established by long usage and acquiesced in by the people. As the constitutionality of the Wilmot Proviso he said 'had never been disputed,' it was therefore acquiesced in by the people and consequently Taylor was bound not to veto it.

"He subsequently admitted in speaking of Cass, that in the Nicholson letter the constitutional power of Congress to exclude slavery from any territory in the Union was denied. Yet he seemed to forget this when he said that the constitutionality of the Proviso had never been disputed. He seemed to be entirely ig-

norant that every propagandist of slavery in existence, with John C. Calhoun at their head, claimed the right, under the Constitution, and independent of Congress, to carry their 'property' into any part of the United States territory and there to hold it.

"Calhoun said in the Senate that when the South consented to the Missouri Compromise the rights of the South granted by the Constitution were given up but belonged to the South the same as if no compromise had been made. Thomas Corwin said in his speech on the Compromise Bill introduced in the Senate last session of Congress that the constitutionality of any measure excluding slavery from the territories could not with safety be left to the decision of the Supreme Court. The House of Representatives had the same views and rejected the bill. None of these facts did the speaker allude to, but instead uttered the stupendous falsehood that the 'constitutionality of the Proviso' had never been disputed. Without this 'whopper,' however, the argument would have been defective. There would have been a gap in it, so the lie was made big enough to fill the gap that the argument might thereby be made sound and conclusive.

"He related a conversation which he overheard at the dinner table of a house in Lowell between two Free Soilers. One of them remarked that the reasoning of the Taylor men was not logical, for it certainly was illogical to say, 'General Taylor is a slaveholder, therefore we go for him to prevent the extension of slavery.' He thought this was an unfair statement of the case and gave what he deemed the correct one in the form of a syllogism as follows: 'General Taylor is a slaveholder, but he will do more to prevent the extension of slavery than any other man whom it is possible to elect; therefore we go for Taylor.'

"It needs no argument to prove that the major proposition does not include the minor and has nothing to do with it. But let that pass. The minor proposition asserts that General Taylor will do '*more*' to prevent the extension of slavery than any other man it is possible to elect, and this assertion is made before the

logician has even attempted to prove that General Taylor was opposed to the extension of slavery at all! The attempt is made to prove that he will do *more* than any other man before it is proved that he will do the first thing. But taking for granted that General Taylor will not veto the Proviso (a position founded on a lie) is that a proof that he will do anything to prevent the extension of slavery? He may never have a chance to veto the Proviso even if elected in November. The slave states are equal with the free states in the Senate and before the Proviso can pass that body one or two of the Southern Senators must yield.

"Under such circumstances, is it likely that any Senator from the South will be influenced to vote for the Proviso by the executive patronage of the unrepentant slaveholder, Zachary Taylor? Is it not more probable that it would be brought to bear on some Northern doughface? It would be quite safe for Taylor to make an equivocal promise not to veto the Proviso, but he has not even done so much as that. The speaker contended that Van Buren had approved the policy of the Mexican War and the annexation of new territory. This he did not prove from Van Buren's letter written in 1844. If he had read that letter to his hearers they would have found that Van Buren wrote *against* annexation, partly because it would produce war. The proof he gave was the fact that some of the same individuals who supported Van Buren in 1844 had since voted both for Texas and war.

"He said in another part of his speech that the Northern Democrats were opposed to the annexation of Texas in 1844. Yet he undertook to prove that Van Buren was in favor of annexation and war from the fact that these men once supported him and that at the very time they themselves were opposed to annexation. But why should Van Buren be held responsible for all his friends? Where is the proof that he ever favored the extension of slavery in all his life? Is General Taylor responsible for all who now support him? Are the sins of Berrien Mangum and other propagandists of slavery to be laid to his

charge? He has enough to answer for on his own account if we acquit him of all guilt connected with the Native Church burning of Philadelphia.

"To show the recklessness and audacity of the honorable gentleman and the low estimate he had formed of his hearers, it will suffice to give but one specimen. Speaking of Van Buren, he said 'he (Van Buren) won't have an electoral vote in the nation nor as many as all others in any county in the nation.' The reasoning adopted by the Whig Free Soilers he gave in the form of a syllogism as follows: 'We can't go for General Taylor because he is not a Whig. Van Buren is not a Whig; therefore, we go for him.' This dishonest statement of the case elicited warm applause from his truth-loving hearers. The syllogism should have stood thus: We can't vote for a man without principles. General Taylor has got none, and Van Buren has, at least, got one good Whig principle; therefore, we go for Van Buren against Taylor.

"For the benefit of those who are like the speaker, always misrepresenting the Free Soil Party, I will define our position in a pro-syllogism. The abolition of slavery in the territory of the United States can never be accomplished unless the North is united. But the North cannot be united until old party lines are broken down. But these lines cannot be broken down unless every man is willing to sacrifice his attachment to minor questions and make opposition to slavery the leading idea; therefore, we have come out of the old pro-slavery parties and formed the United Party of the North."

LINCOLN AT FORT STEVENS

By P. H. KAISER

ON the eleventh day of July, 1864, General Jubal Early with his army was menacing the City of Washington. His forces were concentrated in front of Fort Stevens and the other forts in the immediate vicinity, and the city was momentarily expecting an assault would be made—first upon the forts and then upon the city itself. The writer was a private in Company "K" of the 150th regiment of Ohio National Guards,