

RECOLLECTIONS
OF
PRESIDENT LINCOLN

BY
MOSES GREELEY PARKER, M. D.

LOWELL, MASS.

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DR. MOSES GREELEY PARKER'S MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS
IN DRACUT, 1914.

EXERCISES appropriate to the Memorial day Season were held Sunday night at the "Yellow Meetinghouse" in Dracut, (Mass) the principal historical address being given by Dr. Moses Greeley Parker of Lowell, past president of the National Society of Sons of the American Revolution, and a veteran of the Civil War.

Dr. Parker spoke on his personal recollections of President Lincoln, saying:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am greatly pleased to be asked to speak to you for I was born in Dracut, grew up here and practised medicine among you.

One of the earliest things I remember is coming to this church with my father and mother and sitting in a big box pew. I was so little I could not see over it. This was in the "Old Yellow Meetinghouse," which was later reconstructed,—the upper part being used for church services and the lower for town meetings, lyceums and other gatherings.

You have invited me to give some personal recollections of Abraham Lincoln, whom I had the honor of meeting on several occasions.

I cannot think of this great man without associating him with George Washington.

Washington was born to wealth—Lincoln to poverty.

Washington was educated with great care—Lincoln educated himself.

Washington owned thousands of acres of land—Lincoln not one.

Washington owned 150 slaves—Lincoln not one.

Washington liberated his slaves at his death—Lincoln liberated all the slaves in the United States before his death.

They were both large men, Washington weighed two hundred and twenty pounds, Lincoln was six feet two inches tall, without his "high heels" (as he himself said). Both had large feet, large hands, large hearts and large brains, with great good judgment and farsightedness, and were by far the greatest Presidents this country has ever seen.

That you may know how I came to meet President Lincoln I propose to give you a short history of my army life. After attending lectures at Long Island Medical College and Bellevue Medical College in New York, I graduated from Harvard Medical College in March, 1864. The next week I passed both the army and navy medical examinations and was immediately assigned by Surgeon General Dale to the fifty-seventh Massachusetts regiment, then in camp near Worcester.

While visiting the regiment and waiting for my uniform, General Butler telegraphed to Dr. Kimball of Lowell, to send him three surgeons,—my name being introduced as one of these. I was transferred to Fortress Monroe and was immediately mustered into the United States service for three years as assistant surgeon of the Second U. S. Colored cavalry and was ordered to join the regiment, then in Dismal Swamp, between Norfolk and Suffolk, Va., under command of Colonel Cole.

The first night I slept in a hammock —overcoat and boots on. It rained hard and in the morning there were from two to three inches of water all over the swamp, making it impossible to remain there longer. Colonel Cole ordered the regiment out on to higher land even at the risk of bringing on an engagement, which

it did; and the fight at Bunch of Walnuts and the raid into Suffolk followed; then back to Fortress Monroe for a review and march up the peninsula, stopping long enough at Yorktown to see the old revolutionary fortifications and those of recent date.

Next day we went on to Williamsburg, where we camped on the old battlefield of 1862. Soon we were ordered up the peninsula to find the enemy. This we did on Chickahominy river, with a small fort on the Richmond side. The two colored regiments were drawn up in line of battle to charge, nearly a mile over a level plain, a fort on the opposite side of the river.

Capt. Dollard had dismounted his company of colored cavalry, forded the river higher up, and at a given signal from him the charge was to be made. Meanwhile the colonel, some officers and orderlies were grouped on a small knoll to witness the advance. Soon I heard a zip-zip-zip and said, "They are firing at us!" The colonel laughed, saying, "You are young and have not been under fire much." I did not have to reply as our orderly then fell from his horse, wounded. I had him carried on the safe side of the knoll where the ambulance was, and I noticed that the colonel and all followed "to see me dress the wound"—and thereafter watched the movement from this comparatively safe place!

We returned to Fortress Monroe with hundred of negroes following our regiments and were immediately ordered up the James river to Bermuda Hundred to join the Eighteenth army corps. On the way up the river, we arrived at Wilson's Landing while it was being attacked. Mattresses were piled around the pilot-house and all were ordered to lie down flat on the decks. Then we ran the firing line without loss and reinforced the fort. Soon the gunboats came into position and commenced firing on the enemy, which quickly ended the fight.

We reëmbarked the next day and landed at Bermuda Hundred, becoming a part of the Eighteenth army corps under General Butler.

Here we marched to the front, dismounted and took position behind the breast works. While here, Fort Clifton opened fire on our lines. Our gunboat, the *Commodore Perry*, in replying burst her hundred-pound Parrott gun.

I was asked by the assistant surgeon of the gunboat to come on board and assist him in dressing the wounded. One poor fellow had his foot crushed so badly we had to perform Perigoff's operation, i. e., cut off the foot and turn up the heel, making a round heel stump to walk on. This did so well the naval medical officer was promoted for the work, while I, being away from my command without orders, might have been "cashiered" had any of my men been wounded.

The gunboat was hit several times. One shell was stopped by the tool chest from penetrating the boiler—a most lucky escape. Our next move was to assist Gen. (Baldy) Smith in his attack on Petersburg, which was unsuccessful. Breast-works were thrown up and a siege commenced.

I remained with my regiment (it being dismounted and serving in the trenches in front of Petersburg) till after the explosion of the mine, July 30th, 1864—a day long to be remembered.

I was ordered into the trenches at 3 o'clock in the morning. My colonel was taken ill and I remained with him until 7 a. m., then had to run the "dead line" some one hundred feet wide to reach my place in the trenches in a gopher hole six feet square and about one-half mile west of "the crater."

The regiment was supporting a mortar called the "Petersburg Express," which threw a shell fifteen inches in diameter filled with small balls, which, bursting high up in the air, sent a shower of balls all over the city. So destructive was this that the Confederates, at great risk, placed a cannon on the opposite side of the Appomattox river, enfilading our line, and sending a shell over us to

“the crater.” Our mortar soon dropped a shell near this cannon, which, bursting, silenced this rebel gun forever.

After this battle I was detached from my regiment and ordered to the Eighteenth army corps base hospital, then established in tents in our rear, on the south side of the Appomattox river.

The Eighteenth army corps when it left Fortress Monroe in April, 1864, numbered 32,000 men and now after four months' fighting around Richmond and Petersburg could not muster 15,000 men fit for duty. Winter quarters for the sick and wounded must be provided.

Surgeon General Suckley and Surgeon Fowler, my superior officers, ordered Assistant Surgeon Parker to build a winter hospital for the first division of the corps. I selected for the site a high point of land on the north side of the Appomattox river, six miles from Petersburg and eighteen miles from Richmond, called “Point of Rocks.”

It was a beautiful location on a high bluff overlooking the river, and from it could be seen Fort Clifton, Petersburg and some of the long line of breastworks that extended from Petersburg to Richmond. We located the watertank on the highest point of semi-circle around it with headquarters at the end.

We cut down the tall pine trees and used them for the log cabins and the sides of our hospital buildings, which were built five logs high and using tent cloth for the roof. The building of a winter hospital from the timber lands of the enemy attracted attention not only at General Grant's headquarters, but at Washington.

As Congress was about to appropriate a large sum of money for the City Point hospital, Generals Grant and Butler both visited the division hospital, and after looking it over, asked why we had used cloth for covering in place of boards. They were told that we could not get boards, as they were “all taken by the quarter-

masters to cover their mules; to which General Butler replied, "We will see about that." The next morning I was greatly surprised to receive an order turning over to Points of Rock hospital all boards made the next two days.

I sent the order, with plenty of milk punch made from condensed milk, to the mill, and never did men work better than these men did the next two days.

The large appropriation for City Point hospital was reduced and General Grant had board buildings put up covered with tarred paper and heated with stoves. Doubtless this was one of the reasons that President Lincoln wanted to see our hospital.

Accordingly, one morning about 11 o'clock, President Lincoln and his wife came on the little steamer "Greyhound" from City Point, where they were visiting General Grant, and walked from our landing to the hospital headquarters.

Being officer of the day, I had the honor of receiving the President and a general introduction of officers followed. The President looked over the hospital buildings without going into them. He seemed anxious and careworn. He was very kind and genial in his manner, and was carelessly dressed, wearing a tall hat, making his tall figure look even taller than any of our officers. He moved easily and whenever he sat down he would cross his legs, throwing one knee over the other, and then one leg would hang down nearly parallel with the other, making this position of his graceful, easy and natural. He said but little, was very thoughtful, and evidently wanted to be alone; for he soon left us, walking to the Point of Rocks, (a high bluff) some twenty rods away, and sat down under what was called the "Pocahontas Oak." There he sat looking toward our line of breastworks. Sometimes he placed his elbow on his knee and rested his head wearily on his hand. Obviously he was thinking of something we knew not of. He had, in fact, visited General Grant and probably knew what was about to take place.

Mrs. Lincoln, who was richly dressed in black silk, was rather large, stout and very dignified in appearance. She had been escorted through several of the hospital wards by some of the officers' wives.

When she returned to our headquarters, President Lincoln joined her and the visit was over. By this time hundreds of convalescent soldiers came out to see the President and his wife. When they cheered him, President Lincoln simply raised his hat, bowed and returned to the boat.

The following Sunday, about noon, not long after Davis had left the morning service so suddenly on that eventful Sunday morning in April, 1865, our telegraph operator came to me in a very excited manner, saying, "You ought to know this," and he showed me a copy of the following telegram that had just gone over our wire:

"Be prepared to open every gun on the line at three o'clock this afternoon."
U. S. Grant."

You can imagine, as well as we, what was to take place on that memorable Sunday and only a few hours after Davis had so hurriedly left the morning service.

The firing commenced a little after three o'clock, but few guns replied to the cannonade in our immediate front. The severe fighting was on the extreme left of our line, near the Weldon railroad. We could hear the constant booming of cannon in that direction and occasionally the rattle of musketry, telling that the infantry was engaged and that the battle was for the possession of the railroad, which our side finally obtained.

After dark of this same day came the most brilliant sight I saw during the war; between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, apparently by a pre-arranged plan for order, the Confederates set fire at the same time to their entire camp, (consisting of brush and pine boughs—winter covering for themselves and horses) extend-

ing from Petersburg to Richmond, a distance of about twenty miles. The flames shot up and illuminated the sky for miles around. It was a grand and glorious sight for us, as it told the story of the downfall of Richmond and the end of the rebellion.

The next time I saw President Lincoln and his wife was after our nurses had been received by the President. The story is as follows: One of our most energetic nurses, formerly Miss Joy of Boston, then the wife of a major (and later to be Princess Salm-Salm) and several other nurses wanted to see the President. They went to Headquarters and asked General Sickles if they could meet the President. The general arranged with President Lincoln to receive them at two o'clock that afternoon.

General Sickles was the first Democrat to shake the hand of President Lincoln in the House of Representatives at Washington. It happened in this way: When President Lincoln first visited the House of Representatives the Republicans all came forward to shake his hand, but the Democrats held aloof, retiring to one side of the House. Then General Sickles spoke to the Democrats, saying, "Mr. Lincoln is President, gentlemen, and I am going down to shake hands with him! You can do as you like!" This broke the spell, they followed, and he was the first Democratic member of the House to shake the hand of President Lincoln.

At the hour appointed the nurses, dressed in their best, appeared at General Sickles's tent and said, "We want to kiss the President. Will it do?" "Oh, yes," said the gallant Sickles, "I only wish I were he." "But he is so tall!" "Oh, he will accommodate himself," said Sickles; and he did.

The last time I saw President Lincoln was in Davis's house at Richmond the Tuesday following the fall of Richmond, and two days after Jeff Davis had left so suddenly. President Lincoln evidently had the same desire we all had to see the inside of the city of Richmond.

The President, apparently without fear, went up the James river on a gunboat with Admiral Porter to within one mile of Richmond. Then he and the Admiral were rowed up in a small boat and landed in the lower part of the city, and with only the sailors that rowed the boat, walked into Richmond through the burned district, which was still smoking and smouldering, having been looted and set on fire by the Confederate soldiers before they left the city.

All liquor found in the city was ordered to be destroyed. In many cellars, barrels of the intoxicating stuff were found. These were taken into the street, the heads of the barrels broken open and their contents emptied into the gutter.

Soon the colored people discovered the President, and on bended knee, with upraised hands, they and the poor whites shouted "Glory to God! Glory to God!" "Praise de Lord!" "Massa Linkum has come!" Soon so great a crowd gathered that the soldiers had to be called upon to clear the streets, a carriage was obtained and the President was escorted through the city.

I was on horseback and saw President Lincoln in the carriage in front of Libby prison, looking at that place of horror, now filled with rebel prisoners, which the day before held our Union soldiers. We all enjoyed this sight—the tables were turned and we had the fun of asking these "rebs" "how they liked it." Later in the day I saw President Lincoln at Davis's house. Here he held an informal reception. He was greatly pleased at the turn of events.

I was proud to be remembered and shall never forget his kind and pleasant face and manner as he said when taking my hand, "the war is nearly over." He seemed as if a great load had been lifted from his shoulders since he was at the hospital a few days before.

Eleven days after, this great and good man was assassinated in Ford's Theatre at Washington.

