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Adlai E. Stevenson

Annual Address

DElIVERED BEFORE THE

Illinois State Historical Society

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Mr. President.—History has been defined: "The sum of the biographies of a few strong men." Much that is of profound and abiding interest in American history during the two decades immediately preceding our civil war, is bound up in the biography of the strong man of whom I speak. Chief among the actors, his place was near the middle of the stage, during that eventful and epoch marking period.

Stephen A. Douglas was born in Brandon, Vt., April 23, 1813, and died in Chicago, Ill., June 3, 1861. Between the dates given lie the years that make up a crowded, eventful life. Left penniless by the death of his father, he was at a tender age dependent upon his own exertions for maintenance and education. At the age of fifteen he apprenticed himself to a cabinet maker in the town of Middlebury in his native state. Naturally of delicate organization, he was unable long to endure the physical strain of this calling, and at the close of two years' service he returned to his early home. Entering an academy in Brandon, he there for a time pursued with reasonable diligence the studies preparatory to a higher course. Supplementing the education thus acquired by a brief course of study in an academy at Canandaigua, N. Y., at the age of twenty, he turned his footsteps westward.

One of the biographers says: "It is doubtful if among all the thousands who in those early days were faring westward from New England, Virginia and the Carolinas, there ever was a youth more resolutely and boldly addressed to opportunity than he. Penniless, broken in health, almost diminutive in physical stature, and unknown, he made his way successively to Cincinnati, Louisville and St. Louis, in search of employment, literally of bread." By a sudden turn in fortune's wheel his lot was cast in Central Illinois, where his first vocation was that of teacher of a village school. Yet later—after laborious application—admitted to the bar, he courageously entered upon his marvelous career.

His home was Jacksonville, and to the hardy pioneers of Morgan and neighboring counties, it was soon revealed that notwithstanding his slight stature and boyish appearance, the youthful Douglas was at once to be taken fully into the account. Self reliant to the very verge, he unhesitatingly entered the arena of active professional and political strife with "foemen worthy the steel" of veterans at the bar, and upon the hustings.
The issues were sharply drawn between the two political parties then struggling for ascendency, and Central Illinois was the home of as brilliant an array of gifted leaders as the Whig party at any time in its palmiest days had known. Hardin, Stuart, Browning, Logan, Baker, Lincoln, were just then upon the threshold of careers that have given their names honored and enduring place upon the pages of our history. Into the safe keeping of the leaders just named, were entrusted in large degree the advocacy of the principles of the now historic party, and the political fortunes of its great chieftain, Henry Clay.

As is well known, the principal antagonist of the renowned Whig chieftain was Andrew Jackson. Earlier in their political careers, both had been earnest supporters of the administration of President Monroe, but at its close, the leaders last named with Adams and Crawford, were aspirants to the great office. No candidates receiving a majority of the electoral votes, and the selection by constitutional requirement devolving upon the House of Representatives, Mr. Adams was eventually chosen. His election over his principal competitor, General Jackson, was largely through the influence of Mr. Clay; and the subsequent acceptance by the latter of the office of the Secretary of State, gave rise to the unfounded but vehement cry of "bargain and corruption" which followed the Kentucky statesman through two presidential struggles of later periods, and died wholly away only when the clods had fallen upon his grave.

Triumphant in his candidacy over Adams in 1828, President Jackson, four years later encountered as his formidable competitor his colossal antagonist—the one man for whom he had no forgiveness, even when the shadows were gathering about his own couch.

"The early and better days of the republic" is by no means an unusual expression in the political literature of our day. Possibly all the generations of men have realized the significance of the words of the great Bard:

"Past, and to come, seem best;
Things present—worst.
We are time's subjects."

And yet—barring the closing months of the administration of the elder Adams—this country has known no period of more intense party passion, or of more deadly feuds among political leaders, than was manifested during the presidential contest of 1832. The Whig party—with Henry Clay as its candidate, and its idol—was for the first time in the field. Catching something of the spirit of its imperious leader, its campaign was relentlessly aggressive. The scabbard was thrown away, and all lines of retreat cut off from the beginning. No act of the party in power escaped the lime light, no delinquency, real or imaginary, of Jackson—its candidate for re-election—but was ruthlessly drawn into the open day. Even the domestic hearthstone was invaded and antagonisms engendered that knew no surcease until the last of the chief participants in the eventful struggle had descended to the tomb.
The defeat of Clay but intensified his hostility toward his successful rival, and with a following that in personal devotion to its leader has scarcely known a parallel, he was at once the peerless front of a powerful opposition to the Jackson administration.

Such were the existing political conditions throughout the country when Stephen A. Douglas at the age of 22 first entered the arena of debate. It would not be strange if such environment left its deep impress, and measurably gave direction to his political career. The period of probation and training so essential to ordinary men was unneeded by him. Fully equipped, and with a self confidence that has rarely had a counterpart—he was from the beginning the earnest defender of the salient measures of the democratic administration, and the aggressive champion of President Jackson. Absolutely fearless, he took no reckoning of the opposite forces, and regardless of the prowess or ripe experience of adversaries he at all times, in and out of season, gladly welcomed the encounter. To this end, he did not await opportunities, but eagerly sought them.

His first contest for public office was with John J. Hardin, by no means the least gifted of the brilliant Whig leaders already mentioned. Defeated by Douglas in his candidacy for re-election to the office of Attorney General, Colonel Hardin at a later day achieved distinction as a Representative in Congress, and at the early age of 37, fell while gallantly leading his regiment upon the bloody field of Buena Vista. In the catalogue of men worthy of remembrance, there is found the name of no braver, manlier man, than that of John J. Hardin.

With well earned laurels as public prosecutor, Mr. Douglas resigned after two years incumbency of that office, to accept that of representative in the State Legislature. The Tenth General Assembly—to which he was chosen, was the most notable in Illinois history. Upon the roll of members of the House, in the old capitol at Vandalia, were names inseparably associated with the history of the State and the Nation. From its list were yet to be chosen two governors of the Commonwealth, one member of the Cabinet, three justices of the Supreme Court of the State, eight Representatives in Congress, six senators, and one President of the United States. That would indeed be a notable assemblage of law makers in any country or time, that included in its membership; Mc Clernard, Edwards, Ewing, Semple, Logan, Hardin, Browning, Shields, Baker, Stuart, Douglas and Lincoln.

In this Assembly Mr. Douglas encountered in impassioned debate, possibly for the first time, two men against whom in succession he was soon to be opposed upon the hustings as a candidate for Congress; and later as an aspirant to yet more exalted stations, another, with whose name—now "given to the ages"—his own is linked inseparably for all time.

The most brilliant and exciting contest for the National House of Representatives the State has known, excepting possibly that of Cook and McLean a decade and a half earlier, was that of 1838 between John T. Stuart and Stephen A. Douglas. They were the recognized champions of their respective parties. The district embraced two-thirds
of the area of the State, extending from the counties immediately south of Sangamon and Morgan, northward to Lake Michigan and the Wisconsin line. Together on horseback, often across unbridged streams, and through pathless forest and prairie, they journeyed, holding joint debates in all of the county seats of the district—including the then villages of Jacksonville, Springfield, Peoria, Pekin, Bloomington, Quincy, Joliet, Galena, and Chicago. It was said of Hon. Richard M. Young, a noted lawyer of the early days, that he possessed one eminent qualification for the office of Circuit Judge—that of being a good horseback rider. It can hardly be doubted that our candidates for Congress three score and ten years ago, possessed this qualification in a rare degree. That the candidates were well matched in ability and eloquence readily appears from the fact that after an active canvas of several months, Major Stuart was elected by a majority of but eight votes. By re-elections he served six years in the House of Representatives, and was one of its ablest and most valuable members. In Congress, he was the political friend and associate of Crittenden, Winthrop, Clay and Webster. Major Stuart lives in my memory as a splendid type of the Whig statesman of the Golden Age. Courteous and kindly, he was at all times, a Kentucky gentleman of “the old school” if ever one trod this blessed earth.

Returning to the bar after his defeat for Congress, Mr. Douglas was in quick succession, Secretary of State by appointment of the Governor, and Judge of the Circuit and Supreme Courts by election of the Legislature. The courts he held as nisi prius Judge were in the Quincy circuit, and the last named city for the time his home. His associates upon the supreme bench were Justices Treat, Caton, Ford, Wilson, Scates and Lockwood. His opinions, twenty-one in number will be found in Scannon’s reports. There was little in any of the causes submitted to fully test his capacity as lawyer or logician. Enough, however, appears from his clear and concise statements and arguments to justify the belief that had his life been unreservedly given to the profession of the law—his talents concentrated upon the mastery of its eternal principles, he would in the end have been amply rewarded “by that mistress who is at the same time so jealous and so just.” This, however, was not to be, and to a field more alluring his footsteps were soon turned.

Abandoning the bench to men less ambitious, he was soon embarked upon the uncertain and delusive sea of politics.

His unsuccessful opponent for Congress in 1842 was Hon. Orville H. Browning with whom in the State Legislature, he had measured swords over a partisan resolution sustaining the financial policy of President Jackson. “The whirligig of time brings in his revenges,” and it so fell out that near two decades later it was the fortune of Mr. Browning to occupy a seat in the Senate as the successor to Douglas—“touched by the finger of death.” At a later day, Mr. Browning as a member of the cabinet of President Johnson acquitted himself with honor in the discharge of the exacting duties of Secretary of the Interior. So long as men of high aims, patriotic hearts, and noble achievements are held in grateful remembrance, his name will have honored place in our country’s annals.
The career upon which Mr. Douglas now entered was the one for which
he was pre-eminently fitted, and to which he had aspired from the be-
ginning. It was a career in which national fame was to be achieved,
and—by re-elections to the House, and later to the Senate—to continue
without interruption to the last hour of his life. He took his seat in the
House of Representatives, December 5, 1843, and among his colleagues,
were Semple and Breese of the Senate, and Hardin, Mc Clem and, Fick-
lin and Wentworth of the House. Mr. Stephens of Georgia, with whom
it was my good fortune to serve in the Forty-fourth and Forty-sixth
Congresses, told me that he entered the House the same day with Doug-
alas, and that he distinctly recalled the delicate and youthful appearance
of the latter as he advanced to the Speaker's desk to receive the oath
of office.

Conspicuous among the leaders of the House in the Twenty-eighth
Congress were Hamilton Fish, Washington Hunt, Henry A. Wise,
Howell Cobb, Joshua R. Giddings, Linn Boyd, John Sidell, Barnwell
Rhett, Robert C. Winthrop the Speaker, Hannibal Hamlin elected Vice
President upon the ticket with Mr. Lincoln in 1860, Andrew Johnson,
the successor of the lamented president in 1865, and John Quincy Adams
whose brilliant career as Ambassador, Senator, Secretary of State and
President, was rounded out by near two decades of faithful service as
a Representative in Congress.

The period that witnessed the entrance of Mr. Douglas into the great
commons was an eventful one in our political history. John Tyler,
upon the death of President Harrison had succeeded to the great office,
and was in irreconcilable hostility to the leaders of his party upon the
vital issues upon which the whig victory of 1840 had been achieved.
Henry Clay, then at the zenith of his marvelous powers, merciless in
his arraignment of the Tyler administration, was unwittingly breeding
the party dissensions that eventually compassed his own defeat in his
last struggle for the presidency. Daniel Webster, regardless of the
criticism of party associate, and after the retirement of his Whig col-
leagues from the Tyler cabinet, still remained at the head of the State
department. His vindication, if needed, abundantly appears in the
treaty by which our northeastern boundary was definitely adjusted, and
war with England happily averted.

In the rush of events, party antagonisms, in the main, soon fade from
remembrance. One, however, that did not pass with the occasion, but
lingered even to the shades of the Hermitage, was unrelenting hostility
to President Jackson. For his declaration of martial law in New Or-
leans just prior to the battle, with which his own name is associated
for all time—General Jackson had been subjected to a heavy fine by a
judge of that city. Repeated attempts in congress looking to his vindi-
cation and re-imbursement, had been unavailing. Securing the floor for
the first time, Mr. Douglas, upon the anniversary of the great victory,
delivered an impassioned speech in vindication of Jackson which at
once challenged the attention of the country, and gave him high place
among the great debaters of that memorable congress. In reply to the
demand of an opponent for a precedent for the proposed legislation, Douglas quickly responded: "Possibly, sir, no case can be found on any page of American history where the commanding officer has been fined for an act absolutely necessary to the salvation of his country. As to the precedents, let us make one now that will challenge the admiration of the world and stand the test of all the ages." After a graphic description of conditions existing in New Orleans at the time of Jackson's declaration of martial law; "the city filled with traitors, anxious to surrender; spies transmitting information to the camp of the enemy, British regulars—fourfold the number of the American defenders, advancing to the attack, in this terrible emergency, necessity became the paramount law, the responsibility was taken, martial law declared, and a victory achieved unparalleled in the annals of war; a victory that avenged the infamy of the wanton burning of our nation's capitol, fully, and for all time."

The speech was unanswered, the bill passed, and probably Douglas knew no prouder moment than when a few months later upon a visit to the Hermitage, he received the earnest thanks of the venerable commander for his masterly vindication.

Two of the salient and far reaching questions confronting the statesmen of that eventful congress pertained to the settlement of the Oregon boundary question, and to the annexation of the republic of Texas. The first named question—left unsettled by the treaty of Ghent had been for two generations the apple of discord between the American and British governments. That it, at a critical moment came near involving the two nations in war is a well known fact in history. The platform upon which Mr. Polk had in 1844 been elected to the presidency asserted unequivocally the right of the United States to the whole of the Oregon territory. The boundary line of "fifty-four-forty" was in many of the states the decisive party watch word in that masterful contest.

Mr. Douglas, in full accord with his party upon this question, ably canvassed Illinois in earnest advocacy of Mr. Polk's election. When at a later day, it was determined by the president and his official advisers to abandon the party platform demand of "fifty-four degrees and forty minutes" as the only settlement of the disputed boundary, and accept that of the parallel of forty-nine degrees, reluctantly proposed by Great Britain as a peacable final settlement—Mr. Douglas earnestly antagonizing any concession, was at once in opposition to the administration he had assisted to bring into power. Whether the part of wisdom was a strict adherence to the platform dicta of "the whole of Oregon," or a reasonable concession in the interest of peaceable adjustment of a dangerous question, was long a matter of vehement discussion. It suffices that the treaty with Great Britain establishing our northwestern boundary upon the parallel last named, was promptly ratified by the Senate, and the once famous "Oregon question" peaceably relegated to the realm of history.

A question—sixty odd years ago—equal in importance with that of the Oregon boundary, was the annexation of Texas. The "Lone Star
State” had been virtually an independent republic since the decisive victory of General Houston over Santa Anna in 1837 at San Jacinto, and its independence as such had been acknowledged by our own and European governments. The hardy settlers of the new commonwealth were in the main emigrants from the United States, and earnestly solicitous of admission into the Federal Union. The question of annexation entered largely into the presidential canvas of 1844, and the “lone star” upon democratic banners was an important factor in securing the triumph of Mr. Polk in that bitterly contested election. In the closing hours of the Tyler administration, annexation was at length effected by joint resolution of Congress, and Texas passed at once from an independent republic to a state of the American Union. This action of Congress, however, gave deep offense to the Mexican government, and was the initial in a series of stirring events soon to follow. The Mexican invasion, the brilliant victories won by American valor, and the Treaty of Peace, by which our domain was extended westward to the Pacific, constitute a thrilling chapter in the annals of war. Brief in duration, the Mexican war was the training school for men whose military achievements were yet to make resplendent the pages of history. Under the victorious banners of the great commanders, Taylor and Scott, were Thomas and Beauregard, Shields and Hill, Johnston and Sherman, McClellan and Longstreet, Hancock and Stonewall Jackson, Lee and Grant. In the list of its heroes were eight future candidates for the presidency, three of whom, Taylor, Pierce and Grant, were triumphantly elected.

Meanwhile at the nation’s capitol was held high debate over questions second in importance to none that have engaged the profound consideration of statesmen, that literally took hold of the issues of war, conquest, diplomacy, peace, empire. From its inception, Mr. Douglas was an unfaltering advocate of the project of annexation, and as Chairman of the Committee on Territories, bore prominent part in the protracted and exciting debates consequent upon the passage of that measure in the House of Representatives. In his celebrated colloquy with Mr. Adams he contended that the joint resolution he advocated was in reality only for the re-annexation of territory originally ours under the Louisiana purchase of 1803. That something akin to the spirit of “manifest destiny” brooded over the discussion may be gathered from the closing sentences of his speech: “Our Federal system is admirably adapted to the whole continent; and while I would not violate the laws of nations or treaty stipulations, or in any manner tarnish the national honor, I would exert all legal and honorable means to drive Great Britain and the last vestige of royal authority from the continent of North America, and extend the limits of the republic from ocean to ocean. I would make this an ocean bound republic, and have no more disputes about boundaries or red lines on maps.”

Elected to the Senate at the age of thirty-four, Mr. Douglas took his seat in that august body in December, 1847. On the same day Abraham Lincoln took the oath of office as a member from Illinois in the House
of Representatives. The Senate was presided over by the able and accomplished Vice President, George M. Dallas. Seldom has there been a more imposing list of great names than that which now included the young Senator from Illinois. Conspicuous among the Senators of the thirty states represented, were Dix of New York, Dayton of New Jersey, Hale of New Hampshire, Clayton of Delaware, Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, Mason of Virginia, King of Alabama, Davis of Mississippi, Bell of Tennessee, Corwin of Ohio, Crittenden of Kentucky, Breese of Illinois, Benton of Missouri, Houston of Texas, Calhoun of South Carolina, and Webster of Massachusetts. It need hardly be said that the debates of that and the immediately succeeding Congress have possibly never been surpassed in ability and eloquence by any deliberative assembly.

The one vital and portentous question, in some one of its many phases, then under continuous discussion, was that of human slavery. This institution, until its final extinction amid the flames of war, cast its ominous shadow over our nation's pathway from the beginning. From the establishment of the government under the Federal Constitution to the period mentioned, it had been the constant subject of compromise and concession.

Henry Clay was first known as "the great pacificator" by his tireless efforts in the exciting struggle of 1820 over the admission of Missouri, with its constitution recognizing slavery, into the Federal Union. Bowed with the weight of years, the Kentucky statesman from the retirement he had sought—in recognition of the general desire of his countrymen—again returned to the theatre of his early struggles and triumphs. The fires of ambition had burned low by age and bereavement, but with earnest longing that he might again "pour oil upon the troubled waters" he presented to the Senate as terms of final peaceable adjustment of the slavery question, the once famous "Compromise measures of 1850."

The sectional agitation then at its height was measurably the result of the proposed disposition of territory acquired by the then recent treaty with Mexico. The advocates and opponents of slavery extension were at once in bitter antagonism and intensity of feeling such as the country had rarely known.

The compromise measures—proposed by Mr. Clay in a general bill—embraced the establishment of territorial governments for Utah and New Mexico, the settlement of the Texas boundary, an amendment to the fugitive slave law, and the admission of California as a free state. In entire accord with each proposition; Mr. Douglas had—by direction of the Committee on Territories, of which he was the chairman—reported a bill providing for the immediate admission of California under its recently adopted free state constitution. Separate measures embracing the other propositions of the general bill were likewise duly reported. These measures were advocated by the Illinois senator in a speech that at once won him recognized place among the great debaters of that illustrious assemblage. After many weeks of earnest, at time vehement debate, the bills in the form last mentioned, were passed, and received the approval of the president. Apart from the significance of these measures
as a peace offering to the country, their passage closed a memorable era in our history. During their discussion Clay, Calhoun and Webster—
“the illustrious triumvirate”—were heard for the last time in the Senate. Greatest of the second generation of our statesman, associated in the
advocacy of measures that in the early day of the republic had given
us exalted place among the nations, within brief time of each other,
“shattered by the contentions of the great hall, they passed to the
chamber of reconciliation and of silence.”

Chief in importance of his public services to his state was that of
Senator Douglas in procuring from Congress a land grant to aid in the
construction of the Illinois Central railroad. It is but justice to the
memory of his early colleague, Senator Breese, to say that he had been
the earnest advocate of a similar measure in a former congress. The bill,
however, which after persistent opposition finally became a law was in-
troduced and warmly advocated by Senator Douglas. This act ceded to
the State of Illinois, subject to the disposal of the Legislature thereof,
“for the purpose of aiding in the construction of a railroad from the
southern terminus of the Illinois and Michigan canal to a point at or
near the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, with a branch of
the same to Chicago, and another to Dubuque, Ia., every alternate section
of land designated by even numbers for six sections in width on each
side of said road and its branches.” It is difficult at this day to realize
the importance of this measure to the then sparsely settled State. The
grant in aggregate was near three million acres, and was directly to the
State. After appropriate action by the State Legislature, the Illinois
Central Railroad Company was duly organized, and the road eventually
constructed. The provision for the payment by the company to the State
of seven per cent of its gross annual earnings, is one, the value of which
to this and future generations cannot be overstated. By wise constitu-
tional provision the Legislature is forever prohibited from releasing the
company from this payment.

The completion of the Illinois Central Railroad marked the beginning
of the era of marvelous development in Illinois. The vast land grant,
in convenient holdings, was soon in possession of actual settlers, and a
new impetus quickly given to all projects along the line of material
progress. During the five years immediately succeeding the passage of
the bill, the population of Illinois increased from less than nine hundred
thousand to near a million and a half, the foundations were firmly laid
for the present unsurpassed prosperity of the great central State. A
recent historian has truly said “For this, if for no other public service
to his State, the name of Douglas was justly entitled to preservation by
the erection of that splendid monumental column which overlooking the
blue waters of Lake Michigan, also overlooks for long distance that iron
highway which was in no small degree the triumph of his legislative
forecast and genius.”

The measure now to be mentioned aroused deeper attention—more
anxious concern—throughout the entire country than any with which
the name of Douglas had yet been closely associated. It pertained di-
rectly to slavery, the “bone of contention” between the north and the
south—the one dangerous quantity in our national politics—from the establishment of the government. Beginning with its recognition, though not in direct terms, in the federal constitution, it had through two generations in the interest of peace been the subject of repeated compromise.

As chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, Mr. Douglas in the early days of 1854 reported a bill providing for the organization of the territories of Nebraska and Kansas. This measure, which so suddenly arrested public attention, is known in our political history as the “Kansas-Nebraska bill.” Among its provisions was one repealing the Missouri Compromise or restriction of 1820. The end sought by the repeal was, as stated by Mr. Douglas, to leave the people of said territories respectively to determine the question of the introduction or exclusion of slavery for themselves; in other words, “to regulate their domestic institutions in their own way subject only to the constitution of the United States.” The principle strenuously contended for was that of “popular sovereignty” or non-intervention by Congress, in the affairs of the territories. In closing the protracted and exciting debate just prior to the passage of the bill in the Senate, he said: “There is another reason why I desire to see this principle recognized as a rule of action in all time to come. It will have the effect to destroy all sectional parties and sectional agitation. If you withdraw the slavery question from the halls of Congress and the political arena, and commit it to the arbitrament of those who are immediately interested in, and alone responsible for its consequences there is nothing left out of which sectional parties can be organized. When the people of the north shall all be rallied under one banner, and the whole south marshalled under another banner, and each section excited to frenzy and madness by hostility to the institutions of the other, then the patriot may well tremble for the perpetuity of the Union. Withdraw the slavery question from the political arena and remove it to the states and territories, each to decide for itself, and such a catastrophe can never happen.”

These utterances of little more than half a century ago, fall strangely upon our ears at this day. In the light of all that has occurred in the long reach of years, how significant the words: “No man is wiser than events.” Likewise, “the actions of men are to be judged by the light surrounding them at the time, not by the knowledge that comes after the fact.” The immediate effect of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill was directly the reverse of that so confidently predicted by Mr. Douglas. The era of concord between the north and the south did not return. The slavery question, instead of being relegated to the recently organized territories for final settlement, at once assumed the dimensions of a great national issue. The country at large, instead of a single territory became the theatre of excited discussion. The final determination was to be not that of a territory, but of the entire people.

One significant effect of the passage of the bill was the immediate disruption of the Whig party. As a great national organization, of which Clay and Webster had been eminent leaders, and Harrison and Taylor successful candidates for the presidency, it now passes into history.
Upon its ruins, the republican party at once came into being. Under the leadership of Fremont as its candidate, and opposition by congressional intervention to slavery extension as its chief issue, it was a formidable antagonist to the democratic party in the presidential contest of 1856. Mr. Buchanan had defeated Douglas in the nominating convention of his party that year. His absence from the country, as minister to England, during the exciting events just mentioned, it was thought would make him a safer candidate than his chief competitor, Mr. Douglas. He had been in no manner identified with the Kansas-Nebraska bill, or the stormy events which immediately followed its passage. In his letter of acceptance, however, Mr. Buchanan had given his unqualified approval of his party platform which recognized and adopted the principle contained in the organic law establishing the territories of Nebraska and Kansas as embodying the only "sound and safe solution of the slavery question." Upon the principle here declared, issue was joined by his political opponents, and the battle fought out to the bitter end.

Although Mr. Douglas had met personal defeat in his aspiration to the presidency, the principle of "non-intervention by congress" in the affairs of the territories, for which he had so earnestly contended, had been triumphant both in the convention of the party, and at the polls. This principle, in its application to Kansas, was soon to be put to the test. From its organization, that territory had been a continuous scene of disorder often of violence. In rapid succession three governors appointed by the president had resigned and departed the territory, each confessing his inability to maintain public order. The struggle for mastery between the free state advocates and their adversaries arrested the attention of the entire country. It vividly recalled the bloody forays read of in the old chronicles of hostile clans upon the Scottish border.

The "parting of the ways" between Senator Douglas and President Buchanan was now reached. The latter had received the cordial support of Mr. Douglas in the election which elevated him to the presidency. His determined opposition to the re-election of Douglas became apparent as the senatorial canvas progressed. The incidents now to be related will explain this hostility, as well as bring to the front one of the distinctive questions upon which much stress was laid in the subsequent debates between Douglas and Lincoln.

A statesman of national reputation, Hon. Robert J. Walker, was at length appointed Governor of Kansas. During his brief administration, a convention assembled without his cooperation at Lecompton, and formulated a constitution under which application was soon made for the admission of Kansas into the Union. This convention, was in part composed of non-residents, and in no sense reflected the wishes of the majority of the bona fide residents of the territory. The salient feature of the constitution was that establishing slavery. The constitution was not submitted by the convention to popular vote, but in due time forwarded to the President, and by him laid before Congress accompanied by a recommendation for its approval, and the early admission of the new state into the Union.
When the Lecompton constitution came before the Senate, it at once encountered the formidable opposition of Mr. Douglas. In unmeasured terms he denounced it as fraudulent, as antagonistic to the wishes of the people of Kansas, and subversive of the basic principle upon which the territory had been organized. In the attitude just assumed, Mr. Douglas at once found himself in line with the Republicans, and in opposition to the administration he had helped to place in power. The breach thus created was destined to remain unhealed. Moreover, his declaration of hostility to the Lecompton constitution was the beginning of the end of years of close political affiliation with southern democratic statesmen. From that moment, Mr. Douglas lost prestige as a national leader of his party. In more than one-half of the democratic states he ceased to be regarded as a probable or even possible candidate for the presidential succession. The hostility thus engendered followed him to the Charleston convention of 1860, and throughout the exciting presidential contest which followed. But the humiliation of defeat, brought about as he believed by personal hostility to himself, was yet in the future. In the attempted admission of Kansas under the Lecompton constitution, Mr. Douglas was triumphant over the administration and his former political associates from the south. Under what was known as the "English Amendment," the obnoxious constitution was referred to the people of Kansas, and by them overwhelmingly rejected.

The close of this controversy in the early months of 1858 left Mr. Douglas in a position of much embarrassment. He had incurred the active hostility of the president, and in large measure of his adherents, without gaining the future aid of his late associates, in the defeat of the Lecompton constitution. His senatorial term was nearing its close, and his political life depended upon his re-election. With an united and aggressive enemy, ably led, in his front; his own party hopelessly divided—one faction seeking his defeat, it can readily be seen that his political pathway was by no means one of peace. Such in brief outline, were the political conditions, when upon the adjournment of Congress, Mr. Douglas returned to Illinois in July, 1858, and made public announcement of his candidacy for re-election.

In his speech at Springfield, June 17, accepting the nomination of his party for the Senate, Mr. Lincoln had uttered the words which have since become historic. They are quoted at length, as they soon furnished the text for his severe arraignment by Mr. Douglas in debate. The words are: "We are now far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe this country cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved, I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of
ultimate extinction or its advocates will push it forward until it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new, north as well as south."

This, at the time, was a bold utterance, and it was believed by many would imperil Mr. Lincoln's chances for election. Mr. Blaine, in his "Twenty Years of Congress," says: "Mr. Lincoln had been warned by intimate friends to whom he had communicated the contents of his speech in advance of its delivery, that he was treading on dangerous ground that he would be misrepresented as a disunionist, and that he might fatally damage the republican party by making its existence synonymous with a destruction of the government."

The opening speech of Mr. Douglas at Chicago a few days later, sounding the key note of his campaign, was in the main an arraignment of his opponent for an attempt to precipitate an internecine conflict, and array in deadly hostility the north against the south. He said: "In other words, Mr. Lincoln advocates boldly and clearly a war of sections, a war of the north against the south, of the free states against the slave states, a war of extermination, to be continued relentlessly until the one or the other shall be subdued, and all the states shall either become free or become slave."

The two speeches, followed by others of like tenor, aroused public interest in the State as it had never been before. The desire to hear the candidates from the same platform became general. The proposal for joint debate came from Mr. Lincoln on the 24th day of July and was soon thereafter accepted. Seven joint meetings were agreed upon, the first to be at Ottawa, August 21st, and the last at Alton, October 15th. The meetings were held in the open, and at each place immense crowds were in attendance. The friends of Mr. Lincoln largely preponderated in the northern portion of the State, those of Mr. Douglas in the southern, while in the center the partisans of the respective candidates were apparently equal in numbers. The interest never flagged for a moment from the beginning to the close. The debate was upon a high plane; each candidate enthusiastically applauded by his friends, and respectfully heard by his opponents. The speakers were men of dignified presence, their bearing such as to challenge respect in any assemblage. There was nothing of the "grotesque" about the one, nothing of the "political juggler" about the other. Both were deeply impressed with the gravity of the questions at issue, and of what might prove their far reaching consequence to the country. Kindly reference by each speaker to the other characterized the debates from the beginning. "My friend Lincoln," and "My friend, the Judge," were expressions of constant occurrence during the debates. While each mercilessly attacked the political utterances of the other, good feeling in the main prevailed. Something being pardoned to the spirit of debate, the amenities were well observed. They had been personally well known to each other for many years, had served together in the Legislature when the State Capital was at Vandalia, and at a later date, Lincoln had appeared before the Supreme Court when Douglas was one of the judges. The amusing
allusions to each other were taken in good part. Mr. Lincoln's profound humor is now a proverb. It never appeared to better advantage than during these debates. In criticising Mr. Lincoln's attack upon Chief Justice Taney and his associates for the "Dred Scott decision," Douglas declared it to be an attempt to secure a reversal of the high tribunal by an appeal to a town meeting. It reminded him of the saying of Colonel Strod that the judicial system of Illinois was perfect, except that "there should be an appeal allowed from the Supreme Court to two justices of the peace." Lincoln replied: "That was when you were on the bench, Judge." Referring to Douglas' allusion to him as a kind, amiable and intelligent gentleman, he said: "Then as the Judge has complimented me with these pleasant titles, I was a little taken, for it came from a great man. I was not very much accustomed to flattery and it came the sweeter to me. I was like the Hoosier with the ginger bread, when he said he reckoned he loved it better and got less of it than any other man." Mr. Douglas, referring to the alliance between the Republicans and the federal office holders, said: "I shall deal with this allied army just as the Russian dealt with the allies at Sebastopol, the Russians when they fired a broadside did not stop to inquire whether it hit a Frenchman, an Englishman or a Turk. Nor will I stop to inquire whether my blows hit the Republican leaders or their allies who hold the federal offices." To which Lincoln replied: "I beg the Judge will indulge us while we remind him that the allies took Sebastopol."

In opening the debate at Ottawa, Mr. Douglas said: "In the remarks I have made on the platform and the position of Mr. Lincoln, I mean nothing personally disrespectful or unkind to that gentleman. I have known him for twenty-five years. There were many points of sympathy between us when we first got acquainted. We were both comparatively boys, and both struggling with poverty in a strange land. I was a school teacher in the town of Winchester, and he a flourishing grocery keeper in the town of Salem. He was more successful in his occupation than I was in mine, and hence more fortunate in this world's goods. Lincoln is one of those peculiar men who perform with admirable skill everything which they undertake. I made as good a school teacher as I could, and when a cabinet maker I made a good bedstead and table although my old boss said I succeeded better with bureaus and secretaries than anything else. I met him in the Legislature and had a sympathy with him because of the up hill struggle we both had in life. He was then just as good at telling an anecdote as now. He could beat any of the boys wrestling, or running a foot race, in pitching quoits or tossing a copper, and the dignity and impartiality with which he presided at a horse race, or a fist fight, excited the admiration and won the praise of everybody. I sympathized with him because he was struggling with difficulties, and so was I." To which Mr. Lincoln replied: "The judge is woefully at fault about his friend Lincoln being a grocery keeper. I don't know as it would be a sin if I had been; but he is mis-
taken. Lincoln never kept a grocery anywhere in the world. It is true
that Lincoln did work the latter part of one winter in a little still house
up at the head of a hollow."

The serious phases of the debates will now be considered. The opening
speech was by Mr. Douglas. That he possessed rare power as a debater,
all who heard him can bear witness. Mr. Blaine in his history says:
"His mind was fertile in resources. He was master of logic. In that
peculiar style of debate which in its intensity resembles a physical com-
batt, he had no equal. He spoke with extraordinary readiness. He used
good English, terse, pointed, vigorous. He disregarded the adornments
of rhetoric. He never cited historic precedents except from the domain
of American politics. Inside that field, his knowledge was comprehen-
sive, minute, critical. He could lead a crowd almost irresistibly to his
own conclusions."

Douglas was, in very truth imbued with little of mere sentiment.
He gave little time to discussions belonging solely to the realm of the
speculative or the abstract. He was in no sense a dreamer. What
Coleridge has defined wisdom: "Common sense, in an uncommon de-
gree"—was his. In phrase the simplest and most telling, he struck at
once at the very core of the controversy. Possibly no man was ever less
inclined "to darken counsel with words without knowledge." Positive,
and aggressive, to the last degree, he never sought "by indirections to
find directions out." In statesmanship, in all that pertained to human
affairs, he was intensely practical. With him, in the words of Macaulay
"one acre in Middlesex, is worth a principality in Utopia."

It is a pleasure to recall, after the lapse of half a century, the two men
as they shook hands upon the speaker's stand, just before the opening
of the debates that were to mark an epoch in American history. Stephen
A. Douglas! Abraham Lincoln! As they stood side by side and looked
out upon "the sea of upturned faces"—it was indeed a picture to live
in the memory of all who witnessed it. The one stood for "the old
ordering of things," in an emphatic sense for the government as estab-
lished by the fathers, with all its compromises. The other, recognizing,
equally with his opponent, the binding force of constitutional obligation
yet looking away from present surroundings "felt the inspiration of the
coming of the grander day." As has been well said: "The one faced
the past—the other the future."

"Often do the spirits of great events
Stride on before the events,
And in today, already walks tomorrow."

Few survive of the vast assemblages who listened spellbound to the im-
passioned words of the masterful debaters. The conditions mentioned
by Webster as essential to true eloquence had arisen: "The orator and
the occasion had met." The people of the entire State were aroused,
the interest profound, the excitement at times intense. The occasion
was indeed worthy the great orators; the orators worthy the great oc-
casion. The debaters were to note a mighty epoch in American politics.
The immediate arena of the struggle was Illinois, and the prize of victory, a senatorship. But to those who read the signs, aright, it was but the prelude to the contest for the presidency soon to follow. Within less than two years from the opening debate, Lincoln and Douglas were opposing candidates for the presidency, and the area of the struggle enlarged from a state to a nation. And following close upon its determination, the momentous questions involved, were transferred from hustings and from Senate to find bloody arbitrament on the field.

The name of Lincoln is now a household word. But little can be written of him that is not already known to the world. Nothing that can be uttered or withheld can add to, or detract from, his imperishable fame. But it must be remembered that his great opportunity and fame, came after the stirring events separated from us by the passing of fifty years. It is not the Lincoln of history, but Lincoln, the country lawyer, the debater, the candidate of his party for political office, with whom we have now to do. Born in Kentucky, much of his early life was spent in Indiana, and all of his professional and public life up to his election to the presidency, in Illinois. His early opportunities for study, like those of Douglas, were meagre indeed. Neither had had the advantage of the thorough training of the schools. Of both, it might truly have been said: "They knew men rather than books." From his log cabin home upon the Sangamon, Mr. Lincoln had in his early manhood volunteered, and was made captain of his company, in what was so well known to the early settlers of Illinois, as "the Black Hawk War." Later he was surveyor of his county, and three times a member of the State Legislature. At the time of the debates with Senator Douglas, Mr. Lincoln had for many years been a resident of Springfield, and a recognized leader of the bar. As an advocate he had probably no superior in the State. During the days of the Whig party he was an earnest exponent of its principles, and an able champion of its candidates. As such, he had in successive contests eloquently presented the claims of Harrison, Clay, Taylor and Scott to the presidency. In 1846, he was elected a Representative in Congress, and upon his retirement, he resumed the active practice of his profession. Upon the dissolution of the Whig party, he cast in his fortunes with the new political organization, and was in very truth one of the builders of the Republican party. At its first national convention in 1856, he received a large vote for nomination to the vice presidency, and during the memorable campaign of that year canvassed the State in advocacy of the election of Fremont and Dayton, the candidates of the Philadelphia convention.

In the year 1858, that of the great debates, Mr. Douglas was the better known of the opposing candidates in the country at large. In a speech then recently delivered in Springfield. Mr. Lincoln said: "There is still another disadvantage under which we labor and to which I will ask your attention. It arises out of the relative positions of the two persons, who stand before the State as candidates for the Senate.

"Senator Douglas is of world wide renown. All the anxious politicians of his party have been looking upon him as certainly at no distant day
to be the president of the United States. They have seen in his ruddy, jolly, fruitful face, postoffices, land offices, marshalships, and cabinet appointments, and foreign missions, bursting and sprouting out in wonderful exuberance, ready to be laid hold of by their greedy hands. On the contrary, nobody has ever seen in my poor, lean, lank face that any cabbages were sprouting out."

Both, however, were personally well known in Illinois. Each was by unanimous nomination the candidate of his party. Mr. Douglas had known sixteen years of continuous service in one or the other House of Congress. In the Senate, he had held high debate with Seward, Sumner and Chase from the north, and during the last session, since he had assumed a position of antagonism to the Buchanan administration, had repeatedly measured swords with Toombs, Benjamin, and Jefferson Davis, chief among the great debaters from the south.

Mr. Lincoln's services in Congress had been limited to a single term in the lower House, and his great fame was yet to be achieved, not as a legislator, but as chief executive during the most critical years of our history.

Such in brief were the opposing candidates as they entered the lists of debate at Ottawa on the twenty-first day of August, 1858. Both in the prime of manhood, thoroughly equipped for the conflict, and surrounded by throngs of devoted friends. Both gifted with marvelous forensic powers, and alike hopeful as to the result. Each recognizing fully the strength of his opponent, his own powers were constantly at their highest tension.

"The blood more stirs
To rouse a lion than to start a hare."

In opening, Mr. Douglas made brief reference to the political condition of the country prior to the year 1854. He said: "The Whig and the Democratic were the two great parties then in existence; both national and patriotic, advocating principles that were universal in their application; while these parties differed in regard to banks, tariff, and sub-treasury, they agreed on the slavery question which now agitates the Union. They had adopted the compromise measures of 1850 as the basis of a full solution of the slavery question in all its forms, that these measures had received the endorsement of both parties in their national convention of 1852, thus affirming the right of the people of each state and territory to decide as to their domestic institutions for themselves; that this principle was embodied in the bill reported by me in 1854 for the organization of the territories of Kansas and Nebraska; in order that there might be no misunderstanding, these words were inserted in that bill: 'It is the true intent and meaning of this act, not to legislate slavery into any state or territory, or to exclude it therefrom, but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the federal constitution.'"

Turning then to his opponent, he said: "I desire to know whether Mr. Lincoln today stands as he did in 1854 in favor of the unconditional repeal of the fugitive slave law; whether he stands pledged today
as he did in 1854 against the admission of any more slave states into
the Union, even if the people want them; whether he stands pledged
against the admission of a new state into the Union with such a constit-
tution as the people of that State may see fit to make. I want to know
whether he stands today pledged to the abolition of slavery in the Dis-
trict of Columbia; I desire to know whether he stands pledged to pro-
hibit slavery in all the territories of the United States north as well as
south of the Missouri Compromise line. I desire him to answer whether
he is opposed to acquisition of any more territory unless slavery is pro-
hibited therein. I want his answer to these questions."

Mr. Douglas then addressed himself to the already quoted words of
Mr. Lincoln’s Springfield speech commencing: “A house divided against
itself cannot stand.” He declared the government had existed for
seventy years divided into free and slave states as our fathers made it;
that at the time the Constitution was framed there were thirteen states,
twelve of which were slave holding, and one a free state; that if the
doctrine preached by Mr. Lincoln that all should be free, or all slave
had prevailed the twelve would have overruled the one, and slavery
would have been established by the Constitution on every inch of the
republic, instead of being left as our fathers wisely left it for each
state to decide for itself.” He then declared that “uniformity in the local
laws and institutions of the different states is neither possible nor de-
sirable; that if uniformity had been adopted when the government was
established it must inevitably have been the uniformity of slavery every-
where, or the uniformity of negro citizenship and negro equality every-
where. I hold that humanity and Christianity both require that the
negro shall have and enjoy every right and every privilege and every
immunity consistent with the safety of the society in which he lives.
The question then arises, what rights and privileges are consistent with
the public good? This is a question which each state and each territory
must decide for itself. Illinois has decided it for herself.”

He then said: “Now, my friends, if we will only act conscientiously
upon this great principle of popular sovereignty, it guarantees to each
state and territory the right to do as it pleases on all things local and
domestic instead of Congress interfering, we will continue at peace one
with another. This doctrine of Mr. Lincoln of uniformity among the
institutions of the different states is a new doctrine never dreamed of
by Washington, Madison or the framers of the government. Mr. Lin-
coln and his party set themselves up as wiser than the founders of the
government which has flourished for seventy years under the principle
of popular sovereignty, recognizing the right of each state to do as it
pleased. Under that principle, we have grown from a nation of three
or four millions to one of thirty millions of people. We have crossed the
mountains and filled up the whole northwest, turning the prairie into a
garden, and building up churches and schools, thus spreading civilization
and Christianity where before there was nothing but barbarism. Un-
der that principle we have become from a feeble nation the most power-
ful upon the face of the earth, and if we only adhere to that principle
we can go forward increasing in territory, in power, in strength and in glory until the Republic of America shall be the North Star that shall guide the friends of freedom throughout the civilized world. I believe that this new doctrine preached by Mr. Lincoln will dissolve the Union if it succeeds; trying to array all the northern states in one body against the southern; to excite a sectional war between the free states and the slave states in order that the one or the other may be driven to the wall."

Mr. Lincoln said in reply: "I think and shall try to show that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise is wrong; wrong in its direct effect, letting slavery into Kansas and Nebraska, wrong in its prospective principle, allowing it to spread to every other part of the wide world where men can be found inclined to take it. This declared indifference, but I must think covert zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republic an example of its just influence in the world, enables the enemies of free institutions with plausibility to taunt us as hypocrites. I have no prejudices against the southern people; they are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not exist among them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us we would not instantly give it up. This I believe of the masses north and south. When the southern people tell us they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery than we, I acknowledge the fact. When it is said that the institution exists, and that it is very difficult to get rid of it in any satisfactory way, I can understand and appreciate the same. I surely will not blame them for what I should not know how to do myself. If all earthly powers were given me, I should not know what to do as to the existing institution."

Declaring that he did not advocate freeing the negroes, and making them our political and social equals, but suggesting that gradual systems of emancipation might be adopted by the states, he added: "But for their tardiness in this, I will not undertake to judge our brethren of the south. But all this to my judgment furnishes no more excuse for permitting slavery to go into our free territory than it would for the reviving the African slave trade by law." He then added: "I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races.

But I hold that notwithstanding all this there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas he is not my equal in many respects, certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral and intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody, which his own hand earns, he is my equal, and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man."

Referring to the quotation from his Springfield speech of the words: "A house divided against itself cannot stand," he said: "Does the Judge say it can stand? If he does, then there is a question of veracity not between him and me, but between the Judge and an authority of somewhat higher character. I leave it to you to say whether in the history of our government the institution of slavery has not failed to be a bond of union, but on the contrary been an apple of discord and an element of division in the house, if so, then I have a right to say, that in regard to this question the Union is a house divided against itself; and when the Judge reminds me that I have often said to him that the institution of slavery has existed for eighty years in some states and yet it does not exist in some others, I agree to that fact, and I account for it by looking at the position in which our fathers originally placed it, restricting it from the new territories where it had not gone, and legislating to cut off its source by abrogation of the slave trade, thus putting the seal of legislation against its spread, the public mind did rest in the belief that it was in the course of ultimate extinction. Now, I believe if we could arrest its spread and place it where Washington and Jefferson and Madison placed it, it would be in the course of ultimate extinction, and the public mind would, as for eighty years past, believe that it was in the course of ultimate extinction."

Referring further to his Springfield speech he declared that he had no thought of doing anything to bring about a war between the free and slave states; that he had no thought in the world that he was doing anything to bring about social and political equality of the black and white races.

Pursuing this line of argument, he insisted that the first step in the conspiracy, the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, followed soon by the Dred Scott decision, the latter fitting perfectly into the niche left by the former, "in such a case, we feel it impossible not to believe that Stephen and Franklin, Roger and James, all understood one another from the beginning, and all worked upon a common plan or draft drawn before the first blow was struck."

In closing, Mr. Douglas, after indignant denial of the charge of conspiracy, said: "I have lived twenty-five years in Illinois; I have served you with all the fidelity and ability which I possess, and Mr. Lincoln is at liberty to attack my public action, my votes, and my conduct, but when he dares to attack my moral integrity by a charge of conspiracy between myself, Chief Justice Taney, and the Supreme Court and two Presidents of the United States, I will repel it."

At Freeport, Mr. Lincoln, in opening the discussion, at once declared his readiness to answer the interrogatories propounded. He said: "I do not now, nor ever did, stand in favor of the unconditional repeal of the fugitive slave law; I do not now, nor ever did, stand pledged against the admission of any more slave states into the Union; I do not stand pledged against the admission of a new state into the Union with such a constitution as the people of that state may see fit to make; I do not stand today pledged to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia; I do not stand pledged to the prohibition of the slave trade between
the different states; I am impliedly, if not expressly pledged to a belief in the right and duty of Congress to prohibit slavery in all the United States territories."

Waiving the form of the interrogatory as to being pledged he said: "As to the first one in regard to the fugitive slave law, I have never hesitated to say, and I do not now hesitate to say, that I think under the Constitution of the United States the people of the southern states are entitled to a congressional fugitive slave law. Having said that, I have had nothing to say in regard to the existing fugitive slave law further than that I think it should have been framed so as to be free from some of the objections that pertain to it without lessening its efficiency. In regard to whether I am pledged to the admission of any more slave states into the Union, I would be exceedingly glad to know that there would never be another slave state admitted into the Union; but I must add that if slavery shall be kept out of the territories during the territorial existence of any one given territory, and then the people shall, having a fair chance and a clear field when they come to adopt the constitution, do such an extraordinary thing as to adopt a slavery constitution uninfluenced by the actual presence of the institution among them, I see no alternative if we own the country, but to admit them into the Union. I should be exceedingly glad to see slavery abolished in the District of Columbia. I believe that Congress possesses constitutional power to abolish it. Yet, as a member of Congress, I should not be in favor of endeavoring to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia unless it would be upon these conditions: First, that the abolition should be gradual; second, that it should be on a vote of the majority of qualified voters in the district; third, that compensation should be made unwilling owners. With these conditions, I confess I should be exceedingly glad to see Congress abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and in the language of Henry Clay, 'Sweep from our capitol that foul blot upon our nation.'"

These carefully prepared answers will never cease to be of profound interest to the student of human affairs. They indicate unmistakably the conservative tendency of Mr. Lincoln, and his position at the time as to the legal status of the institution of slavery. But, "Courage mounteth with occasion." Five years later, and from the hand that penned the answers given came the great proclamation emancipating a race. "The hour had struck", and slavery perished. "The "compromises" upon which it rested were in the mighty upheaval, but as the stubble before the flame.

Recurring to the Freeport debate, Mr. Lincoln propounded to his opponent four interrogatories as follows: First, if the people of Kansas shall by means entirely unobjectionable in all other respects adopt a state constitution and ask admission into the Union under it before they have the requisite number of inhabitants according to the bill, some ninety-three thousand, will you vote to admit them? Second, 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? Third, if the Supreme Court of the United States shall decide that states cannot exclude slavery from their limits, are you in favor of acquiescing in, adopting and following such decision as a rule of political action; fourth, are you in favor of acquiring additional territory in disregard of how such acquisition may effect the nation on the slavery question?"

The questions propounded reached the marrow of the controversy, and were yet to have a much wider field for discussion. This was especially true of the second of the series. Upon this, widely divergent, irreconcilable, views were entertained by northern and southern democrats. The evidence of this is to be found in the respective national platforms upon which Mr. Douglas and Mr. Breckenridge were two years later rival candidates of a divided party. The second interrogatory of Mr. Lincoln clearly emphasized this conflict of opinion as it existed at the time of the debates. It is but just, however, to Mr. Douglas, of whom little that is kindly has in late years been spoken, to say, that there was nothing in the question to cause him surprise or embarrassment. It would be passing strange if during the protracted debates with Senators representing extreme and antagonistic views a matter so vital as the interpretation of the Kansas-Nebraska act, as indicated by the interrogatory, had never been under discussion. Conclusive evidence upon the points is to be found in the speech delivered by Senator Douglas at Bloomington, July 16th, forty-two days before the Freeport debate, in which he said: "I tell you, my friends it is impossible under our institutions to force slavery on an unwilling people. If this principle of popular sovereignty, asserted in the Nebraska bill be fairly carried out by letting the people decide the question for themselves by a fair vote, at a fair election, and with honest returns, slavery will never exist one day, or one hour in any territory against the unfriendly legislation of an unfriendly people. Hence, if the people of a territory want slavery they will encourage it by passing affirmative laws, and the necessary police regulations; if they do not want it, they will withhold that legislation, and by withholding it slavery is as dead as if it was prohibited by a constitutional prohibition. They could pass such local laws and police regulations as would drive slavery out in one day or one hour if they were opposed to it, and therefore, so far as the question of slavery in the territories is concerned, so far as the principle of popular sovereignty is concerned in its practical operation, it matters not how the Dred Scott case may be decided with reference to the territories. My own opinion on that point is well known. It is shown by my vote and speeches in Congress."

Recurring again to the Freeport debate, in reply to the first interrogatory, Mr. Douglas declared that in reference to Kansas it was his opinion that if it had population enough to constitute a slave state, it had people enough for a free state; that he would not make Kansas an exceptional case, to the other states of the Union; that he held it to be a sound rule of universal application to require a territory to contain the requisite
population for a member of Congress before its admission as a state into the Union; that it having been decided that Kansas has people enough for a slave state, I hold it has enough for a free state."

As to the third interrogatory, he said: "Only one man in the United States, an editor of a paper in Washington had held such view, and that he, Douglas, had at the time denounced it on the floor of the Senate. That Mr. Lincoln casts an imputation upon the Supreme Court by supposing that it would violate the constitution; that it would be an act of moral treason that no man on the bench could ever descend to. To the fourth, which he said was "very ingeniously and cunningly put" he answered that: "Whenever it became necessary in our growth and progress to acquire more territory he was in favor of it without reference to the question of slavery, and when we have acquired it, he would leave the people to do as they pleased, either to make it free, or slave territory as they preferred."

The answer to the second interrogatory, of which much has been written, was given without hesitation. Language could hardly be more clear or effective. He said: "To the next question propounded to me I answered emphatically, as Mr. Lincoln has heard me answer a hundred times, that in my opinion the people of the territory can by lawful means exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a state constitution. It matters not what the Supreme Court may hereafter decide as to the abstract question whether slavery may or may not go into a territory under 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. Those police regulations can only be established by the local legislatures, and if the people are opposed to slavery they will elect representatives to that body who will by unfriendly legislation effectually prevent the introduction of it into their midst. If, on the contrary they are for it, their Legislature will favor its extension. Hence, no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be on that abstract question, still the right of the people to make a slave territory or a free territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska bill."

The trend of thought, the unmeasured achievement of activities looking to human amelioration, during the fifty intervening years, must be taken into the account before uncharitable judgment upon what has been declared the indifference of Mr. Douglas to the question of abstract right involved in the memorable discussion. It must be remembered that the world has moved apace, and that a mighty gulf separates us from that eventful period in which practical statesmen were compelled to deal with institutions as then existing. And not to be forgotten are the words of the great interpreter of the human heart:

"But—know thou this, that

Men are as the time is."

The great debates between Douglas and Lincoln, the like of which we shall not hear again, had ended and passed to the domain of history. To the inquiry: "Which of the participants won the victory?"—there

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can be no absolute answer. Judged by the immediate result—the former, by consequence more remote and far reaching—the latter. Within three years from the first meeting at Ottawa, Mr. Lincoln, having been elected and inaugurated president, was upon the threshold of mighty events which are now the masterful theme of history; and his great antagonist in the now historic debates—had passed from earthly scenes.

It has been said that Douglas was ambitious.

"If 'twere so, it was a grievous fault
And grievously hath he answered it."

We may well believe that with like honorable ambition to the two great popular leaders of different periods, Clay and Blaine, his goal was the presidency.

In the three last national conventions of his party preceding his death, he was presented by the Illinois delegation to be named for the great office. The last of these, the Charleston convention of 1860, is now historic. It assembled amid intense party passion, and after a turbulent session, that seemed the omen of its approaching doom, adjourned to a later day to Baltimore. Mr. Douglas there received the almost solid vote of the northern, and a portion of that of the border states, but the hostility of the extreme southern leaders to his candidacy was implacable to the end. What had seemed inevitable from the beginning, at length occurred, and the great historic party, which had administered the government with brief intermissions from the inauguration of Jefferson, was hopelessly rent asunder. This startling event, and what it might portend, gave pause to thoughtful men of all parties. It was not a mere incident, but an epoch in history. Mr. Blaine in his "Twenty years of Congress" says: "The situation was the cause of solicitude and even grief with thousands to whom the old party was peculiarly endeared. The traditions of Jefferson, of Madison, of Jackson, were devoutly treasured; and the splendid achievements of the American democracy were recounted with the pride which attaches to an honorable family inheritance. The fact was recalled that the republic had grown to its imperial dimensions under democratic statesmanship. It was remembered that Louisiana had been acquired from France, Florida, from Spain, the independent republic of Texas annexed, and California, with its vast dependencies, and its myriad millions of treasure ceded by Mexico, all under democratic administrations, and in spite of the resistance of their opponents. That a party whose history was interwoven with the glory of the republic should now come to its end in a quarrel over the status of the negro in a country where his labor was not wanted, was to many of its members as incomprehensible as it was sorrowful and exasperating. They might have restored the party to harmony, but at the very height of the factional contest, the representatives of both sections were hurried forward to the national convention of 1860, with principle subordinated to passion, with judgment displaced by a desire for revenge."

The withdrawal from the Baltimore convention of a large majority of the southern delegates and a small following, led by Caleb Cushing
and Benjamin F. Butler from the north, resulted in the immediate nomination by the requisite two-thirds vote of Senator Douglas as the presidential candidate. The platform upon the question of slavery was in substance that contended for by the candidates in the debates with Lincoln. The democratic party divided, Breckenridge receiving the support of the south, Mr. Douglas' candidacy was hopeless from the beginning. But his iron will and courage, that knew no faltering, never appeared to better advantage than during that eventful canvas. Deserted by former political associates, he visited distant states and addressed immense audiences in defense of the platform upon which he had been nominated, and in advocacy of his own election. His speeches in southern states were of the stormy incidents of a struggle that has scarcely known a parallel. Interrogated by a prominent citizen at Norfolk, Va. "If Lincoln be elected president, would the southern states be justified in seceding from the union?" Douglas instantly replied: "I emphatically answer, no. The election of a man to the presidency in conformity with the Constitution of the United States would not justify an attempt to dissolve the union."

Defeated in his great ambition, broken in health, the sad witness of the unmistakable portents of the coming sectional strife, the few remaining months of his mortal life were enveloped in gloom. Partisan feeling vanished, his deep concern was now only for his country. Standing by the side of his successful rival whose wondrous career was only opening, as his own was nearing its close, he bowed profound assent to the imperishable utterances of the inaugural address: "I am loath to close. We are not enemies but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

Yet later, immediately upon the firing of the fatal shot at Sumpter that suddenly summoned millions from peaceful pursuits to arms, by invitation of the Illinois Legislature, Mr. Douglas addressed his countrymen for the last time. "Broken with the storms of State," the fires of ambition forever extinguished, standing literally upon the threshold of the grave, his soul burdened with the calamities that had befallen his country, in tones of deepest pathos he declared: "If war must come, if the bayonet must be used to maintain the Constitution, I can say before God, my conscience is clear. I have struggled long for a peaceful solution of the trouble. I deplore war, but if it must come, I am with my country, and for my country, in every contingency, and under all circumstances. At all hazards our government must be maintained, and the shortest pathway to peace is through the most stupendous preparation for war." Who that heard the last public utterance that fell from his lips, can forget his solemn invocation to all who had followed his political fortunes, until the banner had fallen from his hand—"to know only their country in its hour of peril!"
The ordinary limit of human life unreached; his intellectual strength unabated; his loftiest aspirations unrealized; at the critical moment of his country's sorest need, he passed to the grave. What reflections and regrets may have been his in that hour of awful mystery, we may not know. In the words of another: "What blight and anguish met his agonized eyes, whose lips may tell? What brilliant, broken plans, what bitter rending of sweet household ties, of strong manhood's friendships!"

In the light of what has been disclosed, may we not believe that with his days prolonged, he would during the perilous years have been the safe counselor, the rock, of the great President, in preserving the nation's life, and later "in binding up the nation's wounds."

Worthy of honored and enduring place in history, Stephen A. Douglas, statesman and patriot, lies buried within the great city whose stupendous development is so largely the result of his own wise forecast and endeavor, by the majestic lake whose waves break near the base of his stately monument and chant his eternal requiem.