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Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln

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MRS. ABRAHAM LINCOLN, first lady of the land, stood in her new rose-colored moire-antique dress, ready at last, thank goodness, to descend to her first public reception at the White House. Mr. Lincoln appeared, uncomfortable in his claw-hammer coat and white gloves, and looked with undisguised admiration at this brilliant wife of his. He ought to have said, "My dear, your dress is marvelously beautiful and you are even more so;" but as he looked her over and noticed the scant dimensions of the garment above the waist and the yard and three-quarters that trailed on the floor, he drew a soft whistle. "Whew! What a long tail our cat has!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Lincoln did not greatly enjoy the remark. It would not have been in good taste, she thought, even in Springfield, Illinois, and this was Washington. But a moment later her husband, turning from playing with Willie and Tad, turned to look again at his wife. "Mother," he said, "you look charming!" Then he began quoting poetry, but what poetry it was no one has remembered.

What do we know about these two people, Abraham Lincoln and his wedded wife Mary Todd, who lived together for 23 years from the first days of their boarding (at four dollars a week for the two) at the Globe Tavern in Springfield in 1842 till his death in the White House in 1865? Some people describe their life as one long and beautiful realization of love. Others say that they lived in constant strife, due mainly to her ungovernable temper. Millions of devourers of sob-stuff make themselves tearfully happy in the belief that Lincoln in his youth had one great passion, his love for Ann Rutledge, and that he never loved Mary Todd or any other woman afterward.

It seems more truthful to say that Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd were divinely constituted to make each other uncomfortable and that it was fortunate that they were so made.

Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd married each other because they both wanted each other. But he had a strange shrinking from marriage and she was by nature a flirt and a lover of social display; they had abundant op-

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portunity to quarrel and they did quarrel during their engagement. They had a violent quarrel on "the fatal first of January, 1841," and the two were sundered until November, 1842, a period of almost two years during which Mary, with a heavy heart, flirted with other men and Lincoln proposed to the landlady's little sister and was refused, which served him right.

He never loved any other woman as he loved Mary Todd. The word "love" must be elastic when it serves as a common denominator for the affection of a man of 33, slow-moving, phlegmatic and not very sensitive, and that of a woman ten years younger, passionate, high-strung and extremely temperamental. They made each other unhappy at times but either of them would have made anyone else unhappy, and each of them would have been unhappy without the other.

They were as exact opposites as could be described. He was six feet four inches tall; she was just five feet. He was dark, and slender; she was plump and rather light, with chestnut hair and blue-gray eyes. He moved slowly, thought slowly, spoke slowly; she was full of vivacity. He was easy-going, good-natured and imperious; she was ardent, quick to fly into a passion and as ready to get over it. Yet the fact that they quarreled more or less

frequently is not the matter of prime significance. She was inordinately proud of him and never doubted that he had a great future and that her happiness lay in sharing it.

While she was too nervous to be an ideal mother, sometimes scolding the children when their faults should have been overlooked, and much oftener humoring them when they deserved reproof, she was a loving and devoted mother. She made her children's clothing with her own hands and was a fine seamstress.

Their first son Robert was born in less than a year after their marriage, and the next two boys came at intervals of two years. The second child, Eddie, died February 1, 1850. His mother never ceased sorrowing for him till that grief was overshadowed by the death of Willie, and that in turn by the tragic murder of her husband. Tad, who was born a few months after Eddie died, came as a comfort after the first great sorrow, and was a sweet and lovable boy, but with defective speech and retarded development.

Mrs. Lincoln's position in the White House was a most cruel one. Blood relations of hers came to say good-by before they departed for the South, telling her they would soon be back with the new occupants of the White House, Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson

Davis. Her brothers were in the Confederate army. One brother, Samuel Todd, was killed at the battle of Corinth; another, Alexander, was killed at the battle of Baton Rouge; a third, David, received a bullet wound that long after caused his death. Only one brother, George, a surgeon, came out of the war with life still before him. General Ben Helm, husband of her youngest sister, was killed at Chickamauga.

Mrs. Lincoln had to smile at the Union victories that robbed her of her kindred. Just after Lincoln returned from Gettysburg, Mrs. Helm came through the lines under a flag of truce and spent some days at the White House. Lincoln did his best to conceal the fact that she was there. But the White House was full of spies. The two women hardly dared speak and could only weep silently in each other's arms.

Mrs. Lincoln belonged to a slave-holding family. She was representative of the aristocratic South, but if she did not wholly share her husband's convictions, she supported them. She declared truthfully that when her husband left the old Whig party and joined a new party opposed to the extension of slavery, she encouraged him to make no halfway matter of it.

In the long sorrowful years after the death of her husband, Mrs. Lincoln was happy in her

memory of their last afternoon together. She had made him come for a drive in the fresh air, and they had talked of what they would do at the expiration of his term. They would go back to Illinois, but first they would travel. They would cross the continent on the Union Pacific Railway which Lincoln so earnestly had advocated, and would see miners digging gold in California to pay the national debt. That night came the assassin's bullet. Mary Lincoln was never quite a sane woman after that night.

Cruel beyond belief were the words that were spoken against her and those who rose to speak in her defense were not always wise. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were not always happy together, but they believed in each other and their lives enlarged each other. They lived through a degree of incompatibility which would have sent many couples to the divorce court; but their incompatibility was less significant than their high regard for each other. If the chief end of matrimony is to yield the largest possible total of emotional gratification, the marriage of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd left much to be desired; but there are larger aspects of the marriage relation. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln took each other for better or for worse and they and the world were better for it.

