Lincoln Lore

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France and the United States: Ernest Duvergier de Hauranne Visits Lincoln's America

Editor's Note: In *Lincoln Lore* Number 1670, I erroneously identified the person who discovered the portrait of Lincoln that appears on the dust jacket of Stephen Oates's *With Malice Toward None.* It was Stefan Lorant and not Lloyd Ostendorf who did so, and the discovery was made, not recently, but in the 1940s. My apologies to Mr. Lorant.

M. E. N., Jr.

Barely twenty-one years old when he arrived in the United States in 1864, Ernest Duvergier de Hauranne proved to be an intelligent and mature observer of the disrupted and confusing scene in Civil War America. The young Frenchman combined a foreigner's detachment with a liberal's sympathy for the republican experiment. He came from a prominent but bourgeois family. Prosper Duvergier de Hauranne, his father, served as a cabinet minister under France's Bourgeois King Louis-Philippe; he wrote a ten-volume history of parliamentary government in post-revolutionary France and saw to it that Ernest received a solid education in law and politics as well as proper introductions into the influential liberal circles in France. Since the days of the American Revolution, these circles had somehow been involved with America. Ernest became associated with a friend of the Lafayette family, Duke Victor de Broglie, and devoured that classic of French liberalism, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America.* In June of 1864, Ernest went to America to observe the republican scene and especially the autumn Presidential election.

He took a sprawling and hectic tour and produced from it a sprawling and disorderly book called *Huit Mois en Amerique: Lettres et Notes de Voyage, 1864 — 1865 (Eight Months in America: Letters and Travel Notes, 1864 — 1865).* The book was published in 1866. Professor Ralph H. Bowen of Northern Illinois University saw an abbreviated French edition of the book which was published in 1966, and he eventually translated the much longer original version into English for the famous Lakeside Classics series. These excellent little books have been brought out, one a year since 1903, by R.R. Donnelley & Sons of Chicago, a giant printing firm which publishes, among other things, telephone books. The Lakeside Classics, which often reprint travellers' descriptions of America and especially of the American West, are given as Christmas gifts by the Company and include a brief account of the Company's fortunes in the previous year, constituting what must surely be the most elegant and unusual annual report in all of American business. Volume I of Duvergier de Hauranne's book appeared in 1974 and Volume II in 1975. The books are models of good printing: I detected only one typographical error in some 1100 pages, and the type design, binding, illustrations, and format are distinguished. The translation of Duvergier de Hauranne's prose is wonderful — lively and journalistic as well as precise and crisp. The editor's footnotes, however, are often useless and sometimes misleading, the only weakness in an otherwise superb piece of book production.

The editor, assisted by Monsieur Albert Krebs, Conservateur of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, stresses in the "Historical Introduction" Duvergier de Hauranne's extraordinary democratic sympathies as the principal remarkable aspect of the book. Liberal from the start, the young Frenchman soon transcended Alexis de Tocqueville's "aristocratic liberalism" and "was thoroughly converted in the course of his visit to an advanced form of democratic republicanism, a conversion that made him a political ally (after his return to France) of Léon Gambetta and Georges Clemenceau." In regard to the specific issues of Civil War America, they add, Duvergier de Hauranne's "sympathies were with the Union. This was an attitude not shared by many of his compatriots nor by the government of Napoleon III which, along with the British government and much influential British opinion, favored the Confederacy and viewed the break-up of American unity with complacency if not with downright satisfaction."

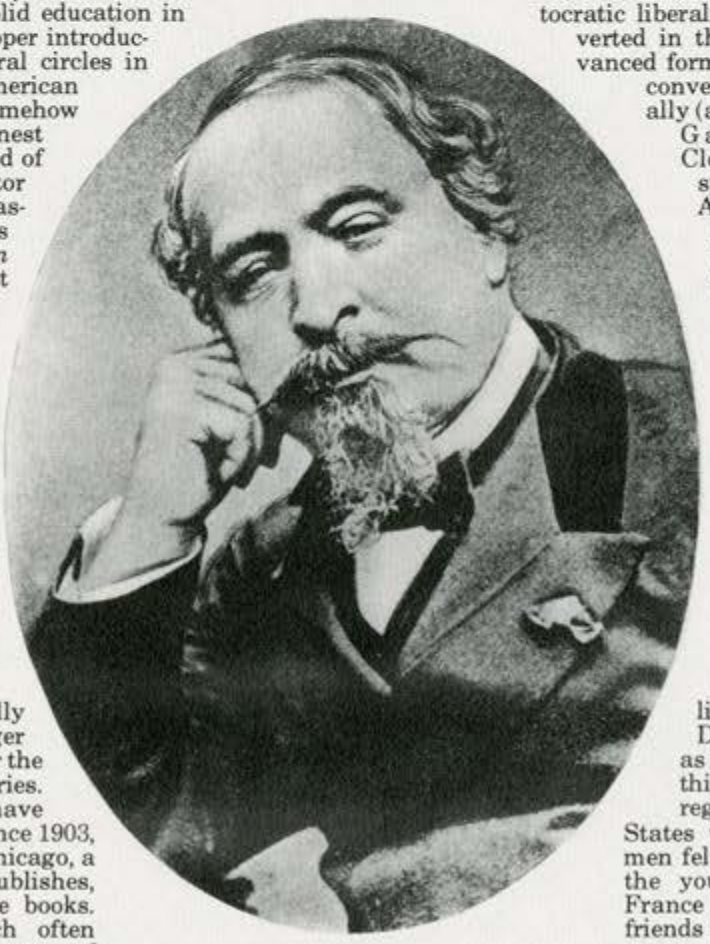

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FIGURE 1. Napoleon III.

Readers of Lynn M. Case and Warren F. Spencer's *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970) will not entirely agree. The course of dominant French opinion, while hardly liberal, was not as far from Duvergier de Hauranne's course as Bowen and Krebs would have one think. When war broke out, France regarded the plight of the United States with sympathetic pity. Frenchmen felt that they had helped establish the young country. More important, France and the United States were friends because they shared a common enemy, England. According to Case and Spencer, Frenchmen were generally hostile towards slavery. Napoleon III and his foreign minister Antoine Edouard Thouvenel regarded a divided

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FIGURE 2. Among Europeans, Americans have always had a reputation for boasting. This *Punch* cartoon, published June 21, 1862, shows Brother Jonathan, the personification of the United States, in conversation with Louis Napoleon. The French emperor is supremely confident, because the United States, far from being ready to conquer the rebels, Canada, Great Britian, and France, was actually in danger of falling apart. The Comte de Paris was the son of Louis-Philippe and, therefore, a claimant to the French throne.

United States as an ineffective counterweight to British naval might. They shared the ordinary Frenchman's sympathy for the United States, but economic hardship changed all of that. The Confederate cotton embargo hurt France almost as badly as England, and Napoleon III found that economic dislocations threatened to undermine his policy of social pacification through economic development and vast programs of public works. The temptation to bring about peace at any price to the United States grew strong.

Secretary of State Seward's belligerence in the early months of the war and France's relative lack of power forced her to follow England's lead in policies towards America. England was not as friendly as France, and economic dislocation did force a change in French sentiment. Nevertheless, the tone of French hostility was softened and somewhat reluctant, not the simple complacency or "downright satisfaction" at America's possible demise that the "Historical Introduction" suggests.

The military victory at Antietam and, to a lesser extent, the moral weight of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation which followed, prevented any bold steps towards intervention on the Confederacy's behalf. Napoleon III made some broadly publicized efforts towards mediation afterwards, but these seem to have been mostly for show for the sake of the French electorate. Unrelieved economic distress led Napoleon III to aid the Confederacy with loans and ship construction. By 1864, these moves were thwarted by other French needs. Napoleon III was heavily involved with a puppet government in Mexico, and the United States bristled publicly at the violation of her neighbor's borders and the Monroe Doctrine. Privately, the United States purred neutrality, and France reciprocated with a corresponding neutrality in regard to the Civil War.

Remove the theme of political liberalism, and one can hardly fail to be impressed with Duvergier de Hauranne's preoccupation with slavery and race. The observations of a non-Anglo-Saxon foreigner upon this aspect of the Lincoln administration are fully as worthy of comment. The young Frenchman was able to describe social reality in the American republic with unblinking realism:

> There is between Broadway and the North River [in New York], otherwise known as the Hudson, a dirty, ragged section [Hell's Kitchen] where the Irish and the colored people live. Nothing could be more pitifully wretched than these wooden hovels, these long, muddy avenues and this swarm of paupers. From time to time a heavy wagon drawn by two skinny horses rolls down an iron track with a noise from a cracked bell. On it the foreigner reads with amazement this inscription: "Carriage for colored people." What is there to say? Are we in Illinois? Are there laws against Negroes? Are they outside the law? No, but the public prejudice persecutes them more tyrannically than any law. They are driven from the horse-cars, excluded from churches.

Duvergier de Hauranne's own sympathies were not infinite, and he quickly adopted a Yankee's dislike of Germans and, especially, of Irishmen. To some degree, these prejudices helped him to explain the other American prejudice away:

> New York is, . . . a Democratic and pro-Southern city

where . . . racial incidents are to be expected. The magnates of finance and the dregs of society, which together reign supreme, want above all an end to the war, a reduction in taxes, the suppression of military conscription. They ask only to grow fat without interference and are very little concerned about the interests of the Union. The reason is that in this America, where already the national bonds are so fragile, New York is, more than any other, a city without a country. It is the cosmopolitan market place, the enormous hostelry that America keeps open for all the peoples of the world. It is natural that its inhabitants should detest making sacrifices to which they do not feel morally obligated. Last year when conscription was introduced, the money of rich Copperheads incited the Irish to rioting so violent that their archbishop himself could not quell it. The signal was given at a moment when the city, stripped of its troops and deprived of its militia, could oppose no resistance to the insurgents. This war in the streets, the first that has stained the Republic with blood, was like a war among savages. They killed, looted, hung Negroes on the lamp posts, mutilated and tortured prisoners. The cruelty of the mob rose to the pitch of delirium, and even the women set an example of ferocity. . . . The Germans are generally more peaceful, when whiskey doesn't get the better of them.

In a Philadelphia bookstore, Duvergier de Hauranne saw "an advertisement of a recent best-seller called *Miscegenation*, or the theory of the regeneration of mankind through universal mixing of the races." After describing the argument in this famous pamphlet (see *Lincoln Lore* Numbers 1635 and 1636), the young Frenchman concluded:

Is this burlesque or is it serious? Neither the one nor the other. Ask the anonymous writer of this dubious pamphlet whether he is a Unionist or a rebel — he won't tell you. He is probably some scandal-mongering charlatan, paid to throw mud at the editor of New York's most honest newspaper, Mr. Horace Greeley. Already the Democrats are going about attributing this "abolitionist filth" to the editor of the *Tribune*. Is it not sad to see the most just of all causes misrepresented, and to see the noble words of Charles Summer and Wendell Phillips intermingled with indecent jokes?

Realistic about racial opinion in the North but sympathetic with abolition, the young Frenchman urged that evidence of some Northern hypocrisy was no cause not to side with the angels.

Are the friends of the South right? Is it true that slavery is only a pretext and abolition an expedient of war? Surely that would not justify the men of the South in taking up arms for the defense of an odious prejudice. But if principles were for the men of the North really only slogans, an ingenious mask to cover their interests, it would be difficult not to become cool to their cause, given this inconsistency which so strongly resembles hypocrisy.

However this may be, the future of slavery depends today on the outcome of the war, and no one should refuse sympathy to a cause which is bound up with that of human liberty. Besides, who knows whether a principle, once admitted, does not produce its own consequences in spite of men? . . . The pretext that has been invoked, however insincerely at first, becomes a commitment from which one can no longer escape, and the prejudice that is disclaimed loses its strength from the day that one no longer dares to justify it. Yesterday a poor colored woman, the widow of a Sergeant Anderson of the Negro troops, dead on the field of honor, was insulted and beaten by a coachman with the help of a policeman. But that evening a newspaper revealed this brutal attack with indignation. Only those who have known America from times past can say how strong a reaction there has been against color prejudice. Logic must

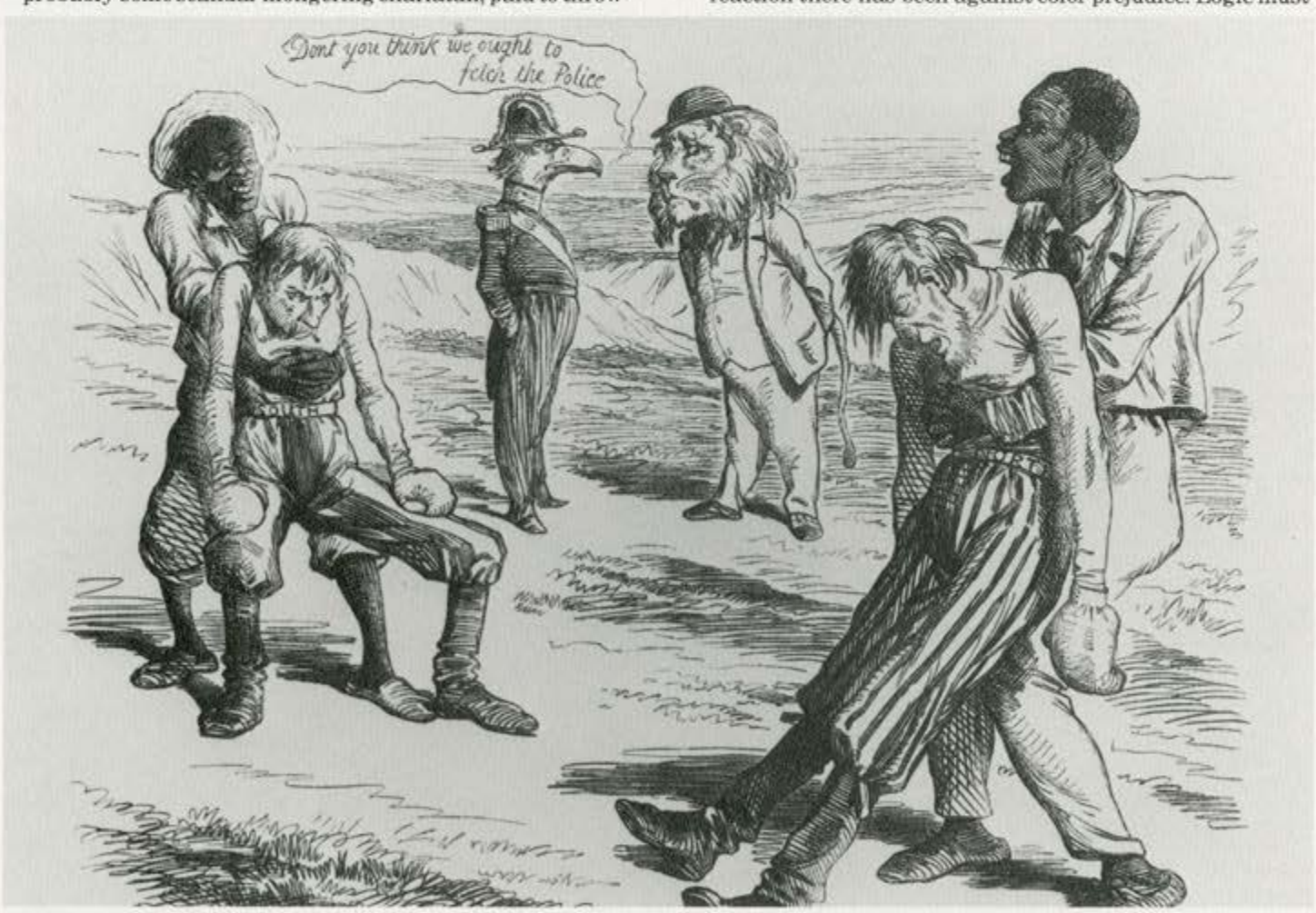

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FIGURE 3. The *Punch* cartoon of September 13, 1862, shows the French cock and the British lion eying the exhausted contestants in the United States. European cartoons ignored the constitutional language in which Americans always couched their national conflicts and focused on the realities of social and economic life, especially on the black man, whose figure constantly appears to mock American heroism. Here, black men are the amused seconds of the exhausted combatants.

take its course, and this great social reform must pass from the realm of institutions into that of everyday life. Already these whites who do not want to sit next to Negroes have made them their comrades in arms. It is difficult to treat like dogs those whom we call brothers, and to prohibit from worshipping God those whom we judge worthy to serve our country.

Duvergier de Hauranne's appraisal of the causes of the Civil War prefigured what many modern historians are saying. "The true causes of the war," he said, "are slavery, the mutual hostility of the two rival societies and, above all, the ambition of the Southerners, who arrogantly sought to perpetuate their dominance in spite of public opinion, and who raised the flag of revolt as soon as the presidency slipped out of their hands." All this appraisal lacks in order to equal a modern appreciation of the causes is to supply the missing logic behind the third and largest reason. Attacking the arrogant Slave Power, as it was called, was a way of expressing dislike of the very different Southern society without necessarily expressing or feeling any sympathy for the slaves themselves. "I do not say," wrote Duvergier de Hauranne, "that the war is being fought over the moral and philosophical question of abolition."

Throughout his travel notes, the Frenchman praised President Abraham Lincoln. He sympathized with him on account of the outrageous attacks that any figure in American politics must withstand. "It is enough," he said of 1864 campaign literature, "simply to quote some titles: *Lincolniana, Father Abe's Practical Jokes, Old Abe's Honor, Abe the Counterfeiter, Abraham Africanus I, or the Mysteries of the White House.*" He admired him for his liberal image and introduced him in his book as "the representative of the farming and laboring classes, the peace-loving President Lincoln." And he admired him for his policies: "Mr. Lincoln has been able for four years to carry on the difficult work of government with dignity; he belongs to the party of moderate abolitionists which has the greatest popular support; and he represents better than anyone else the policy of winning the war and saving the Union."

When he finally met the President on January 20, 1865 (in a meeting not recorded in *Lincoln Day by Day*), Duvergier de Hauranne was predisposed to sympathy. The day before the meeting he wrote that he had "only caught a glimpse of a long-legged giant who was leaving the White House wrapped up to his nose in an enormous scarf." Though it was "the fashion for European visitors to go to ogle the President as they would go to stare at a strange animal, and to make endless disparaging comments at his expense," this visitor would not. Lincoln's simple Western manners would not bother him. When he met Lincoln's son Robert, the Frenchman asked whether Robert would take a trip to Europe soon. Robert replied that he was awaiting the end of the war because the trip would be too expensive at the wartime price of gold. "What modesty in his answers, and what noble austerity!" Duvergier de Hauranne exclaimed. "I know of no other country where the Chief of State is too poor to afford a trip abroad for his son." Of Robert's father, Duvergier de Hauranne said, "I begin to believe that his only fault was to have been a lumberjack, a railsplitter, and a man of all work. For my part, I only honor him the more for it."

Americans and Europeans alike could hardly help remarking upon the simplicity of the White House protocol and security. Duvergier de Hauranne was duly impressed:

For a foreigner the White House possesses a certain prestige; and besides, I have been taught discretion by our customs to the point where I wouldn't dare go past its threshold without a guide or without a special invitation from the great personage who lives there. Yet its doors stand open to every American: like a church, it is everybody's house. At all hours of the day, you will find curious or idle people milling about in the great reception room where the President holds his popular audiences. It is said that some visitors — country bumpkins, no doubt — cut pieces from the silk curtains to take home as souvenirs of their pilgrimage. You may think that a policeman or at least a guard has been posted. No at all! There is only a notice asking visitors to respect the furnishings, which belong to the government.

Senator Charles Summer took the foreign visitor to the President's office. They found Lincoln "behind a huge desk piled so high with papers that it seemed to enclose him like the walls of a confessional." A woman was asking him a favor when they entered. She was trying to supplement the merits of her case with personal charm, "but the President, a grave and somewhat hurried judge, urged her to come to the point, questioned her briefly and rather brusquely, diligently scribbling at his notes all the while, his attitude clearly indicating by his manner that she was wasting his time and that he was neither stupid nor easy-going enough to be taken in by her wiles."

Duvergier de Hauranne found Lincoln to be "simple, serious and full of good sense." He noted especially that there "was not a single burst of clownish laughter, not a single remark in doubtful taste, not one of the 'jokes' for which he is famous." Duvergier de Hauranne had only a ten-minute interview with the President, but it did touch on political subjects, Lincoln commenting in particular "on the unrealisitc hopes the Democratic party entertained four years ago that it could impose its policies on the victorious Republicans."

To be sure, *A Frenchman in Lincoln's America* would not be worth reading just for the account of this brief meeting with President Lincoln. However, his encounters with Lincoln's America were significant, and they are nicely reported in the book. There are descriptions of Washington, D.C., of Pennsylvania in the oil boom, and of Western society and manners. There are numerous discussions of the brutalities of party politics and long considerations of financial policy. Political theory is frequently discussed.

In many instances, the judgments are astute. Duvergier de Hauranne understood perfectly the much-misunderstood Ten Percent Plan for Reconstruction. "An offer as generous as this," he observed, "could be made in the middle of the war at a time when it could still seem to be a measure of pacification as well as a means of weakening the Rebels by bringing back to the fold some of the sheep that had gone astray." Naturally, Lincoln's offer to amnesty "became inapplicable when the war ended, for it had only been extended as a means of securing a voluntary return to the Union, and it would have been too generous to obstinate Rebels who had resisted until the last minute."

On occasion, too, Duvergier de Hauranne's phrases are memorably eloquent. In a passage which may well be quoted by many students of the period in years to come, Duvergier de Hauranne explained, at least in part, why the period of Lincoln's Presidency is one of the most significant for historical study: "Great revolutions put to the test not only the character of a people but also the true worth of the institutions by which they are governed. A single year of domestic crisis tells us more about their virtues and vices than a century of ordinary day-to-day existence under the uncontested rule of strong government."

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FIGURE 4. Lincoln as Frenchmen saw him.