

LINCOLN PLAYS BALL WITH THE BOYS.

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duct of the war, Mr. Lincoln was plunged in a bitter private sorrow. Early in February his two younger boys, Willie and Tad, as they were familiarly known, fell sick. The President at the moment was harassed by McClellan's delay to obey his order of January 31st; by the General's plan of campaign, which he did not believe wise, but which he did not feel justified in overruling; and by the night and day pressure of the press, of Congress, and of innumerable private delegations, all of them wanting the war to go on no more than he did. The illness of his children added a sharp personal pang to his anxiety. In the tenderness of his nature he could not see suffering of any kind without a passionate desire to relieve it. Especially was he moved by the distress of a child. Indeed his love for children had already become familiar to the whole public by the touching little stories which visitors had brought away from the White House and which crept into the newspapers:

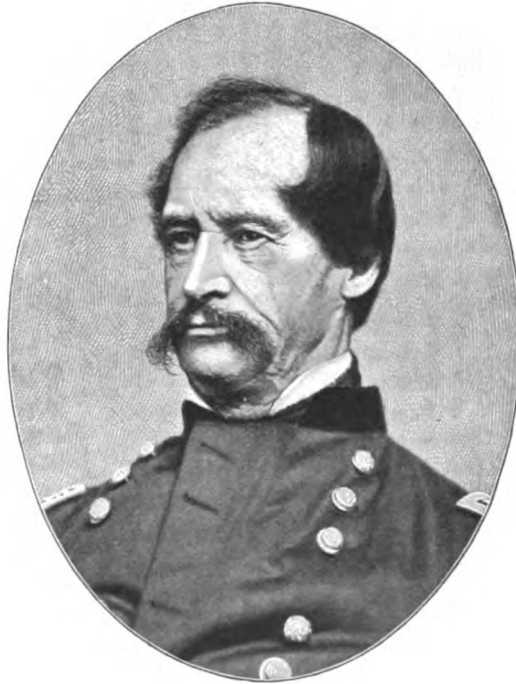
"At the reception Saturday afternoon, at the President's house," wrote a correspondent of the "Independent," "many persons noticed three little girls, poorly dressed, the children of some mechanic or laboring man, who had followed the visitors into the White House to gratify their curiosity. They passed around from room to room, and were hastening through the reception room, with some trepidation, when the President called to them, 'Little girls, are you going to pass me without shaking hands?' Then he bent his tall, awkward form down, and shook each little girl warmly by the hand. Everybody in the apartment was spellbound by the incident, so simple in itself."

LINCOLN'S SYMPATHY WITH CHILDREN.

Many men and women now living who were children in Washington at this time recall

the President's gentleness to them. Mr. Frank P. Blair of Chicago says:

During the war my grandfather, Francis P. Blair, Sr., lived at Silver Springs, north of Washington, seven miles from the White House. It was a magnificent place of four or five hundred acres, with an extensive lawn in the rear of the house. The grandchildren gathered there frequently. There were eight or ten of us, our ages ranging from eight to twelve years. Although I was but seven or eight years of age, Mr. Lincoln's visits were of such importance to us boys as to leave a clear impression on my memory. He drove out to the place quite frequently. We boys, for hours at a time, played "town ball" on the vast lawn, and Mr. Lincoln would join ardently in the sport. I remember vividly how he ran with the children; how long were his strides, and how far his coat-tails stuck out behind, and how we tried to hit him with the ball, as he ran the bases. He entered into the spirit of the play as completely as any of us, and we invariably hailed his coming with delight.*



GENERAL DAVID HUNTER, WHO SUCCEEDED FRÉMONT IN COMMAND OF THE WESTERN DEPARTMENT NOVEMBER 2, 1861, AND FROM NOVEMBER 20, 1861, TO MARCH 11, 1862, COMMANDED THE DEPARTMENT OF KANSAS.

From a photograph in the War Department collection.

The protecting sympathy and tenderness the President extended to all children became a passionate affection for his own. Willie and Tad had always been privileged beings at the White House, and their pranks and companionship undoubtedly did much to relieve the tremendous strain the President was suffering. Many visitors who saw him with the lads at this period have recorded their impressions:—how keenly he enjoyed the children; how indulgent and affectionate he was with them. Again and again he related their sayings, sometimes even to grave delegations. Thus Moncure Conway tells of going to see the President with a commission which wanted to "talk over the situation." The President met them, laughing like a boy. The White House was in a state of feverish excitement, he said; one of his boys had come in that morning to tell him

* Interview for McClure's Magazine by J. McCan Davis.