

Lincoln's Gadfly—Adam Gurowski

By LEROY H. FISCHER

Although Abraham Lincoln's life was menaced from before the time he reached Washington for the inauguration, the wartime President recognized but one potential assassin. This was the stormy European, Adam Gurowski, whose background, nature, and behavior seemed to cast him perfectly in the assassin's role. Even his appearance suggested the part. Ward Hill Lamon, the President's swashbuckling marshal of the District of Columbia, records that Lincoln frequently made this statement in his presence: "So far as my personal safety is concerned, Gurowski is the only man who has given me a serious thought of a personal nature. From the known disposition of this man, he is dangerous wherever he may be. I have sometimes thought that he might try to take my life. It would be just like him to do such a thing."¹ But Lincoln knew Gurowski only as a character type, an individual who by temperament as well as by political affiliation exemplified the most diabolical elements of the Radical Republican ranks. Actually, this exile of Europe would not have done Lincoln physical harm, for his bark, however threatening and trenchant, carried no bite.

Gurowski became known to most of Washington's residents during the war years. As he strolled along Pennsylvania Avenue, those not acquainted with this colorful nobody invariably inquired his identity. He could not have missed Lincoln's eye. This displaced European was a man of medium height, with a large round head, graying hair, side whiskers, and a great paunch. He had the air of an aristocrat, a semimilitary stride, and an expression alternately jovial and scowling. He was all the more eccentric in appearance because of colored glasses (worn to protect an injured eye), a long flowing coat — Old World tailored — and a broad brimmed hat, which, before Lincoln knew him, had a sky-blue veil attached. He

¹ Quoted in Ward Hill Lamon, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865*, ed. by Dorothy Lamon Teillard (Washington, 1911), 274.

would greet a friend with a hearty salutation, then, without a moment's hesitation, launch an endless barrage on his favorite theme, the shortcomings of the Lincoln administration. If the friend dared to disagree — the discreet chose not to — Gurowski would fly into a fit of rage and howl his stock retort: "You are an ass!" On one such occasion he pulled his straw hat down upon his head with both hands and danced like a maniac in the street. At another time he drew a pistol on a Washington fire fighting squad in order to encourage them to move faster to the scene of the conflagration.²

It was this rash and violent side of Gurowski's temperament that Lincoln feared. The Pole frequently did not appear to be reasonable. His approach to most problems was extreme and impractical. Walt Whitman, who often saw him in Washington, found him both very sane and very crazy. He described him as noisy, violent, and by temperament a revolutionist, "a man who rebelled against restraint — even when he would admit it was justifiable." But underneath, deeper than Lincoln's understanding penetrated, Whitman found him a "loving man."³ He was violent by threat alone. Massachusetts' Charles Sumner compared him to a whale kept in a narrow tank in Barnum's Museum. He explained that Gurowski, like the whale, went round and round, blowing with all his power when he came to the surface.⁴ To Lincoln's attorney general, Edward Bates, he seemed "bitter and censorious."⁵ Gurowski's discontent and impatience with men who failed to measure up to his ideals led him to constant grumbling. He was quick to find fault and to point out human weaknesses. Consequently, he was an addict of scandal and gossip. Yet he was ardent, earnest, and completely devoted to causes in which he believed and to individuals he felt were capable, trustworthy, and sagacious. He lacked power to measure character adequately and to view men, measures, and events calmly. Nevertheless, he was a penetrating observer, well equipped because of his keen intellect, thorough academic background, and

² Both incidents are related in a letter from William D. O'Connor to Walt Whitman, Washington, August 13, 1864, Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1906-1914), III, 339-40.

³ Whitman, quoted *ibid.*, 340.

⁴ Robert Carter, "Gurowski," *Atlantic Monthly* (Boston), XVIII (November, 1866), 633.

⁵ Howard K. Beale (ed.), *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866*, American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1930, IV (Washington, 1933), 205, entry of November 27, 1861.

long years of political activity in Europe. He was frank and honest, and above all, true to his capricious convictions. When there was danger of violating inward harmony of conscience he never hesitated to retreat from an idea or to change the route of his reasoning. His convictions, always extreme, dictated his course and often brought to him discredit, loss of position, and personal destitution, as well as social and political ostracism.

What little Lincoln knew of Gurowski's background also suggested the stormy European in the role of assassin. On his record he was the rash and violent type. Had he not participated actively in revolutionary movements that swept Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century? Had he not been deeply involved in Continental political intrigues of peace as well as of war? Was it true that he had once been condemned to death? Had he actually fought duels? One does not wonder at Lincoln's uneasiness. His knowledge of this strange and eccentric character, strengthened by Washington gossip and rumor, justified his misgivings.

Gurowski, born in Poland in 1805 to the title of count, was known for radical patriotic tendencies while a schoolboy; the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia expelled him from the gymnasium of Warsaw and Kalisz for singing Polish patriotic songs and wearing a prohibited Polish costume.⁶ In 1820 the young Count appeared in Berlin and for the next five years studied philosophy, history, jurisprudence, and political economy in German institutions of higher learning. Finding life as a student of famous scholars at the universities of Berlin, Heidelberg, Jena, and Leipzig stimulating but uneventful, he returned to the politically non-existent Poland. There he was imprisoned several times because of opposition to Russian influence. When in 1830 political ferment finally broke into open revolt, he became a leader in the movement he had secretly nursed. In his native country, however, he was considered a popular agitator, too extreme even for the revolutionary

⁶ These evidences of extreme Polish nationalism encouraged by the French Revolution and displayed by Gurowski were the product of his environment. His father, Count Ladislas Gurowski, was active in the Thaddeus Kosciuszko nationalistic uprising of 1794, and as a result lost most of his landed estates and suffered imprisonment. The following year Poland was partitioned for the third time — Russia, Prussia, and Austria taking the remnants — thereby erasing the nation from the political map of Europe for more than a century. Young Adam grew up in the Russian zone of Poland amidst the undercover nationalism fermenting in the years preceding the uprisings of 1830.

patriots. His fellow conspirators sent him to Paris in 1831 as agent of a radical club of Warsaw to dispose of him politely in a position where he could be of little influence on the conduct of the revolution. When the revolutionary movement collapsed he was sentenced to death and his estates were confiscated. In Paris, however, he continued his activities with unabated enthusiasm for the cause of Polish nationalism. Then in 1834, without warning, he published a declaration announcing he was no longer a Pole, a sensational turnabout that won for him the lifelong scorn of his countrymen.⁷

With the next breath Gurowski requested Czar Nicholas I to extend a pardon and permit him to live in Russia. He openly declared that Poland as a nation was dead; he had adopted the new pan-Slav doctrine proposing that Russia lead the Slav peoples. Through the Paris press he attacked Poland and glorified Russia in order to win Nicholas' favor. But it was not until some months later when Gurowski published his *La Vérité sur la Russie* (Paris, 1835), advocating pan-Slavism, that Nicholas was won over and extended a pardon together with an invitation to live in Russia. Now in the service of Nicholas as pan-Slav propaganda adviser, the turbulent Count devised, developed, and administered measures to Russify Poland. But he was soon forced to recognize that the Czarist system failed to meet his expectations. Again discredited and disillusioned, he fled to Prussia in 1844. A man without a country, Gurowski now wandered for several years over Europe and then accepted a professorship of political economy in Switzerland at the University of Bern. Believing that he had been persecuted, that justice could not be expected in Europe, Gurowski at the age of forty-four came to America in 1849, where, upon naturalization, he hoped to complete his "apprenticeship to freedom."⁸ Such was the European background of the man Lincoln feared. As a further qualification for the role in which Lincoln cast him, this stormy petrel claimed to have fought duels — thirty of them.⁹ No one has bothered to contradict the boasting Count. But it is a fact that

⁷ Polish immigrants to the United States ignored Gurowski so completely that there remains no iota of known evidence that he had the slightest contact with these groups during his residence in this country.

⁸ Adam Gurowski, *The Turkish Question* (New York, 1854), 3.

⁹ Gurowski to James S. Pike, April 6, no year, James S. Pike, *First Blows of the Civil War: The Ten Years of Preliminary Conflict in the United States* (New York, 1879), 513.

he challenged a Harvard professor to settle a disputed point with either pistols or swords!¹⁰

Moreover, Gurowski was to Lincoln the prototype of the Radicals, the extremist antiadministration wing of the Republican party. At the beginning of the war the party split into two clashing factions on the conduct and purposes of the contest. Lincoln and his administration were the moderates — the Conservatives — whose purpose was to make the restoration of the Union the one war objective, to be achieved at all costs, but if possible without destroying slavery. The Conservatives, like Lincoln, viewed emancipation as but incidental to a larger issue, a weapon to be used only in extremity. Preferring evolution to revolution, the Lincoln group, both disliking slavery and fearing abolitionist fanaticism, would have gradually brought about the extinction of the institution by compensated emancipation. In opposition to the mild humanitarian policies of the President stood the Radicals, dubbed by John Hay the “Jacobins,” who would have no peace until the war had destroyed not only slavery but a multitude of civil rights in the South as well. The Radicals demanded, in the fullest sense of the word, a pitiless revolutionary war or no war at all. Against the mild presidential program they sneered and scolded vehemently, all the while denouncing Lincoln as a well-meaning incompetent. In general they desired to prolong the war until they had sufficient party support to force their program, which called for the annihilation of organized opposition to the Republican party and the assurance of its continued supremacy.

To this end the Radicals waged an ever-winning campaign against Lincoln's policies, which they alleged were carrying on the war for the maintenance of slavery and other of the very conditions which had generated that conflict. Lincoln surrendered adroitly point after point as he maneuvered to maintain his effectiveness as chief executive in the face of this juggernaut of opposition. He did not, however, yield to the Radicals on all issues, as was notably evidenced by his own moderate reconstruction policy and his veto of the Wade-Davis congressional plan of reconstruction. But the Jacobins forced Lincoln to adopt emancipation as a war aim, for the war they had welcomed must not end without bringing the death blow to slavery. If Radical insistence had not finally brought

¹⁰ Carter, “Gurowski,” *Atlantic Monthly*, XVIII (November, 1866), 628-29.

Lincoln to emancipation, that group would have preferred the nation permanently divided to a restored Union with slavery still in existence. With similar success they forced the use of Negroes as soldiers, their first step in using that race as an instrument to establish Republican political and economic control in the South. They pressured Lincoln into giving reluctant approval to the second confiscation act of July 17, 1862. They drove Conservatives from the cabinet and replaced military men (some of whom were Democrats) in Lincoln's coalition government with their own appointees. Finally, they defeated Lincoln's plan for reconstruction by refusing congressional recognition of his restored state governments and by developing deplorable conditions in the South with their own brand of rule-or-ruin reconstruction.¹¹ It was this radical course that Gurowski approved and followed with conspicuous fidelity. He was the perfect radical type, an uncompromising Puritan in their fold. In their hopes he found a sacred calling, in their kind a Christ-like pattern. "Radicals — true ones —," he declared, "look to the great aim, forget their persons, and are not moved by mean interests and vanities."¹² His temperament and background, not whimsey, determined his political views. Could Gurowski have remained true to his extreme nature had he supported Lincoln's reasonable program for the South's restoration?¹³

Whereas Lincoln typified much that was Conservative in political planning and action, Gurowski represented much that was Radical in that same sphere. View the two also as to temperament, personality, their complete psychology, and the discord is apparent. Lincoln was the antithesis of Gurowski and by the same mark Gurowski was the antithesis of Lincoln. The two were basically at odds. Had the circumstances of their environment at an earlier or later period created a situation similar to that in which Lincoln

¹¹ For a thorough account of Radical and Conservative objectives, see T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals* (Madison, 1941), *passim*, and especially Chap. I. The impact of the Radical program on Lincoln's enlightened policies is evaluated in James G. Randall, *Lincoln the Liberal Statesman* (New York, 1947), *passim*. The conflict between Lincoln and his Radical governors is emphasized in William B. Hesseltine, "Lincoln's War Governors," *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly* (Springfield), IV (December, 1946), 153-200; in the same author's *Lincoln and the War Governors* (New York, 1948), the intraparty conflict is again a keynote.

¹² Adam Gurowski, *Diary, from November 18, 1862, to October 18, 1863* (New York, 1864), 160, entry of March 2, 1863.

¹³ Revisionist treatment, emphasizing Lincoln's humanitarian approach, is ably applied to the vexing problem of the South's restoration in James G. Randall, *Lincoln and the South* (Baton Rouge, 1946), *passim*.

and Gurowski found themselves during the war years, the pattern of conflict would have been the same: patience versus impatience, temperance versus intemperance, understanding versus misunderstanding, tolerance versus intolerance, humanity versus inhumanity. The implication is that the conflict within the Republican party of the Civil War era was basically one of temperament and personality, forces which in turn created issues and shaped policies. No period of cataclysm in history has been without its radicals and conservatives, for it is then that the Lincolns and Gurowskis clash audibly and visibly in the stream of time. Gurowski was at psychological conflict with Lincoln, and it was this conflict which prompted the Count's opinions of Lincoln as well as his letters of advice to the wartime President. In a larger sphere the conflict between Gurowski and the Conservatives is represented by the Count's efforts to mold public opinion for the Radical cause through the propaganda medium of a printed diary.¹⁴ And in the new and realistic Lincoln now rescued from the eulogizers, in all that Lincoln wrote and in all that he did, this gulf of temperament and personality between the chief executive and the Radicals is emphasized.

Imminent war brought the Count to Washington in January of 1861. Hailed by a correspondent as a "wet nurse of revolutions," Gurowski was on hand to enlighten the North.¹⁵ His efforts for the Union cause took the form of his *Diary* and of counsel to government officials. Through his advice he hoped to lead the people of his adopted country to a speedy victory over the Confederacy and to a restored Union without slavery. He tersely stated his purpose: "As a watchdog faithful to the people's cause, I try to stir up the shepherds."¹⁶ Considering his ability equal to if not surpassing that of any government official, he was by no means hesitant or sparing of his advice and criticism. When he set his mind to establish a contact with an official, he usually succeeded. Records indicate that when he failed to reach officials through inter-

¹⁴ Published in three volumes: *Diary, from March 4, 1861, to November 12, 1862* (Boston, 1862); *Diary, from November 18, 1862, to October 18, 1863* (New York, 1864); *Diary: 1863-'64-'65* (Washington, 1866). Cited hereafter as *Diary, I*; *Diary, II*; *Diary, III*.

¹⁵ Unidentified newspaper clipping, Washington, February 8, 1861, Papers of Count Adam de Gurowski (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress). Cited hereafter as Gurowski Papers.

¹⁶ Gurowski, *Diary, II*, 234, entry of May 21, 1863.

views, he was successful by way of mail. To attempt to estimate the Count's influence on the nation's leaders is to speculate wildly. So far as is known, no statesman or government official changed a course of action or a policy because of advice or criticism from Gurowski. To some he was a crank, a splenetic eccentric to be ignored with a smile if not with disgust. To others his advice was considered momentarily and then dismissed as that of an unreasonable personality. To a few Radicals his words were those of a sage. Usually, however, he was too extreme for politically wise Radicals.

Lincoln undoubtedly thought Gurowski an unreasonable personality. Gurowski's letters to him were ample evidence for such an opinion. Epistles to Lincoln from the Count came at intervals frequent enough to be annoying, particularly at the beginning of the war. Foreign policy was a theme on which he wrote to Lincoln in especially admonishing tones, for he felt himself extraordinarily well qualified to advise in this sphere. The first recorded letter on the subject came immediately after Lincoln's blockade proclamation of April 19, 1861. Gurowski explained that this "international demonstration," would evoke foreign recognition of the Confederacy as a belligerent. This would in turn, the Count forecasted, lead to foreign recognition of Confederate privateers. To prevent such a development he advised Lincoln to enforce the blockade rigidly by the use of the entire navy, thereby demonstrating to Europe that he intended to maintain "the fullest exercise of sovereignty."¹⁷ During the same month Gurowski wrote a second letter, this time advising Lincoln against subscribing to the Paris Convention of 1856. The Count, hearing that Lincoln proposed the use of this instrument as a means of preventing Confederate ships from being recognized as legal privateers by foreign powers, told him it would not serve that purpose.¹⁸

The next month Gurowski wrote a verbose letter on the question of the recent recognition of the Confederacy as a belligerent.¹⁹ Of his guidance letters to Lincoln, this is the earliest final draft now

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 27, entry of April, 1861.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹ Gurowski to Lincoln, Washington, May 22, 1861, Nicolay and Hay Collection (Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield). For mention of this letter, see *Diary*, I, 45, entry of May, 1861. The letter was apparently used by John G. Nicolay and John Hay in writing a chapter of *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, 10 vols. (New York, 1890), entitled "European Neutrality" (IV, 266-80), for it is to be found among the Nicolay and Hay notes on that chapter.

known.²⁰ Gurowski labeled this directive with the Roman numeral "III" to set it apart as the third in his series of letters to the chief executive. It is a queer document written in his best hand, as were all his letters to Lincoln. Marked "*Strictly confidential*," it is endorsed: "For the President of the United States. *Strictly* into his own hands." The subject matter is briefly indicated in this introductory comment: "On the relations between the U. States with some from among the European Powers." The advice, spread over seven large pages, consists of sixteen points with numerous subdivisions. He wrote at length of the growing unfriendly attitude of France and England toward the United States and pointed out the causes of this condition as he saw them. The Count suggested to Lincoln that the government "be watchful of the barometer of Europe," and warned the President to be cautious of the techniques and methods of his diplomats.

Gurowski wrote other letters to Lincoln in similar vein, in most instances warning him of what he believed to be William H. Seward's inability to understand Europe and European diplomacy.²¹ In such an epistle he wrote:

Mr. Seward is held in utter contempt by European Cabinets, by European premiers & by European diplomacy. The reasons are obvious. European [s] . . . respect such men as show convictions & character but not

²⁰ There is in the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress), cited hereafter as Lincoln Papers, an earlier final draft of a Gurowski letter to the chief executive. This is one of the thousands of patronage letters David C. Mearns declared "were composed . . . with a sublime faith that Mr. Lincoln had nothing better to do than acquaint himself with the details of their [the writers'] existence and that nothing would please him quite so much as handsomely to repay their prodigal helpfulness to him." David C. Mearns, "The Lincoln Papers," *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, IV (December, 1947), 376. See David C. Mearns (ed.), *The Lincoln Papers*, 2 vols. (New York, 1948), I, 3-136, for a definitive study of the Lincoln Papers. Under date of Washington, March 12, 1861, Gurowski wrote in part: "As I have to humiliate myself and beg for means to live, I prefer to beg them from you the representative of the American people. . . . I have served the sacred cause of human freedom and enlightenment. . . . In Europe I sacrificed to my convictions an elevated social condition and a considerable fortune. . . . I have resided about twelve years in this country & am now reduced to utter extremity. For this reason I beg thro' you from the American people a possibility of a decent activity, & that of becoming in any way whatever useful to the common cause. . . . I rely upon your honor that this step of mine, made in utter despair will not be scornfully divulged to a cold & sneering public." Gurowski to Lincoln, Washington, March 12, 1861, Lincoln Papers. Misspellings in Gurowski quotations are numerous and are original with the author; because of these frequent misspellings, the customary *sic* has not been used in this article.

²¹ Gurowski to John A. Andrew, Washington, April 10, 1863, John A. Andrew Manuscripts (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston).

such who shift with every wind, who instead of being statesmen are common intriguers. European premiers above all in England can not respect a Secretary of State who shows the drafts of his dispatches to a foreign itinerant newspaper reporter as did . . . Seward to Russel of the English Times & of Bull Run Celebrity.²²

Curiously, Gurowski also dispatched letters on the same subject to Mrs. Lincoln, doubtless hoping that she would caution the President as to Seward's incapacity.²³

The Count frequently wrote Lincoln on military affairs also. Pleading for Lincoln's attention, he wrote: "Give my scribbling five minutes of time, & patience. . . . I believe firmly that you will & can save the country notwithstanding the dead weights [the Conservatives] sodered to you."²⁴ In this instance his purpose was to urge Lincoln to arm for military service all available Negroes, his idea being to use them in combating Confederate guerrillas which were harassing Union forces and loyal inhabitants in the border states. He proposed that Lincoln use "foreign thoroughbred officers" to train the colored forces who he believed would strike the greatest terror when armed with pikes. Their training should be simplified and reduced to the barest rudiments, said the Count, who appended: "I shall allways consider it as the greatest good fortune . . . should you especially consider me enabled to be of any use whatever to you & above all in any relation with the Africo Americans."²⁵

²² Rough draft of a letter addressed to Lincoln, not dated, Gurowski Papers. With this, and other unrevised rough draft letters intended for Lincoln, is an envelope endorsed "Letters to the President belonging to the *Diary*." Gurowski evidently retained these first drafts in order to note each in his *Diary*, as he actually did, and as the endorsed envelope would indicate. The "itinerant newspaper reporter" of whom Gurowski wrote was William Howard Russell, on assignment to cover the war for the London *Times*. Being prosouthern in sympathy at the time like many English aristocrats, Russell wrote a devastating account of the Union rout at the first battle of Bull Run. A storm of anger broke in the North when his story was released in that area. Russell found himself threatened even to the point of assassination. So intense was the opprobrium leveled at him that his usefulness as a correspondent had in effect ended. See James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Springfield to Gettysburg*, 2 vols. (New York, 1945), I, 387-89.

²³ Gurowski to Andrew, Washington, April 10, 1863, Andrew Manuscripts.

²⁴ Rough draft of a letter in Gurowski's hand, intended for Lincoln, not dated, Gurowski Papers.

²⁵ The idea of using Negro troops was not new with Gurowski. As he indicated in this letter to Lincoln, he had petitioned the War Department for a commission as colonel of a colored regiment, and in doing so explained that the little military experience and knowledge possessed by him was "no better but perhaps no worse than that of many already engaged in the active service." Duplicate copy of a petition addressed to the Secretary of War, Washington, June 22, 1862, Gurowski Papers.

At another time he warned Lincoln against Seward's dabbling in military affairs, and predicted that with "that half ass half traitor MacClellan," the nation was being destroyed.²⁶ These letters were necessary, thought Gurowski, for he understood that Lincoln never read newspapers or heard, other than through Seward, what was going on outside the White House.²⁷

The idea of a staff of military experts for Lincoln as proposed by Gurowski came as the much publicized George B. McClellan army developed the "slows" in the campaign to strike a crushing blow at the Confederacy by taking its capital city in the spring and summer of 1862. In an effort to bring efficiency and action to an apparently inefficient and inactive military situation, Gurowski wrote the President advising that Major General Franz Sigel be made chief of staff.²⁸ Simultaneously he urged that Lincoln take to the field to command his generals. When on July 11, 1862, Major General Henry W. Halleck was made military adviser to the chief executive with the title of "general-in-chief," Gurowski saw the nucleus of his hoped-for staff. So completely did the Count believe the Halleck appointment to be but the first in the creation of a staff, that he wrote Lincoln requesting an assignment to that body in whatever capacity the President should decide to use his services.²⁹ He assured Lincoln that the rank or standing of the work mattered little, for not even a colonelcy could raise his position in society! In the same letter he suggested that Brigadier General James S. Wadsworth, of Radical affiliation, be attached to Halleck's staff also.³⁰ Calling himself an impartial witness on how things were

²⁶ Gurowski to Andrew, Sunday, October 25, 1862, Andrew Manuscripts.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Gurowski, *Diary*, I, 214, entry of May, 1862. See also Gurowski to Lincoln, Washington, May 26, 1863, Lincoln Papers, for reference to this staff suggestion. Gurowski explained that Franz Sigel had been educated for the position. His record had been good. This influential German-American performed commendable service in saving St. Louis, with its important arsenal, for the North at the very outbreak of the war. During the remainder of 1861 he participated in various skirmishes and battles in the struggle for the possession of Missouri, climaxing his efforts by conspicuous skill and courage at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, on March 7-8, 1862, in the decisive Union victory that won Missouri. But in 1864, because of ever mounting Radical influence in government circles, Sigel was not considered sufficiently aggressive and was subsequently removed from command.

²⁹ Rough draft of a letter in Gurowski's hand, intended for Lincoln, not dated, Gurowski Papers.

³⁰ James S. Wadsworth, a much respected friend of Gurowski for more than a decade, came to be in his view the embodiment of Radical perfection. Wadsworth, like Gurowski, was a bitter enemy of George B. McClellan, was consistently opposed

managed in Washington, he recommended Wadsworth because he believed much depended upon the "intimate surroundings of men who are to act . . . upon the destinies of the country. . . . You are aware of it even better than I." Gurowski excused his epistle with the explanation: "I thirst for the success of my adopted country [and] . . . for that of the eminent general who is to be the head of our armies."

As months of military inactivity dragged on, the anomalous office filled by Halleck showed no spark. The General in Chief demonstrated his incompetence all the more when he devoted his time to mountains of minutiae instead of to the strategy of the armies of the North. The scholarly Halleck thoroughly irritated the Count, who could not tolerate an office general at his best. Gurowski's temper reached the boiling point, and as if to relieve the pressure the old grumbler treated Lincoln to a rash letter.³¹ He indicted the President for appointing Halleck to his post solely on the basis of a military treatise the General had written years before the war,³² denouncing Halleck's publication as superficial and of no value when measured by European standards. In warning Lincoln of Halleck's inability, he wrote that he was not an applicant for a position or for a military commission, but pleaded: "for God's & the country's sake read what follows. No personal interest dictates these here lines." After accusing Lincoln of placing in Halleck's hands "a power which must ruin any country even if the man holding such a position were a genius, a genuine Napoleon," Gurowski informed the President that Halleck "literally never

to Lincoln's conservatism, and like Gurowski and other members of the Radical cabal, boomed ambitious Salmon P. Chase as early as 1862 for the Republican presidential nomination in 1864. The Count's hero met his death in the Wilderness in May, 1864, an event which sent him to the depths of despair and to heightened verbal attacks on those Conservatives still in the Lincoln government. See Gurowski, *Diary*, III, 221-24, entries of May 8, 9, 10, 11, 1864.

³¹ Gurowski to Lincoln, Washington, January 21, 1863, Lincoln Papers; a rough draft of this letter, dated January 20, 1863, is in the Gurowski Papers. Gurowski records writing the letter in his *Diary*, II, 101, entry of January 20, 1863. A comparison of the rough draft and the final draft indicates no important revision; the final draft shows no verbal tempering whatsoever.

³² Henry W. Halleck's book was *Elements of Military Art and Science; or, Course of Instruction in Strategy, Fortification, Tactics of Battles, &c., Embracing the Duties of Staff, Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, and Engineers; Adapted to the Use of Volunteers and Militia* (3rd ed., New York, London, 1863). The initial edition had appeared at the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846. Halleck, a member of Phi Beta Kappa and a graduate of the United States Military Academy, wrote books on mineral law and on international law.

saw a fite . . . on a genuine field-of-battle; he possesses not . . . the first notion of what is a campaign. . . . His ignorance tells in the butcheries & defeats; Halleck wholly demoralizes the army." Then the complaining Count told Lincoln that no absolute monarch of Europe would have dared to create the office of general in chief for even the ablest of military men because such desk positions were taboo on that continent. Warming to his theme, his valedictory to Lincoln continued: "Gl Halleck is odious to the country, to all good & brave officers who are not spitlickers; he is envious to genuine military capacities & prevents such capacities to take in hand the salvation of the country." If Lincoln must have men such as McClellan or Halleck as commanding generals, wrote Gurowski, he should return to McClellan, for he was "the less destructive curse of the two." This Halleck, Gurowski snarled, had not his heart in the cause, for his sentiments were "those of a hireling but not of a patriot."

With these anti-Halleck flurries the Count's emotions calmed, but he again brought the staff idea to Lincoln's attention, this time in a letter written when the war looked especially dark for the North.³³ In addition, Gurowski once more urged the President to take field command of the army. He wrote the letter following a conversation with a general of Radical sentiment who had talked with Lincoln in the gloomy days following the disasters of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. "The patriot observed," wrote Gurowski, "that Mr. Lincoln wanted only encouragement to take himself the command of the Army of the Potomac."³⁴ In giving this encouragement Gurowski suggested that Lincoln fortify himself with a staff, for which he suggested appointees.³⁵ He explained that "the military disasters of . . . [McClellan, Ambrose E. Burnside, Joseph Hooker, and Halleck] can be traced to one cardinal reason, . . . the absolute ignorance and incapacity of their respec-

³³ Gurowski, *Diary*, II, 230, entry of May 17, 1863; Gurowski to Lincoln, Washington, May 26, 1863 (envelope notation: "To His Excellency own hands"), Lincoln Papers. The endorsement on the envelope in Lincoln's hand reads, "Gurowski — May 26, 1863." The nine day discrepancy in these dates was probably due to Gurowski's effort to polish his original draft and to obtain pertinent suggestions from friends.

³⁴ Gurowski, *Diary*, II, 229, entry of May 17, 1863.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 233; Gurowski to Lincoln, Washington, May 26, 1863, Lincoln Papers. Those recommended were Generals John Sedgwick for chief of staff, George G. Meade, Gouverneur K. Warren, Andrew A. Humphreys, John B. Turchin, John G. Barnard, and Colonel James B. Fry, all of whom Gurowski believed understood and were completely fit for the duties of a staff of military experts. The proposed chief of staff was an enthusiastic supporter of the Radical program.

tive Staffs. . . . But this . . . condition of warlike success is unknown to, & therefore despised by infatuated West pointers."³⁶ Gurowski's appeal went unheeded, and the staff of experts he featured, modeled after the Prussian pattern, did not materialize during the war.³⁷ Halleck, however, was at last removed from his unsuitable office on March 12, 1864, several days after Ulysses S. Grant had been created lieutenant general in charge of the armies of the Union. With this Radical sympathizer now at the helm, Gurowski anticipated long awaited military action. It was Jacobin pressure that had made way for Grant by forcing the removal of both McClellan and Halleck, Democrats in Lincoln's coalition government. Success on the field of battle came primarily from Grant's determination, the North's superior resources, and the Confederacy's attrition. The Count, however, continued in his conviction, based upon his studies of European military history, that a group of military experts, the embodiment of the modern general staff, was a basic essential to the achievement of any sizable military force. The exiled Pole, as his letters indicated, had made every effort to pass this wisdom on to the Commander in Chief.

Did Lincoln read Gurowski's letters? It can safely be said that some came to his attention and that he probably glanced through their contents. The four Gurowski letters in the Lincoln Papers may well have been surveyed by the President, and in one case a Gurowski envelope bears his endorsement. But presidential secretary John Hay would have us believe that Lincoln read only one in fifty letters addressed to him; presidential secretary John G. Nicolay estimates the number at one in a hundred.³⁸ Another of Lincoln's helpers, William O. Stoddard, who screened much of the incoming mail at the White House, observed that the "larger number of the epistles belonged in one or another of the two tall wastebaskets which sat on either side of me, and their deposits were as rapid as my decisions could be made. It had to be swift work." This "river of documents" hit a daily average of approximately two hundred and fifty items, exclusive of newspapers, Stoddard

³⁶ Gurowski to Lincoln, Washington, May 26, 1863, Lincoln Papers.

³⁷ In 1903, with the defects of American military planning during the Spanish-American War fresh in mind, Congress belatedly passed a law authorizing a general staff. Until World War I the vicissitudes of this body were numerous and at times distressing. See Otto L. Nelson, Jr., *National Security and the General Staff* (Washington, 1946) 58, *et seq.*

³⁸ Mearns, "The Lincoln Papers," *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, IV (December, 1947), 372.

noted.³⁹ A student of the Lincoln Papers deduced that "the letters which were held for some attention must have been considered by the secretariat to possess interest or pertinency."⁴⁰ Consequently, there is no doubting that many a Gurowski letter addressed to the White House was waylaid by the secretaries or clerks and without ceremony consigned to a trash basket or kept for a private collection of Lincolniana.⁴¹ A Gurowski letter to Lincoln is to be found among the Nicolay and Hay notes used in the preparation of the authorized Lincoln biography.⁴² In this instance, however, it is probable that this epistle was originally in the Lincoln Papers. Nicolay and Hay evidently failed to return this Gurowski item; both had access to the contents of the Lincoln Papers in writing their biography. In fact, the papers were actually in the custody of Nicolay from 1874 to his death in 1901, whereupon they were stored in the State Department with the approval of Hay, then secretary of state. There is always the chance that the letter may have been kept privately by Nicolay or Hay at the time it reached the White House, but this is highly improbable. The more plausible explanation is that the document was once an item of the Lincoln Papers. But regardless of what disposition was made of Gurowski's letters, it is definite that the quarrelsome Count did dispatch his pearls to Lincoln, fully expecting the President to read them.

Gurowski was by no means alone in sending letters of advice and direction to Lincoln. Hundreds of letters of the same nature remain in the Lincoln Papers. Few, if any, self-appointed presidential advisers were as consistent as Gurowski. In the number of letters sent to Lincoln and in his insistence that he reach Lincoln the Count was not outdone. Gurowski's letters to Lincoln are unique because of their flavor. Like the Count himself, they were amusing, sincere, earnest, extreme, and completely unsophisticated. His colorful vocabulary and faulty understanding of English sentence structure made all he wrote even more curious. Yet there was something of wisdom in the substance of Gurowski's opinions. No other

³⁹ William O. Stoddard, "Face to Face With Lincoln," ed. by William O. Stoddard, Jr., *Atlantic Monthly*, CXXXV (March, 1925), 333.

⁴⁰ Mearns, "The Lincoln Papers," *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, IV (December, 1947), 372.

⁴¹ Stoddard wrote of withholding from Lincoln's correspondence a crank letter subsequently destroyed by fire along with his "collection of autographs." Stoddard, "Face to Face With Lincoln," *Atlantic Monthly*, CXXXV (March, 1925), 334.

⁴² See n. 19.

unsolicited Lincoln adviser wrote with a background at all similar to Gurowski's. There is much that is rational in his advice to Lincoln when viewed in the light of his experience and knowledge. Of the crank letters in the Lincoln Papers, none are actually saner than those of the Count. It was not what Gurowski said that made him a crank, but the way he said it.

Gurowski's opinions of the President were representative of the views the vindictive Radicals had of the chief executive. During the first year of the war he was particularly hopeful that Lincoln would develop "energetic qualities" through the "shock of events."⁴³ The Conservatives, however, Gurowski observed, were the preponderant influence over Lincoln. "More than ever," he wrote, "Lincoln is under the thumb of Seward. . . . Seward brings him out to take airing as were he Lincoln's nurse, who dares not a single mental or bodily move without his preceptor."⁴⁴ Lincoln, in fact, he said, bore a "slender historical resemblance to Louis XVI. — similar goodness, honesty, good intentions; but the size of events seems to be too much for him."⁴⁵ The events of war that Gurowski hoped would spur Lincoln to activity seemed to bring no results.

I wait and wait for the eagle which may break out from the White House. Even the burning fire of the national disaster at Bull Run left the egg unhatched. . . . it looks as if the slowest brains were to deal with the greatest events of our epoch. Mr. Lincoln is a pure-souled, well-intentioned patriot, and this nobody doubts or contests. But is that all which is needed in these terrible emergencies?⁴⁶

I still hope, perhaps against hope, that if Lincoln is what the masses believe him to be, a strong mind, then all may come out well. Strong minds, lifted by events into elevated regions, expand more and more; their "mind's eye" pierces through clouds, and even through rocks; they become inspired, and inspiration compensates the deficiency or want of information acquired by studies. Weak minds, when transported into higher regions, become confused and dizzy. Which of the two will be Mr. Lincoln's fate?⁴⁷

Lincoln appeared all the more hesitant and bungling to the Radicals as they gathered strength during the second year of the war. With their increases in power and influence came renewed and ever

⁴³ Gurowski, *Diary*, I, 46, entry of May, 1861.

⁴⁴ Gurowski to Charles Sumner, Washington, May 1, 1861, Charles Sumner Manuscripts (Harvard College Library, Cambridge).

⁴⁵ Gurowski, *Diary*, I, 89, entry of August, 1861.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98, entry of September, 1861.

more powerful cries for the vigorous prosecution of the war and the pitiless crushing of the Confederacy. "Davis is making history," Gurowski growled, "and Lincoln is telling stories."⁴⁸ Whatever Lincoln did do, he explained, came through the pressure of public opinion. This force pushed and slowly moved Lincoln in spite of his "reluctant heaviness" and his opposition.⁴⁹

To offset this Radical clamor, the Conservatives explained that Lincoln was a man of great virtue who proceeded with the utmost caution, not wanting to hurt anyone with whom he dealt. Gurowski willingly conceded the claims made by Lincoln's eulogists and friends, but complained that these character qualities so commendable in private life were transformed "from positives into negatives, since Mr. Lincoln's contact with the pulsations and the hurricane of public life."⁵⁰ He found a noteworthy illustration in Lincoln's failure to remove General McClellan from command. Lincoln, Gurowski said, preferred to sacrifice the best blood of the country rather than demote and offend McClellan by removing him.⁵¹ Honesty of purpose when not backed by "clear, strong brains" was worthless even in a private individual, said the Count, but in a public figure, and particularly in the leader of the nation, it became a "positive nuisance." He predicted that the President would eventually be successful, "but not by his own merits but because a noble & devoted people carries him on its shoulders."⁵² He could not consider Lincoln "a blessing to the people, to the cause of humanity & of freedom. At the utmost I fear him as I would an unavoidable evil, an original sin."⁵³

Vainly, Gurowski said, he strove to find the much heralded noble and energetic qualities of Lincoln. All he found was "the stubbornness of a mule."⁵⁴ When the Jacobins railed bitterly after the Union disaster at Fredericksburg, Gurowski, in evident anguish, exclaimed: "You can not change Lincoln's head, you can not fill his small but empty skull with brains; & when in the animal & human body the brains are wanting, or soft or diseased the whole body suffers or is paralyzed, so with the nation."⁵⁵ The truth was,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 144, entry of January, 1862.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 157-58, entry of February, 1862.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 205, entry of May, 1862.

⁵¹ Gurowski to Andrew, Department of State, Washington, May 7, 1862, Andrew Manuscripts.

⁵² Gurowski to Andrew, Department of State, Washington, June 20, 1862, *ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Gurowski to Andrew, Washington, October 19, 1862, Andrew Manuscripts.

⁵⁵ Gurowski to Andrew, Washington, December 27, 1862, *ibid.*

he believed, that Lincoln had come to represent nothing more than the unavoidable constitutional formula. He said frankly: "For all other purposes, as an acting, directing, inspiring, or combining power or agency Mr. Lincoln becomes a myth." That he existed at all was evidenced only by his preserving slavery, retaining and supporting General McClellan, listening to Secretary of State Seward, distributing the spoils of office, and "digging the country's grave."⁵⁶

During the remaining years of the war, Gurowski believed Lincoln was spurred to action only at the demands of the people. His slowness, moreover, was marked by blood and disaster. "Perhaps, elephant-like," Gurowski mused, "Mr. Lincoln slowly, cautiously but surely feels his way across a bridge leading over a precipice."⁵⁷ However, he said, Lincoln's success came at the public's demand, and not at the President's initiative: "Lincoln acts when the popular wave is so high that he can stand it no more, or when the gases of public exasperation rise powerfully and strike his nose."⁵⁸ Pledging himself to fight to the last against Lincoln and "all the shams," he attributed Lincoln's position in the public eye not to his own qualities but to the efforts of the Radicals.⁵⁹ They had "charitably" drawn a veil over his "defects" of character, mind, and intellect: "It is the work of the radicals that Mr. Lincoln stands to-day before the people and before the civilized world as the incarnation of the sacred Northern cause."⁶⁰ As the North undertook extensive military operations, this time with success, and called for huge quotas of men to fill depleted ranks and build new armies, Gurowski sniped at Lincoln with this biting parody:

A new call for 500,000 men. Lincoln ought to make his *whereas* as follows:

Whereas, my makeshift and of all foresight bereaved policy —

Whereas, the advice of a Seward, of a Blair, and of similar etc's —

Whereas, my Generals, such as McClellan, Halleck, and many other pets appointed or held in command for political reasons, have occasioned a wanton slaughter of men; *therefore*

⁵⁶ Gurowski, *Diary*, I, 262, entry of September, 1862.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 153, entry of February 26, 1863. See also *ibid.*, 328, entry of September 20, 1863.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 40, entry of December 6, 1863.

⁵⁹ Gurowski to Andrew, Washington, March 27, 1864, Andrew Manuscripts.

⁶⁰ Gurowski, *Diary*, III, 171, entry of April 11, 1864.

I, Abraham Lincoln, the official Juggernaut, call for more victims to fill the gaps made by the mental deficiency of certain among my commanders as well as by the rebel bullets.⁶¹

When in 1864 the Radicals were forced to the support of Lincoln for want of a candidate better suited to their designs, Gurowski defended the President against those who offered the criticism that he was not "a 'classical scholar,' therefore not a gentleman and unfit for the Presidency." The old grumbler asserted that the American classical scholar was a most disgusting individual. Excepting those in the teaching profession, he admitted that he preferred "the railsplitter to any narrow, classical hairsplitter."⁶² Then Lincoln's assassination shocked the nation. Momentarily, Gurowski reflected that Lincoln might have been crushed by the problems and by the arduous solutions he would have attempted to administer in reconstruction. The assassination, "this oozing blood," the Count said, nearly sanctified Lincoln. His murder compensated for the shortcomings of which he was accused by the Jacobins, thought Gurowski, and opened to him immortality.⁶³

During all these years of letter writing Gurowski frequently saw Lincoln in Washington, but his contacts with him were seldom of a personal nature. When he met the President on the streets (and he often did) he observed that he looked spiritless, exhausted, quenched, and careworn, as if his nights were sleepless and his days comfortless.⁶⁴ He was in Lincoln's presence when he received a telegram announcing a move of John Pope's army in the West. The Count remembered the occasion because of several "not very washed stories" which Lincoln told, much to Gurowski's disgust, after reading the dispatch.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine accurately Lincoln's opinion of Gurowski, for Lincoln never so far as is known mentioned him in writing. John Hay reports that the President was very much amused at a story which he told him about the Count. The tale was that Gurowski went about Washington with this absurd prattle relative to the presidential contest of 1864: "I despise the anti-Lincoln Republicans. I say I go against Lincoln, for he is no fit for be President: di say di

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 290, entry of July 18, 1864.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 348-50, entry of September 17, 1864.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 398-99, entry of April 15, 1865.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 241-42, entry of June 5, 1863.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 252, entry of August, 1862. On humorless Gurowski's dislike of Lincoln's storytelling, see Carter, "Gurowski," *Atlantic Monthly*, XVIII (November, 1866), 633.

for one term (holding up one dirty finger), bimeby di brat Lincoln, den di for two term (holding up two unclean digits): di is cowards and Ass!"⁶⁶

Although Lamon is the only source of authority for the view that Gurowski was the one potential assassin recognized by Lincoln, there is no reason why full credence should not be given to his statement.⁶⁷ Naturally enough, Lincoln would have confided such an opinion in Lamon, for this towering and handsome gentleman was his bodyguard. In this capacity he had accompanied Lincoln to Washington for the inauguration. With a doglike devotion he personally guarded the President. Always armed to the teeth, Lamon's giant person was a threat to any would-be assassin. When plots against Lincoln's life were especially numerous in 1864, he slept next to his bed chamber. He also managed to supervise in great part the protection he thought Lincoln needed but which he could not give in person. All his life Lamon regretted his absence from Washington (on an official errand to Richmond) on the night of the assassination. His personal efforts in Lincoln's behalf were more than the exercise of a duty as marshal of the District of Columbia, for Lincoln was a former law associate, an intimate and respected friend of long standing. Lamon did not indicate his own reaction to Lincoln's fear of Gurowski. Perhaps he considered the Count physically harmless and unworthy of further attention. Whatever Lamon's reaction, Lincoln had no real cause to worry, for the fact remains that although this expatriated Pole frequently thought irrationally and threatened similarly, he was but threat and fury alone. He had the habit of becoming completely rational before he could bring himself to the point of a violent act. Although highly impractical on occasion, he would have disposed of Lincoln only by the constitutional process of election. He loved his adopted land far too much to violate its legal procedures. A student of Lincoln's assassination comments that if the President had known more of this type of "European theorist" he would not have feared the Count.⁶⁸ But to Lincoln, Gurowski was the embodiment of Radical Republican passion with all its antidemocratic implications.

⁶⁶ Gurowski, quoted in the diary of John Hay, April 28, 1864, Tyler Dennett (ed.), *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay* (New York, 1939), 177.

⁶⁷ See n. 1.

⁶⁸ Otto Eisenschiml, *In the Shadow of Lincoln's Death* (New York, 1940), 19.