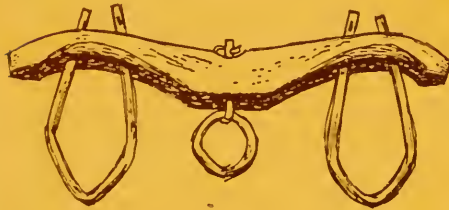


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BEN HARDIN HELM

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Confederate General Ben Hardin Helm:
Kentucky Brother In-Law Of
Abraham Lincoln

A Condensation of the Original Study

By

R. GERALD MCMURTRY, LTT.D., L.L.D.

Director

THE LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE FOUNDATION

Fort Wayne, Indiana



Address at Annual Meeting
LINCOLN FELLOWSHIP OF WISCONSIN
Madison
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INTRODUCING R. GERALD McMURTRY

THE AUTHOR of this address on "Ben Hardin Helm" is expertly qualified by a background of more than a quarter century of study of the Kentucky-born exemplar—Abraham Lincoln. Dr. R. Gerald McMurry is a native of Elizabethtown, Hardin County, Kentucky, the community where Lincoln's parents set up housekeeping and the county where Abraham himself was born.

A graduate of Centre College, Dr. McMurry has been recognized with honorary degrees by his alma mater and by Iowa Wesleyan College. He is a member of the New York and Chicago Civil War Round Tables and of the Sons of the American Revolution.



Since 1931 he has been actively engaged in historical research dealing with the many phases of the life and career of our sixteenth President. He is the author of about twenty-five books and pamphlets and of approximately two hundred magazine articles on Lincoln and his contemporaries.

For many years Dr. McMurry edited *The Lincoln Herald*, quarterly magazine of Lincoln Memorial University at Harrogate, Tennessee, where for nineteen years he was director of the Department of Lincolniana and directed what is said to be the largest collection of literature pertaining to the Civil War period to be found in any institution of higher learning. In June, 1958, he received from Lincoln Memorial the "Lincoln Diploma of Honor" for high service in the interpretation of the life, deeds, and immortality of Abraham Lincoln.

It was from such a background that, in 1956, Dr. McMurry was selected to succeed the eminent Lincoln authority, Dr. Louis A. Warren, as director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation at Fort Wayne, Indiana, his present work. The Foundation is a center of Lincoln information where are to be found approximately 200,000 items, including books and pamphlets, exclusively of Lincoln character, numbering about 9,000.

Dr. McMurry received national attention in the *Saturday Evening Post* of February 16, 1947, when his work at the Foundation and its museum was featured in a lengthy illustrated article.

He is currently serving as a member of the Indiana Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission by governor's appointment, and of the National Sesquicentennial Commission by President Eisenhower's appointment.—L. W. B.

CONFEDERATE GENERAL BEN HARDIN HELM:
KENTUCKY BROTHER-IN-LAW OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By R. Gerald McMurtry

On September 24, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln sent a telegram to his wife, who was then residing at the Fifth Avenue Hotel while on a visit to New York City. In terse sentences he told her of the "late battle between Rosecrans and Bragg" in which "we are worsted." As to the casualties he informed his wife rather unsympathetically, because in a telegram he could not well afford to show any sympathy for a rebel general, that "your brother-in-law, Helm" was among those killed in the engagement.

Nevertheless the death of Brigadier-General Ben Hardin Helm came as a severe blow to the president. "I never saw Mr. Lincoln more moved," said David Davis, "than when he heard of the death of his young brother-in-law . . . only thirty years old, at Chickamauga. I called to see him about four o'clock on the 22nd of September; I found him in the greatest grief. 'Davis' said he, 'I feel as David of old when he was told of the death of Absolom.' I saw how grief-stricken he was, so I closed the door and left him alone."



Ben Hardin Helm

Lincoln, suffering intense grief, could recall his last visit with Helm in mid-April of 1861. He had extended to the loyal Kentuckian a cordial personal invitation to come to Washington. He knew that Helm was a strong Southern-rights Democrat, but on April 27 he handed him a sealed envelope. "Ben," he said, "here is something for you. Think it over by yourself and let me know what you will do." The sealed envelope contained a coveted commission—paymaster in the United States Army with the rank of major. But in 1863 when Lincoln grieved over the death of his relative there was in the War Department this record: "Ben Hardin Helm, nominated for paymaster in the United States Army, April 27, 1861. Declined."

At least twice in 1861 and 1862 Confederate Brigadier-General Helm found an opportunity to send friendly messages to President Lincoln, but the nature of these messages is unknown. While Helm opposed the Union government he did not question the sincerity of his brother-in-law, the President.

This gallant soldier was the son of John La Rue and Lucinda Barbour Hardin. He was born June 2, 1831, at his grandfather's home in Bardstown, Kentucky. His father was twice governor of Kentucky. John L. Helm served as a Whig governor from July, 1850 to September, 1851, succeeding John J. Crittenden who resigned to enter the Fillmore cabinet. In 1867 he served as a Democratic governor for five days, his death occurring on September 8, 1867.

The Governor at the beginning of the Civil War was strongly in favor of the Union, but as the struggle continued and with the beginning of reconstruction he greatly feared that the government would disintegrate or become a central despotism. In his will of over 5,500 words he recorded this prophecy on November 15, 1865:

"The South was conquered and in my firm conviction the North will sooner or later learn that they are the whipped party."

Ben Hardin Helm's mother was the daughter of Ben Hardin, a member of the United States Senate from Kentucky. John Randolph, the eccentric Virginian, called Ben Hardin "a kitchen knife, rough and homely but keen and trenchant." Randolph had a knack for calling Kentuckians names. He once said that Henry Clay was so brilliant and so corrupt that the only thing he could be compared to was "a heap of rotten mackerel in the moonlight because he shines as he stinks."

Ben Helm received his elementary education at the Elizabethtown Seminary, completing the course of study when he was fifteen. He next entered the Kentucky Military Institute during the winter of 1846. He remained there only three months. On June 2, 1847, his 16th birthday, he entered the West Point Military Academy. He completed the course at the academy and graduated in the class of 1851, ranking ninth in a class of forty-two members.

Upon his graduation he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the "Second Cavalry" and assigned to duty on the frontier at Fort Lincoln, Texas. However, before reporting for duty Helm attended the cavalry school for practice at Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania. While serving with the "Second Dragoons" he contracted inflammatory rheumatism. He was granted a leave of absence and returned to his home in Kentucky. Six months in the army had convinced him that he should follow a military career and he fully intended to return to Fort Lincoln when he got well.

But at home he gave some thought to the future. He took into consideration his health and the slow promotions in the army during periods of peace. So on October 9, 1852, he resigned his commission, largely because his father wanted him to study law. After regaining his health he began the study of law at home and in his father's law office. Entering the School of Law at the University of Louisville, he graduated in the spring of 1853. Next he enrolled for a six months' law course at the Harvard Law School.

This legal career led to the formation of a partnership in Elizabethtown with his father for a period of about two years. Then in 1856 he formed a partnership with Martin H. Cofer which was dissolved in 1858. Martin H. Cofer's wife, a Miss Bush, was a niece of Lincoln's step-mother. In 1858 Ben Helm went to Louisville to engage in a more lucrative practice and there he formed a partnership with Horatio W. Bruce. This lasted until 1861 when both men cast their lots with the Confederacy.

Helm was said to be a fine lawyer who employed the technique of a general coupled with "astuteness of the hairsplitters." During the years 1855-1857 Helm dabbled in politics, becoming a Representative of Hardin County in the General Assembly. From 1856 to 1858 he was commonwealth attorney for his own district. The most remarkable thing about the career of this young man is that he achieved all these things by the time he was twenty-eight years of age.

While in the General Assembly, Helm met Miss Emilie Paret Todd, the daughter of Robert S. Todd of Lexington, and they were married on March 20, 1856. Their marriage, while highly approved by all the families concerned, was a topic of conversation and the subject of a considerable number of letters written by the Stuarts, Edwards and Todds.

In 1857 Helm had some legal business which took him to Springfield, Illinois, and while there he called on his in-laws, the Lincolns. With them he talked politics, compensated emancipation of the slaves and about the people and events in Hardin County, Kentucky. When Helm left Springfield he little realized what four years would bring. Then he did not dream that one day he would lead a Southern army against the constituted government. Neither did he visualize that Lincoln would head that volcanic government. Returning to Kentucky, Helm watched the comet-like rise of Lincoln. For awhile he believed there would be no war in spite of all the threats that were hurled by the South against the Black Republican Party. In the election of 1860 Helm probably voted for John Bell of Tennessee for president, who ran on the Constitutional Union ticket, because his father was a strong Bell-Everett man.

While Helm believed there would be no war, he had the foresight to leave the legal field and to seek a commission in the United States army. Helm's first step in reentering the service was to be appointed the Assistant Inspector General of the Kentucky State Guard in 1860. However, the election of Lincoln materially increased his opportunity for a military career. It is believed that as early as March 1861 Helm went to Washington in quest of an army commission.

The commission Lincoln offered Helm in April caused him to be completely stunned. Apparently he did not think such an attractive offer would be forthcoming from the Lincoln government. He even confessed to Lincoln that he had not voted for him in the 1860 election, but that he had no ill will against him. He thought his offer was both kind and generous.

The paymaster position with the rank of major was attractive. It carried a salary of \$187 a month, broken up as follows: \$80 salary, \$36 rations, \$24 forage for three horses, and \$47 for two servants. Then, too, it was highly probable that Helm would secure promotions as time went on, probably becoming a colonel within a year. Helm would also enjoy the distinction of being one of the youngest officers with the rank of major in the entire army. Also because of his work in the legal field he would be particularly suited for a position as paymaster.

In the meantime, Lincoln had made Helm another inducement. He would send him to the frontier if he was unwilling to use his sword directly or indirectly for the coercion of the Southern states if a major war should ensue. Mrs. Lincoln also made a plea. She wanted Emilie to live with them in the White House. Mary Lincoln said she would be the toast of Washington society.

However, fate seemed to enter into Ben Helm's decision. He contacted his Southern friends in Washington and they did not agree with Lincoln's policies. But a most decisive turn of events came when he called on Colonel Robert E. Lee, the day he resigned his commission in the United States army. Lee told Helm that he would never fight against his own people. Lee did not doubt Lincoln's sincerity, and after he learned that Helm was the President's brother-in-law he told him Lincoln could not control the political chaos that was on the horizon.

Helm left the city of Washington still undecided. Upon his return to Kentucky he went to Frankfort. In the state capital Helm saw two of his friends, Major General Simon Bolivar Buckner, the Inspector General of the Kentucky State Guard, and Thomas B. Monroe, Jr., the Attorney-General. These men were going with the Confederacy.

It was the firing on Fort Sumter that caused wavering men to make a decision, and when Governor Beriah Magoffin issued his famous dispatch of April 15, 1861, in answer to Simon Cameron, the Secretary of War, who had asked for Kentucky troops to put down the rebellion, the die was cast. Governor Magoffin replied: "I say, emphatically, Kentucky will furnish no troops for the wicked purpose of subduing her sister Southern states."

It was during the critical state of affairs in April 1861 that Helm made his next stop. He went to Montgomery, Alabama, and called on President Jefferson Davis, offering his military services. Davis' reply was: "Bring Kentucky into the Confederacy." The South at this time had more troops than they could adequately arm and equip. Returning to Kentucky, Helm became active in the State Militia and tried to establish in Kentucky "strict neutrality," a condition that was found later to be impracticable. This in a sense was a violation of Davis' request, because both the North and the South could not tolerate strict neutrality on the part of Kentucky.

With the war situation becoming more critical, Helm turned his attention to recruiting. He organized ten companies which constituted the First Regiment of Kentucky Cavalry. It was said of Helm that "one blast upon his bugle horn was worth a thousand men." The regiment was mustered in at Bowling Green, Kentucky, and Helm was commissioned a colonel by the Confederate government in September 1861. During the training period of the First Kentucky Cavalry, Helm's regiment engaged in scout and outpost duty, becoming a kind of corps of observation. When the Confederate army abandoned Bowling Green, Helm's regiment covered the withdrawal. Arriving in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on February 23, 1862, Helm was placed under the orders of General John C.

Breckinridge, where his regiment was temporarily brigaded with the Kentucky Infantry. Upon receiving an order to observe the movements of the Union forces on the Tennessee River, Helm took up his station at Burnsville, Mississippi, and guarded the approaches to the town of Corinth.

Knowing of Colonel Helm's scouting activities, General Albert Sidney Johnston sent Helm on an observation tour between the Federal position on the Tennessee River and Nashville. Helm took with him a select body of men, leaving the latter part of March to observe the activities of General Don Carlos Buell's Army. Helm reported to General Johnston that Buell was planning to march to the Tennessee River and join General Ulysses S. Grant. Helm believed that Buell could join Grant by April 6, 1862.

On the basis of these observations Johnston planned the battle of Shiloh. Johnston wanted to fight the battle on April 4, before Buell's arrival, but he was prevented from doing so because of the difficulty of transporting his artillery over the wet and soft country roads. The failure to attack Grant before he was reinforced by Buell resulted in a defeat for the Confederate forces and the death of the able Kentuckian, General Johnston.

During the battle of Shiloh Helm was required to hold his position on the Tennessee, to guard the approaches to Johnston's left and rear, and with such an assignment he found little opportunity for brilliant action. In spite of the fact that General Johnston lost his life, Helm was promoted for his work in the intelligence service. He was commissioned a brigadier-general on April 17, 1862, with the appointment predated March 14th.

Helm was ordered to report to General John C. Breckinridge and was made commander of the Third Brigade of Infantry of the Reserve Corps, consisting of Arkansas, Mississippi and Missouri regiments. Helm was disappointed with his command because he had under him no Kentucky troops. This situation, however, did not exist for any lengthy period of time, because on July 8, at Vicksburg, another change was made in the Reserve Corps, when the regiments under Brigadier-General J. M. Hawes were designated as the Second Brigade and placed under the command of General Helm. The troops of this brigade consisted of men from Kentucky, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Helm appointed his staff officers, and among the half-dozen men he selected he picked Major Thomas H. Hayes, his brother-in-law and a resident of Hardin County, Kentucky, and Lieutenant Alexander H. Todd, of Lexington, Kentucky, another brother-in-law, to act in the capacity of assistant inspector general and aide-de-camp, respectively. The Second Brigade was destined to see action within the month at the Battle of Baton Rouge. It was the plan of General Breckinridge to capture Baton Rouge, with the assistance of the immense iron-clad ram, the *Arkansas*, which was to cooperate with his land force. The city was occupied by a Union army under the command of General Thomas Williams, who was successful, although he lost his life, in driving Breckinridge back.

Shortly before the attack on August 5, Breckinridge's men were waiting for daylight in order to make a charge when an unfortunate accident occurred. Some mounted rangers were placed behind the artillery and infantry, but in the darkness they eased forward because they were eager to get into the fray, and in riding to the front they encountered Union sentries. This caused an exchange of shots to be fired. The Confederate rangers then galloped back to their own lines amidst a hail of fire, and this action provoked additional firing between the Confederate troops and their mounted horsemen.

The results were tragic, and among other casualties Brigadier-General Helm was dangerously injured by a fall from his horse, being knocked over and contused by running cavalry. Lieutenant Todd, Mrs. Lincoln's half-brother, was killed from one of the aimless shots that was fired during the confusion. Lieutenant Todd, age 23, was the youngest of the Todd brothers. He is described as having been handsome, and with a winning personality. He was idolized by his family and evidently had an interesting career before him. He received a special invitation from Abraham Lincoln to witness the inauguration ceremonies on March 4, 1861, which he accepted.

The news of Alexander Todd's death caused Mrs. Lincoln to fall to her knees and weep, exclaiming, "Oh, little Aleck, why had you too to die!" Alexander Todd was the second brother to lose his life, as Samuel Todd was killed while serving in a Louisiana regiment at Shiloh. David Todd, a third brother, was also destined to die from the effects of a wound received at Vicksburg.

General Helm's injury was of such a nature as to render him disabled for weeks, and General Thomas H. Hunt, who had immediately assumed command of his brigade in the action before Baton Rouge, was given temporary command of the troops while his commander recovered. By September, General Helm was again able to report for duty and he was assigned the command of the Post of Chattanooga. Later he was transferred to the command of the Eastern District, Department of the Gulf, with headquarters at Pollard, Alabama. This transfer was made after General Braxton Bragg's army had passed Chattanooga on his retreat from Kentucky. The reason for assigning General Helm to the Department of the Gulf was due to the Confederate's apprehensions of an advance on the part of the Federals operating from Pensacola.

On January 31, 1863, by direction of President Davis, Helm was ordered to report to General William Joseph Hardee for the command of the brigade of the late Brigadier General Roger W. Hanson, who had been killed at the battle of Stone's River. Hardee then ordered Helm to report to Breckinridge for the command of the First Kentucky Brigade, which consisted of the Second, Fourth, Sixth, and Ninth Kentucky Regiments, Forty-first Alabama Regiment and Captain Robert L. Cobbs (Kentucky) Battery.

General Helm took up his assignment on February 16, 1863, and he immediately selected his staff officers. Of the seven men who were chosen, two were from his home community of Hardin County and one of his aides-de-

camp was Lieutenant William Wallace Herr, who married in January, 1866, Katherine Bodley ("Kitty") Todd, the sister of Mrs. Helm and a half-sister of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln.

For several months the First Kentucky Brigade, which was a part of the Division commanded by General Breckinridge, was more or less idle. While they were stationed in Middle Tennessee at Wartrace, Manchester, Beech Grove and Hoover's Gap, General Helm drilled his men and became active in his duties as commander. When Breckinridge was absent it devolved upon him to command the division, which was good training for a brigadier. Due to the fact that time and again their divisional or brigade commander was absent, or transferred to other commands, or killed in battle, the expatriated Kentuckians often thought of their brigade as an orphan—hence the use of the name "Orphan Brigade" later became current.

The division of Breckinridge was next ordered into Mississippi to reinforce General Joseph E. Johnston, who in turn was to relieve General John C. Pemberton, then under siege at Vicksburg. Helm's brigade spent the entire month of June, 1863, in the vicinity of Jackson, Mississippi, fortifying their position, picketing and following the general routine of camp life. The overall strategy of the Confederates failed and this campaign proved to be the most disagreeable in Helm's career.

On August 25, 1863, the Division of Breckinridge was ordered to Tyler's Station, located near Chattanooga, to reinforce General Bragg. On September 2nd, Helm's Brigade went into camp and by the eighth day of that month the movements which were the preliminary steps leading to the great battle of Chickamauga were initiated. They marched and countermarched and finally after complicated preliminary military maneuvers the division bivouacked on September 18th, near Chickamauga Creek.

Approaching Chickamauga Creek from Pigeon Mountain, Breckinridge's division took their place on the east side of that stream. Their position was near Glass's Mill and they constituted the extreme left of the infantry of the Army. Breckinridge ordered the second Kentucky across the ford near Glass's Mill in order to determine the strength of the Federal forces, and the Sixth Kentucky was placed in close supporting distance. Other forces were dispatched along the creek, and on the morning of the 19th the remainder of Helm's brigade, along with other regiments, was sent across Glass's Ford. The advance position of Helm's Brigade drew fire from the Federals.

While this minor engagement was taking place, General Breckinridge received orders from Lieutenant General D. H. Hill to withdraw his position and to proceed to a point about three miles south of Lee and Gordon's Mill. This place was on the road leading from Chattanooga to Lafayette, and was an ideal situation for guarding the approach to that road from Glass's Mill and the ford above. A few casualties resulted from the directed change in the position,

but the losses were slight. However, this point was not held for any length of time, as Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk was moving the division of his wing as so many men upon a chessboard.

The last important movement of Breckinridge's division occurred during the night of September 19th and the morning of the 20th, when he was ordered to lengthen the battle line upon the right of Major Patrick R. Cleburne, which placed the Kentuckians on the extreme right of the infantry line of battle, General Helm's brigade constituting the extreme left of Breckinridge's line, General Stovall's was in the center, and General Adam's brigade was on the right.

With orders to advance on the Federals, Cleburne's and Breckinridge's divisions, after some delays, moved forward about 9:30 a. m., and this phase of the battle of Chickamauga opened with great fury, and Helm's brigade which had lunged forward with terrific force turned out to be in the center of the fiercest fighting.

About 10 a. m. while Breckinridge's division was moving forward against the Federals it was noticed that for some reason a part of the left brigade under Helm had not advanced simultaneously with the rest of the division. Later it was determined that they were facing breastworks situated in angular positions, which subjected Helm's men not only to fire in front but to a fierce infiltrating fire from the left. This portion of the line proved to be one of the most hotly contested positions of the entire battlefield. Here gallant Kentuckians by the hundreds "gave their lives in reckless fashion" as they pushed ahead under the withering crossfire. General Helm, their beloved leader, riding boldly toward the works of the enemy, was hit in the right side by a musket ball and fell mortally stricken from his horse.

Immediately after Helm had received his fatal wound Colonel Joseph H. Lewis of the Sixth Kentucky was ordered to command the brigade—the "Orphan Brigade," but the fire of the Federals drove the Confederates back two hundred yards to the rear and this left a gap in Breckinridge's lines, which caused much tactical trouble and a great loss of life during the remainder of the battle. The rest of the encounter is of course a matter of historical record, and even the dying General Helm at the close of the day heard that the battle of Chickamauga was a victory for the Confederates.

When General Helm fell on the morning of September 20, 1863, he was carried from the field by two aides, Lieutenant William Wallace Herr and Lieutenant John B. Pirtle. Upon an examination of the wound in his right side it was soon determined by the military surgeons of the field hospital that there was no hope for his recovery. He lingered for several hours and during the night of that fatal day he expired. The corpse of the thirty-two year old brigadier-general was conveyed to the home of Colonel W. H. Dabney in Atlanta, where the remains lay until the 23rd. A funeral service for the brave

soldier was held in the Episcopal Church, followed by interment in the Atlanta Cemetery with military honors. Emilie arrived just in time to be present at the sad rites.

On the same day that President Lincoln wired Mrs. Lincoln (September 24, 1863) informing her of her brother-in-law's death, he sent a telegram to General William S. Rosecrans at Chattanooga, Tennessee, stating that he had read the accounts of the battle in the Richmond papers and he inquired concerning the death of General Helm. Lincoln explained that General Helm was listed as killed, but that a General John B. H. Helm was listed as among those wounded. Likely Lincoln held a faint hope that General Helm's wounds were not fatal, but such was not the case.

In that day news traveled slowly in some sections of the war-torn country and it was not until the early days of October that Governor Helm heard the account of the death of his son. On October 11, 1863, at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, he wrote Mrs. Robert S. Todd at Lexington, Kentucky. In his letter he announced his son's death and expressed the opinion that Emilie wanted to come home. Governor Helm asked Mrs. Todd if she could get passes from Lincoln for Emilie and her two children. After General Helm's funeral, General Bragg had tried to get passes for the young widow from General Grant, but that Union officer was not sympathetic to the proposal. Mrs. Todd followed Governor Helm's suggestion and through Dr. Lyman Beecher Todd, the Lexington postmaster and cousin of Mrs. Lincoln, passes were secured. Mrs. Todd then went to Georgia to accompany her daughter and her two children home.

In writing the pass for Mrs. Helm, Lincoln inadvertently made a slip. It was his custom never to write or utter the word "Confederate" when he referred to the states that had seceded from the Union. Yet, in Mrs. Helm's pass he referred to ("... the late General B. H. Helm, who fell in the Confederate service)." Lincoln assumed, although one wonders why, that Mrs. Helm would take the oath of allegiance. Accordingly he drafted an amnesty oath for her to subscribe:

"I, Emily T. Helm, do solemnly swear in presence of Almighty God that I will henceforth faithfully support, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States, and the union of the States thereunder; and that I will, in like manner, abide by and faithfully support all acts of Congress passed during the existing rebellion with reference to slaves, so long and so far as not repealed, modified, or held void by Congress, or by decisions of the Supreme Court; and that I will, in like manner, abide by and faithfully support all proclamations of the President, made during the existing rebellion, having reference to slaves so long and so far as not modified or declared void by the Supreme Court. So help me God."

Thinking that Mrs. Helm would take the oath of December 8, 1863, Lincoln carefully prepared the following statement of amnesty:

"Mrs. Emily T. Helm, not being excepted from the benefits of the proclamation by the President of the United States issued on the eighth day of December, 1863, and having on this day taken and subscribed the oath according to said proclamation, she is fully relieved of all penalties and forfeitures, and remitted to all her rights—all according to said proclamation, and not otherwise; and, in regard to said restored rights of person and property, she is to be protected and afforded facilities as a loyal person."

In a postscript of the amnesty statement Lincoln indicated some concern about the property of the young widow:

"Mrs. Helm claims to own some cotton at Jackson, Mississippi, and also some in Georgia; and I shall be glad, upon either place being brought within our lines, for her to be afforded the proper facilities to show her ownership and take her property."

Traveling northward by steamer under a flag of truce, Mrs. Helm, her two children and her mother arrived at Fortress Monroe. There Mrs. Helm was told that she could not proceed any further until she took the oath of allegiance. This she refused to do, under the penalty of being sent back to the South. The Federal officers tried to use kindness and they explained that the requirement of the oath was not their order but that of the President. In despair the Federal officers wired the President for instruction. Lincoln replied, "Send her to me."

Mrs. Todd proceeded on her way to Lexington, taking the younger daughter, Elodie, while Mrs. Helm and Katherine went on to Washington, D. C. Ben Hardin, the youngest child, had not been born at the time Emilie visited the White House. Once in the capital the meeting between Emilie and Mary Lincoln was quite touching. One was grieving over the loss of a husband and the other was not yet reconciled to the death of Willie.

Mrs. Helm was shown every courtesy during the week she stayed in the White House. She occupied the suite that had been so beautifully decorated for the Prince of Wales when he visited the country in 1860. Mrs. Lincoln tried to keep the conversation in channels other than the war while she was her guest. However, Katherine Helm and Tad Lincoln argued over who was president—Lincoln or Davis.

On December 14, 1863, Senator Orville H. Browning called on Lincoln, who told Browning that his sister-in-law was in the house, but that he did not wish it known. Lincoln also told Browning about Mrs. Helm's cotton. He thought she ought to have it but he was afraid that he would be censured if he should help her to get it. Lincoln failed to keep Mrs. Helm's visit a secret, because this ardent Southerner could not hold her tongue when the Confederacy was assailed. One day Senator Ira Harris and General Daniel E. Sickles called at the White House. General Sickles told Mrs. Helm that she might give Senator Harris some news of his old friend, John C. Breckinridge. This she refused to do. She answered all of his questions in an evasive manner. This angered Harris

who remarked that the Union soldiers had whipped the rebels at Chattanooga, and that he had heard "that the scoundrels ran like scared rabbits." This was too much for Emilie Helm who told Senator Harris that "they had followed the example set for them by the Federals at Manassas." Sickles struggled upstairs, because he had lost a leg at Gettysburg, to Lincoln's office to tell the President that he would have to get that rebel out of this house. This demand angered Lincoln who told the excited general that he (Lincoln) was usually in the habit of choosing his own guests and, besides, he explained that Mrs. Helm was there because of his orders.

After a week's visit in the White House, Mrs. Helm decided to continue her journey to Lexington. When she departed Lincoln wrote her a pass "to protect her against the mere fact of being General Helm's widow." Lincoln also told her that in her zeal for the Southern cause she should do nothing which would embarrass him or the administration. He told her that he had never known her to do a mean thing.

Upon her return to Lexington and Elizabethtown, Emilie did not find the peaceful and serene communities that she had known before the war. In Lexington she found conditions exceedingly trying because of the tyrannical rule of General Stephen G. Burbridge. This Union officer was enforcing martial law upon the people of the Blue Grass country. Mrs. Helm was indignant at the conditions she saw in Lexington, and her mother and sister tried to thwart Burbridge in every way they could.

In spite of Mrs. Helm's commendable personal conduct the activities of her sister Katherine (Kitty) Todd and her mother placed the young widow in an extremely unfavorable position. The mother and daughter were unusually active in the fall of 1864 when they attempted to prevent the infliction of the death penalty upon Captain McGee and Walter Ferguson, two Confederate soldiers who had ridden with the troops of General John Hunt Morgan. The Todds went so far as to petition Lincoln to commute the sentence, but their efforts were in vain. However, it is believed that Lincoln would have yielded to their pleas, but the petition of mercy was intercepted and Lincoln did not receive their request for commutation.

Some charges were trumped up against Mrs. Helm, because Burbridge and his underlings resented this Southern woman who enjoyed immunity as a result of Lincoln's protection paper. Only once did she have occasion to use the order and that was when she asked a Federal officer to keep his troops, who had camped near her home, from trespassing and to cease taking her family's food as it was being cooked in their kitchen.

Emilie's presence in Lexington did not ever go unnoticed by the Union authorities, and within less than a year after her return home a malicious rumor of treasonable acts against the government was charged against her. Upon hearing the charges the President wrote General Burbridge the following letter:

"Last December Mrs. Emilie T. Helm stopped here on her way from Georgia to Kentucky, and I gave her a paper, as I remember, to protect her against the mere fact of her being General Helm's widow. I hear a rumor today that you recently sought to arrest her, but was prevented by her presenting the paper from me. I do not intend to protect her against the consequences of disloyal words or acts, spoken or done by her since her return to Kentucky, and if the paper given her by me can be construed to give her protection for such words or acts; it is hereby revoked *pro tanto*. Deal with her for current conduct just as you would with any other."

In the light of this letter it would appear that Mrs. Helm had actually violated a confidence. The publication of this letter in the *Century* magazine, December, 1895, Vol. LI, No. 2, as a part of the article "Appeals to Lincoln's Clemency" by Leslie J. Perry, was a surprise to Mrs. Helm who up to that time did not know of its existence. In the *Century* magazine, June 1896, Vol. LII, No. 2, page 318, Mrs. Helm in the "Open Letters" under the title "President Lincoln and the Widow of General Helm" defended her position and gave a convincing explanation why she thought Lincoln wrote the letter.

Further proof that Mrs. Helm did not violate Lincoln's confidence is indicated by the fact that he continued to help her try to get possession of her six hundred bales of cotton. Lincoln secured an order from General Grant dated March 25, 1865, for the protection of the cotton and Mrs. Helm made an inopportune business trip to the South at the time of the fall of Richmond, to further establish her possession of the valuable commodity. Unfortunately the cotton was burned in an accidental fire, and Mrs. Helm was advised to leave immediately on the next flag of truce boat.

With the war at an end, Emilie Todd Helm's long life was spent in devotion to her gallant husband's memory and her cruel fate was softened somewhat by her three children. Residing for awhile in Lexington, she then moved to the ancestral acres of the Kentucky Helms in Elizabethtown, Hardin County.

As a widow in her early twenties, she had as her main purpose in life the education of her children, and this expense necessitated the acceptance of some suitable position. As her residence in Kentucky had been almost intolerable, Emilie bought a home in Madison, Indiana, north of the Ohio River, where she could remain free of the turmoil of the reconstruction program. There she became the organist in Christ Church, where as an accomplished musician she earned a livelihood.

After residing in Madison for ten or twelve years Mrs. Helm moved to Louisville, Kentucky, and for about two years she taught a class in music. Next she decided to return to Elizabethtown where she was appointed postmistress by President Chester A. Arthur. She held this office for twelve years, three successive presidential terms, preceding 1895. During her Elizabethtown residence she was honored (1888) with the title "Mother of the Orphan Brigade."

She again returned to Louisville to reside. Ben Hardin, her third child and only son, had promised his mother to buy a Blue Grass farm as soon as he could make the money, and in 1912 he purchased the colonial home of Colonel Abraham Bowman, situated near Lexington on the Bowman's Mill Road. There, in an atmosphere of the past, surrounded by the trappings of her soldier-husband, and deeply imbued with the Lincoln tradition, she died February 20, 1930, at the age of ninety-three years.

The most significant event in her life, after the war had ended, was the occasion of the reunion of the First Kentucky (Orphan) Brigade of Infantry at Elizabethtown on September 19, 1884. It was at this solemn and impressive gathering of Confederate veterans that the remains of General Ben Hardin Helm was re-interred in the pioneer burial ground of his fathers, in the shadow of the great granite shaft erected by the State of Kentucky in honor of the General's father, Governor John L. Helm.

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