Henry Smith Lane

By JAMES A. WOODBURN

Henry Smith Lane was born in Montgomery County, Kentucky, February 24, 1811. He was just two years younger than Lincoln, a native of the same state. Lane and Lincoln were much alike. They were typical pioneer western citizens, and they were in close agreement in their political opinions.

Lane received an academic education under private tutors. He studied law before leaving Kentucky, and, in 1832, when just twenty-one, he removed to Crawfordsville, Indiana. There he entered upon the practice of law. He soon became interested in politics, a common habit among Hoosiers, and, as a Kentucky follower of Henry Clay, he became identified with the new Whig party.

In 1837 Lane was elected to the Indiana senate. In 1840 he was elected to the House of Representatives at Washington, to fill a vacancy caused by the resignation of Tilghman A. Howard, of Rockville, who was the Democratic candidate for Governor. Lane was re-elected to the following Congress, and thus he served in the House from 1840 to 1843.

At the outbreak of the Mexican War, Lane raised a regiment of Indiana Volunteers for the service. Of this regiment he was first a Major and later its Lieutenant Colonel. Unlike many of his fellow Whigs, he ardently supported this war and rendered creditable service in its conduct.

After the war, upon his return to Indiana, Lane abandoned the Law as a profession and became a banker in Crawfordsville. In 1849 he was again a candidate for Congress but was de-
feated by Joseph E. McDonald, who afterwards spoke of him as "always the soul of honor and generous toward his opponents."

In the break-up of the northern Whig party from 1854 to 1856, Lane became one of the founders of the Republican party in Indiana, and it is safe to say that he was as influential as any man in the state in determining the cast and character of the new party and in leading it to victory. In this formative period, the Republican party in Indiana was quite heterogeneous, being made up of varied elements. There were old anti-slavery Whigs in the new party—Lane was one; there were old Free Soilers, more radical anti-slavery men—Julian was one; there were Anti-Nebraska Democrats, ready to leave their party to resist slavery extension—Morton was one; there were "Maine Law" advocates, temperance men, bent on outlawing the liquor traffic, and they were strong in voting power—Test of Richmond and Wright of Logansport, were two of them; and there were the Americans, or "Knownothings"—"Old Dick" Thompson, of Terre Haute, was one, a late comer into the new party. These "Knownothings" very easily held the balance of power between the two main parties, as did also the temperance men.

A fusion of these elements under the name of the "People's Party", carried the state in 1854. Could enough of them be held together under the dominant issue of no further extension of slavery to enable the new Republican party to carry the state in 1856? The result of the latter election showed that such unity could not be achieved in so short a time, but the outcome of the contest of 1856 was a more homogeneous party with a future before it. Lane's leadership in the movement was recognized.

These varying elements of opposition to the Democratic administration held a mass convention in Indianapolis on May 1, 1856, fully 30,000 strong. It was an outpouring of self-appointed delegates. They met on the State-House grounds—no hall in town could hold the throng. Henry S. Lane was chairman of this vast concourse of his fellow citizens and fellow partisans. He made a fervent speech, urging three issues underlying what he called the coming revolution:
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1. No further extension of slavery.
2. Prohibition of the liquor traffic.
3. Full citizenship requisite for voting—not merely a declaration of intention.

The mass convention declared for this program. Here were offers to various groups and constituencies, but it was hardly a platform on which a majority of our voters could be united. The discordant fusion elements of 1854 had not yet fully coalesced by 1856. Oliver P. Morton, former Democrat of Centerville, was nominated for Governor by that mass convention, and, although defeated, the race he made showed that the new party was headed for unity and victory.

On June 17, 1856, the anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill, the new Republican party met in its first national nominating convention. Lane was made permanent chairman of that historic body. This was a recognition of his standing and prominence, and an honor sufficient of itself to give him a permanent name in American history. The New York Evening Post reports that when the committee conducted Lane to the chair “three rousing cheers were given for the Hoosier State.” After Lane’s election as permanent chairman the convention gave itself up to “exuberant speech making”. Lane’s qualities of oratory were well adapted to that convention of earnest and enthusiastic men. Addressing the delegates as “Friends of Freedom”, the Chairman said:

The honor conferred upon me is worthy of any citizen of the Republic and far transcends any poor merits of mine. I thank the convention on behalf of my young Commonwealth.

We are assembled almost within the shadow of those venerable trees whose infant boughs were moved and stirred by the swaying shouts of freemen when a great nation was born into the world.”

He spoke for the cause of free labor, free thought, free press, free speech, free men. He drew a lurid picture of conditions in Kansas:

When the Kansas-Nebraska inquity was adopted, my allegiance to Kentucky politics from that hour slumbered in the grave of Henry Clay. We once had peace on slavery. We acquiesced in the compromises of 1850. By the accursed ambition of Stephen A. Douglas the whole slavery agitation has again been opened. I call upon the people to witness that this agitation has not been brought on the country
by any action of ours. It is forced upon us and we are forced to
meet it.

We shall follow no sectional banner, but the banner of the nation,
with its stars undimmed and with all its bars aflame. We seek to
bring back the Government to where our fathers left it. There is
no disunion sentiment in our hearts. I love the Union of the Con-
stitution and I would preserve the Union of the Constitution, not by
the surrender of our rights but by manfully defending them by an
efficient execution of the laws and by a proper interpretation of the
constitution. Do this and the Union is safe. The cry of disunion
comes from South Carolina, from the unhung nullifiers with Gen.
Jackson's halters around their necks. They dare to reproach me with
the want of fidelity to the Union. Gentlemen, there is no danger of
a dissolution of the Union.

They tell us we are sectional. Freedom is national, slavery is
sectional, and we make no war upon it. If to oppose the extension
of slavery is to be an "Abolitionist," then write "Abolitionist" all over
me. Nay, more, as the proudest word of my mother tongue, write
"Abolitionist" upon my tomb!

Such were his convictions in 1856, and such was the challenge
of his leadership flung out at Philadelphia to his adversaries
in Indiana and the nation.

In 1859 Lane was elected by his party majority in the
Legislature to the United States Senate. But his election was
contested, and the Democratic majority in the Senate gave the
seat to his political opponent, Jesse D. Bright.

In 1860 Lane was nominated for Governor by the Republi-
cans. Morton, the standard bearer of '56, was named for
Lieut. Governor. Here, heading the ticket, were an old Whig
and an old Democrat. There was not a formal bargain, but a
mutual understanding, though it was not made public, that, if
the Republicans should be successful in the state, Lane would
go to the Senate allowing Morton to become Governor.
The plan was carried out. Lane was elected Governor, by
nearly 10,000 majority, but he served only two or three days.
The Republican legislative caucus nominated him for Senator;
he was elected, resigned as Governor, Morton became our War
Governor, and was able to succeed himself in 1864, not having
served a full term before his re-inauguration.

In that famous campaign of 1860, the Democrats nominated
Thomas A. Hendricks for Governor and David Turpie for
Lieut. Governor. It is probable that the same kind of an un-
derstanding existed on the Democratic side of the political
fence, namely, that if the Democrats should be successful
Hendricks would go to the Senate and Turpie become Governor.
Lane and Hendricks, Morton and Turpie! It seems to us that there were giants in those days. In addition to this Big Four heading the two tickets, Benjamin Harrison was running against Michael C. Kerr for Reporter of the Supreme Court. "Two stronger tickets", says Dr. Esarey, "never opposed each other in an Indiana campaign." There was a subsequent President, a later Speaker of the national House, and five future United States Senators on those tickets of 1860.

On the hustings, Lane was the equal, if not the superior, of any of them. He hardly had a rival as a popular political campaigner. His speeches were not intended for reading by posterity; they were made for the occasion, full of effective eloquence. He was a fine story teller, but a deeply earnest man, and he could always hold an audience. He illustrated well the maxim that an orator should put fire into his speeches or put his speeches into the fire. Julian said of Lane that he "was full of patriotic ardor, and, like Baker, of Oregon, had the rare gift of eloquent impromptu speech."

It was the custom of those days, after the manner of Lincoln and Douglas, for opposing candidates to have joint debates before the people. Lane and Hendricks spoke from the same platform, each presenting his claims and the claims of his party before the voters. Having read the reports of the Lane-Hendricks debates, it seems to the writer of this paper that Lane was the better orator, being more emotional in his appeal; but that Hendricks was the better debater, the more logical in his reasoning and argument.

As we look back upon the history of the years, 1860-1861, we think of slavery as the dominant, if not the only, issue of the day. It was slavery that seemed to be rending the nation in twain. Secession and civil war were impending, but the Lane-Hendricks debates show how conservative these candidates were. Hendricks never mentioned the subject of slavery, and Lane discussed it chiefly to resent the charge of abolitionism made against himself. Lane was not an abolitionist, no more so than was Lincoln. Years earlier; on Sept. 29, 1835, before the Western Literary Society of Wabash college, he had denounced the Abolitionists as fanatics and deplored their ill-timed efforts to bring about the abolition of slavery. He be-

* Logan Esarey, History of Indiana, II, 659.
lieved that any general scheme of emancipation should be accompanied by a plan for African colonization. He had voted in Congress in 1842 for the censure of Giddings in the Creole Case, along with his Indiana colleagues, Wallace, Thompson, and Kennedy. Did this vote come from lack of vision or lack of courage to attack slavery? He denounced Helper's "Impending Crisis," which appeared in 1854, as "incendiary," a volume which John Sherman and other Republican leaders had recommended as a good campaign document. He looked upon John Brown as a deluded enthusiast. He disliked any radical outbreak or utterance. He stood for law, order, precedent, and the old standards of the Constitution.

Lane claimed only to stand on old ground where former party leaders had stood. His antagonism to slavery was only opposition to slavery extension. "Wherever slavery exists by local law," he said, "there it is sacred and is protected by the constitution of the United States." He meant that it was politically sacred, not morally so. Lane, again like Lincoln, hated slavery and hoped, as he said, to live, as he did live, to see the day when all men should be free, South as well as North, and when the "foot of a slave shall never again tread the soil of the Republic." But to bring that about, he looked not to violence but to evolution and orderly procedure.

Lane held the Democratic party responsible for the new agitation of the slavery question, because of its repeal in 1854 of the Missouri compromise restriction. He rejected the dogma deduced from the Dred Scott opinion that the constitution carried slavery into the Territories and protected it there; and in this he was merely standing where Washington and Jefferson, Webster and Clay, and other leaders of parties had stood in days gone by. Lane stood his ground on the essential point as stoutly as Lincoln did. He would not yield one jot nor one tittle for an extension of slave territory. He was willing to guarantee that Congress should not interfere with slavery in states where it existed; that might even be put into the constitution, if need be, but not one foot more of the national territory should be devoted to slavery.

At Evansville, Lane broke off the joint debates with Hendricks and hastened to Chicago to attend the Republican national convention of 1860, not as a delegate but as one deeply interested in the outcome of that convention. As the party
nominee for Governor in a pivotal state he was anxious that the strongest possible candidate for President should be named by his party. He believed that Seward's nomination would endanger the cause in Indiana. He wanted a safer, more conservative candidate, one who had not made so prominent an anti-slavery record. He wanted Lincoln; and, perhaps, no single man did more than Lane to bring about Lincoln's nomination — for which the country may do well to acknowledge its debt of gratitude. Lane is represented as going from one caucus room to another, after midnight on May 18, "toiling with desperation to bring the Indiana delegation to go as a unit for Lincoln."

The Indiana delegation did go as a unit for Lincoln. David Davis, Lincoln's manager, may have promised Caleb B. Smith a Cabinet position to bring this about. There is evidence enough to suggest it but not enough to prove it. Curtin the party candidate for Governor in Pennsylvania (with a similar but more unfortunate commitment to Simon Cameron) brought Pennsylvania into line with Indiana. Curtin and Lane made it clear that a pronounced enemy of the Know-Nothing's could carry neither Pennsylvania nor Indiana. As the result of the support of Indiana and Pennsylvania, Lincoln was nominated. Indiana and her candidate for Governor had rendered a service to the nation.

Lane's inaugural address (lately read by the writer), was delivered at Indianapolis when he took the oath of office as Governor on January 14, 1861. It was at a crisis in the country's history. The nation was facing disunion. South Carolina had already seceded, and other Southern states were preparing to take the same fatal step. Lane addressed himself more to national than to state issues. He thought the patriotism of the land would be sufficient to save us from civil war and fraternal bloodshed. He denounced the secession movement as "a treasonable conspiracy" originated by pestilent demagogues whose avowed object was the dismemberment of the United States. He knew of no compromise, no concession which the people of the United States should make to satisfy South Carolina. He would have "the right of every State in the Confederacy and of every individual preserved inviolate." He called the Union a "confederacy," as was often done by men of both sections in days prior to the Civil War. He said:

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1 Murat Halstead, Caucuses [Conventions] of 1860, 142.
The novel, alarming and treasonable assumption that any State in the Union has a right to secede at pleasure is a doctrine unknown to the constitution, at war with the principles on which the Government was established, and destructive of those high and sacred objects sought to be accomplished by the confederation. Can the result of an election legally held be a fair cause of dissolution? Such an admission would be a base surrender of the right of the majority to rule. No violation of the South's constitutional rights is contemplated by the new party now coming into power. Such fear is utterly groundless. The South is under a false impression that war is to be made on Southern rights and people.

Governor Lane pledged Indiana's support to the President-elect in the full and free exercise of his constitutional powers. In this he was fully justified, and he was supported by the majority of the people of Indiana. He was also approved when he said that he would have Indiana "yield to her sister States, cheerfully and promptly, all their just rights as equals under the constitution,—being governed by a sense of justice and a desire to advance the peace and prosperity of our common country".

A few weeks before his inauguration as Governor in a letter to Hon. Stephen S. Harding, Lane said:

If the election of a President constitutionally conducted in all respects is to furnish a pretext for dissolving the Union, then the Union can only be saved by a base surrender of that liberty which the constitution was ordained and established to protect and perpetuate, and I, for one, am ready for no such sacrifice. . . . I am not ready to give up my right to vote for whomever I please for President, nor do I yet feel like apologizing to the "fire eaters" for being found in the majority once in twenty years. The people of Indiana are true to the Union and loyal to the constitution, and I hope they will be found ready to support the President in the free exercise of all his constitutional powers, and to aid in the enforcement of the laws at all times and under all circumstances.4

During his term in the Senate, Lane loyally and constantly supported Lincoln and the war for the Union. On January 21, 1862, he voted for the expulsion of his colleague, Senator Jesse D. Bright, though not at all on personal grounds. He had good political reasons for opposing Bright but he harbored no personal resentments. "There is no evidence", says Dr. Esarey "that Lane ever had a personal enemy in the world". In his

4 Lane to Harding, Dec. 25, 1860. Harding Papers (ms.).
Senate speech on the Bright case, Lane used the occasion to express his loyal support of the Union cause:

I will vote the last dollar in taxes, the last soldier that may be called for, nay, more, I will prosecute this war at any and all hazards, even though it should result in the bankruptcy of every individual and corporation in the Union. I would give the very garments off my shoulders to prosecute the war, nay, more, I would die a pauper and be buried by public charity rather than to suffer the war to fail for want of taxes.

There was acclamation in the galleries and they had to be cleared for their applause.

Lane retired from the Senate in 1867. Later he was a member of the United States Indian Commission for two years, 1869-1871. He continued to retain an active interest in politics. He was a delegate from Indiana to the Republican national conventions of 1868 and 1872. He was, also, a member of the "Loyalist Convention" of 1866, representing the Congressional, or anti-Johnson, party in the famous contest over Reconstruction.

Lane's last days were spent in Crawfordsville, where he died on June 18, 1881, at the age of seventy. It is a pleasure to pay this poor but sincere tribute to his honor. Here was a man who stood as a peer among the state's famous public men of his day. His career and character were of a kind that give to the Commonwealth encouragement and pride. It is fitting that there should be a memorial shrine to him in the community in which he spent nearly fifty years of his life. It is fitting that the state of Indiana should do him honor. It is fitting that the Historical Society of his state and our Pioneer Society, should preserve the record of his life and public services and make this record available to the children of the state from generation to generation. The commonwealth grows in honor by honoring its worthy men.