

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN LORE

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Dr. Louis A. Worren

Editor

### MURRAY'S ENGLISH READER

"Murray's English Reader was the best school book ever put into the hands of an American youth." Abraham Lincoln is said to have made this statement to William Herndon and of course the implication is clear that Lincoln used the book when a boy.

The preface sets forth its purpose in these words: "To improve youth in the art of reading; to meliorate their language and sentiments; and to inculcate some of the most important principles of piety and virtue." It is to serve also as "an auxiliary to the author's English Grammar."

One of the most important features of the book is the introduction. It outlines in great detail, Proper Loudness of Voice; Distinctness; Slowness; Propriety of Pronunciation; Emphasis; Tones; Pauses; and Mode of Reading Verse. The subject matter is arranged with the above principles in mind, the pieces selected giving exercise to a great variety of emotions, and the correspondent tones and variations of voice. The author claims his selections to be "extracted from the works of the most correct and elegant writers . . ."

The book of 269 pages is divided into two parts, one in prose, the other in verse.

A glance at the contents catalogues the pieces thus: Didactic pieces, Narrative pieces, Argumentative pieces, Descriptive pieces, Pathetic pieces, and Promiscuous pieces.

Such meaty and contemplative selections as the essays of Addison; Dr. Johnson's observations; public speeches of Lord Mansfield, Cicero and the Apostle Paul whet the appetite of the reader. Goldsmith's description of Niagara Falls found therein may have been lying dormant in Lincoln's mind from the time he first read it until he made his Niagara Falls speech.

Selections from the dialogues of Damon and Pythias, and Democritus and Heraclitus are offered those students who prefer histrionics. A letter from Pliny to Marcellinus on the death of a beautiful young woman who passed away just before her wedding day may have been remembered by Lincoln in later years, with the passing of Ann Rutledge.

Brief sentences are compiled under such subjects as Disinterested Friendship, Patience under Provocation, Discretion, Temper, Gentleness, Forgiveness, etc.

Passages and quotations from the Bible are very frequent all through the book. The author says that he has been "solicitous to recommend to young persons, the perusal of the sacred Scriptures, by interspersing through his work, some of the most beautiful and interesting passages of those invaluable writings. To excite an early taste and veneration for this great rule of life, is a point of so high importance, as to warrant the attempt to promote it on every proper occasion."

### The ENGLISH READER

or  
Pieces in Prose and Poetry

selected from

THE BEST WRITERS.

Designed to Assist Young Persons  
To Read with Propriety and Effect

To Improve Their  
Language and Sentiments  
And to Inculcate

Some of the Most Important Principles of

PIETY AND VIRTUE

With a few preliminary observations  
on the Principles of Good Reading.

BY LINDLEY MURRAY,

Author of "English Grammar," &c. &c.

THIRD UTICA EDITION

UTICA:

Printed by Seward and Williams

1816

The volume does not lack for pensive proverbs and wise sayings but it is to be regretted that the names of the authors are usually deleted.

"I consider a human soul without education, like marble in a quarry; which shows none of its inherent beauties, until the skill of the polisher fetches out the colours."

"Revenge dwells in little minds."

"Gentleness corrects whatever is offensive in our manners; and by a constant train of humane attentions studies to alleviate the burden of common misery."

"In judging others, let us always think the best and employ the spirit of charity and candor. But in judging of ourselves, we ought to be exact and severe."

"Diligence, industry and proper improvement of time, are material duties of the young."

"Sincerity and truth form the basis of every virtue."

"To maintain a steady and unbroken mind, amid all the shocks of the

world, marks a great and noble spirit."

"When upon rational and sober inquiry we have established our principles, let us not suffer them to be shaken by the scoffs of the licentious, or the cavils of the sceptical."

"What avails the show of external liberty, to one who has lost the government of himself?"

Part Two of the book is devoted to Pieces in Poetry, and the Chapter heads read about as did the Prose pieces. In the section headed Descriptive Pieces, we find part of a letter by Addison written in blank verse and entitled "Liberty and slavery contrasted."

"Oh, Liberty . . . poverty looks cheerful in thy sight."

"But what avail . . . the smiles of nature and the charms of art,  
While proud oppression in her valleys reigns,  
And tyranny usurps her happy plains?"

Cowper, in no uncertain terms gives us his "indignant sentiments on national prejudices and hatred; and on slavery."

"He finds his fellow guilty of a skin  
Not colour'd like his own; and having pow'r

To enforce the wrong for such a worthy cause,  
Dooms and devotes him as his lawful prey."

And also declares that:

"I had much rather be myself the slave,

And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him."

Possibly some of the couplets and single stanzas were remembered by Abraham Lincoln down through the years. The book is rich in these.

"Tis education forms the common mind:

Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined."

These three lines must have encouraged him:

"Our needful knowledge like our needful food,

Unhedged lies open in life's common field

And bids all welcome to the vital feast."

We would not be surprised if one coming upon a clearing in the Southern Indiana county in the early part of the last century would have heard the youthful Railsplitter, Abraham Lincoln, reciting these lines which he had learned in Murray's English Reader:

"Loud sounds the axe, redoubling strokes on strokes;

On all sides round the forest hurls her oaks

Headlong. Deep echoing groan the thickets brown;

The rustling, crackling, crashing, thunder down."