

LINCOLN LORE

No. 103

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 30, 1931

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

OBSCURE SKETCHES OF LINCOLN

The historian who values original sources always welcomes evidence that has not been subject to the reminiscent mood. The day by day record in the form of the diary offers the most trustworthy account of passing events if the recorder be a keen observer and of unprejudiced mind.

In striving to get a word picture of Abraham Lincoln previous to his inauguration as president it is very difficult to discover many sketches which are not influenced by his administration days, the martyrdom which concluded his illustrious career, or the bias of a partisan writer. This last qualification eliminates most of the news correspondents who contributed to the daily press, during the campaign of 1860. These excerpts are presented in Lincoln Lore because of the scarcity of the publications from which they are gleaned.

In some sketches prepared by Lillian Foster, of southern birth, and published in a volume entitled "Way-side Glimpses," copyrighted 1859, we find the following description of Abraham Lincoln as he appeared to her when he was the Republican candidate for the Senate in 1858.

"The next, following the same order as before, was the great Republican gathering, which was addressed by Mr. Lincoln, the Republican candidate for the Senate. The meeting was large and enthusiastic. Mr. Lincoln is not much known out of Illinois. In person, he is tall and awkward; in manner, ungainly. His face is certainly ugly, but not repulsive; on the contrary, the good humor, generosity and intellect beaming from it, makes the eye love to linger there until you almost fancy him good-looking. He is a man of decided talents. On the stump, ready, humorous, argumentative, and tells an anecdote with inconceivable quaintness and effect. He is honest as a man, and enthusiastic as a politician. He is an able lawyer, and that is the true field of his fame; but, unless I am mistaken in my estimate above, he will for some years, at least, remain an ornament to that noble profession."

The next sketch is from the pen of an "American Abolitionist" as he so signs and demonstrates throughout the lengthy article found in Fraser's Magazine of January, 1865. His criti-

cisms of Lincoln's policies indicate that he would not allow any flattery to creep into the sketch which follows.

"It was when he was on one of these political excursions, to-wit, at Cincinnati, in the September of 1859, that I first saw and listened to Mr. Lincoln. It is the fashion in that region to hold large political meetings in the open market spaces, which are found in Western as regularly as in German cities. Cincinnati is the largest city of the greatest of the Western states, Ohio, and is on its southmost verge divided from Kentucky only by the Ohio River. It has long had a bitterly pro-slavery party, has been the arena of the worst mobs against abolitionists, and of many disgraceful renditions of fugitives, owing to its proximity to the slave State. It consequently arrested my attention when, passing through the crowded market space, intent only upon getting home by elbow aid, I heard a voice, less flat than those ordinarily heard on such occasions, utter these words: 'No policy will ever deal satisfactorily with slavery, that does not deal with it AS WRONG.' I paused at this, and presently heard the following given with good emphasis: 'I say there is room enough for us all to be free; and it not only does not wrong the white man that the negro should be free, but it positively wrongs the mass of white men that the negro should be enslaved.'—here I felt that he was about going on to a high strain but the applause was too faint, and he continued—'that the mass of white men are really injured by the effects of slave labour in the vicinity of the fields of their own labour.' He then went into a dissertation about capital and labour, and after a quarter of an hour made another effort at the higher ground, with this result: 'Every man that comes into this world has a mouth to be fed and a back to be clothed; by a notable coincidence every man has two hands; now I have concluded that those hands were meant to feed that mouth and clothe that back; and—mark you, Kentuckians!—any institution that interferes with the rights of those hands so to do, is sure to come, sooner or later, tumbling about the ears of those who uphold it.' On the whole I rather liked the voice and what it said, and made my way towards the house-balcony on which he stood. The first near glance at the speaker was calculated to produce a smile: One might swear that he was the type of the American Union as it was and Constitution as it is. Long and lank as the traditional Yankee; lean and hungry as the 'poor white' of the South that he was born; with the arm of a Hoosier that can 'whip his weight in wild cats'; with a backward length of skull, and feeble occiput which reminded one of the Indian characters; and yet with

an eye full of softness, a voice full of affection and even delicacy; he stood, the sum of a long column of Boones and Bowies, Pograms and Puritans. It was a physical necessity that this average American should have been born in the most central of the states—Kentucky—and a political propriety that he should have drifted into the State that represented the faintest divergence from the slave system—Illinois. I have often thought of the impression made upon me on this evening, when I first saw and heard this man, of something he said to Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, who more than two years ago, after delivering a lecture at the Smithsonian Institute, was induced to call upon the new President. Mr. Lincoln advanced and said immediately: 'Mr. Emerson, I remember having heard you give a lecture in the West some years ago, in which you remarked: "Every Kentuckian has an air about him that seems to say, 'Here I am: if you don't like me, so much the worse for you!"' This, accompanied as it was by one of the President's loudest laughs, needs only a slightly mystical interpretation to tell the whole story: There he is; there he was foreordained to be; if we do not like him, so much the worse for us, for to be rid of him implies certain preliminary dealings with such hard facts as Kentuck, Hoosier, and Wolverine are!

At this time the thought of nominating Mr. Lincoln for the presidency had not occurred to any human being."

An English observer who had but recently returned from the United States, released under the pen name "Cunard," in *Once a Week* for December, 1860, the following paragraph:

"Old Abe is a gaunt giant more than six feet high, strong and long-limbed. He walks slow, and, like many thoughtful men (Wordsworth and Napoleon, for example), keeps his head inclined forward and downward. His hair is wiry black, his eyes are dark-grey; his smile is frank, sincere, and winning. Like most American gentlemen, he is loose and careless in dress, turns down his flapping white collars, and wears habitually what we consider evening dress. His head is massive, his brow full and wide, his nose large and fleshy, his mouth, coarse and full; his eyes are sunken, his bronzed face is thin, and drawn down into strong corded lines, that disclose the machinery that moves the broad jaw.

"This great leader of the 'Republican' party—this Abolitionist—this terror of the 'Democrats'—this honest lawyer, with a face half Roman, half Indian, so wasted by climate, so scared by a life's struggles, was born in 1809, in Kentucky.