

LINCOLN LORE

No. 106

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

April 20, 1931

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BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

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THE AUTHOR OF "LINCOLN: THE MAN"

In reviewing a biography where the personality of the author works its way into the development of the text and certain pre-conceived notions evidently bias his judgment, it is entirely within the scope of a reviewer to point out personal prejudices which cause the contribution to assume the status of a eulogy or a diatribe.

A review of *Lincoln: The Man* by Edgar Lee Masters cannot be undertaken without first considering the qualifications of the author to make what he calls an "analytical portraiture" of Abraham Lincoln.

The sketch of Masters appearing in the current issue of *Who's Who* furnishes a background for the study. It is complete as therein published with the exception of his literary contributions.

MASTERS, EDGAR LEE, author; b. Garnett, Kan., Aug. 23, 1869; s. Hardin Wallace and Emma J. (Dexter) M.; ed. high school and Knox Coll., Ill.; studied law in father's office; admitted to bar, 1891; m. Helen M., d. Robert E. Jenkins, of Chicago, June 21, 1898 (divorced); m. 2d. Ellen F. Coyne, Nov. 5, 1926. Democrat. Mem. Nat'l. Inst. Arts and Letters. Club: Jefferson (president, 1904-05, 1907-08).

The preliminary section of Masters' book although minus a preface makes one immediately suspicious of the writer's intent. Lincoln had many portraits taken during the presidential campaign, but the one chosen for the frontispiece is by far the most unsatisfactory likeness obtained of him during that period.

The dedicatory page which has become sort of an altar place in most books, degenerates here into an exhibition of irony, when one considers the contents of the publication.

In the list of illustrations one finds the author's attitude of mind most clearly revealed. The illustrative material consists of twelve exhibits in-

cluding the frontispiece. With one or two exceptions they are selected evidently to discredit Abraham Lincoln.

The first one is a common school boy doggerel about "being good but God knows when." It is to be found in copy books published long before Lincoln was born, yet Masters, in referring to this writing of Abraham Lincoln at the age of fourteen, says that even then "he knew how to express himself," as though the question of his ultimate spiritual attainment was giving him concern.

The Lincoln and Berry tavern license, the second exhibit, is another one of the same character and is shown opposite page 30 where the author "wonders what Lincoln meant when he denied that he ever kept a grocery-store. The compound word "grocery-store," was not used by Lincoln. If the context of both Lincoln's and Douglas's speeches at Ottawa are studied one will conclude that Lincoln used the word "groggery," where it appears in the printed text as "grocery."

When one scans through the rest of the illustrations consisting of manuscripts and portraits, he is convinced that the author of the book has made it a point to gather and arrange exhibits which would have a tendency to mislead the reader or cause him to form an unfavorable opinion of the subject of the biography.

In the development of the argument there are three great passions which consume the author. He hates the Christian religion, its founder and all of its adherents. Christianity to him is a "poisonous inoculation" of the Republic, and Jesus Christ a false accuser.

He hates modern Americanism, and especially the political party now in power, including all who at any time have been members of it. He also takes Woodrow Wilson from among the opposing party and puts him among the condemned for good measure.

He hates most of our American heroes and especially Abraham Lincoln. He presents him as a "sophist," a "demagogue," as "intellectually cunning," and devoid of every virtue, even the honesty with which he has been clothed. The "Jehovah man" seems to be the term by which Masters feels he can best deride him and in one scene he has Herndon introduce Lincoln as "the King of Glory."

In the opening paragraph of his book Masters says "the time has arrived when his (Lincoln's) apotheosis can be touched with the hand of ra-

tional analysis." It is difficult to find any evidence of a rational approach to the study of Lincoln's character in the entire book. It is a series of immoderate, absurd, and extreme statements which are neither founded on fact nor in harmony with reason.

One is convinced after having completed the reading of the text that any man who demonstrates on nearly every page his hatred for individuals and institutions which have been considered honorable at least, is not qualified to make a worth-while "analytical portraiture" of any American citizen, to say nothing of the one who breathed the spirit of "malice toward none and charity for all."

Masters is not only disqualified from giving an "analytical portraiture" of Lincoln because of his partisan viewpoint and his unbridled irrationalism, but a still more serious obstruction prevents him from carrying out his task. He does not know Abraham Lincoln.

He acknowledges Herndon and Beveridge as his chief source of authority. A recent facsimile reprint of Herndon's work shows but eighty-eight pages on Lincoln's entire administration and Beveridge only follows Lincoln's history up to the debates. While he mentions the fact that other lives of Lincoln were used and refers to two or three of them, he presents no bibliography and follows no system for showing the source of his information. Any student in the field of Lincolniana who takes Masters' book in hand is convinced by the many inaccuracies, that the author is not acquainted with his subject.

Masters may have lived in the Lincoln country as a youth, but he has not lived nor spent much time in libraries which have accumulated an extensive Lincolniana.

His lack of information about the enormous amount of authentic Lincoln data available is clearly evident when he says that within the scope of his book containing four hundred and ninety pages, "the facts are here set down completely and with care; and upon them the delineations and arguments are based."

Note:

This review of "The Author of 'Lincoln: The Man'" will be supplemented next week by an article on "The Argument in 'Lincoln The Man.'"