

# LINCOLN LORE

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### THE ARGUMENT IN "LINCOLN; THE MAN"

Beveridge's *Lincoln* was reviewed by Edgar Lee Masters in the *New York Herald Tribune* for September 9, 1928. In this contribution Masters said: "Some future biographer may be able to construct an analytical study of Lincoln and to reduce the enigmatic character of the man to its psychological elements . . . It will require a mind of high and singular gifts to do this but it should be done." The review is concluded with this paragraph: "After many books on him more than on any other character, his mind remains to be expounded and that can be done by the right sort of genius using this work of Beveridge for the facts, together with a work similarly executed covering Lincoln's career as President."

Possibly Masters feels that he has supplied "the mind of high and singular gifts" and "the right sort of genius," for his analytical study of *Lincoln: The Man*, but where did he secure the other necessary element—a Beveridge-like work on Lincoln's administration? In 1928 he thought such a book possible, but in 1931 he says, "no new fact of moment about Lincoln can now be brought to light."

In this same review Masters suggests that an analytical study of Lincoln can be pursued "after the manner of the eloquent but partisan work on the constitution by Von Holst or by the way of dissecting Lincoln's mind with whatever Freudianism so far as it is sound can bring to the analysis."

Here we have set forth some indication of Masters' original plan for the development of his argument and it appears that instead of choosing one or the other of the methods suggested, he tried to incorporate both, especially Von Holst's "partisan" attitude. Von Holst says in his preface, "several European critics of my work have been of the opinion that my judgment of the American system of government and its workings is an almost unqualified condemnation." Masters' treatment of Lincoln has also been received as "an almost unqualified condemnation."

The author makes a feeble attempt to follow the Freudianism system of psycho-analysis but his intense pre-

judice would prevent him from drawing any scientific conclusions.

It cannot be said, however, that either the Von Holst method, or the findings of Freud, dominates the development of the argument. Masters' "analysis of Lincoln's mind and character" is nothing more or less than a setting forth of certain selected testimony, much of questionable authenticity, which is assembled with the idea of making a case. He presents the deductions of the plaintiff, but there is no setting forth of the plea for the defense. The presentation is better characterized as the argument for the affirmative in a debate:—"Resolved; that Lincoln was not a great man."

It is not the purpose of this review limited by space to a single sheet, to prepare an argument in refutation of nearly 500 pages of text. Its chief purpose is to set forth the character of the testimony by the means of a few words of rebuttal and the display of some of the author's findings.

For some reason our worthy opponent makes a direct attack on Abraham Lincoln's grandfather, a captain in the Revolution, who served as adjutant general in Augusta County, Virginia, on many occasions.

He claims the pioneer Lincoln deserted his country's cause "to escape the stress of war" or "rid himself of excess taxation." This is a pure assumption without proof. An opponent in debate would be justified in quoting the paragraph written by Masters for the *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society* for January, 1926, in which he says that his own grandfather, Squire Davis Masters, "prospered greatly during the Civil War when the price of beef was high." Why was he not fighting for his "country's cause?" He was but 48 years old at the outbreak of the war.

The curse under which our worthy opponent places the father of Abraham Lincoln is even worse than the reflection cast upon the grandfather. Thomas Lincoln, as revealed by duly authorized records, was in possession of 700 acres of land and four horses before removing from Kentucky. He was recognized for his high moral integrity, and respectability in the community where he lived, as well as his industry as a cabinet maker.

The following references illustrate to what extent the author has exaggerated the status of Thomas Lincoln. "He was shiftless, bound down in poverty . . . was utterly ignorant . . . Rather than labor to rise to their (neighbors) level, he preferred the woods and loathsome poverty, rats and cold and filth."

The president receives the same general treatment meted out to the father and grandfather, and the Lincoln we have learned to know fades out into a repulsive character wearing his name. One of the very few com-

pliments Masters' reluctantly pays him, states that Lincoln manifested a "literary cast of mind," although one cannot feel that Lincoln is much better than a plagiarist when Masters alleges that "Lincoln nearly always drew upon someone else for his ideas."

Through nearly seventy-five years of painstaking research and sane interpretation, biographers of note have given us a fairly accurate portrait of Abraham Lincoln. When one assembles and studies some of the loose statements which are found in *Lincoln the Man*, he feels that any American school boy who has studied the speeches and letters of Lincoln could prepare an adequate refutation of most of the following quotations taken at random from the text.

"Lincoln grew up with a detached mind."

"Lincoln was familiar even to vulgarity."

"Lincoln who never forgot what he considered a wrong."

"He was not speaking the truth."

"Lincoln was slow to think, so also was his conscience slow to be touched."

"There was no time when he was not thinking of his career."

"The mixture of false assertion with false argument is one of the most amazing emanations of Lincoln's distorted mind."

"His skill in leading his adversary on until he was ready to drive the knife into him."

"Lincoln was a cold man. He went about grotesquely dressed, carrying a faded umbrella, wearing a ludicrous plug hat. He was mannerless, unkempt, and one wonders if he was not unwashed."

"He had nothing beautiful about him in his home or in his office."

"He was not the brave, truthful, earnest, spiritual, highly moral colossus that now belongs to poetry and myth."

Inasmuch as Masters was able to discover in himself the man in the Beveridge review with "a mind of high and singular gifts," and "the right sort of genius," able to prepare within a period of three years, an analytical portraiture of a man whom he had never seen, and whom even now he does not know, we observe with interest the announcement of his next effort.

One will find on page eighty-seven of his *Lincoln* diatribe these words. "A poet some day will make a book of Lincoln going from county seat to county seat, staying at the inns and entertaining the attendants at courts and the villagers with the Aesopian stories which he invented, or borrowed and improved. Such a book would stand side by side with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* if it were well done." Of course it will be "well done."