

# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 207

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 27, 1933

## THE EXPURGATED TEXT OF HERNDON'S LINCOLN

No book about Abraham Lincoln has been more severely criticised by some and more favorably mentioned by others than the biography by William Herndon. It was published first in 1889 as a three-volume work, and three years later it was reprinted in what has become known as the expurgated two-volume edition.

Those who have been unfriendly to Abraham Lincoln have had much to say about the alleged propaganda which caused the three-volume work to be reduced to two volumes, with the inference that much historical data, unfavorable to Lincoln, was not used in the revised edition. Many Lincoln students also have come to believe that if they do not own the original three-volume edition, they are losing much valuable historical data. The fact is that, although the same size type and the same number of lines to the page were used in both editions, the supposed expurgated edition has forty-three pages more in the text than the original three-volume work. It also includes in addition an introduction of ten pages by Horace White.

The so-called expurgated edition in reality is an enlarged edition as already stated. If one will review the table of contents of the two editions he will find that an entirely new chapter appears in volume one which discusses Lincoln's visit to New England. There are thirteen pages in this chapter. Another addition to the two-volume work is the whole of chapter four in volume two. This is a detailed account of the Lincoln-Douglas debates by Horace White, and adds forty-four pages to the expurgated edition. At the very conclusion of the book there is added to the appendix an article of three pages on Lincoln at Fort Monroe.

There are but two instances in the entire three volumes where data was deleted before the second edition was printed. On page three Herndon wrote a paragraph on Lincoln's ancestry in which he brought serious charges against both the mother and grandmother of the president. The stories, based on purely traditional data, which now has been discredited, occupied approximately three pages. This is one of the two deleted sections in the book. The expurgated data did not cast any reflection whatever on the character of Abraham Lincoln. The only real loss to biographers from its deletion is the following oft-repeated statement which Herndon claimed Lincoln made to him: "God bless my mother; all that I am or ever hope to be I owe to her."

No further change in the text of the original work is made until page fifty is reached. Here some traditional reminiscences of Lincoln's boyhood in Indiana are deleted from the text. Herndon was of the opinion that Lincoln had a grudge against the Grigsby family, and exhibits some evidence which he gathered in the form of satires which he claims Lincoln composed.

Herndon's first story grew out of the double wedding when the brothers, Ruben and Charles Grigsby, married Betsy Ray and Matilda Hawkins respectively. This gave Lincoln, according to Herndon, a theme for "The Chronicles" he is said to have written. This backwoods literature was rude and coarse, and if designed to ridicule the Grigsbys it must have achieved its purpose. While the authorship has never been proved beyond a question of a doubt, there is some likelihood that Lincoln was the author.

About the same time Herndon claims that Lincoln composed a burlesque verse which ridiculed William Grigsby. It was not too vulgar for Herndon to print in his book, but, if Lincoln wrote it, as Herndon claims he did, it does not go down to Lincoln's credit. These two Grigsby stories, including the foot notes, take up six pages of the text and account for the larger part of the excerpted data which does not appear in the two-volume work.

From page fifty-six on to the close of the three-volume work there is no further attempt to cut out any of the

text of this first edition. Thus it will be observed that the three-page story of Lincoln's ancestry and parentage and the six-page story about the Grigsbys is the sum total of all printed matter that does not appear in the much featured expurgated two-volume edition.

Instead of mourning over the loss of the two deleted sections in the first edition, Lincoln students should deeply regret that much more of the story as told by Herndon was not expurgated before the second and subsequent editions of the biography were sent to the press.

If all the data not true to fact had been deleted from the first chapter of the original work, at least half of the text would have been lost. Following are some of the subjects which Herndon, through exaggeration or misrepresentation, has made valueless to those who are interested in historical accuracy: pages 4, 5, and 6, properly deleted by Herndon himself; sketch of Thomas Lincoln, pages 11 and 12; Nancy Hanks' relation to the Sparrows, etc., page 13; Lincoln's parents at Elizabethtown camp meeting, pages 14 and 15; and many minor details.

The second chapter is but little better, with these inaccuracies outstanding: Abraham Lincoln's cruelty to animals, page 18; Thomas Lincoln's attitude towards slavery, page 19; land deals of Thomas Lincoln, page 19; the river trip, page 20; the half-faced camp, page 21; Thomas Lincoln's abuse of his son, page 22; exaggeration of Sarah Bush's economic condition, page 30; and many purely traditional statements of no historical value.

The third chapter contains the six deleted pages already mentioned and much more data based on traditions which it would be difficult to support by any authoritative evidence.

One word may be said, however, in favor of the first printed edition—the illustrative material is far superior both in quality and volume to that in the two-volume work.

These pictures appearing in the three-volume work do not appear in the two-volume publication:

Volume one: Dennis Hanks; brick mold made by Thomas Lincoln; the Crawford Home; Josiah Crawford; Judge John Pitcher; John Hanks; grave of Thomas Lincoln; certificate of surveying; Mary S. Owens; Ninnian W. Edwards; page from Lincoln-Stuart fee book; Joshua F. Speed; Stuart-Lincoln office.

Volume two: Mary Todd; Sarah Rickard; Julia Jayne; group—Stuart, Butterfield, Herndon, Matheney, Shields; group—Ferguson, Logan, Baker, Broadwell, Conkling; group—Merryman, Shutt, Yates, McGaughey, Butler, Judge Treat; five Lincoln portraits; A. Campbell.

Volume three: First Presbyterian Church; Norman B. Judd; letter to the Kansas delegate; Old State House; Lincoln portraits; A. Campbell.

Volume three: First Presbyterian Church; Norman B. Judd; letter to the Kansas delegate; Old State House; Lincoln parlor in Springfield; Mrs. Ninnian W. Edwards; Mrs. Lincoln in the White House; Leonard Sweet; Henry C. Whitney; John M. Palmer; five portraits of Lincoln; plan of box of Ford's Theatre; groups of statuary on Lincoln monument in Springfield; group—Keyes, Brown, Dresser, McClernand, Edwards; group—Hay, Rosett, Logan, Zane, Collons.

There have been two reprints of the original Herndon work in recent years. In 1921 a three-volume work was published by The Herndon-Lincoln Publishing Company. It is a facsimile work minus the illustrative material.

In 1930 Paul M. Angle edited a reprint of the three volume work bound under one cover. Although it does not contain any of the illustrative material in the first edition, it does have at least two marked advantages over all other editions—an excellent and complete index and valuable foot notes pointing out some arguments in the text which research has proven to be untenable.