

LINCOLN LORE

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

Number 416

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 29, 1937

WHY WAS LINCOLN MURDERED?

"Why Was Lincoln Murdered?" is the title of a new book by Otto Eisenschiml. A direct answer to this perplexing question is not given on any one of the more than five-hundred closely printed pages but in every chapter, the story is "apalling in its implications," to borrow an expression from the jacket of the book.

Many people close to Lincoln during the presidential years, including his own wife, are portrayed as having played, consciously or unconsciously into the hands of designing people, while the individuals usually associated with the assassination of the chief magistrate of the nation appear as abused and innocent victims of a ruthless military court.

Mr. Eisenschiml's graphic and unusual story of the nation's greatest personal tragedy can best be visualized by presenting a list of the most prominent characters which appear. Within the quotation marks, are brief sketches by Mr. Eisenschiml, which give a line or two of information about them.

Principals

Edwin M. Stanton—"Brusque, insolent, cruel . . . one man who profited greatly by Lincoln's death."

John Wilkes Booth—Abraham Lincoln's assassin who's "services had been hired and paid for by some mysterious power."

Prisoners

Mrs. Mary E. Surratt—"A pious, industrious housewife, a devoted mother and a capable business woman."

David E. Herold—"A very light, trivial, unreliable boy, with a leaning toward practical jokes."

Dr. Samuel A. Mudd—"The gentle kindly country practitioner, who enjoyed nothing more than a peaceful hour in the circle of his family."

Lewis Paine—Who stabbed Secretary Seward—"a young giant with defiant eyes . . . who expected to walk to the gallows with his head erect and a joke on his lips."

George A. Atzerodt—"A shrinking little man" . . . who "positively refused to take part in it (the assassination)."

Michael O'Laughlin—"A victim of mistaken identity."

Edward Spangler—"The happy, go-lucky, scene shifter at Ford's Theatre."

Witnesses

Mrs. Abraham Lincoln—"What prompted the wife of the President to make this unusual request in behalf of an observer and mediocre patrolman (Parker)?"

John F. Parker—"Why the negligence of the guard who accompanied the President to the theatre?"

Miss Clara Harris—"Was it something more than forgetfulness that changed her testimony almost over night?"

Major Rathbourne—"An assertion made in the first account and deleted in the second must have been stricken out deliberately and for good reasons. For what reasons?"

S. P. Hanseom—"Here we have an editor of a metropolitan daily in possession of a sensational and exclusive news story . . . What made him keep it under cover?"

General Grant—"What compelled Grant to be absent (from the theatre) or else who influenced him to leave town?"

Colonel Conger—"Who was shot at Garretts' farm on the night of April 26, 1865?"

Col. L. C. Baker—"What did Baker strive so hard to intimate? Were his lines intended to convey the thought that Stanton was obsessed with a ghastly fear?"

Prosecutor

Although refraining from making positive statements which might answer the great question propounded in the title, the author does not leave the reader in doubt about the main thesis of his book. In fact, it might be stated in a positive affirmation something like this: Resolved, That Mr. _____ was primarily responsible for the murder of Abraham Lincoln.

To the support of this argument, the author has brought for observation and study, an immense volume of original duly authorized documents, and an enthusiasm generated by the conviction that he is not mistaken in his conclusions. Having so thoroughly and often impressively submitted the affirmative side of the debate, it would be especially valuable if he would now prepare a companion volume setting forth an equally impressive argument

for those who may favor the negative view point.

Extraneous Evidence

It is to be regretted, however, that the author in his zeal to build up a strong case against the character of the chief adversary in his thesis, has been led far afield from the general argument of the assassination of Lincoln to assume the role of a criticque in the field of military technique. Two chapters in his book, assigned to this task, will not find many students of Abraham Lincoln sympathetic with his conclusions.

It is a new Lincoln indeed, who was apparently not adverse to prolonging the war for the specific purpose of abolishing slavery; who "sensed a future rival in this idol of the army (McClellan) and was not particular anxious to help him gather laurels;" who "never sought to square himself with the man" he had wronged; who was himself "responsible for the inaction of the navy." It is very difficult for those who have followed Lincoln through the war to subscribe to Mr. Eisenschiml's conclusions that "Stanton and the Radicals had greater influence over Lincoln than military necessity."

Verdict

With all the new evidence introduced by Mr. Eisenschiml before us, in which he makes martyrs out of prisoners and creates designing hypocrites out of many who have been looked upon as honorable citizens, yet it cannot be denied that John Wilkes Booth, with his own hand, committed the most diabolical deed which has ever been recorded in the annals of American public life. Lincoln is still The Martyr, and arguments which have a tendency to center public interest on the criminals rather than on the great sacrifice made by the nation in the loss of its beloved leader, are but of secondary importance. Regardless of who first made the statement, Abraham Lincoln is still, "The Man for The Ages."