

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN VISITING THE WOUNDED

Memorial Day recalls the deep sympathy which Abraham Lincoln often expressed for those who were enduring physical suffering, and even death, for the cause they believed to be just. In the series of informal portraits which the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company is now having made to help visualize the outstanding characteristics of Lincoln, the study "Lincoln Visiting the Wounded" by Pruett Carter is one of the most impressive.

During the war the nation's capitol was literally a city of hospitals. There were twenty-one buildings in use at one time, caring for more than fourteen thousand patients. Aside from these structures made available for the exclusive task of caring for the wounded, public buildings, halls, schools, churches, private dwellings, etc. were used to provide for those who were less seriously impaired.

At Alexandria, there was a huge convalescent camp where at one time 10,000 patients were gathered. If one can conceive of Abraham Lincoln living in the very midst of this hospital city, it will not be difficult to associate the accompanying picture with the usual routine of the President as he went from one hospital to another with his words of encouragement, sympathy, and even benedictions.

Lincoln appointed Dr. Bliss to organize the hospital units in Washington and the building of Armory Square Hospital resulted from his recommendations. During its construction he met Dr. Bliss twice each week to consult with him about helpful appliances for the comfort of the injured. The cost of many of these improvements he paid for out of his own pocket. Among the many incidents remembered at Armory Square during the President's visits there was Lincoln's question to a Pennsylvania soldier who exceeded him in height: "Hello, comrade, do you know when your feet get cold?"

Possibly the most familiar story associating Abraham Lincoln with one of his many visits to the hospital is told by Mrs. Andrews in her book "The Perfect Tribute."

The traditional scene presents Mr. Lincoln at the bedside of a dying confederate officer. The President has been brought there by the soldier's brother whom he met by accident and who was in search for a lawyer to draw up a will. The identity of the President was unknown to both of the brothers. The invalid's sister had brought in a newspaper containing a copy of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address which had been admired and which was read by the dying soldier to his unknown friend, the author.

Mrs. Pomeroy, an acquaintance of Mr. Lincoln's and a nurse at Columbia College Hospital, gives this reminiscence of a visit of the President:

"I was in my room at the time, and the surgeon in charge came and told me that the President would like to see me. Then the Surgeon-General invited me to do escort duty to the President, by going all through the hospital, which I did, and then went out into the tents and performed the duty there. The soldiers were called out by the officers, arranged in a straight line, and Mr. Lincoln, in his unpretentious way, with his hat off, shook hands with each one, asking his name and the name of his regiment and company. Such a scene will never be

effaced from the memory of the soldiers as the lame, halt and withered came straggling into line at the unexpected beat of the drum.

"Their enthusiasm was unbounded, and they expressed their minds after the interview by saying, 'We'll vote him in next election.'

"One poor fellow for days afterwards refused to wash the hand that had grasped the President's."

The reminiscences of Dr. Jerome Walker gives a good picture of Lincoln in the hospitals. The incident occurred at City Point, just one week before his assassination. "As we went from tent to tent I could not but note his gentleness, his friendly greetings to the sick and wounded, his quiet humor as he drew comparisons between himself and the very tall and very short men with

whom he came in contact, and his genuine interest in the welfare of the soldiers.

"Finally, after visiting the wards occupied by our invalid and convalescing soldiers, we came to three wards occupied by sick and wounded Southern prisoners. With a feeling of patriotic duty, I said, 'Mr. President, you won't want to go in there; they are only rebels.' I will never forget how he stopped and gently laid his large hand upon my shoulder and quietly answered, 'You mean Confederates.' And I have meant Confederates ever since.

"There was nothing left for me to do after the President's remark but to go with him through these three wards; and I could not see but that he was just as kind, his handshakings just as hearty, his interest just as real for the welfare of the men, as when he was among our own soldiers.

"As we returned to headquarters, the President urged upon me the importance of caring for them as faithfully as I should for our own sick and wounded."



LINCOLN VISITING THE WOUNDED—By Pruett Carter