

# 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 453

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

December 13, 1937

## THE LINCOLN FAMILY AT HOME

The Christmas season with its religious and social atmosphere is an important factor in cultivating the finer attributes of the American home. It is to be regretted that Abraham Lincoln, who best personifies our national idealism, has seldom been presented as a home-loving man. Although there were four boys in the home, three of them living through the years of early childhood, few glimpses of Lincoln with his wife and children have been preserved.

William Herndon, Lincoln's last law partner, who was mainly responsible for first putting in circulation the story of the traditional Abraham Lincoln-Ann Rutledge romance, wrote a letter of inquiry on December 20, 1866, to Rev. James Smith, spiritual adviser of the Lincoln family in Springfield, from 1849 to 1856. Herndon asked the clergyman: "Was Abraham Lincoln an Honest man?" This brought from the minister a letter dated January 26, 1867, from which the reply to this question is herewith excerpted.

Sir: Your letter of the 20th of December was duly received. In it you ask of me to answer several questions in relation to the late illustrious President, Abraham Lincoln . . . .

Early in December last an article went the rounds of the papers in this country, purporting to be a part of a lecture delivered by you on Mr. Lincoln's life and past history, which I read with mingled feelings of indignation and sorrow, because, coming as it did from his intimate friend and law partner, it was calculated to do the character of that great and good man an incalculable injury, deeply to wound the feelings of his heart-broken widow and her orphan boys, and to place that whole family, both the living and the dead, in a most unenviable light before the public. In the article referred to, speaking of the death and grave of Miss Ann Rutledge, you represent Mr. Lincoln as having said: "That his heart, sad and broken, was buried there." You give it as your opinion "that he never addressed another woman as 'Yours affectionately,'" that "he generally and characteristically abstained from the use of the word 'love,' that he never ended his letters 'yours affectionately,' but always signed them 'Your friend, Abraham Lincoln.'" . . . .

Now, sir, I maintain that every reflecting person who believes your statements to be true is bound to reply to your third question, Abraham Lincoln was not an honest man, for he assiduously and perseveringly sued for the hand, the heart, the love, and devotion for the life of a young lady, who was much admired for her intelligence, her fine conversational powers, and capability of making herself very agreeable in any circle, and who could, if so disposed, have wedded with the first of the land. This he did, when according to you, all he had to give in return was a dead heart, buried in the grave of another woman, and he was in such a mental condition that he had to abstain from the use of the word love. Therefore, when that young lady accepted his suit, and promised to become his wife, he could not go even so far as to say "I am yours affectionately." Nay, more; when Abraham Lincoln led his bride to the hymeneal altar, immediately before that bond was tied which death alone can dissolve, he most solemnly promised before God and man to be to her a faithful, loving, and affectionate husband until parted by death, when, according to you, he had neither love nor affection to bestow. Therefore, your statement being true, Abraham Lincoln was worse than a dishonest man.

He was often absent from his family and no doubt wrote his wife many letters. According to you he never ended any of these letters "yours affectionately," but always "your friend, Abraham Lincoln," an insult which

every lady of feeling and spirit would resent, and I must say, your statements being true, to me it is strange—nay, passing strange—that the lady to whom these letters were addressed, who, you know as well as I do, possesses exquisite sensibility, spirit, and high sense of honor, not only did not resent the first insult of that sort, but patiently and silently submitted to the repetition of it from month to month and from year to year. And what a cold-hearted man he must have been who for many years thus treated the wife of his bosom, whom he had solemnly promised to love and cherish. Your statements also contain a most cruel and I fear malignant attack upon his heart-broken widow, as one for whom the husband entertained no love, no affection. Sir, was it not enough that she should be overwhelmed and stricken to the earth by the dreadful blow which had fallen upon her in the cruel death of her husband, but you must come on the scene and mingle your poison chalice into that cup of woe which she must drink even to the dregs?

This is not all; but the necessary tendency of your statements is to put a public brand upon the boys of that great and good man, to whom you are under so many and great obligations, as the sons of a man who never loved their mother. Such is the character of the martyred President which must necessarily be drawn from the statements made concerning him, and given to the public by his intimate friend and law partner for twenty years.

A law office is by no means the best field for judging the characters of each other by those who are brought in contact there. No, sir, it is in the family circle the man exhibits himself as he really is, his bearing toward his wife, his treatment of his children, and dependents, his free and easy conversation with those who are admitted into that circle. There are to be found the tests by which a man's character and feelings are to be determined, and no one enjoys better opportunities to be enabled to put a proper estimate upon the members of it, than the pastor who is respected and esteemed by them; who has buried their dead and baptized their living; who in seasons of sorrow has administered to them those consolations which the Gospel of the Son of God can alone communicate. . . . Such was the position occupied by your humble servant in the family of Abraham Lincoln, to say nothing of his calls upon myself, and our pleasant conversations in drives across the prairies.

During seven years, when he and myself were at home, scarcely two weeks ever passed during which I did not spend a pleasant evening in the midst of that family circle, and my intercourse with himself there convinced me that Abraham Lincoln was not only an honest man, but pre-eminently an upright man, ever ready, so far as in his power, to render unto all men their just dues, and that he was utterly incapable of withholding from the bride he led to the altar what was her due, by giving her a heart which was dead and buried in the grave of another, but that in the deep and honest sincerity of his soul, he gave her a heart overflowing with love and affection; and my intercourse with him and his family left the abiding impression upon my mind, by his demeanor toward her, that he was to the wife of his bosom, a most loving and affectionate husband; who would, on no occasion, have insulted her by sending her a letter closing with, "your friend, Abraham Lincoln." I do most solemnly testify that during my repeated visits I never saw a frown upon his brow, or heard him utter a harsh or unkind word to his lady or any of his children, but seemed overflowing with geniality, good humor and kindness—clear proof of his love and affection. . . .

James Smith.