

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 471

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

April 18, 1938

LINCOLN REMEMBERS THE PATRIOTS

Comparatively few persons residing outside of the New England states are informed that April 19 is a legal holiday in Massachusetts. While students of history may associate the date with the Revolutionary War, the importance and significance of the battle of Concord and Lexington which occurred at that time has largely faded out of the consciousness of the American people.

This early skirmish with the British, however, was deeply impressed upon the mind of Abraham Lincoln as were the other dramatic incidents in the struggle for national independence. On his way to Washington for the inauguration in 1861, the President-Elect stopped at Trenton, New Jersey, and in an address to the Senate, then in session, mentioned the fact that when he was a small boy and first began to read he acquired a biography of George Washington by Weems.

Lincoln told the legislators that this book deeply moved him and that he remembered "all the accounts there given of the battle-fields and the struggles for the liberties of the country," and he further remarked, "you all know, for you have been boys, how these early impressions last longer than any others." He concluded his reference to these events by the statement, "I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that these men struggled for."

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Weems' "Washington" in impressing upon the mind of Lincoln and other American youth, the great price paid for our liberties. Weems has been severely and often unjustly criticised for his highly emotional presentation of the events in which Washington was one of the moving figures. But few, if any, modern historians have been able to inspire the young readers with such a dynamic passion of patriotism as resulted from reading these inspirational stories of Revolutionary episodes.

The following account by Weems, of the battle of Concord and Lexington, must have been Abraham Lincoln's introduction to the heroic sacrifices of the defenders of our liberties.

"The tremendous cloud of civil war was now ready to burst: and April the 19th, 1775, was the fatal day marked out by mysterious heaven, for tearing away the stout infant colonies from the long loved paps of the old mother country. Early that morning, general Gage, whose force in Boston was augmented to 10,000 men, sent a detachment of 1,000 to destroy some military stores which the Americans had collected in the town of Concord, near Lexington. On coming to the place, they found the town militia assembled on the green near the road. 'Throw down your arms, and disperse, you rebels,' was the cry of Pitcairn the British officer; which was immediately followed by a general discharge of the soldiers; whereby eight of the Americans were killed and several wounded. The provincials retired. But finding

that the British still continued their fire, they returned it with good interest; and soon strewed the green with the dead and wounded. Such fierce discharges of musquetry produced the effect that might have been expected in a land of freemen, who saw their gallant brothers suddenly engaged in the strife of death.

"Never before had the bosoms of the swains experienced such a tumult of heroic passions. Then throwing aside the implements of husbandry, and leaving their teams in the half-finished furrows, they flew to their houses; snatched up their arms; and bursting from their wild shrieking wives and children, hasted to the glorious field where LIBERTY, heaven-born goddess, was to be bought for blood. Pouring in now from every quarter, were seen crowds of sturdy peasants, with flushed cheeks and flaming eyes, eager for battle! Even age itself forgot its wonted infirmities: and hands, long palsied with years, threw aside the cushioned crutch, and grasped the deadly firelock. Fast as they came up, their ready muskets began to pour the long red streams of fiery vengeance. The enemy fell back, appalled! The shouting farmers, swift closing on their rear, followed their steps with death, while the British, as fast as they could load, wheeling on their pursuers, returned the deadly platoons. Like some tremendous whirlwind, whose roaring sweep all at once darkens the day, riding the air in tempests; so, sudden and terrible, amidst clouds of dust, and smoke, and flame, the flight of Britain's warriors thundered along the road. But their flight was not in safety. Every step of their retreat was stained with the trickling crimson. Every hedge or fence by which they passed, took large toll of hostile carcasses. They would, in all probability, have been cut off to a man, had not general Gage, luckily recollected, that, born of Britons, these Yankees might possess some of the family valour; and therefore sent 1,000 men to support the detachment. This reinforcement met the poor fellows, faint with fear and fatigue, and brought them safely off to Boston.

"In this their first field, the American farmers gleaned of the British about sixty-three, in slain, and two hundred and eighty wounded and prisoners. The fire of civil discord now broke out a roaring flame: and, with equal ardour, both parties hastened to clap on the 'kettle of war.'"

The day following Abraham Lincoln's remarks to the legislature of New Jersey at Trenton he spoke in Independence Hall at Philadelphia. Here again he had an opportunity to refer to the struggles of the Revolutionary fathers.

"It was not the mere matter of separation of the colonies from the motherland, but that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence which gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence."