

# 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 512

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

January 30, 1939

## SCOTT'S LESSONS IN ELOCUTION

Among the many schoolbooks made available to Abraham Lincoln during his Indiana years, Scott's *Lessons in Elocution* seems to have been given little attention. There is a probability that the book may have been brought to Indiana by Sarah Bush Lincoln, as there was a copy of Scott's in the Bush family in Kentucky.

A few days after Isaac Bush, brother of Sarah, came back from New Orleans with the President's father, Thomas Lincoln, in May 1806, Isaac bought some items, which may have been presents for his sisters, from Bleakley and Montgomery's store in Elizabethtown. This possibility is seen in the fact that he had charged to his account "Sundries for Mrs. Radley" and "Sundries for Mrs. Johnston". Three other purchases made at the same time are itemized as "1 Dictionary, 1 Scott's Lessons, 1 Introduction". It would be interesting indeed to know whether or not his copy of Scott's *Lessons* was the copy which thirteen years later came into the hands of Abraham Lincoln. Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln had three children by Daniel Johnston, the oldest one being thirteen years of age when Sarah married Mr. Lincoln and moved to Indiana, so it is likely there would be some schoolbooks in her family.

One of the testimonies which has come down from Abraham Lincoln's stepmother with reference to the boy's early habits is of interest. She says he attempted to excel in everything he undertook. On page ninety-five of Scott's book under the chapter entitled "Proper Employment of Time" appears this admonition, "Whatever you pursue, be emulous to excel". This might well be called the inspirational motto of Lincoln's life, and he started out to excel in the field of elocution or oratory. The Gettysburg Address, called the outstanding oration in the Anglo-Saxon tongue, reveals how he succeeded in public speaking.

Scott's *Lessons in Elocution* contains over four hundred pages of print in small type with ten words to the line and forty lines to the page. It is a much more exhaustive compilation of prose and poetry than Murray's *English Reader*. Aside from the selections from the world's best literature which comprise the larger part of the volume, there are fifty-six pages preliminary to the exercises which are called "The Elements of Gesture" and "Rules Respecting Elocution".

"The principal object of the publication", according to the author, "is to encourage a general style of action when speaking which shall always keep the body in a graceful position, and shall so vary its motions at proper intervals as to see the subject operating on the speaker and not the speaker on the subject." Four figures illustrating proper positions in making gestures are included. Rules for expressing over seventy-five of the principal passions and humors are included in the section on "Elements of Gesture".

Eight rules, extracted from alker's *Speaker*, are laid down by Scott, and Lincoln undoubtedly learned them. Verbatim they are:

1. Let your articulation be distinct and deliberate.
2. Let your pronunciation be bold and forcible.
3. Acquire a compass and variety in the height of your voice.
4. Pronounce your words with propriety and elegance.

5. Pronounce every word consisting of more than one syllable with its proper accent.

6. In every sentence distinguish the more significant words by a natural, forcible and varied emphasis.

7. Acquire a just variety of pause and cadence.

8. Accompany the emotions and passions which your words express by correspondent tone, looks, and gestures.

An interesting selection on "Grace in Writing" from Fitzborne's *Letters* may have influenced Lincoln's style:

"Whatever, therefore, is forced and affected in the sentiments; whatever is pompous or pedantic in the expressions is the very reverse of grace. — Grace, in short, is to good writing, what a proper light is to a fine picture. It not only shows all the figures in their several proportions and relations but shows them in the most advantageous manner. Grace is discovered in the placing even the single word or the turn of a mere expletive".

The compilation of prose and poetry arranged for exercises are equally divided between those chosen for speaking. Numerous readings are reproduced from the "Spectator" and the "Tattler". Several of Dosley's *Fables* and Percival's *Tales* are presented, and a very generous contribution of the most important speeches and soliloquies from Shakespearian works including Lucius' Speech for Peace, Soliloquy of Hamlet's Uncle, Soliloquy of Hamlet, Antony's Oration over Caesar's Body, Brutus and Cassius, and so on.

Supplementing the many Shakespearean writings are famous puns of prose and poetry which we find Lincoln using or referring to in his own writings. Here in Scott's *Lessons* appear Gray's "Elegy" with tolling curfew, lowing herds and finally "the short and simple annals of the poor"; Milton's "L'Allegro" with jest and youthful jollity, quips and cranks, nods and becks and all the rest; Cowper's "John Gilpin" which must have given Lincoln as great pleasure as did the reading of the "Country Schoolteacher" which concluded:

"And still they gazed and still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all he knew."

In Scott's work there was an opportunity for Lincoln to read masterpieces of such authors as Goldsmith, Hume, Pope, Milton, Homer, Cowper, Dryden, Chesterfield, and so on, but most of all he may have profitted from the short pithy paragraphs which appear throughout the book, and the origin of some of Lincoln's own maxims may be traced to this source. Here are a few:

"A man acquainted with history may in some respects be said to have lived from the beginning of the world".—Hume.

"When I compare the speeches of some amongst us with their actions, I am at a loss to reconcile what I see with what I hear".—Demosthenes.

"The man is well enough: says little, thinks less, and does nothing at all".—Boniface.

"Never sport with pain and distress in any of your amusements, nor treat even the meanest insect with wanton cruelty".—Blair.

"Without exemplary diligence you will make but a contemptible proficiency".—Knox.