

LINCOLN LORE

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MOST TIMELY LINCOLN EDITORIAL

For many years the Lincoln National Life Foundation has been gathering outstanding editorial writings on Abraham Lincoln which appear in the press, until now over 1,500 of them have been separately mounted and filed under the name of the newspaper in which they appeared. The date of the paper is also noted so that the entire file is available for reference.

During the accumulation of material for this file it occurred to the compilers that it would be a real service if some well-informed group would select each year what appeared to be the most timely editorial appearing during the week of February 12. Such a committee known as the Lincoln Foundation Advisory Group has submitted recommendations for the most timely editorials for the week of February 12, 1942.

The editorial receiving the largest number of votes this year was written by Thomas Lomax Hunter, who writes the column "As It Appears to The Cavalier," a feature of the Richmond (Virginia) *Times-Dispatch*. The editorial appears in the column for Thursday, February 12, and is printed in full in this issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

As It Appears to the Cavalier

Surely we are far enough from the War Between the States to recognize the greatness of Abraham Lincoln and to look on his birthday as a notable one in American history. Since we settled a constitutional question by fratricidal strife we have fought two foreign wars to victory and are now engaged in a third.

Outside the confines of the United States of America any man asked to name our two greatest men would unhesitatingly say Washington and Lincoln. There is no need to compare the greatness of these two Americans. No man in our history can endure comparison with Washington. He is the one superlative American.

Lincoln is more the typical American. George was once a loyal British officer. He was the father of our independence, but he can hardly be called the father of democracy. He was probably never a democrat in the sense in which that word has come to be understood. He was a country squire and distinctly an aristocrat by nature. The political philosophy of Hamilton was more his than that of Jefferson.

Lincoln expresses in his life the possibilities and opportunities which this land holds out to men of character and genius. From that chill penury which is supposed to suppress the noble rage of genius; from the humblest and meagerest beginnings, he rose to be the recognized great man of his generation. He might be said to be the apotheosis of American democracy.

His letters and speeches are models of lucid and elegant English. He wrote so well that the pedants of some dim tomorrow will deny him the authorship of his letters and speeches as they now attempt to deny Shakespeare the authorship of his plays. Envy, like death, loves a shining mark.

The rugged and homely face of the man has a charm in it that is irresistible. There is humanity's genuine stamp. Though he was successful in politics his character

is free of that smugness which we associate with the typical politician.

If there was about him anything of posing and pretense it has escaped even his bitterest critics. "Vulgar" some say, "crude and full of coarse jests." Those are critical quibbles, complaints that his manners did not have the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. The man did not pretend to be more than what he was, honest, kind, touched to the heart at human sorrow and infinitely gentle.

He was no courtier, if you wish to condemn him for that. He had none of the graces which enable men to *caper nimbly in a lady's chamber to the lascivious pleasings of a lute*. He had goodness rather than the garnishments of goodness. His life had the kind of cleanness which comes from within and not from without. His bitter enemies were never able to point to any ignoble act of his, and were forced to the petty recourse of taunting him with his lack of polish.

He went through the bitterest of wars and did not become bitter. The South would have escaped the persecutions and indignities of the reconstruction period had not Lincoln fallen with his work unfinished. My father and my uncles were soldiers in the army which opposed him, but from them I never heard a word of abuse of Lincoln. I grew up in an atmosphere in which the man who fought on the other side was credited with doing what he thought was right.

I have noticed that it is not the soldier who hates his foes. Generally he has respect for his foes. It is the men who manage to stay out of the fighting forces who do the hating. They fight with words who never bore a gun.

As a child, I adored the Southern heroes, but had a measure of respect for men like Lincoln and Grant. I realize that any sense of conscious righteousness which fortifies our resolution, the same sense of conscious righteousness fortifies the foe.

To hate Mr. Lincoln, is to hate those things most admirable in human character. Greatness and goodness do not always go together. In Lincoln, they so obviously did that they make the man's character invulnerable to spite and detraction. Throw a stone at him and it rebounds into your own face.

We can, with a better countenance, ask credit for the pure and noble men who led our fathers in the great struggle if we are generous enough to recognize greatness and goodness in those who fought against us. To scorn Lincoln is to direct scorn at what is finest and noblest in human character. It is a stultification of the best that is in yourself.

Today we are a united people. The causes of the quarrel that led our fathers to war are dim in the minds of our youth. That war bequeathed to us some shining characters on both sides. Let us honor them all and make exemplars of them all. Let us remember Lincoln today as a great American about whom we may all proudly say: *There was a man!*

THOMAS LOMAX HUNTER.