

LINCOLN LORE

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MOST TIMELY EDITORIAL—FEBRUARY 1943

The Lincoln Foundation Advisory Committee, consisting of nineteen of the nation's outstanding students of Lincoln, select each year what appears to them to be the most timely editorial written during the week of Lincoln's birthday. Last year Thomas Lomax Hunter, of the *Richmond (Virginia) Times Dispatch* was author of the editorial selected. This year Ben Hur Lampman, associate editor of *The Oregonian* is given recognition for his editorial, "Humility of Abraham Lincoln" appearing in *The Oregonian* on February 12, 1943. An editorial entitled, "Lincoln of Tomorrow," by F. Lauriston Bullard, chief editorial writer of *The Boston Herald*, received the second largest number of ballots cast by members of the Advisory Group. Both of these editorials are printed in this issue of the bulletin.

HUMILITY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Once each year, on the anniversary of his birth, we come to the shrine of Abraham Lincoln to renew our faith and our fidelity. This is the great and unfailling wellspring of our Americanism, and from it we draw also of confidence and courage. The spiritual essence of the emancipator—his commonness, the simplicity of his patriotism, his valiant modesty—satisfies a deep spiritual need in the nature of Americans. So it is that when we remember Lincoln, on the day set apart for his memory, our reverence for him comes near to religion. And well it might, for goodness so characterized him, far beyond the merit of others, as to cause it to seem that deity was his guide. John Bigelow, in an appraisal of Lincoln, once wrote:

"He was so modest by nature that he was perfectly content to walk behind any man who wished to walk before him."

Our modern examples of leadership, the world over, were not cast in this mold of humility, and this is said without disparagement of any that fight the good fight. Yet they stand at the feet of the emancipator, to look far up at that seamed and homely countenance, sad with understanding and trial, but touched with humor, too, and filled with sympathy. Of all the merging qualities that made him great, that lifted him to place at his nation's need, as though the man himself were an answer to devout prayer, not least was that of a sincere humility. There comes to mind, and one regrets an inability to trace the quotation, something else that has been said of Lincoln. Something which takes us back to his times, yet affords us the finding of history. It is this, as we remember it:

"Tender as a woman, manliness and meekness

In him so allied,

That they who judged him by his strength or weakness,

Saw but the single side."

But now we see, and clearly, that in meekness and humility were resident his strength and his devotion. How then should Lincoln lead our people if he were here today? Not less resolutely, one may well imagine, but with the compassion and insight that attended all his service to his country. And men might now misjudge him, as they did in the times of the civil war—some with honesty and some from pettiness of motive—while he moved lonely in his destiny. It would be afterward, the true appraisal and

agreement. And the repentance. One would not wish, who has been taught to love him, that he might pass this way again. But, for that matter, is not Lincoln with us still?

Ben Hur Lampman

LINCOLN OF TOMORROW

Abraham Lincoln is one of those gigantic men who defy analysis. We have scores of interpretations of his character and career, each differing from the others.

But not all the evidence is in. Many problems remain unsolved. New letters and documents are discovered every year. We may expect a large addition to the huge mass of published Lincolniana when the time limit established by the late Robert T. Lincoln expires and the manuscripts now sequestered in the Library of Congress are made available for public inspection. There is reason to assume that nothing to the discredit of Lincoln will be found. Most of the material is understood to consist of the writings of other public men.

To reach the real Lincoln, we must divest him of the legends that cluster about him, and answers must be found for numerous questions that have baffled investigators. A work is about to appear which explodes the yarn that he had no money sense and was so thrifless as to be compelled to borrow to meet the expenses of his inaugural journey to Washington. Qualities and incidents now rated as of minor significance must be given their correct weight in the final evaluation.

He was one of those rare men whose historical importance belongs to a few years in late middle life, long after he began to describe himself as an "old man." The older Charles Francis Adams was shocked by his curious interview with the President in 1861. The younger Adams watched his development during the war with wondering admiration and declared him to have become by 1865 an utterly different being. But that development began about 1854 with the vision of "the house divided," which did not find utterance until 1858.

The Lincoln of tomorrow will be greater and truer than the Lincoln of today. He will be the same, yet not the same. It has been said that the Union could not have been saved without his faith in the providence of God. One wonders if he could have saved the Union without his divine sense of humor. In the future, we shall think more of the granite stratum in his character. No weak man would have dreamed of choosing such a Cabinet as his with four of his rivals for the Presidency among its seven members, and three of whom considered themselves his superiors. He defeated compromise in 1860, governed without Congress for three months after Sumpter fell, defied the radicals by his pocket veto in 1864, and went steadily forward with his plans for a peace without penalty.

The story teller, the man who could not condemn a soldier "whose legs ran away with him from the battle front," the sad Lincoln who chanted the verses about the folly of human pride, will stay with us. With the rectification of errors and the fuller appreciation of his statecraft and political management, a better and bigger Lincoln will emerge sometime.

F. Lauriston Bullard