

LINCOLN LORE

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WAR WORRIES OF THE LINCOLNS

The world conflict in which we are now engaged can hardly bring to us here in America the manifold worries which overwhelmed our grandparents during the Civil War.

Most important of all the considerations is the fact that the conflict was a fratricidal war, not Englishmen against Italians, Russians against Germans, and Americans against Japanese, but brother against brother. It would take an unusual amount of preliminary propaganda to bring one to the conclusion that for any cause whatsoever, he should take his brother's life.

While Abraham Lincoln had no close relatives in the Southern lines, his wife had four brothers and three brothers-in-law in the Confederate service. The Todd family, like so many Kentucky groups, especially, was divided in their loyalties to the Union and Confederacy, respectively.

George Rogers Clark Todd, an own brother of Mary Todd, became a famous surgeon in the Confederate Army and was the only one of the four brothers to survive the hostilities.

In the Todd family burial lot at Lexington, Kentucky, there is a memorial marker erected to the memory of Elizabeth L. Todd, who died on February 16, 1874. She was the second wife of Robert S. Todd and stepmother of Mary Lincoln. On the same stone that bears her obituary lines, is this inscription, "In memory of my boys, Samuel B. Todd, David H. Todd, Alexander H. Todd, all Confederate soldiers." Two of these boys died in battle and the third from injuries. Elizabeth Todd had but three sons.

The Boston Transcript for August 11, 1862, carried this news item under the title, "Mrs. Lincoln's Brother Killed. New York, August 20. Among the rebels killed at Baton Rouge was Capt. Alexander H. Todd, the brother of Mrs. Lincoln."

Such stories as the following report, which appeared in the Boston Transcript, for October 2, 1861, would have a tendency to make people suspicious of Mrs. Lincoln. "An arrival from Richmond states that the rebel treatment of the prisoners is very bad, especially since the late escapes. The most brutal of the officers was Captain Todd, Mrs. Lincoln's brother, who would kick the dead bodies of our men calling them d—d abolitionists."

Undoubtedly it was the knowledge that the President's wife had brothers in the Confederate Army that led to the accusation that she was disloyal to the Union, and it is doubtful if, before or since, there has been a like incident of a charge of treason brought to the very doors of the White House.

In 1916, Gilbert A. Tracy secured a permission from E. J. Edwards to reprint an essay published many years before in a Washington newspaper. Only thirty copies of the pamphlet were printed for private distribution. The most interesting statement in the twenty-one page publication, entitled *The Solitude of Lincoln*, is the reminiscences of a Congressman, who was on the Senate committee for the conduct of the war. Mr. Edwards records the statement as told to General Thomas L. James, in these words.

"One morning our committee purposed taking up the reports that imputed disloyalty to Mrs. Lincoln. The sessions of the committee were necessarily secret. We had just been called to order by the chairman, when the officer stationed at the committee room door opened it and came in with a half-frightened, half-embarrassed expression on his face. Before he had opportunity to make explanation, we understood the reason for his excitement, and were ourselves almost overwhelmed by astonishment. For at the foot of the table, standing solitary, his hat in his

hand, his tall form towering above the committee members, Abraham Lincoln stood. Had he come by some incantation, thus appearing of a sudden before us unannounced, we could not have been more astounded.

"The pathos that was written upon Lincoln's face, the almost unhuman sadness that was in his eyes as he looked upon us, and above all an indescribable sense of his complete isolation—the sad solitude which is inherent in all true grandeur of character and intellect—all this revealed Lincoln to me, and I think to every member of the committee, in the finer, subtler light whose illumination faintly set forth the fundamental nature of this man. No one spoke, for none knew what to say. The President had not been asked to come before the committee, nor was it suspected that he had information that we were to investigate the reports, which, if true, fastened treason upon his family in the White House.

"At last Lincoln spoke, slowly, with infinite sorrow in his tone, and he said:

"I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, appear of my own volition before this committee of the Senate to say that I, of my own knowledge, know that it is untrue that any of my family hold treasonable communication with the enemy."

"Having said that, Lincoln went away, as silently and solitary as he came. We sat for some moments speechless. Then by tacit agreement, no word being spoken, the committee dropped all consideration of the rumors that the wife of the President was betraying the Union. We had seen Abraham Lincoln in the solemn and isolated majesty of his real nature. We were so greatly affected that the committee adjourned for the day."

There was one other war worry, however, which was before Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln constantly, and that was the public opinion about their son Robert's attitude toward the war. Robert, himself, was very anxious to enter the service when the war broke.

The Lincoln National Life Foundation has come into possession of a much worn book which bears out Robert's interest in the army. Benson J. Lossing prepared a descriptive sketch for a publication entitled, *Cadet Life at West Point*, by an officer of the United States Army. The book was published by T.O.H.P. Burnham, of Boston, in 1862, and on the flyleaf of the book, there is the autographed inscription, "R. T. Lincoln, Harvard College, March, 1862."

While the President was anxious to have Robert follow his own pleasure in the matter of enlistment, Mrs. Lincoln was quite outspoken about Robert continuing his university education. To Senator Harris, who complained about Robert's failure to enter the army, Mrs. Lincoln expressed herself in these words: "Senator Harris, he is not a shirker as you seem to imply for he has been anxious to go for a long time. If fault there be, it is mine, I have insisted that he should stay in college a little longer as I think an educated man can serve his country with more intelligent purpose than an ignoramus."

While this attitude would be understood now, and would be encouraged by the Government, it brought much grief to the Lincoln family in 1863. Robert did enter the service after his graduation from the university, but there has always been a feeling among unadvised people that Captain Robert Lincoln was a slacker or sheltered for purely personal reasons by his distinguished parents. It might be of interest to note that Robert eventually became Secretary of War in the cabinet of two Presidents, Garfield and Arthur.