

LINCOLN LORE

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THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS

The year that Lincoln died, there came from the press a book entitled, *The President's Words*, by Rev. Edward Everett Hale, of Boston. It was one of the first attempts to compile "A Selection of Passages from the Speeches, Addresses and Letters of Abraham Lincoln."

The little book, whose title is similar to the caption of this issue of *Lincoln Lore* has been a source of great inspiration to many of the earlier students of Abraham Lincoln. Daniel Fish, compiler of the bibliography which bears his name, stated that this was the first Lincoln book that came into his hands. That same copy which Daniel Fish acquired just after he was discharged from duty in the Civil War is before the editor of *Lincoln Lore* as he writes this monograph.

In the introduction of Dr. Hale's book is found a quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson which was then but a prediction, but now a prophecy fulfilled: "He (Lincoln) is the author of a multitude of good sayings, so disguised as pleasantries that it is certain they had no reputation at first but as jests; and only later, by the very acceptance and adoption they find in the mouths of millions, turn out to be the wisdom of the hour. I am sure, if this man had ruled in a period of less facility of printing, he would have become mythological in a very few years, like Aesop of Pilpay, or one of the Seven Wise Masters, by his fables and proverbs.

"But the weight and penetration of many passages in his letters, messages, and speeches, hidden now by the very closeness of their application to the moment, are destined hereafter to a wide fame. What pregnant definitions! what unerring common sense! what foresight! and, on great occasions, what lofty, and, more than national, what humane tone! His brief speech at Gettysburg will not easily be surpassed by words on any recorded occasion."

Fifty years ago Osborn H. Oldroyd published a book which he called, *Words of Lincoln*. Nicolay and Hay, about the same time, brought out their monumental volumes which have become known as the *Complete Works of Lincoln*, yet how incomplete they were, as witnessed by Tracy's *Uncollected Letters of Abraham Lincoln*, Angle's *New Letters and Papers of Abraham Lincoln*, Hertz's *Letters and Documents, Lincoln Letters at Brown*, and enough copies of unpublished works of Lincoln in the Lincoln National Life Foundation Archives to make still another volume.

There is no source material available to the student of Lincolniana so valuable as the President's own words,

and one is at a loss to understand how early biographers, with no considerable number of these writings available, were able to contribute very much to our understanding of Lincoln. Although a vast amount of authentic Lincoln data has now been assembled, it is largely inaccessible to the average student, because it is extremely difficult to systematically catalogue the information. An attempt to organize the works of Lincoln would call for a division of the words he wrote from the words he spoke. Although there may be some overlapping, this seems to be the most logical arrangement.

WRITTEN WORDS

The written words of Lincoln should include all those writings in his own hand, and correspondence which he is known to have dictated, or which was copied from his notes by his secretaries. The most important words he wrote were those which came from his pen as President, and they are designated as State Papers.

State Papers

The two inaugural addresses, from the viewpoint of national interest, might be given the preference among the State Papers, although some of his annual and special messages were of far reaching importance. In this group, also, should be included his various proclamations, with the Emancipation and First Annual Thanksgiving writings of outstanding significance. There then follow a great many military papers such as executive orders, calls for troops, appointments, pardons, discharges, and a vast number of endorsements which appear on all kinds of government writings which called for his comment.

Correspondence

Lincoln's correspondence was voluminous for that day and time when men were not given much to letter writing. During the Illinois years the subject matter of his letters were of three types—political, professional and personal—with the former class finding their climax in the campaign of 1860. As Chief Executive, it is necessary to include telegrams among his correspondence and here again cabinet members, military officers, party leaders and personal friends received the bulk of his letters.

Manuscripts

Included in this division of his writings one would find the written addresses of his Illinois days which dealt with various subjects and came to a climax at Cooper Institute. It is here also we would tabulate his few poetic expressions, memoranda for his ad-

resses, and those interesting notes which he often scribbled on small pieces of paper. A eulogy, an acceptance speech, autobiographical sketches, etc., we would expect to find in this division.

Documents

The great mass of legal documents which he wrote including petitions, promissory notes, deeds, wills, receipts and other business writings would be grouped here. His earlier papers such as surveys, election reports, resolutions, muster rolls, etc., would fall within this classification.

SPOKEN WORDS

There is not an established line of demarcation which would guide us in selecting the words Lincoln spoke, from the great mass of traditional data. The words he wrote can usually be identified without much confusion but much uncertainty surrounds many alleged quotations. The reputed anecdotes of Abraham Lincoln which grow in number, year by year, is but an illustration of the spurious matter which clutters up any list of Lincoln's sayings. There is, furthermore, much confusion about stories he told and the reciting of anecdotes for which he was famous.

Conversation

The reminiscences of his friends who wrote down, at the time, parts of the conversation in which they engaged. Some secondary testimonies and a few extracts of reported conversations in contemporary papers can be relied upon.

Public Speeches

Many of the speeches Lincoln made in his early days were not written out before their delivery. Many were made from fragmentary notes. We are safe in including here speeches which were recorded stenographically, such as the Lincoln debates with Douglas, reporters' notes, and a few reconstructed speeches which seem to have the imprint of authenticity.

Personal Reminiscence

This is the division which is most difficult to establish as there seems to be an habitual practice on the part of Lincoln biographers to confuse anecdotes Lincoln told with personal reminiscence. Of course, there were a few anecdotes that were of biographical content but strictly speaking, the rehearsing of some episodes in his own experience should be catalogued under personal reminiscences.

Anecdotes

Possibly the field where Lincoln seems to excel in conversation was the relating of anecdotes. Here is a great mass of material which must undergo a rigid examination before allowing it to bear the label of Lincoln.