

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 762

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

November 15, 1943

APPLAUSE AT GETTYSBURG

The Gettysburg Address has been given a new emphasis in view of the war effort. Its timely phrases spoken on a famous battlefield find a sympathetic response during a contest where liberty again seems to be a motivating factor. Many of the minor incidents associated with its composition, delivery, and acceptance have been subjects of much controversy.

Usually there would be no question as to whether or not certain remarks brought forth applause, however, there is a wide divergence of opinion among those who attended the Gettysburg ceremonies, with respect to how the address of the President was received. Some of those present were very sure the applause was generous while others attending the exercises were equally sure that the address was received in silence.

In weighing the evidence of the witnesses who have expressed such contradictory conclusions about applause, certain observations about their qualifications to speak with authority might be noted. Of course, there is always much emphasis placed upon the testimonies of eyewitnesses as it would appear as if what they had to say about an incident would be the best possible source of information.

Of least importance among the testimonies of eyewitnesses are the large number of interviews which have been recorded by interviewers, after having talked with some of those who heard the famous speech. Not only are the reminiscences apt to be colored, but the manner in which leading questions may have been put to the witnesses have had much to do in drawing out a desired reaction.

Eyewitnesses, who personally wrote down what they observed, should also have their testimonies come under the close scrutiny of the searchers for facts. The time element is possibly the most important factor to take in account when tabulating the value of such testimony. We may always expect to find the widest divergence of opinion between those observations written down at the time an incident happened, and written accounts penned many years after the events occurred. Not only is this true with respect to the testimony of different individuals, but it is also evident in the reminiscences of the same person who at different times, widely separated, has left written records of the same incident. Fading memories have greatly distorted the accuracy of historical records.

If twenty-five or fifty years have elapsed since an event took place and the affiant during this long interval has read many accounts by others of the proceedings, his own reminiscences will likely be greatly influenced by the printed stories of what occurred. This is one of the most injurious influences which work on reminiscences and contribute tremendously to their unreliability. An eyewitness may be greatly influenced in his repetition of a story by the written statements of one who had no first-hand information on which to draw.

The most dependable evidence about the Gettysburg Address should come from those who wrote down what occurred at the time the event took place, but even here, we must proceed with caution, as possibly there were those who may not have paid strict attention to all the sound incidents connected with the celebration. A least one episode apparently detracted from the attention of those close to the speakers' stand. A photographer was attempting to set up his equipment, which activity for some reason is always a human interest attraction. The fact that the photographer was moving the camera about through the entire time the speech was being delivered, and never did succeed in taking the picture might have diverted the attention of those who otherwise would have noted applause, if there were any. The absence of any mention of applause in a reminiscence should not be a positive proof that there was none.

An ideal witness would be one, who as a matter of business, was ordered to go to Gettysburg on November 19, 1863, take down in shorthand the proceedings of the day, transcribe his notes immediately and prepare them for printing. It would seem that what he reported would be of inestimable value, and free from just as much of the personal equation as possible. In fact, such a person would be serving in a capacity not unlike that of a court stenographer. The amazing fact is that there is available the testimony of just such a witness and the printed report of his transcribed notes include a verbatim copy of the Gettysburg Address. He was the representative of the Associated Press.

Charles Hale, who was the secretary of the commission sent to Gettysburg by Governor Andrew, of Boston, also took down the address in shorthand, and it is almost word for word the same as the Associated Press copy. The Hale transcript, although making no citation within the text where the applause is said to have occurred, does divide the address into several paragraphs. The general paragraph arrangement apparently follows the same division with one or two exceptions, as the applause citations in the Associated Press report. Mr. Hale also stated in his notes that the address was delivered "with great deliberation," which method itself would open opportunity for applause.

Without hardly an exception those holding that there was no applause at Gettysburg made their observations many years after the event took place. This viewpoint has contributed greatly to the supposition that the address of Lincoln was not well received and that the people present failed to be impressed with the beauty of its diction. Another school of thought, which also has no place for applause in the address, bases its supposition on the solemnity of the occasion and argues that applause at Gettysburg would have been like blasphemy.

The copy of the address, which the representative of the Associated Press sent out from Gettysburg on the very day the address was delivered contains in brackets the word "applause" at five different places in the address, and at the end of the address, the citation, "long continued applause." The fact that the Associated Press report is accepted generally as the most accurate copy of what was said should also give weight to the correctness of the interpretations with respect to applause. A verbatim copy follows:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. [Applause]. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war; we are met to dedicate a portion of it as the final resting place of those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or to detract. [Applause]. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. [Applause]. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work that they have thus far so nobly carried on. [Applause]. It is rather for us here to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, [Applause] that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people and for the people, shall not perish from the earth. [Long continued applause.]