

# 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 813

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

November 6, 1944

## LINCOLN COMMENTS ON HIS RE-ELECTION

For some time previous to his election for a second term Lincoln had thought it rather doubtful that he would be continued in office, and the little memorandum he wrote with respect to the probable outcome is well-known to Lincoln students. Some important statements he made immediately after his election may not be so familiar to the casual reader.

An observation made by one of his secretaries about his reaction to his re-election might present a preliminary view of his attitude. Nicolay or Hay in writing about the election day, stated:

"To Mr. Lincoln this was one of the most solemn days of his life. Assured of his personal success, and devoutly confident that the day of peace and the re-establishment of the Union were not far off, he felt no elation and no sense of triumph over his opponents. His mind seemed filled with mingled feelings of deep and humble gratitude to the vast majority of his fellow-citizens who were this day testifying to him their heartfelt confidence and affection, and of a keen and somewhat surprised regret that he should be an object in so many quarters of so bitter and vindictive an opposition. He said to one of his secretaries: 'It is singular that I, who am not a vindictive man, should always, except once, have been before the people for election in canvasses marked for their bitterness. When I came to Congress it was a quiet time; but always, except that, the contests in which I have been prominent have been marked with great rancor.'"

The observation of his secretary is borne out in a brief speech which he made to a group of serenaders at the door of the War Department at 2 a.m. the morning after the election, in which he is reported to have said:

"He did not pretend that those who had thought the best interests of the nation were to be subserved by the support of the present Administration embraced all the patriotism and loyalty of the country." He continued:

"I do believe, and I trust without personal interest, that the welfare of the country does require that such support and indorsement be given.

"I earnestly believe that the consequence of this day's work (if it be as you assume, and as now seems probable) will be to the lasting advantage, if not, to the very salvation of the country. I can not at this hour say what has been the result of the election. But, whatever it may be, I have no desire to modify this opinion, that all who have labored to day in behalf of the Union organization have wrought for the best interest of their country and the world, not only for the present but for all future ages.

"I am thankful to God for this approval of the people, but, while deeply grateful for this mark of confidence in me, if I know my heart, my gratitude is free from any taint of personal triumph. I do not impugn the motives of any one opposed to me. It is no pleasure to me to triumph over any one; but I give thanks to the Almighty for this evidence of the people's resolution to stand by free government and the rights of humanity."

The communication which Lincoln prepared for Congress following his election is brief, indeed, but significant:

"Having served four years in the depths of a great and yet unended national peril, I can view this call to a second term, in nowise more flatteringly to myself, than as an expression of the public judgment, that I may better finish a difficult work, in which I have labored from the first, than could any one less severely schooled to the task.

"In this view, and with assured reliance on that Almighty Ruler who has so graciously sustained us thus far; and with increased gratitude to the generous people for their continued confidence, I accept the renewed trust, with its yet onerous and perplexing duties and responsibilities."

On the manuscript Lincoln had written this request:

"Please communicate this to the two Houses of Congress."

One of Lincoln's finest speeches, but one that is seldom read, was delivered at a White House serenade on November tenth, following the election. It has been preserved in facsimile from which these words are transcribed:

"It has long been a grave question whether any government, not too strong for the liberties of its people, can be strong enough to maintain its own existence in great emergencies.

"On this point the present rebellion brought our republic to a severe test, and a presidential election occurring in regular course during the rebellion added not a little to the strain. If the loyal people, united, were put to the utmost of their strength by the rebellion, must they not fail when divided, and partially paralyzed, by a political war among themselves?

"But the election was a necessity—We can not have free government without elections; and if the rebellion could force us to forego, or postpone a national election, it might fairly claim to have already conquered and ruined us. The strife of the election is but human nature practically applied to the facts of the case. What has occurred in this case, must even recur in similar cases—Human nature will not change—In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak, and as strong; as silly and as wise; as bad and good—Let us, therefore, study the incidents of this, as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged.

"But the election, along with its incidental, and undesirable strife, has done good, too. It has demonstrated that a peoples' government can sustain a national election, in the midst of a great civil war—Until now it has not been known to the world that this was a possibility. It shows also how sound, and how strong we still are. It shows that, even among candidates of the same party, he who is most devoted to the Union, and most opposed to treason, can receive most of the people's votes. It shows also to the extent yet known that we have more men now, than we had when the war began. Gold is good in its place, but living, brave, patriotic men are better than gold. But the rebellion continues, and now that the election is over, may not all, having a common interest, reunite in a common effort, to save our common country? For my own part I have striven, and shall strive to avoid placing any obstacle in the way. So long as I have been here I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom.

"While I am deeply sensible to the high compliment of a re-election, and duly grateful, as I trust, to Almighty God for having directed my countrymen to a right conclusion, as I think, for their own good, it adds nothing to my satisfaction that any other man may be disappointed or pained by the result.

"May I ask those who have not differed with me, to join with me, in this same spirit towards those who have?

"And now, let me close by asking three hearty cheers for our brave soldiers and seamen and their gallant and skillful commanders."

Nicolay and Hay further commented on the manner in which Lincoln received the many "tumultuous demonstrations of good will" in these words:

"He was absolutely free from elation or self congratulations. He seemed to depreciate his own triumph and to sympathize rather with the beaten than the victorious party."