

# 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 894

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

May 27, 1946

## A MEMORIAL DAY RESOLUTION

**"WE HERE HIGHLY RESOLVE THAT THESE DEAD SHALL NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN."**

Long before the Civil War broke, there was at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, a burial place on an elevation known as Cemetery Hill. At the entrance to the cemetery a substantial two story brick structure had been erected with rooms on either side of the driveway which passed under the arch connecting the two parts of the building. Over the arch was a decorative urn, a memorial symbol of the dead.

When the northern and southern armies met here in 1863 this gateway structure became a strategic place in the Federal line and the focal point of some of the most severe fighting. If soldiers had any sense of humor left by the time they reached this spot it was probably revived by a sign near the cemetery gate which warned: "All persons using firearms in these grounds will be prosecuted with the utmost rigor of the law." Soldiers were persecuted "with the utmost rigor" for using firearms here on July 1, 2, and 3 in 1863. The tremendous loss of life during those three days can best be impressed on one by a comparison of the losses during the "Battle of the Bulge" in the recent World War, where during a period of thirty days there were 53,000 allied troops killed, wounded or missing. At Gettysburg there were 53,000 men killed or wounded in but three days.

Just how much the time element had to do with inspiring the Federal troops to victory at Gettysburg we shall never know but there must have been some psychological reaction to the realization that the concluding skirmishes of the great battle were being fought on the eve of July 4th, the birthday of the nation. It would have been a stupid officer, indeed, who did not utilize the significant anniversary atmosphere to drive home the sentiment expressed by Lincoln in his first message to Congress: "Surely each man has as strong a motive now to preserve our liberties as each had then to establish them."

When Lincoln was first informed about the plans for a national cemetery at Gettysburg the reports of the unprecedented number of casualties there, were already known to him. In preparing his remarks he must have been conscious of the great sacrifice made at Cemetery Hill and other points where the battle waged furiously.

On the evening of November 17th two days before the dedication William Saunders, who designed the burial plot, at the invitation of the President laid before him the plan for the new cemetery. According to Saunders, the President "seemed familiar with the topography of the place, although he had never been there." Saunders

also remembered that Lincoln commented: "It is an admirable and befitting arrangement."

While preparing the address it is apparent that Lincoln kept before him the picture of Gettysburg which he put in these words: "We are met on a great battle field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live." He then talked about "the brave men, living and dead who struggled here," emphasizing that the world "can never forget what they did here."

With direct reference to the "honored dead" Lincoln urged that "we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion," and then he put into the form of a resolution a proposal that should be made, by every orator in every cemetery in every age, where American soldiers are buried. He said "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

The original source of this sentiment as expressed by Lincoln may have first appealed to him as a small boy when he read Weems' *Life of Washington* and was so deeply impressed with the sacrifices made by the fathers of the country. Weems pictures in dramatic form the parting of Washington and his soldiers at the close of the war in these words "Happy farmers! The long winter of war is past and gone—the springtime of peace is returned and the voice of her dove is heard in our land! Restore your wasted farms. . . ." then Weems follows with a portrait of how Washington was affected by coming upon the graves of some of his fallen soldiers and the author puts in quotations the sentiments of Washington: "There the battling armies met in thunder. The stormy strife was short. But yonder mournful hillocks point the place where many of our falling heroes sleep; perhaps some good angel has whispered that *their fall was not in vain.*"

Lincoln's resolution at Gettysburg should be endorsed by every American who visits a cemetery on Memorial Day or participates in honoring those who have made the supreme sacrifice in this past World War. The question of whether or not one "dies in vain" depends on those who live to perpetuate the ideals of the nation. It may yet be too early to determine whether or not we have broken faith with our sons who may have died in the last World War. Those at Gettysburg did not die in vain; they saved the union.