

LINCOLN LORE

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SCRUTINIZING THE PERFECT TRIBUTE

The reappearance of *The Perfect Tribute* in a new dress and a 1956 copyright notice invites some comments on this fascinating book by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews. First published in 1906, it is timely indeed for Charles Scribner's Sons to bring out a new edition on the fiftieth anniversary year of its initial printing. The jacket presents a pleasing study of Lincoln at Gettysburg by Rudolph Ruzicka which is duplicated in color as the frontispiece.

When the first edition of the book was released the *London Spectator* commented, "The story is admirably told." *The Dial* observed: "The little story is written with tenderness of touch and delicacy of diction which makes it delightful reading." *The New York Times* called it "one of the greatest stories of recent years." As a fine example of a short colorful essay it has been widely used as a students' textbook and the issuing of a cheap school edition has given it a circulation close to a million copies. Produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer as a one reel film in 1935 with Charles (Chic) Sale as Lincoln, it was given a nationwide showing by the movies.

Several years ago the editor of *Lincoln Lore* received an interesting letter from one of the recipients of this bulletin in which he stated that he had been able to secure from the son of Mrs. Andrews "an authentic statement concerning the authorship of *The Perfect Tribute*." The son's reminiscences were attached to the letter with the suggestion by the correspondent that "doubtless it will prove to be interesting reading for lovers of the 'Perfect Tribute.'" This fiftieth anniversary of the publication seems to offer the proper environment for the review of this original source material Mrs. Andrews used for her essay.

Inasmuch as no comments were made through the years of distribution, either by the author or publisher of the book, about the authenticity of the story, it was accepted generally as factual. On the jacket of this new edition, however, the publishers refer to it as a "short moving tale of Abraham Lincoln." It is in reality almost wholly fiction combining three separate episodes: Lincoln's journey to Gettysburg, the reaction to his speech, and a dramatic scene in a prison hospital in Washington the day following the address.

Mrs. Andrews was born in Mobile, Alabama, lived in Lexington, Kentucky for a period and then moved to New York state. She had come to admire Lincoln and felt that some tribute should be paid him by a southern woman. She had considerable literary ability as her many published essays attest and the opportunity for developing the Lincoln story occurred at a time when early preparations were being made to celebrate the centennial of Lincoln's birth. Mrs. Andrews' son came home from school one day and told her an interesting Lincoln story that had been related by his teacher. It so impressed the boy's mother, that she decided to make it the basis of an essay which she hoped might be a worthy tribute to Lincoln.

The teacher had told his pupils of a conversation that as a small lad he had heard carried on between his father, Anson Burlingame, and Edward Everett. Mr. Everett was recalling some of the incidents on the way to and at Gettysburg. He told Mr. Burlingame "how Lincoln wrote the address on a piece of brown paper on the train going up to Gettysburg, how he delivered it, how there was a period of silence as if what had been said had so deeply impressed the crowd that they would no more applaud it than they would have applauded the

Lord's Prayer in a church." The above information within the quotation marks is apparently the basic source material out of which Mrs. Andrews composed *The Perfect Tribute*.

The conversation between Everett and Burlingame must have occurred some time between Nov. 19, 1863 and Jan 15, 1865 as Mr. Everett died on this latter date. Mr. Burlingame also died five years later, so after 1870 there would have been no opportunity to recall the conversation for his son. While teacher Burlingame may have repeated the story on other occasions, it was not until forty years after he heard the original conversation that he told the class of pupils, which included Mrs. Andrews' son, about Mr. Everett's statements. After so long a period the details of the conversation might not have been so clear in the teacher's mind.

Some minor details in Mrs. Andrews' text warns one to be on guard for inaccuracies because the time element in the departure of the special train, both from Washington and from Gettysburg, is in error. Also the personnel of the President's party is incorrectly noted. The statement that Edward Everett was on the train is the most grievous mistake as Mrs. Andrews weaves about Mr. Everett's presence on the trip, some of the President's comments. More disconcerting still is the implication that the story of Lincoln's writing the address on the train between Washington and Gettysburg came from Everett's own observations.

The facts are that Mr. Everett was not on the train and in no position to comment what writing Lincoln may or may not have done enroute. Everett was already in Gettysburg when the special train left Washington. Furthermore, John Nicolay, Lincoln's secretary, who was with the President all the way from Washington to Gettysburg has left the statement that Lincoln did no writing whatever on the train. A further established fact is that one copy and possibly two copies of the address were written out before the President left Washington.

A further deduction which Mrs. Andrews makes from the story which teacher Burlingame told her son was that when Lincoln finished his speech "There was no sound from the silent vast assembly . . . not a hand was lifted in applause." The President was interrupted by applause five different times during the address and at the conclusion there was "long continued applause."

The son of Mrs. Andrews clearly states with reference to the concluding episode in *The Perfect Tribute* that his mother "added the fiction part—she added the part about the young Southern boy and the dying Southern soldier, his brother." In other words, Warrington Blair, his sister, Miss Eleanor Hampton Blair, Carter Hampton Blair, his fiance, Miss Sally Maxfield and Senator Warrington were purely fictitious characters. The story which Mrs. Andrews relates about Lincoln visiting the dying Captain Blair in a Confederate prison hospital is purely imaginary. Nevertheless it is a dramatic piece of fiction.

There was one observation made by Mrs. Andrews in her book which was truly prophetic. Referring to Lincoln's address she commented: "Fifty years from now American school boys will be learning it as a part of their education." We regret however, that youth as well as adults who have read *The Perfect Tribute* and seen it dramatized on the screen have been so greatly misinformed about the composition and immediate reception of one of the world's greatest orations.