



Lincoln Lore

October, 1984

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SOME CONTOURS OF EUROPEAN SYMPATHY FOR LINCOLN

Respect for Abraham Lincoln now knows no international boundaries, but, as most students of the Civil War realize, this represents a dramatic reversal of early sentiments, especially in Europe. Great Britain, despite her solid antislavery tradition, proved to be strongly sympathetic to the Confederate cause. French officialdom was, if anything, even more pointedly pro-Southern. Ironically, the fastest friend of the Lincoln government was the creakiest and most outmoded despotism in Europe, Russia.

All along, of course, there had been some European voices raised in praise of the Northern cause and its leader. Most authorities agree that these voices became a bit louder after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Union military victory naturally quieted pro-Southern enthusiasms in Europe, and Lincoln's assassination shocked most respectable opinion abroad into expressions of condolence and sometimes into belated realizations that Lincoln had not been so bad after all. An example of the latter might be W. Binns' *Sermon on the Death of President Lincoln*, published in Birkenhead, England. Lincoln's bibliographer, Jay Monaghan, summarizes this rare eulogy as follows: "A British preacher who originally favored the South shows himself to have been converted to the Northern cause by the assassination."

More commonly, the effect of the assassination was to silence Lincoln's critics rather than to convert them instantaneously into eulogizers. It also gave his long-time admirers an unaccustomed moment in the limelight. When thus exposed fully to the light of day, pro-Lincoln sentiment in Europe revealed certain contours perhaps not as easily seen in the darker days of the Civil War.

Among the sympathetic sentiments for Lincoln unleashed in Europe by his martyrdom, the ones which are easiest for the American student to examine are expressed in funeral sermons published as pamphlets in 1865. Monaghan claims that 404 Lincoln funeral sermons survive in pamphlet form, and 9 of these were published in Great Britain. Two were American

sermons published for English readers. The remaining seven are sermons by Binns (mentioned above), C. M. Birrell, R. B. Drummond, Christopher Newman Hall, James A. Picton, S. A. Steinthal, and James Wayman. Most of them are quite rare and not all could be examined for this article, but, of the available sermons, none seemed to have a particularly remarkable text, and there was considerable variety in content.

But in one important — and strangely neglected respect — they are all alike. This similarity escaped the notice of the best-known writers on Lincoln funeral sermons, Jay Monaghan and Charles J. Stewart, because they chose by and large to ignore denomination as a factor. To do so in the case of the British sermons, however, would be to miss the most important point. To be sure, they were not all products of the same denomination. Binns was a Unitarian, for example, and Birrell was a Baptist. But note the places where the sermons were delivered: Unitarian Chapel, Birkenhead; Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool; Edinburgh; Surrey Chapel, London; Gallowtree Gate Chapel, Leicester; Platt Chapel (Ashton?); and Newington Chapel, Liverpool. *None was in the Church of England; all were Nonconformists.*

Or so, at least, the available evidence indicates. The building where the Edinburgh sermon was delivered is not indicated, but it was more than likely a Presbyterian church. Christopher Newman Hall, who gave his eulogy in Surrey Chapel, was a famous Congregationalist divine with a large following in America. James A. Picton was also a Congregationalist, the author of books on Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth, and an advanced radical

in politics to boot. The affiliations of the ministers of Platt Chapel and Newington Chapel, Liverpool, are unknown at this writing, but the word "chapel" betrays their Nonconformity. In nineteenth-century England, one was or attended "chapel" or "church"; that is, one was either a Nonconformist or a member of the established Church of England.

Here, then is the hidden contour of British sympathies for

S E R M O N

ON THE ASSASSINATION OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

PREACHED AT

Surrey Chapel, London.

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 1865.

BY

REV. NEWMAN HALL.

BOSTON:

BARTLETT AND HALLIDAY.

1865.

THE RULER OF NATIONS:

A SERMON

OCCASIONED BY

THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

BY THE

REV. C. M. BIRRELL.

LIVERPOOL;

HENRY GREENWOOD, 52, CASTLE STREET.

AND MAY BE HAD THROUGH ALL BOOKSELLERS.

Lincoln. Nonconformists, mostly evangelical Protestants, were keenly interested in him. The Church of England seemed silently indifferent. That is not to say that there were no individual Anglicans who admired Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, but being a member of the established church was apparently not a good predictor of pro-Northern sentiment. Being a Nonconformist, on the other hand, was, John Bright, whom one recalls as perhaps Lincoln's best friend among the prominent politicians of Great Britain, was a Quaker.

Such a pattern makes sense, for the evangelical impulse behind the antislavery movement in Great Britain (as well as the United States) was crucial. Of the two American sermons published in England, one was by Henry Ward Beecher, the Congregationalist and antislavery leader. The other, a eulogy delivered by Thomas Williams in Christ Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh, declared "that the Union could really be saved upon no other terms than those of absolute justice to the black man."

There were other sources of British sympathy for Lincoln, of course. John Stuart Mill's antislavery enthusiasm for the Northern cause was hardly a product of evangelical religion, of which his Utilitarian philosophy could surely be called an enemy, but it was not the product of conformity either. Sympathy with Lincoln's cause generally came from outside the establishment in England. And if Nonconformity, (in the sense of adherence to a dissenting sect) was not the *locus* of antislavery, pro-Northern, and pro-Lincoln sentiments, then it was surely at least a good predictor of such sentiments.

German-language eulogies present a rather different problem. There were so many German-speaking people in the United States that most eulogies in German were in fact products of the United States. Finding among these a split along evangelical/Catholic lines should hardly come as a surprise, for it is a rough rule of thumb among political historians of this period that German-Americans divided along denominational lines in their adherence to political parties, the German Catholics being mostly Democrats and German

Protestants, Republicans. What is really surprising about the 8 German-language Lincoln eulogies published in 1865 is that 4 of them were Jewish: Jonas Bondi's *Charakteristik Abraham Lincolns dargestellt in einer Trauer-Predigt* (*Character Sketch of Abraham Lincoln Presented in a Funeral Sermon*), delivered in a New York City synagogue at 29th Street and 8th Avenue; Dr. David Einhorn's *Trauer-Rede* (*Funeral Oration*), delivered at a Philadelphia temple; Rabbi H. Hochheimer's *Predigt* (*Sermon*), delivered in Baltimore; and Rabbi Benjamin Szold's *Vaterland und Freiheit* (*Fatherland and Freedom*), delivered at a memorial service at the same Baltimore synagogue. Once again, Lincoln's appeal to out-groups was strong.

To shift the focus to the Continent and to the French language is to move to a predominantly Catholic culture dominated by a government grudgingly hostile to Lincoln's administration. In France Lincoln appealed especially to groups politically opposed to the dictatorship of Napoleon III, but to some degree political opposition there also followed religious lines. Of the handful of French-language publications issued in 1865, only two were funeral sermons. Significantly, both of these were delivered in Masonic services in Paris. Lincoln had never been a Mason, but Freemasonry in France had a distinctly liberal political complexion and throughout the nineteenth century provided a focus of anti-government activity in times of repressive regimes. Most other identifiable French memorial publications on Lincoln came from left-wing republican and even socialist sources. Achille Arnaud, for example, published a 96-page biography called *Abraham Lincoln sa naissance sa vie, sa mort avec un recit de la Guerre d'Amerique d'apres les documents les plus authentiques* (*Abraham Lincoln, His Birth, His Life, His Death, with a History of the War of America from the Most Authentic Documents*). He was the editor of *l'Opinion nationale*, a radical republican newspaper. Likewise, socialist Louis Blanc was among the signers of a letter to Mrs. Lincoln which accompanied a French medal struck in her martyred husband's honor.

The source of some French-language publications sympathetic to Lincoln was doubtless Protestant as well. Laurence Louis Felix Bungener's *Lincoln Sa Vie Son Oeuvre Et Sa Mort*

THE PASSING AWAY OF HUMAN GREATNESS:

A SERMON

ON THE

Death of President Lincoln,

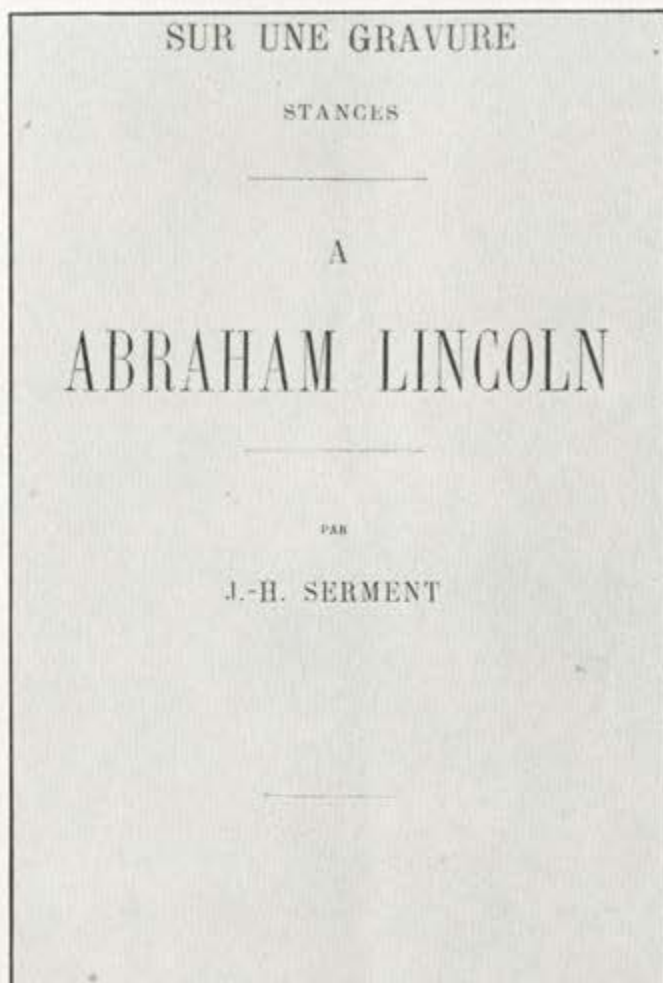
PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 7, 1865,

IN THE

NEWINGTON CHAPEL, RENSILAW STREET.

BY THE

REV. JAMES WAYMAN.



(*Lincoln: His Life, His Works, and His Death*) was translated into Dutch, German, and Italian, but it was originally published in French in Lausanne, Switzerland. Switzerland was a bastion of Protestantism on the European Continent. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum's copy of Bungener's original pamphlet is a presentation copy to Thaddeus Stevens, the Radical Republican from Pennsylvania. J.-H. Serment published a poem in French in Paris entitled *Sur une Gravure Stances A Abraham Lincoln (On an Engraving: Stanzas to Abraham Lincoln)*, but he was a lawyer from Calvinist Geneva.

These publications are hardly the equivalent of opinion surveys. Numerous factors besides general popularity may have dictated the publication of a funeral sermon: the wealth of the congregation, the verbal dexterity of the preacher, or the denominational traditions of literary production. On the other hand, such publications provide an avenue to understanding popular opinion not provided by the public monuments and private letters of high government officials or the editorials in the party press. The contours of European opinion glimpsed here certainly suggest that a denominational approach to the hundreds of Lincoln funeral sermons produced by American religion would be worthwhile.

Speaking of Richard Nelson Current

Most Lincoln students are familiar with at least some of Richard N. Current's work. He completed James G. Randall's *Lincoln the President: Last Full Measure*, the fourth volume of the best biography of Lincoln ever written and the winner of a Bancroft Prize. *The Lincoln Nobody Knows* is a classic, perhaps second only to Benjamin Thomas' *Abraham Lincoln* among the most-read scholarly works on Lincoln. And *Lincoln and the First Shot* remains the most acceptable treatment of the Fort Sumter controversy.

Readers with a special interest in Lincoln may not be aware, however, that Professor Current has more than a dozen other books to his credit including a widely used college text for the American history survey; biographies of Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, and Thaddeus Stevens; a large history of Wisconsin in the Civil War era; a biography of Henry Stimson; and a book on the development of the typewriter. These broad

interests offer a clue to the distinguishing quality of his work on Abraham Lincoln. For Richard Current, unlike other authors in the field, Lincoln has never been the be-all and end-all of his professional interest. He has had no stake in defending or attacking him. There is a cool tone of passionless objectivity about his writings on Lincoln. He has always cared greatly about accuracy and precision, but he has always been willing to let the historical chips fall where they may.

Speaking of Abraham Lincoln: The Man and His Meaning for Our Times, published by the University of Illinois Press in 1983, brings together eleven Lincoln "talks," as Professor Current terms them, delivered here and there from 1955 to 1982. Eight were previously published in various places. All eleven of them are interesting and useful.

The first two essays depict Lincoln as a conservative like Daniel Webster and a most reluctant emancipator who might have kept the proclamation in his desk and freed no one had General McClellan won a really decisive victory at Antietam. There follow more vigorously pro-Lincoln articles, which emphasize the "growth" of Lincoln's views on the questions of slavery and race. Indeed, the tone seems to change with the sixth and final section of the essay on the reluctant emancipator. "The Confederates and the First Shot," first published in 1961, redressed the unfair balance Current had earlier perceived in scholarship on the Sumter question:

This whole Fort Sumter debate has been conducted on an unfair, one-sided basis. The argument centers about Lincoln alone. He is accused — and defended. The pressures and considerations culminating in his decision are analyzed and appraised, this way and that. Yet *he* did not give the order for the firing of the first shot; Jefferson Davis did. That obvious fact somehow is overlooked. It would help to clear the air and restore our perspective if we were provided with a careful study of the pressures and considerations leading to the Confederate decision. We already have a classic anti-Lincoln essay entitled "Lincoln and Fort Sumter." What we need is a comparable article bearing some such title as "The Confederates and the First Shot."

When Current provided that article himself, he depicted the Confederate leadership as "imperial" in its ambitions and the decision to fire on Fort Sumter as one made by reason of political rather than military necessity.

The essay dealing with Lincoln and Thaddeus Stevens



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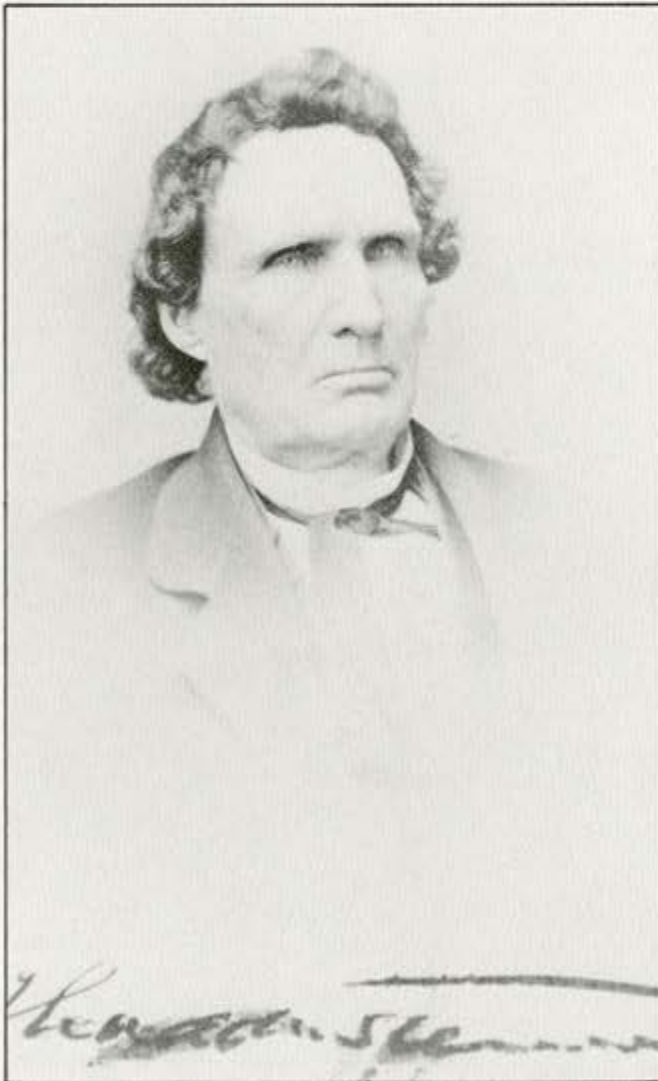
Daniel Webster.

contains a typically clear explanation of differences on constitutional theory between the two Republican leaders:

The two men had different conceptions of the very nature of the war. Originally Lincoln took the position that it was not really a war at all; it was simply a matter of enforcing the laws, of putting down an insurrection. Yet, only a week after the firing on Fort Sumter, he issued a proclamation of blockade. Promptly Stevens went to Washington and gave the president a lecture on international law. He pointed out to Lincoln that, in peacetime, a government does not issue such a proclamation and at no time does it blockade its own ports. By implication, he went on, the president had both acknowledged the existence of a state of war and recognized the Confederacy as a belligerent. Henceforth, in law as well as in fact, the Union and the Confederacy were two separate, warring nations. This being so, the American Constitution no longer applied, but only international law, the "laws of war."

Lincoln was soon claiming and exercising the "war powers" of the president. He and other authorities in the North eventually adopted the theory that they were dealing with both a rebellion and a war — the War of the Rebellion. He continued to assume that the Constitution remained in effect with regard to the South as well as the North, yet he did things he would not constitutionally have done if that had been so.

This is a subtle piece of writing, as a quick comparison with almost any other explanation of the constitutional questions separating Lincoln and the Radical Republicans will prove. And note as well the smooth way Current instructs his readers without sounding like a school marm or allowing the grinding gears of scholarship to show. I particularly admire the progression from explaining (1) that if the Constitution did not



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Thaddeus Stevens.



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George Bancroft.

apply, international law did (there was no state of nature even in warfare) and (2) that international law was often called the laws of war in Lincoln's day, and (3) that the war powers of the president were not described by the Constitution but by international law.

A short essay on the "mission" of the Civil War North precedes a longer one lamenting the decline of Lincoln's relevance to immigrants with the rise of modern ethnic consciousness. Touching on another contemporary theme in a talk on the "Lincoln Presidents," Current attacks the notion that Lincoln supplied models for the "imperial presidency" of the Cold War-Viet Nam War era. In the course of doing so, he also amusingly exposes the twentieth-century presidents' attempts to force Lincoln's hat onto their own rather less interesting heads. A thoughtful talk on "Lincoln the Southerner" explores the question of Lincoln's personal sectional identity as well as his symbolic sectional image. And an amusing one on George Bancroft and Lincoln concludes the book.

If the essays have any faults, they lie in the occasions of their original delivery. Most were written for events which, if not exactly celebratory in purpose, certainly did not invite a stance of scathing denunciation, muckraking, or iconoclasm. They were "talks," after all, and a speaker must consider his audience. I have faced similar situations many times myself and wrestled — much less successfully — with the problems of adhering to the documentary records without adopting what might seem to be an overly critical or uninspiring tone. And I think even Professor Current has been coerced by circumstances into an occasional Fourth-of-July-ism that one would not find in his books.

Otherwise, I can find no other concessions to the moment. Particularly in terms of style, these are little masterpieces of well-crafted writing, economical, sprightly, well organized, with no rough transitions or tiresome digressions. The book, in short, is a delight.