BOOK REVIEWS


For this little book, Dr. William E. Baringer has with considered judgment selected from the available mass of speeches and letters, those passages which he believes to express the principles that motivated Lincoln's actions and reactions. That Lincoln was not "a writer" in the sense in which we understand the term as well as the fact that this material was written for practical purposes has undoubtedly complicated the task. To have confined the excerpts to only one hundred and sixty-seven pages shows remarkable restraint.

The book gains from the simplicity of its organization. Dr. Baringer has grouped his selections under ten headings. After an introductory one which, for want of a better name, he calls "Human Interest"; the categories deal with such diverse fields as politics, slavery, law, American Institutions, labor, religion, civil liberties, and red tape. The editor has been scrupulously careful to avoid explanation and comment.

Yet in spite of the ease with which the book can be read, it is certainly intended, primarily, for the Lincoln scholar. The reaction of the ordinary layman when he reads the title is one of delighted anticipation. Here at last, the great man speaks for himself. But as the reader advances, his pleasure dims—not because the selections are not well chosen, certainly not because of any lack of scholarship on the part of the editor; but because, no matter how well chosen, words out of their context are too often like dead branches cut from a living tree. The sap, the vitality, is gone. There is a consciousness, too, that so often it is not what a man says that reveals his philosophy but his manner and tone while saying it.

One of the mistakes the ordinary man makes when reading such a compilation is to try to ferret out solutions to current problems. For example: Who better than the Great Emancipator could solve our present problem of de-segregation? The solution is not so easy as that. What Lincoln actually did say about the social and political status of the Negro when freed was: "Free them and
make them politically and socially your equals? My own feelings will not admit this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not."

Here lies the danger of divorcing any man's words from their context and from the time and circumstances under which they were said. The reader needs to know that these sentences were part of a speech made in Peoria, Illinois, in answer to Stephen A. Douglas who had come to his home territory to defend his stand on the Missouri Compromise. "The long dark fellow" was attacking the most accomplished orator of his day, a man whose personal magnetism and dramatic force had more than once swayed the nation. Even if Lincoln had had no political ax to grind, what he said nearly a hundred years ago can have no bearing on what he might say about the Negro as he is today.

It is when we stop expecting him to be a prophet that our real pleasure begins. Here is a human being capable of great tenderness, shrewd appraisal, tolerance, patience, and the saving grace of laughter.

To lawyers he says: "If you can not be an honest lawyer, be honest without being a lawyer."

To a mother who has lost her sons in battle: "I pray that our Heavenly Father will assuage the anguish of your bereavement."

To one with whom he has been angry: "If I do get up a little temper, I have not sufficient time to keep it up."

Anyone who has been burdened with the duty of writing many letters of recommendation rejoices to read: "I am always for a man who wishes to work; and I shall be glad for this man to get suitable employment at Cavalry Depot or elsewhere."

No review of *The Philosophy of Abraham Lincoln* is complete without mention of the Introduction. In it C. A. Muses, general editor of the Falcon's Wing Press, makes an arresting comparison of the philosophy of freedom as opposed to the philosophy of Communist societies. He examines minutely the attitudes of Lincoln and of Lenin toward "individual mankind" and clearly and logically places before us the choice we must make today. His conclusion is a ringing challenge. "The voices of six million slain free Russian peasants . . ., the thousands of Soviet-persecuted Socialists and Zionists, the countless dead and living dead of East Germany in 1953, of Hungary in 1956, and Tibet in 1959 who bravely strove for their
freedom and were shamefully left to die in their own blood by the West, may help us decide. The human race itself weighs in the balance: to fail morally now is tantamount to mankind's suicide. The choice is ours."

Pittsburgh
Loretta P. Byrne


The author has psychoanalyzed and dramatized this most controversial Pennsylvanian and at the same time turned back the clock of historical interpretation almost to the Radical Republican "Bloody Shirt" type of the Post-Civil War period. Born in Vermont with a clubfoot, with a father who had already sired a son with two clubfeet, a shiftless father who deserted his family, the adolescent Thaddeus Stevens was marked so deeply as never to recover. "He would punish 'the father'—the Southern white man—for branding the Negro, in a kind of symbolic punishment of his own father—or of God Himself—for branding and crippling him" (p. 306). Educated in New England, a graduate of Dartmouth College, he came to Pennsylvania to teach and remained to practise law and politics, engage in various business activities including land speculation and iron manufacture, and finally die and be buried, also with historical notice.

Stevens' life was marked throughout by sound and fury. It was featured by sensational criminal law practise, accusations of sharp business dealings, apparently false allegations in regard to an early Negro sweetheart, furious and persistent Anti-Masonic controversy, violent Abolitionist propaganda, the scourging of the South in his Reconstruction policy, and finally the unique impeachment of a President.

The author strives earnestly to like her subject but evidently finds it difficult. Her great admiration for his devotion to public schools and his obsessive sympathy for the underdog—she is not quite sure how much of it was hatred for the top dogs—seems to be counteracted by her feeling that he may have been guilty of "malignity, avarice, corroding lust, and uncontrollable ambition" (p. 351).