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Abraham Lincoln's Personality

Psychobiography

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

As to the Psychology of Abraham Lincoln

THE life of Abraham Lincoln bids fair to be as fruitful of commentaries as have been the works of Shakespeare. The latest attempt to explain the secret of his success is to be found in *The Voice of Lincoln* by Judge R. M. Wanamaker of the Supreme Court of Ohio. No new facts are brought out in this volume, but the author has endeavored to throw fresh light on facts already known.

Declaring Lincoln's life to be a demonstration of efficiency for every situation which he encountered, he asks how this backwoods boy managed to become the greatest lawyer of his State, the greatest orator of his day and the greatest statesman of his age. "In short, what was the paramount philosophy of his life, as gathered from what he said, from what he did, from how he lived and how he died?" The purpose of Judge Wanamaker's work is to answer these questions as they have not been answered heretofore.

The Child of Poverty.

No book on Lincoln has ever exhibited more impressively the extreme poverty of his infancy and youth. When we consider the conditions under which Abraham Lincoln was born and brought up it would seem that no ambitious American boy can have cause to be discouraged by the direst want in his early years.

no floor, except the earth. The hovel in Indiana, to which the Lincoln family removed when little Abe was only seven years old, was not much better, being "a half faced camp" or log structure enclosed on only three sides and without floor, door or window. The mattress on his parents' bed consisted of a bag filled with leaves.

The boy's life was really lacking in any element of comfort until about the time he was 10 years old when his father's second marriage made a great change for the better in a material sense and gave him a sweet, tender and wise stepmother. She sympathized with the lad in his love of reading and study and encouraged that "passion for knowledge" which Judge Wanamaker regards as the greatest gift bestowed by nature upon Abraham Lincoln, and practically the parent of all others. A New York interview is quoted in which Mr. Lincoln told of the origin and growth of his intense desire for the acquisition of information.

His Passion to Know.

"Among my earliest recollections," he said, "I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way that I could not understand. I can remember going to my little bedroom, after hearing the neighbors of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings. I could not sleep, although I

fied until I had repeated it over and over again, until I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me; for I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, until I have bounded it north and bounded it south and bounded it east and bounded it west."

The same intensity which made Lincoln's love of knowledge a passion created in his soul a passion for justice; and these two passions, according to Judge Wanamaker, were "ever present and prevailing throughout his personal and public life." Taken together, they constituted the keystone of his character. Many anecdotes and incidents are related in the present volume to support the author's view in this respect. These two qualities, however, in and of themselves, hardly suffice to explain Lincoln's advancement from the boyhood we have indicated to the position of the most influential leader of men who has attained the Presidency since Washington. Indeed, we doubt whether his career ever can be adequately explained. It is too wonderful.

Dana on Lincoln.

One of the most helpful contributions to a comprehension of the man during his last years in the White House is con-

tained in the late Charles A. Dana's *Recollections of the Civil War*. Apropos of Judge Wanamaker's chapters on Lincoln's passion for knowledge, it is interesting to note what Mr. Dana has to say on that subject:

"Mr. Lincoln was not what is called an educated man. In the college that he attended a man gets up at daylight to hoe corn and sits up at night by the side of a burning pineknot to read the best book he can find. What education he had, he had picked up. He had read a great many books and all the books that he had read he knew. He had a tenacious memory, just as he had the ability to see the essential thing. Thus while we say that Mr. Lincoln was an uneducated man in the college sense, he had a singularly perfect education in regard to everything that concerns the practical affairs of life. His judgment was excellent and his information was always accurate. He was a man of genius and contrasted with men of education the man of genius will always carry the day. Many of his speeches illustrate this."

The Gettysburg Speech.

Mr. Dana quotes Stanton as saying that Lincoln's Gettysburg speech will be remembered as long as anybody's speeches are remembered who speaks in the English language; and Judge Wanamaker is equally emphatic in his chapter on the famous oration, which threw that of the renowned Edward Everett so completely into the shade. The author points out that the Gettysburg oration contains only ten sentences, comprising 267 words, 200 of which are words of one syllable; and he calls attention to the frequent use of the word *dedicate*, which, occurs six times. "As the word 'dedicate' was the biggest and best word in the English language in 1863 in mid-war," so, we are told, "that same word 'dedicate' is the biggest and best word in the English lan-

guage to-day when we are likewise in mid-war." A remarkable feature of the Gettysburg speech is that it contains no word of bitterness or reproach against the South. A Confederate soldier who fought there can read it with admiration to-day.

Lincoln's Leadership.

No estimate of the character of Lincoln could be at all adequate which did not emphasize the capacity for leadership which he manifested from the first; so it is not surprising that Judge Wanamaker devotes two chapters to *Lincoln the Leader*. Mr. Dana tells us that this phase of his character was strikingly manifested in his relations with the members of his Cabinet. "He treated every one of them with unvarying candor, respect and kindness; but though several of them were men of extraordinary force and self-assertion—this was true especially of Mr. Seward, Mr. Chase and Mr. Stanton—and though there was nothing of selfhood or domination in his manner toward them, it was always plain that he was the master and they the subordinates. They constantly had to yield to his will in questions where responsibility fell upon him."

As President, he always gave an impression of reserve force to those whom he met. "He was calm, equable and uncomplaining. In the discussion of important questions, whatever he said showed the profoundest thought, even when he was joking. He never was impatient, he never was in a hurry and he never tried to hurry anybody else. To every one he was pleasant and cordial. Yet they all felt that it was his word that went at last."

Judge Wanamaker shows how this capacity for leadership was recognized in youth, when he was the favorite referee, umpire and judge in all competitive games and contests, from a wrestling match to a horse race; and early in his

professional life he was frequently chosen by his fellow members of the bar to preside at the trial of cases in the absence of the Judge regularly assigned to hold court. In his recently published essay on the early life of Lincoln, entitled *Honest Abe; A Study in Integrity*, Mr. Alonzo Rothschild says: "From Lincoln's earliest youth the passion to surpass others had dominated him at every turn. Pitting his strength, whether of mind or body, against that of his associates, he lost no opportunity of excelling them, until it seemed almost a second nature for this homely mixture of modesty and self-assertion, of good humor and mastery, to become the central figure of the group through which he moved." While it cannot be denied that he aspired to popularity, he sought it only by endeavoring to render himself worthy of the esteem of his fellow men.

A. Secret of Greatness.

In nothing did Lincoln show his greatness as a leader so much as in his disregard of hostile personal criticism by men whose advancement he deemed essential to the welfare of the country. Although Stanton had once compared him to a gorilla, he appointed him Secretary of War and would never allow him to resign. Although Chase had been politically disloyal to him while he was Secretary of the Treasury and afterward, when Taney's death caused a vacancy in the Supreme Court he appointed Chase Chief Justice. With Abraham Lincoln no personal consideration could prevail against the public good.

Judge Wanamaker's *The Voice of Lincoln* is an instructive and thought compelling commentary on the life of the greatest American of the nineteenth century.

THE VOICE OF LINCOLN. By R. M. WANAMAKER. Charles Scribner's Sons. \$2.50.

Lincoln's Mental Portrait

A Note on Some of the Striking Traits of the Civil War President's Mind and Character.

By ROSSITER JOHNSON,

Author of "A History of the War of Secession."

We have had a generous allotment of genial humorists, brilliant punsters and finished epigrammatists; but I think we may rank Lincoln as our greatest master of applied wit. This may be due partly to the fact that among the few books to which in youth he had access, and which he read thoroughly, was *Aesop's Fables*. This happy faculty appears not only in the anecdotes—real or fictitious—rehearsed in the village store, not only in the Cabinet meeting or the drawing room of the White House or the encounters with office seekers, but occasionally in the serious passages of diplomacy. When the Confederate commissioners met him and Seward on the gunboat to discuss a possible basis of peace one of them pleaded that if he should consent to treat with the Confederacy as an established independent power he would have a precedent in Charles I., who treated with his rebellious subjects. "I don't know much of history," said the President, "I trust to Secretary Seward for that. All I remember about Charles is that he lost his head."

From the beginning of his active life he bore a reputation for honesty that became proverbial. When his partner had bankrupted their business and died he paid off the indebtedness to the last dollar. After a varied career as farmer, soldier in the Black Hawk war, storckeeper, river pilot, and surveyor, he read law and entered upon its practice. Naturally enough with this came something of aspiration to office, and he served a single term in Congress. The only remarkable thing that he did there was to introduce his "spot resolutions," which called upon President Polk to designate the spot where, as he said in his message, the Mexicans had invaded our soil and murdered American citizens. Neither Mr. Polk nor any one else has ever answered.

Lincoln's mental equipment included, in apparent perfection, the faculty—perhaps the most necessary of all to the logician and the debater—of quickly detecting a hidden fallacy and exposing and analyzing it. This was shown to advantage in the contest that first brought him into general notice through the country. It was in 1858, and discussion of the question of admitting slavery to the Territories, based on the abolition of the Missouri Compromise in 1854, was at its height. Stephen A. Douglas and Lincoln, rival candidates for the United States Senate, debated it at large meetings in seven towns. Fortunately their speeches were reported and may be had in print. Douglas was pleading for his doctrine of Popular Sovereignty, and Lincoln was demonstrating its fallacy. Their styles were as different as extreme rudeness and extreme courtesy can be. Sneers at Lincoln's early poverty and occupations were rebuffed with ready humor. The affair presents a notable example of the generic difference between smartness and ability. Lincoln carried the State by 4,000, but Douglas had a majority in the Legislature.

In speaking a few weeks before this Lincoln had said: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one

thing or all the other." Thus briefly but exactly he stated the philosophy of the armed conflict that began three years later. In his clear vision all the efforts of the well meaning compromisers and legislative tinkers had been unavailing and would be forever futile. This speech immediately became famous.

For the Presidential nomination in 1860 William H. Seward was his chief competitor and on the first ballot had the greater number of votes. But Lincoln was nominated on the third ballot. The campaign that followed was much like that of 1840, when William Henry Harrison was elected; and again Douglas was Lincoln's Northern opponent. In the Electoral College Lincoln had a majority of 57 over all. The House of Representatives elected at the same time contained a majority for the opposite political party—until the Southern members withdrew when their States seceded. The inauguration presented, incidentally, a notable dramatic climax. It had been the duty of Lincoln's chief competitor for the high honor, Vice-President Breckinridge, to declare in Congress the result of the election. The outgoing President sat there and listened to a faultless logic and firm purpose that contrasted sharply with his own timidity and helplessness. The oath of office was administered by Chief Justice Taney, whose most famous decision was thereby sent to the juridical scrap heap. And Senator Douglas, with commendable good nature, held the new President's hat while he was speaking. His two pro-slavery predecessors had scolded the Northerners as if they were culprits; in his inaugural address he talked to the Southerners as brothers.

Lincoln knew when to be prompt, stern and decisive. In sending Charles Francis Adams as our Minister to England he included this passage in his instructions: "If you shall, unhappily, find her Majesty's Government tolerating the application of the so-called seceding States [for recognition as an independent nation], or wavering about it, you will not leave them to suppose for a moment that they can grant that application and remain the friends of the United States. You may even assure them promptly that if they determine to recognize, they may at the same time prepare to enter into alliance with the enemies of this Republic."

Mr. Lincoln's natural tender heartedness caused him to prevent the execution of deserters to such an extent that Gen. Grant asked him to discontinue it; and when the Confederacy was conquered he privately expressed to some of his commanders his wish that the leaders might be allowed to escape out of the country if they wished to do so.

Perhaps Lincoln was a minority President—but already posterity gives him a majority over all others, with the uncertain exception of Washington.

Perhaps he seemed a fair mark for foreign satirists—but now read their apologies.

Perhaps his face was not beautiful—but five million households have lovingly hung it on their walls.

He was born to the lowest seat in our great civic synagogue; he died in the highest; and his posthumous fame is commensurate with his wonderful career.

Lincoln's Wonderful Memory.

One of my cousins, John Holmes Goodenow of Alfred, Maine, writes Noah Brooks in the Century, was appointed minister to Turkey early in the Lincoln administration, and was taken to the white house before his departure for his post to be presented to the President. When Lincoln learned that his visitor was a grandson of John Holmes, one of the first senators from Maine, and a man of note in his day and generation, he immediately began the recitation of a poetical quotation which must have been more than a hundred lines in length. Mr. Holmes, never having met the President, was naturally astonished at this outburst; and as the President went on and on with this long recitation, the suspicion crossed his mind that Lincoln had suddenly taken leave of his wits. But when the lines had been finished the President said: "There! that poem was quoted by your grandfather Holmes in a speech which he made in the United States senate in ——" and he named the date and specified the occasion.

Paper on Lincoln Arouses Protest

Classed as Sufferer From Mental Disorder

NEW YORK, May 23 (P)—A paper classifying Abraham Lincoln as a sufferer from definite attacks of mental disorder, to be given by Dr. A. A. Brill, former Columbia University psychiatry clinic head, before the American Psychiatric Association, at Toronto, Ont., June 5, has evoked a bitter protest from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, prominent Brooklyn psychiatrist.

Dr. Brill describes Lincoln as a schizoid-maniac personality. He points out that the "occasional coarseness" of the president's wit was a manifestation of his psychosis.

Dr. Hicks came upon the statements of his colleague in the program of the association's 87th annual meeting which contains abstracts of the speeches to be delivered.

Indignant over Dr. Brill's analysis of Lincoln, Dr. Hicks describes the allusions as "insulting" to right thinking Americans and to the memory of "one of the two greatest presidents in the history of this republic." He charges Dr. Brill with "blaspheming the memory of the immortal dead."

He has entered a formal protest against the speech with Dr. Walter M. English of Brockville, Ont., president of the association, and with Dr. Samuel W. Hamilton, White Plains, N. Y., chairman of the program committee.

Dr. Brill's only comment on this action was to state he intended delivering the address. He said he would stick to the original text of the speech, already submitted to the program committee.

In his paper titled "Abraham Lincoln as a Humorist" Dr. Brill describes him as the only president who was known to appreciate and produce wit.

"All of Lincoln's biographers have endeavored to explain this light vein in their serious-minded hero, and they are particularly puzzled and confused at his tendency to obscene joking."

"All agree, as one puts it, that 'when hunting for wit he had no ability to discriminate between the vulgar and the refined substance from which he extracted it.'"

"Anyone studying him," Dr. Brill states, "can readily find the marked emotional fluctuations that swayed his whole life. Lincoln was a schizoid-maniac personality, who had definite attacks of this malady."

DECLARES LINCOLN MIND DISORDERED

Paper by Former Columbia Expert for Psychiatry Meeting Cites His Jokes as Symptom

HIS COLLEAGUE PROTESTS

New York, May 23.—(AP)—A paper classifying Abraham Lincoln as a sufferer from definite attacks of mental disorder, to be given by Dr. A. A. Brill, former Columbia University psychiatry clinic head, before the American Psychiatric Association, at Toronto, Ont., June 5, has evoked a bitter protest from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, Brooklyn psychiatrist.

Dr. Brill says that the "occasional coarseness" of the President's wit was a manifestation of his attacks.

Dr. Hicks came upon the statements of Dr. Brill in the program of the association's eighty-seventh annual meeting.

Dr. Hicks describes the allusions to Lincoln as "insulting" to right thinking Americans and to the memory of "one of the two greatest Presidents in the history of this Republic." He charges Dr. Brill with "blaspheming the memory of the immortal dead."

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LINCOLN 'INSULT' EVOKES PROTEST

Brooklyn Psychiatrist Attacks Address Scheduled for Toronto Gathering

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Indignant over Dr. Brill's analysis of Lincoln, Dr. Hicks describes the allusions as "insulting" to right-thinking Americans and to the memory of "one of the two greatest Presidents in the history of this Republic." He charges Dr. Brill with "blaspheming the memory of the immortal dead."

He has entered a formal protest against the speech with Dr. Walter M. English, of Brockville, Ont., president of the association, and with Dr. Samuel W. Hamilton, of White Plains, N. Y., chairman of the Program Committee.

Dr. Brill's only comment on this action was to state he intended delivering the address.

ALIENIST PROTESTS 'ATTACK' ON LINCOLN

Times
Dr. Hicks Scores Speech Drafted
by Dr. Brill on Mentality of
the Former President.

HE TERMS IT "BLASPHEMY"

May 23 1931
Former Columbia Psychiatrist, In
Talk for Convention, Held Lincoln
Had Malady of Mind.

A speech prepared by Dr. A. A. Brill, former head of the psychiatry clinic at Columbia University, for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Toronto June 5, classifying Abraham Lincoln as "a schizoidmanic personality," who suffered attacks of mental disorder, has evoked a bitter protest from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, Brooklyn psychiatrist and alienist.

At his home at 619 Second Street, Brooklyn, last night, Dr. Hicks said the statements of Dr. Brill came to his notice in the printed form of the convention program, containing abstracts of the speeches to be delivered at Toronto.

A week ago, he said, he sent a formal protest to Dr. Walter M. English of Brockville, Ont., president of the association, and to Dr. Samuel W. Hamilton of the Bloomingdale Hospital in White Plains. In these protests Dr. Hicks said he described his colleague's remarks about the American President as an insult to right-thinking Americans and to the memory of "one of the two greatest Presidents in the history of this Republic." One of the assertions to which Dr. Hicks took exception was to the effect that Lincoln's occasional coarseness of wit was a manifestation of his psychosis.

Dr. Brill's protest to Dr. English read: "It seems to me that it is about time the American people awoke to the fact that we have an element in this country who seem to thrive on slime and filth, even to attacking

the memory of the greatest personalities that this country has had in its history, and as a member of the American Psychiatric Association I feel it my duty that I make protest against permitting such a paper to be read at its annual congress in Toronto.

"Blaspheming the memory of the immortal dead should cease. Probably 90 per cent of its membership are loyal citizens and are residents of the United States, and I feel this proposed address is an insult to right-thinking Americans and to the sacred memory of one of the two greatest Presidents in the history of this Republic."

Dr. Hicks also contended that Dr. Brill had applied Freudian theories to his analysis of Lincoln. Dr. Brill is credited with being one of the leading exponents of Freudianism in this country.

Dr. Hicks also took exception to Dr. Brill's closing sentence in the prepared paper, which read: "Abraham's oral erotic theory in manic-depressive psychosis is fully confirmed by the study of this phase of Abraham Lincoln."

Dr. Brill's subject for discussion at the convention is "Abraham Lincoln as a Humorist." In it, he described Lincoln as the only President who had been known to appreciate and produce wit, and conceded that besides being a great wit he was one of the outstanding Presidents.

His prepared paper said in part: "Now and then we encounter in psychiatric practice people who have the capacity to produce wit. They produce wit unconsciously; it comes on the spur of the moment as an inspiration. My experience taught me that these individuals belong to a definite type of personality; they represent a mixture of the schizoid and syntonik personalities."

"The extreme of this type is designated by Bieuler as the schizoidmanic psychosis. Did the great emancipator belong to this type of personality? Lincoln had undoubtedly suffered from some psychotic manifestation, notwithstanding the reluctance of two great psychiatrists, Morton Prince and Macfie Campbell, to pronounce judgment on this delicate subject. Any one studying him, even superficially, can readily find the marked emotional fluctuations that swayed his whole life. Lincoln was a schizoid-manic personality, who had definite attacks of this malady."

SPURS FIGHT TO HALT

BRILL TALK ON LINCOLN

May 24 1931
Dr. Hicks Sees Blasphemy in
Charge War President Had Mental Disorders at Times.

Dr. Edward E. Hicks, Brooklyn psychiatrist, received a reply yesterday from Dr. Samuel W. Hamilton of the Bloomingdale Hospital at White Plains in reference to the former's protest against an address to be delivered at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Toronto in June. Dr. A. A. Brill, former director of the psychiatry clinic at Columbia University, who is to make the address, classifies Abraham Lincoln as a "schizoidmanic personality" who suffered attacks of mental disorder, according to Dr. Hicks. Dr. Hamilton is chairman of the program committee of the meeting and could call off Dr. Brill's address, according to Dr. Hicks.

However, in answering Dr. Hicks's request that "blaspheming the memory of the immortal dead should cease," Dr. Hamilton said the committee would continue to be careful in the selection of speakers for the association's annual meetings, according to Dr. Hicks. The reply did not say that any action would be taken regarding the Brill address.

"This question is more important than gangster murders," said Dr. Hicks. "The murder of a gangster is one thing, but the murder of the reputation of a great patriot is another matter. Every true American must look upon Lincoln as I do."

Dr. Brill is scheduled to speak on "Abraham Lincoln as a Humorist." Dr. Brill states that "Abraham Lincoln's oral erotic theory in manic-depressive psychosis is fully confirmed by the study of this stage of Abraham Lincoln."

Protest Is Made Against Attack on Lincoln's Mentality

New Sentinel 5-25-1931

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He has entered a formal protest against the speech.

Scientist Says Lincoln Schizoid Manic Personality

Dr. A. A. Brill, New York Psychoanalyst, in National Conference Declares Great Emancipator Had Divided Personality, Two Natures That Never Became Fused—Statement Meets Opposition.

TORONTO, June 5.—(A.P.)—Abraham Lincoln was analyzed as a "schizoid manic personality"—a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde who had his baser nature under rigid control—at the American Psychiatric Association meeting today.

The analysis was read by Dr. A. A. Brill, a psychoanalyst of New York City.

When an abstract of Dr. Brill's speech appeared in the program of the association last month, it brought a bitter protest from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, prominent Brooklyn psychiatrist, who described the illusions to Lincoln as "insulting." Dr. Hicks entered a formal protest against the speech with officers of the association.

Schizoid is a word of Greek derivation meaning to split, and the expression applied to Lincoln does not mean insanity. Dr. Brill found the trace of dual personality in a reputed tendency to tell off-color anecdotes, which bubbled up as part of Lincoln's humor. The split personality source was traced to his conflicting inheritances from his mother and father, two natures "that never became fused in him."

Dr. Brill ranked Lincoln as a wit with Mark Twain, Uncle Remus and other great American humorists. He confined his study to the emotional side of the Emancipator.

"What is very peculiar about Lincoln's stories and jokes," said Dr. Brill, "his own and those he appropriated from others is the fact that many, if not most, are of an aggressive or algolagnic nature, treating of pain, suffering and death, and that a great many of them were so frankly sexual as to be classed as obscene. Most of his biographers speak of the latter, but are at a loss to explain why Lincoln resorted to this form of wit. Thus, Beveridge remarked that he had faults extremely human, such as his love of a certain type of anecdote, a taste which he never overcome and the expression of which, as will appear, was so marked a feature of his manhood and so shocking to the eminent men among whom he did his historic work."

Quotes Authorities.

Dr. Brill named as other authorities for the anecdotes, "Carl Sandburg quoting Henry Villard," and Dr. Holland's Abraham Lincoln.

"Looking at this behavior with present-day eyes," Dr. Brill said, "I cannot be shocked by any of Lincoln's stories that I heard or read. To be sure he called a spade a spade, and having been brought up in the back woods of pioneer days, he did not possess the inhibiting influences of a New England environment.

"Lincoln had to cope with enormous trials and vicissitudes, poor heredity from his father's side, humble birth, abject poverty, struggle for education, and an unsatisfied love life, all of which he summed up in the story of the boy who was asked whether he liked ginger bread.

"'Gee,' he said, 'I like it more than anything else, but I get less of it.'

"But despite these handicaps, he attained the highest ambition of any American. Nevertheless throughout his life he was unable to disburden himself of his depressive moods."

"To any psychiatrist," Dr. Brill says, "the above mentioned descriptions are quite plain. We know that in the ordinary case of manic depressive psychosis, the depressions are often followed by a phase of elation. As far as my investigations go no distinct manic attacks were ever observed in Lincoln.

"There were no doubt numerous mild euphoric rises (general spirit of elation) which showed themselves in his incessant story telling and in his fluent wit.

Was Not Insane.

"Judging by all the descriptions given of Lincoln's depressions, I feel that all one can say is that he was a schizoid manic personality, now and then harassed by schizoid manic moods. These moods never reached to that degree of profundity to justify the diagnosis of insanity. At all times Lincoln remained in touch with reality, his ego never sought refuge in insanity.

"Those who study the deeper recesses of the mind will readily understand the nature of this emotional surging. Two contrasting natures struggled within him—the inheritance from an untutored, roving and unstable father, who treated him brutally, and from a cheerful, fine, affectionate mother from whom Lincoln claimed to have inherited his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity and his ambition.

"His mental regressions were shallow and transient in comparison to the pathological escapes one sees in the psychoses and intoxications. But humor does furnish an escape from pain."

*See Editorial
Shelby County Librarian
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"'Gee,' he said, 'I like it more than anything else, but I get less of it.'"

"But despite these handicaps, he attained the highest ambition of any American. Nevertheless throughout his life he was unable to disburden himself of his depressive moods."

"To any psychiatrist," Dr. Brill says, "the above mentioned descriptions are quite plain. We know that in the ordinary case of manic depressive psychosis, the depressions are often followed by a phase of elation. As far as my investigations go no distinct manic attacks were ever observed in Lincoln.

"There were no doubt numerous mild euphoric risings (general spirit of elation) which 'showed themselves in his incessant story telling and in his fluent wit.

Was Not Insane.

"Judging by all the descriptions given of Lincoln's depressions, I feel that all one can say is that he was a schizoid manic personality, now and then harassed by schizoid manic moods. These moods never reached to that degree of profundity to justify the diagnosis of insanity. At all times Lincoln remained in touch with reality, his ego never sought refuge in insanity.

"Those who study the deeper recesses of the mind will readily understand the nature of this emotional surging. Two contrasting natures struggled within him—the inheritance from an untutored, roving and unstable father, who treated him brutally, and from a cheerful, fine, affectionate mother from whom Lincoln claimed to have inherited his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity and his ambition.

"His mental regressions were shallow and transient in comparison to the pathological escapes one sees in the psychoses and intoxications. But humor does furnish an escape from pain."

Brill's Attack On Lincoln Is Hotly Resented

1931

NEW YORK, June 6.—(A.P.)—A woman biographer, a German historian and a psychiatrist, all widely known, were on record today as opposed to Dr. A. A. Brill's theory that Abraham Lincoln was a "schizoid-manic" personality.

Dr. Brill's contention that Lincoln was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type who succeeded in keeping his baser nature under rigid control was disputed by Ida M. Tarbell, Emil Ludwig and Dr. L. Pierce Clark.

Miss Tarbell said she never has been able to trace to Lincoln any story that could not be repeated to decent-minded persons. Dr. Brill claims Lincoln had a low taste in humor which descended to the obscene.

Dr. Brill expressed his views in a paper which he delivered before a joint session of the American Psychoanalytic and American Psychiatrist Associations in Toronto, Ont., yesterday.

"I have sometimes suspected," said Miss Tarbell, "that those who insist on his (Lincoln's) grossness might have been finding what they looked for—and enjoyed—that it was their obscenity rather than his that was behind the story."

Emil Ludwig, in a radio address, said the spirit of Lincoln was the "most beautiful" of the fathers of America he had studied.

"I saw men of all centuries and many nations," Ludwig declared. "None of them, however, touched my heart from the human point of view as much as Lincoln."

Dr. Brill maintains Lincoln failed to grasp realities.

"Who had a firmer grasp upon eternal verities of the issues at stake during the Civil War?" Dr. Clark asked.

DR. BRILL DESCRIBES LINCOLN AS 'MANIC'

**Tells Psychiatrists at Toronto,
However, That Emancipator
Was Not Insane.**

CITES JOKES IN ANALYSIS

**Attributes His Moods to Parental
Influences and Repression
of Himself.**

DR. MORENO IS SKEPTICAL

**Asserts Psycho-Analysis Has Not
Progressed Far Enough to
Deal With Lincoln.**

1931

Special to The New York Times.

TORONTO, Ont., June 5.—Dr. A. A. Brill, New York psychoanalyst, today read before the American Psychiatric Association's convention here his paper in which he described Abraham Lincoln as a "schizoid manic personality." Protests against a hearing for him did not develop seriously.

Dr. Brill, however, explained that he did not intend to attribute insanity to Lincoln. Schizoid, it had been explained, is a word meaning to split and he indicated that manic was used to describe surging moods, sometimes buoyant, sometimes depressed. "Judging by all descriptions given of Lincoln's depressions," he said, "I feel that all one can say is that he was a schizoid manic personality, now and then harassed by schizoid mania moods. These moods never reached to that degree of profundity to justify the diagnosis of insanity. At all times Lincoln remained in touch with reality. His ego never sought refuge in insanity."

An American by adoption, Dr. J. L. Moreno, New York psychiatrist, formerly of Vienna, took issue with Dr. Brill, saying psychoanalysis has not developed to the point where it could make a satisfactory analysis of Lincoln.

Dr. Brill's paper was entitled "Lincoln as a Humorist."

"What is very peculiar about Lincoln's stories and jokes, his own and those he appropriated from others," he said, "is the fact that many, if not most, are of an aggressive or algolagnic nature, treating of pain, suffering and death, and that a great many of them were so frankly sexual as to be classed as obscene. Most of his biographers speak of the latter, but are at a loss to explain why Lincoln resorted to this form of wit.

His Attitude Toward Women.

"Lincoln was a very aggressive person and hence one would expect him to be also sexually aggressive. According to Herndon, Mr. Lincoln had a strong passion for women. And, yet, much to his credit, he lived a

pure and virtuous life.

"Lincoln had to cope with enormous trials and vicissitudes, poor heredity from his father's side, humble birth, abject poverty, struggle for education and an unsatisfied love life. But, despite these handicaps, he attained the highest ambition of any American. Nevertheless, throughout his life he was unable to disburden himself of his depressive moods."

Dr. Brill said there are "many authorities" for the existence of these moods, described variously as the blues, melancholy, abstraction and mental depression.

"To any psychiatrist," Dr. Brill says, "the above-mentioned descriptions are quite plain. We know that in the ordinary case of manic depressive psychosis the depressions are often followed by a phase of elation. As far as my investigations go no distinct manic attacks were ever observed in Lincoln. There were, no doubt, numerous mild euphoric rises (general spirit of elation), which showed themselves in his incessant story-telling and in his fluent wit.

"Those who study the deeper recesses of the mind will readily understand the nature of this emotional surging. Two contrasting natures struggled within him, the inheritance from an untutored, roving and unstable father, who treated him brutally, and from a cheerful, fine, affectionate mother from whom Lincoln claimed to have inherited his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity and his ambition."

Dr. Moreno said Dr. Brill's conclusions were based on the statements of friends and contemporaries, who had "all kinds of motives to relate all kinds of stories about Lincoln."

Had a psychiatrist made a study of Lincoln, he added, Dr. Brill would have been perfectly justified in accepting the findings, but he held that, as no scientific study of the great American emancipator had been made, there was not any justification for any attempt to analyze his personality from what is related about him by a layman. A genius of his sort was capable of playing rôles and saying many things which could be explained in a multitude of ways besides the analysis of Dr. Brill.

After hearing Dr. Brill read his paper, Dr. W. M. English Brockville, retiring president, declared that "this most interesting paper is now before you for discussion. I see nothing of which we can complain."

The convention ended with a trip to the Ontario Hospital at Whitby.

Dr. Clark Takes Opposite View.

The characterization of Abraham Lincoln as a "schizoid manic personality" by Dr. A. A. Brill in Toronto yesterday, drew a reply here from Dr. L. Pierce Clark, consulting neurologist for Manhattan State Hospital. Dr. Clark, who is a member of the American Psychiatric and the American Psychoanalytic Associations, now holding joint sessions in Toronto, said he had been making a psychoanalytic study of the personality of Lincoln for over five years, for the purpose of writing a book to be called "The Spirit of Lincoln."

Pointing out that the "schizoid" or "schizophrenic" characteristics attributed to Lincoln, indicated a failure to accept reality, Dr. Clark declared that perhaps no President had ever had the innate power to see in and through the intricacies of the fundamental constitutional policy of national against States' rights that Lincoln had possessed. The real genius of Lincoln's mind, he said, was a supreme faculty of understanding the common mind of the American people as a whole.

Dr. Clark also criticized Dr. Brill for applying the principles of Freud too carelessly "to a personality of which the analysts often know too little."

LINCOLN'S DUAL LIFE DISPUTED

*Psychoanalyst's Study Held
Not Based on Facts*

*Expert Had Called Nature
"Schizoid-Manic"*

*Knowledge of Emancipator
Second-Handed*

TORONTO (Ont.) June 5. (AP)—The processes by which Dr. A. A. Brill, New York psychiatrist, concluded that Abraham Lincoln was a dual personality who rigidly controlled his baser nature, were disputed by Dr. J. L. Moreno of New York at a joint session of the American Psychiatrist and Psychoanalytic Associations today.

Dr. Moreno challenged Dr. Brill's scientific procedure in concluding that Lincoln was a "schizoid-manic" type, given to low humor of an "obscene" character. The psychoanalytic method, Dr. Moreno maintained has not been developed sufficiently to warrant its use in an analysis of Lincoln.

KNOWLEDGE HEARSAY

Not only has no expert psychiatrist first-hand knowledge of Lincoln, he said, but it is erroneous to base a study of the man on stories told about him by contemporaries who might have had "all sorts of motives for telling them."

Dr. Moreno's criticism followed upon Dr. Brill's delivery of a paper "Abraham Lincoln as a Humorist" which had aroused opposition from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, prominent Brooklyn psychiatrist, when an excerpt appeared in the program of the association last month. Dr. Hicks declared Dr. Brill's statements "insulting."

Schizoid is a word of Greek derivation meaning to split, and the expression applied to Lincoln does not mean insanity. Dr. Brill found the trace of dual personality in a reputed tendency to tell off-color anecdotes, which bubbled up as part of Lincoln's humor. The split personality source was traced to his conflicting inheritances from his mother and father, two natures "that never became fused in him."

Dr. Brill ranked Lincoln as a wit with Mark Twain, Uncle Remus and other great American humorists. He confined his study to the emotional side of the Emancipator.

STORIES OFF COLOR

"What is very peculiar about Lincoln's stories and jokes," said Dr. Brill, "his own and those he appropriated from others, is the fact that many, if not most, are of an aggressive or algolagnic nature, treating of pain, suffering and death, and that a great many of them were so frankly sexual as to be classed as obscene. Most of his biographers speak of the latter, but are at a loss to explain why Lincoln resorted to this form of wit. Thus, Beveridge remarked that 'He had faults extremely human, such as his love of a certain type of anecdote, a taste which he never over-

came and the expression of which, as will appear, was so marked a feature of his manhood and so shocking to the eminent men among whom he did his historic work.'"

Dr. Brill named as other authorities for the anecdotes "Carl Sandburg quoting Henry Villard," and Dr. Holland's "Abraham Lincoln."

DEPRESSION MOODS

"Looking at this behavior with present-day eyes," Dr. Brill said, "I cannot be shocked by any of Lincoln's stories that I have heard or read. To be sure he called a spade a spade, and having been brought up in the back woods of pioneer days, he did not possess the inhibiting influences of a New England environment."

"Lincoln had to cope with enormous trials and vicissitudes, poor heredity from his father's side, humble birth, abject poverty, struggle for education and an unsatisfied love life, all of which he summed up in the story of the boy who was asked whether he liked gingerbread."

"Yes," he said, "I like it more than anything else, but I get less of it."

"But despite these handicaps he attained the highest ambition of any American. Nevertheless, throughout his life he was unable to disburden himself of his depressive moods."

MANIFEST IN WIT

Dr. Brill says there are "many authorities" for the existence of these moods described variously as the blues, melancholy, abstraction and mental depression.

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"There were no doubt numerous mild euphoric rises (general spirit of elation) which showed themselves in his incessant story telling and in his fluent wit."

CONTRASTING NATURES

"Judging by all the descriptions given of Lincoln's depressions, I feel that all one can say is that he was a schizoid-manic personality, now and then harassed by schizoid-manic moods. These moods never reached to that degree of profundity to justify the diagnosis of insanity. At all times Lincoln remained in touch with reality, his ego never sought refuge in insanity."

"Those who study the deeper recesses of the mind will readily understand the nature of this emotional surging. Two contrasting natures struggled with him—the inheritance from an untutored, roving and unstable father, who treated him brutally, and from a cheerful, fine, affectionate mother, from whom Lincoln claimed to have inherited his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity and his ambition."

"His mental regressions were shallow and transient in comparison to the pathological escapes one sees in the psychoses and intoxications. But humor does furnish an escape from pain."

Notables Denounce Analysis Of Lincoln as 'Jekyll-Hyde Type'

**Ida Tarbell, Emil Ludwig and Dr. L. P. Clark Assail
Dr. Brill's Theory Emancipator Had
Schizoid-Manic Personality**

New York, June 6.—(AP)—A noted woman biographer, an eminent German historian and a widely known psychiatrist, were on record today as opposed to Dr. A. A. Brill's much-discussed theory that Abraham Lincoln was a "schizoid-manic" personality.

Dr. Brill's contention, after a psychoanalytic study of Lincoln, that he was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type, who succeeded in keeping his baser nature under rigid control, was disputed by Ida M. Tarbell, writer; Emil Ludwig, historian and biographer, and Dr. L. Pierce Clark, author of "The Spirit of Lincoln," soon to be published.

Miss Tarbell, in an article written for the Associated Press, declared she has never been able to trace to Lincoln any story that could not be repeated to decent-minded persons. Dr. Brill claims Lincoln had a low taste in humor descended to the obscene.

Dr. Brill expressed his views in a paper which he delivered before a joint session of the American Psychoanalytic and American Psychiatrist Association in Toronto, Ont., yesterday.

"Dr. Brill's paper on Abraham Lincoln," said Miss Tarbell, "is less formidable in its terminology and connotations than we usually get from scientific gentlemen.

"I have sometimes suspected, too, that those who insist on his (Lincoln's) grossness might have been finding what they looked for—and enjoyed—that it was their obscenity rather than his that was behind the story."

Emil Ludwig, in a radio address, declare the spirit of Lincoln was the "most beautiful" of the fathers of America he has ever studied.

"I saw men of all centuries and many nations," Ludwig declared, "None of them, however, touched my heart from the human point of view as much as Lincoln.

Dr. Brill's conclusion that Lincoln's mental processes were of a schizoid, or "split" type, was assailed by Dr. L. P. Pierce Clark as erroneous. Dr. Brill maintains Lincoln failed to grasp realities, Dr. Clarke pointed out.

"Who had a firmer grasp upon eternal verities of the issues at stake during the Civil War?" Dr. Clark asked.

June 6-1931

Lincoln 'Used Wit to Escape From Depressive Moods'

**Psychoanalyst Describes 'Honest Abe' as Schizoid-Syntonic Type Like Mark Twain—Personality
Due to Conflict of Parents' Nature.**

TORONTO, Ont., June 3 (UP).—Abraham Lincoln used humor as a mode of escape from emotional disturbances caused by his dual personality.

That is the view of Dr. A. A. Brill, New York psychoanalyst, here to attend sessions of the American Psychiatric Association.

Brill will read a paper Friday on "Abraham Lincoln as a humorist."

He was careful to emphasize that Lincoln was not mentally disordered or insane, but of the "schizoid-syntonic" type of personality which is "as far removed from insanity as Toronto is from the Himalayas."

All such types unconsciously seek release from their depressive moods through humor, Brill said, and cited "Uncle Remus" and Mark Twain as similar types.

"Lincoln's personality was the result of a struggle between the natures of his parents, as his mother was of the amiable, cheery, affec-

tionate type, while his father was of the gloomy, shut-in type who dwelt largely within himself."

Discussing Lincoln's stories, Brill said the trait was due to Lincoln's backwoods rearing where he had no inhibiting influences, and also because there was little possibility for Lincoln to obtain "the vicarious outlets through the drama, etc., so useful and even necessary for modern man."

Explaining that obscene wit is indulged in whenever men are isolated from the opposite sex and is a "substitute outlet for suppressed and repressed sex," Brill remarked that "It is no wonder that honest Abe made use of spicy wit as a vent for his repressed sexuality, and possessing the gift to make wit, he used it as a displaced outlet for his suppressed impulses."

Brill said: "Lincoln's great success may be largely due to the fact that he overcame all his difficulties because he used humor as an escape."

Recd

June 4-1931

Lincoln Called Demented

In a paper read on June 5 at a meeting in Toronto of the American Psychiatric Association, Dr. A. A. Brill classified Lincoln as "a shizoidmaniac personality who suffered from definite attacks of mental disorder, the occasional coarseness of his wit being a manifestation of his psychosis." Dr. E. E. Hicks, noted alienist, protested against the paper as "an insult to right-thinking Americans and to the memory of one of the two greatest presidents in the history of this republic." Other protests were also offered.

Lincoln Analysis Assailed

Miss Tarbell, Ludwig and Dr. Clark Take Issue With Dr. Brill's Views.

NY Sun June 6 1931

A woman biographer, a German historian and a psychiatrist were on record today as opposed to Dr. A. A. Brill's much-discussed theory that Abraham Lincoln was a "Schizoid-maniac" personality. Dr. Brill's contention, after a psycho-analytic study of Lincoln, that he had a dual personality but succeeded in keeping his baser nature under rigid control, was disputed by Ida M. Tarbell, writer; Emil Ludwig, historian and biographer, and Dr. L. Pierce Clark, author of "The Spirit of Lincoln," soon to be published.

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Miss Tarbell Replies.

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Emil Ludwig in a radio address declared the spirit of Lincoln was the "most beautiful" of the fathers of America he ever has studied.

"I saw men of all centuries and many nations," Ludwig declared. "None of them, however, touched my heart from the human point of view as much as Lincoln."

"I see in him a great character of Shakespeare, comparable only to Hamlet or King Lear. At the same time he strikes me as much more American than Washington. Lincoln constantly lives in my heart."

Dr. Brill's conclusion that Lincoln's mental processes were of a schizoid, or "split" type, was assailed by Dr. L. P. Pierce Clark as erroneous. Dr. Brill maintains Lincoln failed to

grasp realities, Dr. Clark pointed out.

Dr. Clark Differs.

"Who had a firmer grasp upon eternal verities of the issues at stake during the civil war?" Dr. Clark asked.

"I do not believe the characterization of Lincoln's wit which Dr. Brill quotes, nor that Lincoln had no ability to discriminate between the vulgar and refined substances from which he extracted it."

"I venture to say that no woman ever heard Lincoln tell an out-and-out smutty story, a suggestive one, or even one which Freud designates 'tendentious' without the Great Emancipator being fully aware of what he was saying."

At Atlanta Dr. Newdigate Owensby of Atlanta, a member of the board of councillors of the American Psychology Association, said he "thoroughly concurred" with Dr. Brill.

Jekyll-Hyde Personality Inherited From Conflicting Parentage, Says Scientist

COLLEAGUES TAKE ISSUE

Toronto, June 5.—(AP)—The processes by which Dr. A. A. Brill, New York psychiatrist, concluded that Abraham Lincoln was a dual personality who rigidly controlled his baser nature were disputed by Dr. J. L. Moreno, of New York, at a joint session of the American Psychiatrist and Psychoanalytic Associations today.

Dr. Moreno challenged Dr. Brill's scientific procedure in concluding that Lincoln was a "schizoid manic" type, given to low humor of an "obscene" character. The psychoanalytic method, Dr. Moreno maintained, has not been developed sufficiently to warrant its use in an analysis of Lincoln.

Not only has no expert psychiatrist first-hand knowledge of Lincoln, he said, but it is erroneous to base a study of the man on stories told about him by contemporaries who might have had "all sorts of motives for telling them."

Paper Called Insult

Dr. Moreno's criticism followed Dr. Brill's delivery today of a paper, "Abraham Lincoln as a Humorist," which had aroused opposition from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, prominent Brooklyn psychiatrist, when an excerpt appeared in the program of the association last month. Dr. Hicks declared Dr. Brill's statements "insulting."

Schizoid is taken from the Greek word meaning to split, and the expression as applied to Lincoln does not mean insanity. Dr. Brill concluded that Lincoln had a schizoid, or Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality, from Lincoln's reputed tendency to tell off-color stories.

Dr. Brill traced the split-personality to Lincoln's parents; a father who was "untutored, roving and unstable, who treated him brutally," and a mother who was "affectionate, cheerful, fine, from whom Lincoln claimed to have inherited his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity and ambition."

Stories of Pain

"Those who study the deeper recesses of the mind," Dr. Brill said, "will readily understand the nature of this emotion surging."

"What is very peculiar about Lincoln's stories and jokes, his own and those he appropriated from others, is the fact that many, if not most, are of an aggressive or algolanic nature, treating of pain, suffering and death, and that a great many of them were so frankly sexual, as to be classed as obscene."

Lincoln, Dr. Brill concluded, suffered from depressive psychosis, with periods of emotional depression followed often by phases of elation. His incessant story-telling and fluent wit were examples of his emotional elation.

Dr. Brill ranked Lincoln as a wit with Mark Twain, Uncle Remus and other great American humorists. He

By IDA M. TARBELL

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New York, June 5.—(AP)—Dr. A. A. Brill's paper on Abraham Lincoln as a humorist is less formidable in its terminology and connotations than we usually get from scientific gentlemen. It is lively, interesting and understandable.

As a long-standing student of Lincoln's life I should qualify somewhat certain evidence on which he depends. Take the question of the character of the stories Lincoln told. Were they obscene?

Couldn't Curb Tongue

Dr. Brill is right in saying that at the worst they were extremely tame in comparison to what we hear nowadays on the stage and in drawing rooms. His stories undoubtedly were the type told in his time in the primitive and rather gross society from which he sprang. That should be expected.

Probably they changed little throughout his life, for Lincoln was

*John Public Ledger
June 6 1931*



IDA M. TARBELL

never really at home in a society which had been subjected to the restraints and refinements imposed by what we call cultivation. He was too natural and honest a human being easily to curb his tongue or change his ways.

It should be remembered, too, that in the Civil War it was the habit to tack his name to all kinds of jokes and stories, even to publish collections gathered from right and left under the name of "Old Abe."

I have never been able to trace to him with evidence worth accepting a story I could not repeat—to a decent-minded listener. I think it quite possible that when Dr. Holland said that the whole West was full of his gross stories he was really saying that every ancient and obscene yarn retold was begun, to give it freshness—"here is a new Lincoln story"—it is a common-enough habit.

Blames Listeners

I have sometimes suspected, too, that those who insisted on his grossness might have been finding what they looked for—and enjoyed—that it was rather their obscenity than his that was behind the story.

There is another bit of evidence which Dr. Brill uses which needs qualification. In talking of Lincoln's father, Tom, he overlooks as did Senator Beveridge, his chief authority, the rather extensive documentary evidence collected and published by Dr. Louis Warren proving that Tom Lincoln was neither as illiterate or shiftless as most of his biographers would like to have us believe. A literary device to throw his son's greatness into still higher light, making him more of a "mystery."

Dr. Brill calls attention to Lincoln's refusal to visit his father in what proved to be his last illness, but he does not give the real reason. It was a good reason, all those who knew his wife, Mary Lincoln, and her ways agree. She was having a baby and would not allow Mr. Lincoln out of her sight; particularly would she have made it difficult for him to go to his father, for she detested the family, always objected to his seeing or helping them. I am not quite as much impressed as Dr. Brill is by the "oedipus situation."

However, Dr. Brill has written a





**LINCOLN :: A
PSYCHO-BIOGRAPHY**

L. PIERCE CLARK

LINCOLN: A PSYCHO-BIOGRAPHY

WHEN, in the spring of 1925, the late Senator Beveridge was deep in research for the great life of Lincoln he was never to complete, and was seeking guidance and corroboration from scholars all over the country, he was surprised at the frequency with which the scholars suggested that a psychiatrist would be a more useful adviser than a historian.

Even at that time a distinguished psychiatrist, who is also an ardent admirer of Lincoln (his admiration persisting after evolving a sound clinical diagnosis), was at work on a complete life of Lincoln from the psychoanalytic viewpoint. His narrative arranges all the facts, all the events, into a pattern only a psychiatrist could discern. The ambiguities, dualities, and complexities of Lincoln are, for the first time, laid bare and made explicable.

Dr. Clark advances the hypothesis that Lincoln's stepmother encouraged the boy to study, protected him against the sneers of his pioneer father, and that Lincoln carried through his young manhood (and later) what is popularly called a "mother fixation." This is offered as an explanation for some of the more startling experiences in Lincoln's love life. Dr. Clark's psychoanalytical picture of Lincoln also suggests the reasons for Lincoln's greatness, delineates the personal idiosyncrasies which set Lincoln apart, caused him to exert both a charm and a power over people.

"He does belong to the ages, even after such a thoroughgoing Freudian as Dr. L. Pierce Clark has finished with him. . . . Dr. Clark moves us to pity as well as to reverence. . . . The Freudian interpretation may be made grotesque or beautiful, according to the language in which it is stated; fortunately, Dr. Clark chooses as a rule to give it in singularly beautiful language . . . a picture poetic and tender as well as scientific remains, contributing to explain much that has heretofore remained dark in Lincoln's life."

—Robert L. Duffus, New York Times.

"The Fatal First of January, 1841!"

his marriage, he wishes for him that Utopia which Lincoln himself is to find unrealizable, "to be exclusively concerned for one another." He believes his part in Speed's marriage was "fate. . . . I always was superstitious; I believe God made me one of the instruments of bringing your Fanny and you together, which union I have no doubt He had foreordained. Whatever He designs He will do for me yet. 'Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord' is my text just now."

In these days of his hard-earned freedom, Lincoln's conscience bothers him. His sense of dishonesty toward Mary Todd constantly comes to the fore. He would be entirely happy "but for the never-absent idea that there is one still unhappy whom I have contributed to make so," he informs Speed. "That kills my soul. I cannot but reproach myself for even wishing to be happy while she is otherwise." Witness the slight discharge of his guilt when he hears that Mary has derived much enjoyment from a recent trip to Jacksonville with a party of friends: "God be praised for that!"

Searching for the perfect love, we have Lincoln's words written to Speed: "It is the peculiar misfortune of both you and me to dream dreams of Elysium far exceeding all that anything earthly can realize."

As Mrs. Abell had done for Lincoln in the past, the wife of the editor of the Whig newspaper at Springfield now assumes the rôle of matchmaker and brings the estranged couple together at her home. Mrs. Edwards subsequently hears how Mrs. Francis has connived to have them meet, that the engagement has been resumed in spite of her advice. With revived spirits, Mary happily tells her sister, "The world—woman, and man [are] uncertain and slippery. It [is] best to keep [our] secret courtship from all eyes and ears!"

Lincoln must needs take the "fatal step" with a leap and a bound. Mary's shocked family hear her decision with surprise; what good can come of such a hasty marriage? Along towards afternoon on the 4th of November, '41, in trepidation and obviously nervous, Lincoln approaches Matheny. His manner appears unusually constrained as he asks if he will act that evening as his best man. Almost tearfully he says, "Jim, I shall have to marry that girl!"

As the dreaded hour approaches, Lincoln's dejection is likened to that of an animal on the way to slaughter. Emerging from his room in the Butler home dressed in his 'go-to-meetin'' clothes, he is ac-

L. PIERCE CLARK

author of "*Lincoln: A Psycho-biography*"

After receiving a degree from New York University Medical College, he served in general and special hospitals devoted to nervous and mental diseases, did post-graduate work in the Universities of Vienna and Berlin, served an internship under Hughlings Jackson and Sir William Gowers at the National Hospital for the Paralyzed and Epileptic, London.

On his return to this country he became an associate neurologist and psychiatrist at the Vanderbilt Clinic, Columbia University. He organized the establishment of the Central Neurological Hospital on Welfare Island. He is now consulting neurologist to the Manhattan State Hospital, the Central Islip State Hospital, the Craig Colony for Epileptics, Randalls Island Hospital and School for Mental Defectives, and Letchworth Village.

He practises Freudian psychoanalysis and founded the Psychoanalytic Sanatorium at Stamford, Connecticut, the first in this country. In 1928 he edited and published the "Archives of Psychoanalysis." He is translator and publisher of Freud's "Hemmung, Symptom und Angst" and the translator of Anna Freud's "Technique of Child Analysis."

In popular lectures he has undertaken to apply psychoanalytic principles to the interpretation of remarkable historical personalities, notably Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, Dostoevsky, Lincoln, John Brown, and others.

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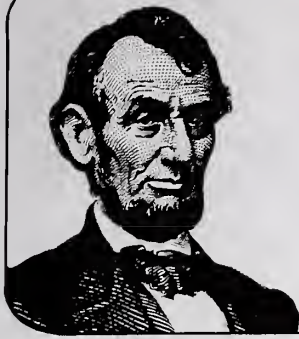
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November, 1982

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor
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CAN A HERO SURVIVE PSYCHOANALYSIS?

Most readers are afraid of psychohistory. They fear it will be filled with big Germanic or Greek words of indefinite meaning. They think it will demean its subject. (That may be all right with someone like Hitler, but most buyers of Lincoln books admire the man and are suspicious of his detractors.) They think it will be meaningless because it is impossible to accomplish with a man now dead for over a century what analysts accomplish only with difficulty after many weekly sessions on the couch.

These are not the silly fears of lay-persons to be equated with superstition and brushed aside by the learned. There are professional historians and serious biographers who, in essence, share all of these common doubts about psychohistory. Plenty of scholars detest "psychodogmatism" and jargon-filled writing. Some scholars are suspicious of the application of a "therapy," or rather a therapeutic method, to the life of a historic figure because it somehow implies from the very start that there was something "wrong" with the figure. Many scholars are concerned about the scarcity of documentation in ordinary historical sources for the things that are most important to psychoanalytic investigation.

Furthermore, there is good reason to fear psychohistory because of its record to date. As many psychohistorians are themselves quick to admit, the number of existing examples of excellent psychohistory is small, and the number of embarrassingly bad examples is distressingly large.

The result is that a great number of people who are interested in Abraham Lincoln have not read Charles B. Strozier's *Lincoln's Quest for Union: Public and Private Meanings* (New York: Basic Books, 1982). They have not read it because they are afraid of its "avowedly psychohistorical" approach. Some, I am sorry to report, have been ready to scoff and giggle without so much as a peek inside the covers. I have been careful here not myself to scoff at the fears which underlie such a phenomenon; they are worthy of respectful notice.

The tragedy in all this is that many readers are missing out on something they would really enjoy and — more to the point — on something they deeply crave. Professor Strozier has written, no matter what he avows, a piece of what can best be called "intimate biography." This is a well-written and lively book about Abraham Lincoln the man. There is scarcely a scholar in this country, hardly an author with a monograph on some specialized Lincoln subject to his credit, who has not at some time or other winced at hearing a reader express a wish for a really readable book about Lincoln the man, his hopes, his fears,

his personal foibles, his inner strengths, his human weaknesses. That book is here now, and it would be a shame for the readers who have waited so long to be scared off from it.

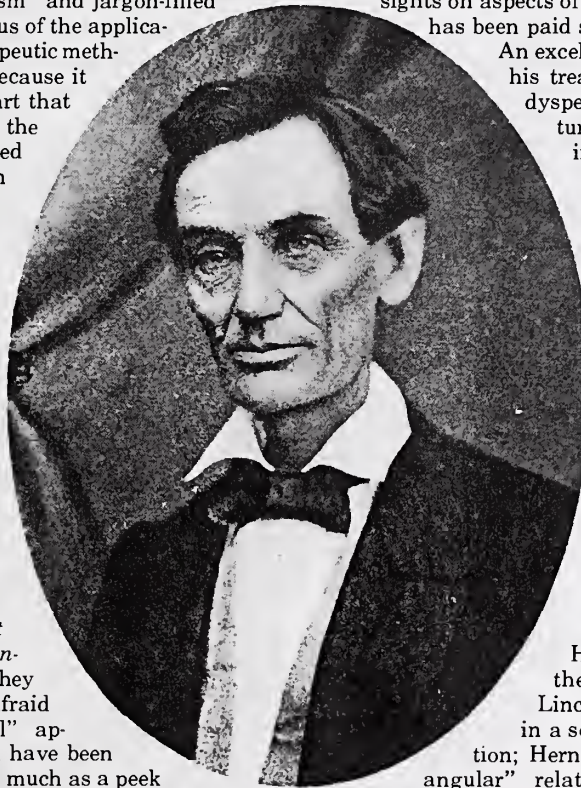
Oddly enough, writers interested in Lincoln's psyche, from Edmund Wilson to Dwight Anderson, have not really given the readers what they should. They have not offered readers even a perverted description of Lincoln's intimate or personal life. They have merely stood the traditional public Lincoln on his head and claimed that he was a closet tyrant stalking the presidency and thinking jealously about George Washington's reputation. Strozier has offered a genuinely personal portrait of Lincoln, real flesh-and-blood biography. This is something that was needed — especially since it includes helpful new insights on aspects of Lincoln's life to which little attention has been paid since the days of Billy Herndon.

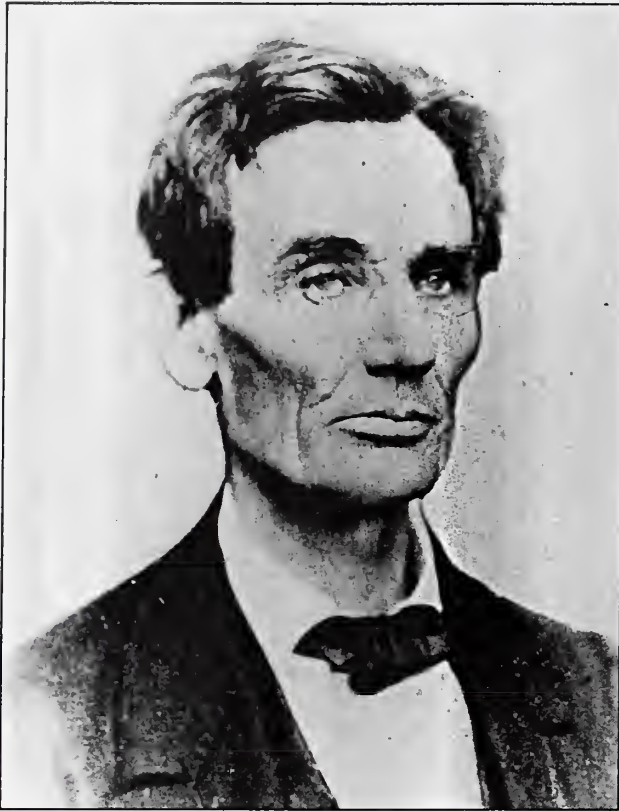
An excellent example of Strozier's best work is his treatment of William H. Herndon. That dyspeptic but clever critic of American culture, Gore Vidal, has recently been mining Herndon's irresponsible and uninformed speculations about his law partner's sex life for some considerable nuggets of sensational journalistic copy. It has been my lot to answer the questions raised by readers of Vidal's cynical speculations. They are easily enough dismissed, but something in my answers always bothered me. I was never quite satisfied that my explanations of Herndon's errors got to the bottom of the matter.

They did not, but Professor Strozier does. Herndon had, Strozier says quite accurately, an "obsessional interest in Lincoln's sex life." Lincoln was, in many ways, the most important person in Herndon's life. He was also, of course, the most important person in Mary Todd Lincoln's life. She and Herndon engaged in a sort of competition for Lincoln's attention; Herndon, Lincoln, and Mary had a "triangular" relationship. An "elemental jealousy" prompted the hatred between Lincoln's law partner and Lincoln's wife, and that jealousy explains Herndon's extraordinary interest in Lincoln's sex life as nothing else will.

This is only one example among many of the useful insights in *Lincoln's Quest for Union*, but it serves well to typify Strozier's focus on the personal. The language, it should be noted, is the language of common sense. It is English. It is not jargon or, as some cynics describe it, "psychobabble." Psychohistorical training seems to have equipped Professor Strozier particularly well to come up with insights like this, but, wherever such ability comes from, it has not been obscured by the customarily loose and impenetrable language of psychoanalysis.

I focus on language here because I think it is important —





and not merely because books should be written so that reasonably intelligent readers can learn from and enjoy them. It is important because the language of psychoanalysis is, on the whole, dangerous to historical writing.

Words have meanings, and the extreme language of psychoanalysis — “rage,” “killing fathers,” “annihilation,” “world-destroying rage,” “revenge,” “fantasies... of omnipotence,” “compulsive,” “obsessive” — does not translate well into precise historical analysis. The language most often distorts, but at best it might have some utility in dealing with extreme figures from history. It is not only useless but dangerous in dealing with figures who were eminently successful in bland and lawyerly occupations, who forged great political alliances balancing the ambitions and egos of hundreds of men, who wrote two-hour-long speeches and careful state papers on subjects like the tariff and the sub-treasury, and who somehow pleased large majorities of ordinary people. The extreme rhetoric of psychoanalysis can do nothing but violence to a Victorian sobersides like Abraham Lincoln, who confined his psychologically interesting behavior to a few risqué jokes, a handful of stirring references to the Declaration of Independence, a couple of cool remarks about his father, some periods of melancholy, and four dreams.

Incidentally, this rhetorical problem is not one that stems from Sigmund Freud and the infancy of psychobiography. As Professor Strozier points out, Freud “all but missed rage,” and it is the newer theoreticians of psychoanalysis, including Strozier’s favorite Heinz Kohut, who have given us this language of extremism. Strozier uses it occasionally himself but only occasionally, and it has not done to him what its use has done to other psychobiographers — made them tone deaf to excesses in any sort of language. Words like “tyrant,” “demonic,” and “malignant” come all too easily to less careful psychobiographers like Dwight Anderson.

Professor Strozier prides himself on his “conservative” use of evidence. As one of the leaders of the discipline of psychohistory, he is keenly aware of the criticism that psychohistorians have used evidence carelessly. Strozier strives to use as evidence only things which most other historians would also be willing to use. He is, by and large, successful in this. But he should perhaps be even prouder of his respect for language and the meaning of words. That too has prevented him from writing a book that no one could or should read.

He has been successful in using evidence conservatively, by and large, and when he has faltered in this, there have been

conventional historians like me quick to pounce on him. Don E. Fehrenbacher, for example, in the issue of *Reviews in American History* for March 1983, took Professor Strozier to task for putting too much emphasis on Lincoln’s mention in a brief autobiography of shooting a wild turkey — and for misinterpreting the incident to boot. The gaffe by Strozier is uncomfortably reminiscent of Freud’s now notorious misinterpretation and mistranslation of an allusion to a bird by Leonardo da Vinci. Freud’s error has become a classic instance of the misuse of evidence by psychohistorians. One wishes Professor Strozier had not, at the very least, chosen a bird incident for one of his least convincing arguments.

Happily such instances are few, and there are many instances of close, careful, and original readings of documents to outweigh them. For example, he nicely juxtaposes two letters of Mary Todd Lincoln about her son Robert:

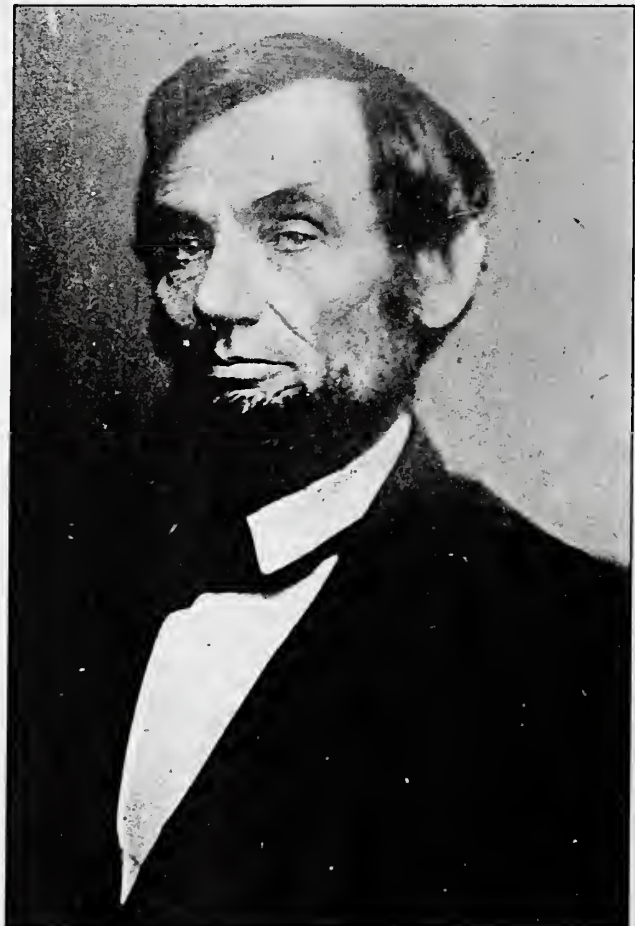
[1859] I miss Bob, so much [now that he has gone away to school] that I do not feel settled down, as much as I used to & find myself going on trips quite frequently.

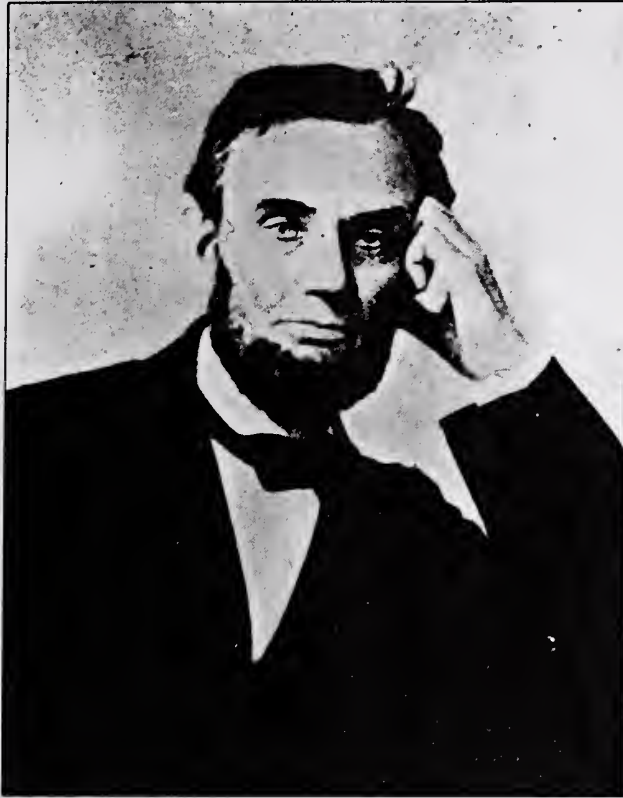
[1877] In our household, he was always trying to obtain the mastery, on all occasions — never daring of course to be insolent, to my amiable devoted children or myself, when my beloved husband, was near, it was a great relief to us all, when he was sent to school, then we had a most loving peace.

By reading closely and carefully, Strozier comes up with astute judgments, including his now famous interpretation of Lincoln’s letters to Joshua Speed about courtship and marriage, an almost adolescent correspondence by men in their thirties. Strozier makes good sense of them without making fun of them. There are also good sections on Lincoln’s humor and on Lincoln’s search for a metaphor for the expansion of slavery.

The overall impression given by the book is not one of being assaulted by the avant-garde. It seems, rather, almost curiously old fashioned, full of anecdotes and vivid quotations from letters.

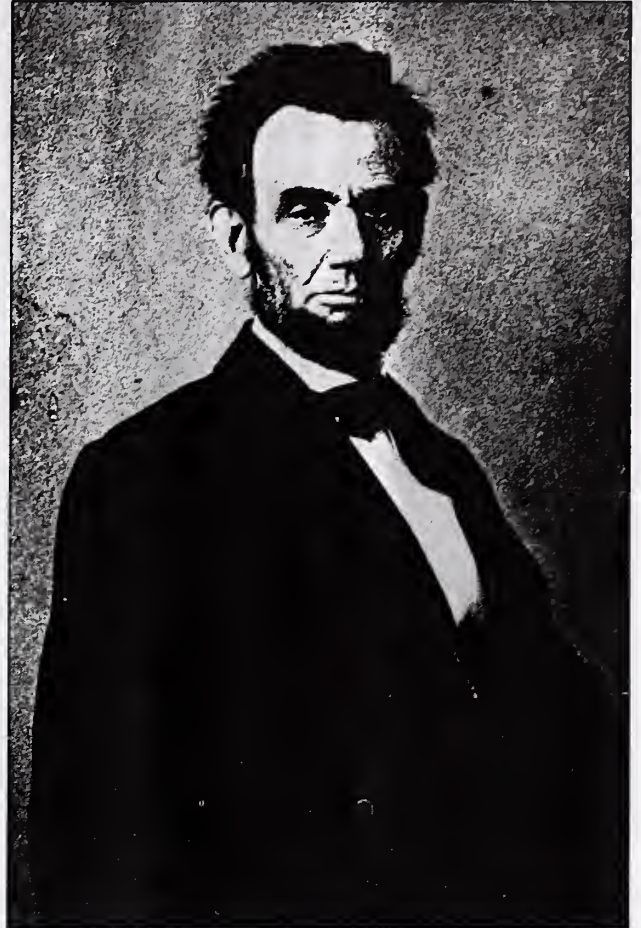
One other distinguishing characteristic of *Lincoln’s Quest for Union* is the author’s modesty. This is a welcome but rare attribute. In the “Preface” Strozier admits: “The ‘real’ Lincoln remains obscure to me.” Lincoln has a stubbornly intriguing ability to remain obscure to most people who write about him,



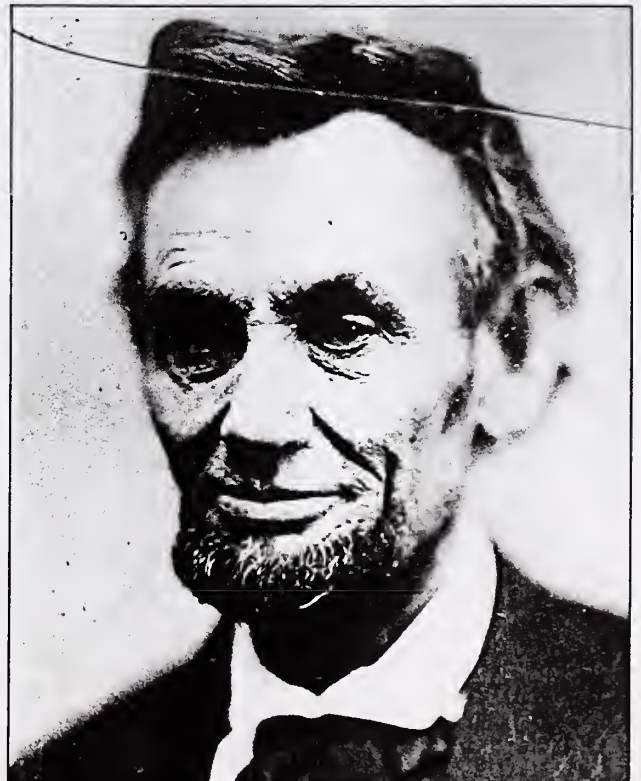
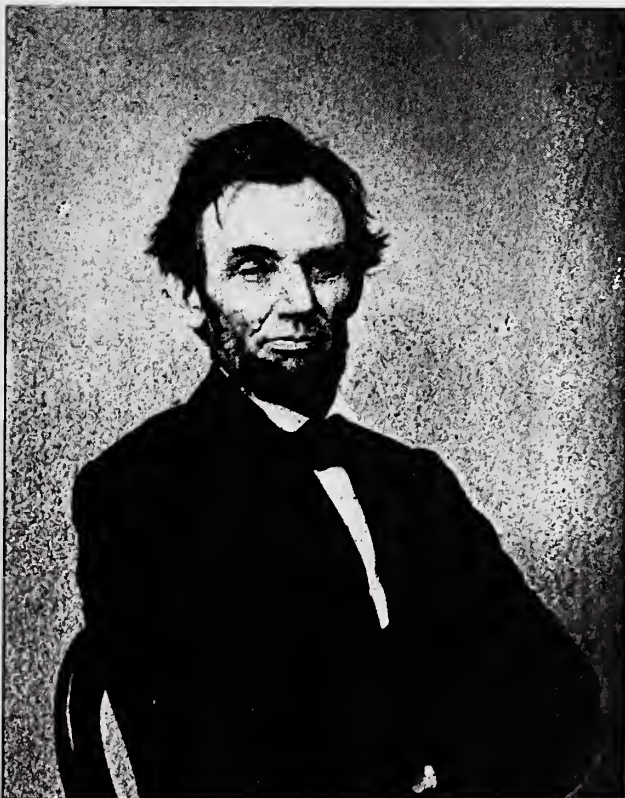


but few of us ever admit it in print. Professor Strozier also warns readers in the "Preface" about one chapter in the book in which the emphasis is not on Lincoln and in which the "analysis is complicated." "For those whose interests focus solely on Lincoln," he says, "it might be wise to skip Chapter 8. For the rest, take a deep breath."

Strozier has done what lamentably few of his fellow psychohistorians — or perhaps I should say few historians in general — have done: he has kept his readership in mind. He wrote



Lincoln's Quest for Union in the hope of gaining a large readership, and the book certainly deserves it. The hero of Strozier's book survives the psychoanalysis, and so will the readers.



AN EARLY ASSUALT ON LINCOLN'S PSYCHE

The history of psychological studies of Abraham Lincoln goes all the way back to William Herndon, who speculated for years on his famous law partner's mind. Probably the first scholarly study with a psychological bent was Nathaniel W. Stephenson's widely acclaimed *Lincoln: An Account of His Personal Life, Especially of Its Springs of Action as Revealed and Deepened by the Ordeal of the War*, which appeared in

1922. Over a decade would pass before the publication of the first full-fledged psychobiography, L. Pierce Clark's *Lincoln: A Psycho-Biography* (1933).

The most sensational foray of psychoanalysis into the field of Lincolniana, at least before the appearance of Edmund Wilson's chapter on Lincoln in *Patriotic Gore* in 1962, was A. A. Brill's speech on "Abraham Lincoln as Humorist" at the

annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Toronto on June 5, 1931. Even before Brill delivered his speech, he met sharp resistance. An abstract of the address appeared in the convention program circulated before the meeting and incensed a Brooklyn psychiatrist named Edward E. Hicks. A week before the convention met, Dr. Hicks sent a formal protest to Dr. Walter M. English, president of the American Psychiatric Association. Hicks called Brill's remarks on Lincoln an insult to right-thinking Americans and to the memory of "one of the two greatest Presidents in the history of this Republic." Hicks thought it time the American public "awoke to the fact that we have an element in this country who seem to thrive on slime and filth." He called it "blaspheming the memory of the immortal dead." The Association's program chairman responded only that the group would continue to take care in choosing speakers for its meetings. Brill delivered his speech as announced.

The speech attracted press attention not only because of its subject but also because of the speaker. Abraham Arden Brill was America's first psychoanalyst and her foremost champion of Freudianism. Born in Austria-Hungary in 1874, Brill emigrated to the United States at age fifteen to escape his father's authority. He lived in New York City for most of the rest of his life but studied psychoanalysis in Zurich and Vienna. He translated Freud's works into English and spread the gospel of psychoanalysis wherever he went. Historian John C. Burnham has said that Brill's work was marked by "preoccupation with the grossly sexual" and "insensitivity to intellectual subtlety," but these traits probably served psychoanalysis well in its infancy by describing it in "sensational" and "simplistic" terms.

In the paper on Lincoln, Brill claimed that Lincoln was the only President "to produce wit." The psychiatrist's experience

had taught him that genuine wits were "a mixture of the schizoid and syntonio personalities." Brill added that "the extreme of this type" was the "schizoid-maniac psychosis" and that Lincoln "had undoubtedly suffered" from this "malady." Brill once described his own psychology facetiously as "schizoid manic."

When the controversy hit the national press, it produced the

usual high comedy. The Associated Press story gave considerable space to the comment on Brill's speech given at the convention by Dr. J. L. Moreno. Brill had characterized Lincoln's humor as being

a "low" type, "frankly sexual" and "obscene." Moreno objected that a psychoanalyst should not rely on stories told about Lincoln by others who might have had "all sorts of motives for telling them." Dr. Brill commented on Lincoln's melancholy and his "unsatisfied love life." Moreno argued that the psychoanalytic method was not well enough developed to warrant application to Abraham Lincoln.

The comedy developed when newspapers picked up and adapted the AP story. There was the inevitable trotting out of shopworn psychological bromides — that Lincoln was "a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde who had his baser nature under rigid control." The wire service provided the customarily solemn and poorly written dictionary definitions of the obscure words for the rubes the reporters pictured as their readers: "Schizoid is a word of Greek derivation, meaning to split, and the expression applied to Lincoln does not mean insanity." Headline writers stretched the truth: "CALLS LINCOLN MAD; AROUSES HOT PROTEST." And some rubes really did get things mixed up; one paper said that Brill attributed a "schizoid-maniac" personality to Lincoln.

Ida Tarbell, Emil Ludwig, and L. Pierce Clark were quoted in the press as responding to the "attack on Lincoln's mentality." Tarbell wrote a reply for the AP, claiming that she could never trace any story to Lincoln that was unsuitable for decent-minded persons. She accused those who found "grossness" in Lincoln of reading their own obscenity into his story. Ludwig, in a radio address, said that Lincoln had the "most beautiful" spirit among American heroes. Dr. Clark, noting that "schizoid" or "schizophrenic" personalities indicated a failure to accept reality, declared that no President had the innate power that Lincoln possessed to grasp the realities of national policy in the intricacies of constitutional debate over states' rights.

The controversy soon died and has long since been forgotten. It occurred in an era when psychiatrists were still commonly called "alienists" and was a good deal removed from the modern era, with its glib ability to spout Freudian terms.

Yet it seems a familiar enough scene. Brill focused on Lincoln's humor, still a favorite subject in psychological studies of Lincoln. His paper was almost immediately characterized as an attack. And his reception was overwhelmingly hostile. If nothing else, the incident stands as a warning to future psychobiographers. Their task will never be an easy one.



Dr. A. A. Brill.

Says Lincoln Had Dual Nature

New York Psychiatrist Reads His Protested Paper—Puts Blame on Parents.

TORONTO, June 5 (A. P.).—Abraham Lincoln was analyzed as a "schizoid manic personality"—a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde who had his baser nature under rigid control—at the American Psychiatric Association meeting today. The analysis was read by Dr. A. A. Brill, a psychoanalyst, of New York city.

When an abstract of Dr. Brill's speech appeared in the program of the association last month, it brought a bitter protest from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, prominent Brooklyn psychiatrist, who described the illusions to Lincoln as "insulting." Dr. Hicks entered a formal protest against the speech with officers of the association.

Schizoid is a word of Greek derivation, meaning to split, and the expression applied to Lincoln does not mean insanity, Dr. Brill explained. He found the trace of dual personality in a reported tendency to tell off-color anecdotes, which bubbled up as part of Lincoln's humor. The split personality source was traced to his conflicting inheritances from his mother and father, two natures "that never became fused in him."

Ranked With Mark Twain.

Dr. Brill ranked Lincoln as a wit with Mark Twain, Uncle Remus and other great American humorists. He confined his study to the emotional side of the emancipator.

"What is very peculiar about Lincoln's stories and jokes," said Dr. Brill, "his own and those he appropriated from others is the fact that many, if not most, are of an aggressive or algolagnic nature, treating of pain, suffering and death, and that a great many of them were so frankly sexual as to be classed as obscene. Most of his biographers speak of the latter, but are at a loss to explain why Lincoln resorted to this form of wit." Thus, Beveridge remarked that he had faults, extremely human, such as his love of a certain type of anecdote, a taste which he never overcame, and the expression of which, as well as his wit, was remarked as a feature of his character and so pointing to the eminent man, among whom he did his historic work."

Dr. Brill named as other authorities for the analysis: Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Herbert A. Abrams Lincoln.

Psych-Biog.
HOWARD I. KUSHNER

Self-Destruction in the Promised Land

A PSYCHOCULTURAL
BIOLOGY OF
AMERICAN SUICIDE



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Suicide emerges as an alternative of last resort for the incomplete mourner when other strategies prove either insufficient or unavailable. The life of Meriwether Lewis is suggestive of incomplete mourning, and a fuller understanding of his death should lead us to a more complete picture of his life. Admittedly, Lewis's suicide provides a sketch rather than a complete picture of how cultural and historical factors interact with psychological and organic factors in suicidal behavior. In a subsequent chapter this historical context for incomplete mourning will be elaborated. First, however, I want to explore more fully the relationship between loss and subsequent suicidal behavior by examining a successful strategy: the case of an individual who experienced severe early loss, but who nevertheless did not commit suicide.

THE STRATEGY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

All loss, as the case of Meriwether Lewis illustrates, calls forth personal strategies and socially defined rituals. It is the failure of these strategies that can eventually lead to suicide. Even suicide is not necessarily a denial of life. As Robert Jay Lifton explains, suicide often includes an attempt to live on, if only in the memory of those left behind. We shall examine Lincoln's early years from this point of view.⁵¹

The main argument here is that the goal of Lincoln's well-known depressive behavior was to avoid self-destruction.⁵² As we shall see, his actions prior to 1842 fit this pattern. A threatened suicide in 1841 served as an extreme and partially successful attempt to purge the guilt, anger, and fears of desertion brought on by severe early loss and incomplete mourning.

Lincoln was born in Kentucky in 1809, the same year that Meriwether Lewis killed himself. Among Abraham Lincoln's earliest memories was the death of his infant brother Thomas when Abraham was between two and three years old. Thomas was buried in a small grave within sight of the family cabin.⁵³ In 1816, when Ab-

⁵¹ I wish to emphasize the modest purposes of this section. The life of Abraham Lincoln is employed here only as an example of how early loss and later depressive episodes do not necessarily end in suicide. This discussion should not be confused with an explanation of why Lincoln was elected president or with the causes of the Civil War.

raham was seven, his father Thomas, his mother Nancy Hanks, and his nine-year-old sister Sarah moved to Little Pigeon Creek in Spencer County, Indiana. Soon they were joined by Nancy's uncle, Thomas Sparrow, his wife Elizabeth, and Nancy's illegitimate nineteen-year-old cousin, Dennis Hanks. Thomas Lincoln and his family lived in a one-room cabin, while the Sparrows and young Hanks lived close by in an even more primitive lean-to.⁵⁴

In September 1818 Thomas Sparrow and his wife Elizabeth contracted brucellosis, a disease transmitted from cow's milk,⁵⁵ and within a week both died.⁵⁷ As her aunt and uncle lay dying, thirty-five-year-old Nancy Hanks Lincoln realized that she had contracted early signs of the illness. She called her children, Abraham, now nine, and Sarah, eleven, to her bedside. To her son, Nancy reportedly said, "I am going away from you, Abraham, and I shall not return. I know that you will be a good boy that you will be kind to Sarah and to your father." Nancy Lincoln died on 5 October 1818, one week after her uncle Thomas Sparrow. Abraham had watched his mother go through the course of the "milk sickness" in their one-room cabin and now he helped his father fashion a rude coffin. Father and son hauled it to a burial plot 1500 feet south of the cabin site, where a neighbor conducted a brief interment service.⁵⁸

The next several years were bleak ones for Thomas Lincoln and his children. Young Sarah took over the duties of her mother until her father married the widow Sarah Bush Johnston of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, a year later. Sarah Johnston moved into the already crowded Lincoln cabin with her three children, Elizabeth, twelve, John D., ten, and Matilda, eight.⁵⁹

Lincoln's relationship with his new stepmother seems to have been untroubled and affectionate—indeed, it remained closer than his relationship with his father. Charles B. Strozier writes that "Nowhere does Lincoln every say anything good about Thomas—a reticence that contrasts strikingly with his openly expressed idealization

⁵⁴ Brucellosis or undulant fever, which almost always proved fatal, was well known and sensibly feared by settlers in western Kentucky and southern Indiana. Its symptoms included "dizziness, nausea, vomiting, stomach pains, intense thirst, and a sickening odor of breath." Within a week, the victim would experience irregular respiration, an uneven pulse rate, below normal temperature, and "prostration . . . followed by a semi-to complete coma." See Wesley W. Spink, *The Nature of Brucellosis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 145–170; B. M. Thimn, *Brucellosis: Distribution in Man, Domestic and Wild Animals* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1982).

of Nancy and his deep affection for Sarah."⁶⁰ The portrait Lincoln left of his father in an 1848 letter to a relative is curt and unflattering: "Owing to my father being left an orphan at the age of six years, in poverty, and in a new country, he became a wholly uneducated man; which I suppose is the reason why . . . I can say nothing more that would interest you at all."⁶¹ All evidence indicates that Lincoln shared William H. Herndon's characterization of Thomas Lincoln's "utter laziness and want of energy," which Herndon attributed to Thomas's loss of potency.⁶² In 1851 Lincoln declined to visit Thomas, then on his deathbed, because, as he wrote to his stepbrother John D. Johnston, "Say to him that if we could meet now, it is doubtful whether it would not be more painful than pleasant."⁶³ At times Lincoln seems to have had the fantasy that Thomas Lincoln was not actually his father and that his mother Nancy Hanks was the illegitimate descendent of aristocratic Virginia planters.⁶⁴

In any case, with his mother's death, Lincoln transferred his filial affections even more intensely to his sister Sarah. Her death at twenty-one during childbirth in January 1828 devastated the nineteen-year-old youth: "He sat down on the door of the smoke house and buried his face in his hands. The tears slowly trickled from between his bony fingers and his gaunt frame shook with sobs." One who remembered Lincoln in the years immediately following Sarah's death pictured him as "wily and sad and thoughtful by turns." His sister's death, according to Louis Warren, "left lasting marks deep within his mind and spirit, and he endured long periods of melancholic brooding and depression."⁶⁵

Hearing of more promising opportunities in central Illinois, Thomas Lincoln led his family to a settlement about ten miles west of Decatur in the winter of 1830-1831. Within a year the Lincoln family moved to Coles County, Illinois, and twenty-two-year-old Abraham left his father's house to settle ultimately in New Salem along the Sangamon River where he worked as a clerk in a general store. Within six months Lincoln was an unsuccessful Whig candidate for the state legislature. In the middle of the campaign Lincoln served briefly as a militia captain in the Blackhawk War. By 1833 he was appointed as postmaster; he was a respected member of the community and a joint owner with William F. Berry of a general store. Even though that venture failed in 1834, twenty-five-year-old Abraham Lincoln was elected to the state legislature at Vandalia.⁶⁶

Thus, in a relatively short period Lincoln had achieved what he had admitted candidly in 1832 was one of his primary motives for seeking political office: "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed by my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition, is yet to be developed."⁶⁷

Electoral success, however, did not remove his recurrent depressive (or as he called them "hypocondria") episodes. The death of his friend Ann Rutledge in 1835 brought back memories of his earlier losses. Lincoln had become friends with Ann when he had first arrived in New Salem and had boarded at her father's tavern. No evidence exists to substantiate Herndon's claim that Lincoln and Ann were engaged. Lincoln's well-documented fears of rejection by women during this period suggests that he had sought out Ann's company because she was engaged and therefore Lincoln could maintain a friendship with her without the danger of commitment. Even after Ann broke off her engagement with John MacNamara, it is unlikely, because of Lincoln's internal conflicts, that he would have suggested marriage.⁶⁸ On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that he suffered greatly from her death. Lincoln's excessive public mourning at Ann Rutledge's death suggests to Robert V. Bruce "that the long repressed grief at the loss of his mother may have broken out again to swell Lincoln's grief at the similar death of Ann."⁶⁹

All the women for whom Lincoln had cared most intensely had died. This fact provides an important context for understanding Lincoln's seemingly bizarre courtship of Mary Owens, which began in 1836, a little more than a year after Ann's death. Mary Owens, who lived in Kentucky, had met Lincoln briefly during an 1833 visit to her older sister, Mrs. Bennett Abell, in New Salem. Three years later Mrs. Abell suggested that she would bring Mary Owens back from Kentucky if Lincoln were interested in marrying her. Lincoln consented, but when Mary arrived, Lincoln's actions and words transformed his proposal into an offer no young woman could accept.⁷⁰

In December 1836 Lincoln left for the legislative session meeting at the capitol in Vandalia. His letters to Mary Owens were filled with ambiguous messages. Although these were couched in terms of his

continuing commitment to marriage, they seemed aimed at least unconsciously at obtaining a release from his promise. For instance, he wrote in December that "things I cannot account for, have conspired and have gotten my spirits so low, that I feel I would rather be any place in the world but here." He told Mary that he had "not been pleased since I left you." Yet he did not take the next step. Instead he ended, "This letter is so dry and stupid that I am ashamed to send it, but with my present feelings I can not do any better."⁷¹

Instead of returning to New Salem when the legislative session ended, Lincoln traveled to Springfield where he decided to settle. In May he wrote Mary that although he was "often thinking about what we said of your coming to live in Springfield. I am afraid you would not be satisfied." He informed her at great length and detail of the unpleasant living conditions that awaited her if she joined him. "My opinion," Lincoln offered, "is that you had better not do it." But, he promised, if she were inclined to insist on accepting his earlier offer of marriage, he would "most positively abide by it."⁷²

If Mary Owens had not by then totally abandoned any ideas of marriage, Lincoln's letter of August must have provided the final reasons for that: "I want at this particular time, more than anything else, to do right with you, and if I *know* it would be doing right, as I rather suspect it would, to let you alone, I would do it." It was up to her, Lincoln suggested, to make the next move: "And for the purpose of making the matter as plain as possible, I now say, that you can drop the subject, dismiss your thoughts (if you ever had any) from me forever, and leave this letter unanswered, without calling forth one accusing murmur from me." One cannot imagine how Mary Owens ever could have accepted Lincoln's "proposal." Certainly, politician and orator that he was, it is difficult to believe that Lincoln expected that Owens would have held him to his commitment. His closing lines could not be misunderstood: "If it suits you best not to answer this—farewell—a long life and merry one attend you."⁷³

Nevertheless, one cannot read these letters without also sensing the pain that he felt. Lincoln was attracted to the idea of marrying Mary Owens, yet he maintained a genuine conscious fear that he could make no woman happy. This was no doubt a projection of his unconscious anxiety that previous experiences would be repeated; that Mary Owens, like the other women he had loved, would desert him.

Later Lincoln related his relationship with Owens to others in a humorous context; but humor, particularly Lincoln's, often obscured deeper ambivalences and harms. When he told Eliza Browning in 1838 that "when I beheld her [Owens], I could not for my life avoid thinking of my mother," Lincoln was revealing more of his inner conflicts than his caricature of Mary suggests.⁷⁴

Lincoln unquestionably suffered from the loss of those he loved most intensely. His fear of further losses was acute—particularly when it came to women. It manifested itself in a reluctance to form attachments that surpassed nineteenth-century-frontier conventions of male shyness. In January 1841 Lincoln, not quite thirty-two, began a six-month-long severe episode of depression that included a threat to take his own life.

The Strategy of Depression

Lincoln characterized his behavior as "a discreditable exhibition of myself in the way of hypochondriaism." His actions led his friends "to remove all razors, knives, pistols, etc. from his room and presence," because they feared "that he might commit suicide." They described his behavior variously as "crazy as a loon," "deranged," and "that he had two Cat fits and a Duck fit." He described himself as "the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth." Lincoln wrote to a close friend that he could not go on living: "To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better."⁷⁵ Scholars generally agree with Strozier that although Lincoln was "subject to depression throughout his life," this was "his most severe bout."⁷⁶

The precipitating incident was the threat of still another loss. Two important events preceded Lincoln's suicidal behavior. On 1 January 1841, Lincoln's most intimate friend, Joshua Speed, with whom Lincoln had shared a bed for the past four years, sold his store in preparation for leaving town to marry a woman in the neighboring state of Kentucky. On the same day, Lincoln broke his engagement to marry his fiancée, Mary Todd.⁷⁷

One scholar, who studied these events intensively, concluded that the suicidal behavior resulted almost entirely from the broken engagement: "It is clear from his later references . . . to his ensuing

emotional chaos, that Lincoln underwent misery of no mild variety as a result, not merely of his own indecision and instability, but also of his awareness that he was the cause of an injury . . . no less severe and humiliating than his own."⁷⁶ Other investigators, however, have found Speed's imminent departure as the primary anxiety-producing element. Speed was so concerned about his friend's condition (and apparently so aware of his role in producing it) that he deferred his plans to leave for Kentucky for almost six months. Speed's father's death late that spring made his remaining in Springfield impossible. Concluding that Lincoln was "emotionally unfit to be alone," Speed took him to Kentucky where Lincoln lived with Speed and his family for the next several months. At the end of the summer, Speed returned to Springfield with Lincoln, where he remained until December 1841.⁷⁹

Having deferred his plans for almost a year, Joshua Speed finally married Fanny Henning in February 1842. Prior to the wedding Lincoln and Speed exchanged a series of letters in which Lincoln revealed quite explicitly his own anxieties about the connection between love and death. Speed had written that he feared for Fanny's health and, ultimately, for her life. "Why Speed," Lincoln replied, "if you did not love her, although you might not wish her death, you would most calmly be resigned to it." Then Lincoln added, "Perhaps this point is no longer a question with you, . . . [but] you must pardon me. You know the Hell I have suffered on that point."⁸⁰ With Speed's assurance that married life was far from miserable, Lincoln resumed his relationship with the jilted Mary Todd and on 4 November 1842 they were married. Lincoln was thirty-three.⁸¹

Although Lincoln would experience other depressive or melancholic episodes during his life, none reached the intensity of his experience of 1841. A clinician encountering Lincoln in the early months of 1841 would have taken seriously both Lincoln's threats and his friends' judgments that he was a candidate for suicide. Lincoln's life history prior to 1841 provides compelling support for such a view.

In Lincoln's case, those toward whom he had felt the closest—his mother, his sister, and Ann Rutledge—all had deserted him by dying. His only brother died at the age of two or three and perhaps because of these events, Lincoln proved unable to form any positive attachment to his father. Lincoln's experience made him anxious

about desertion by those (especially women) with whom he formed close relationships. His behavior toward Mary Owens provides a graphic example of these ambivalent feelings. When Joshua Speed, the closest friend he ever made, decided to leave Springfield (and Lincoln) to move to Kentucky to marry Fanny Henning, it was not surprising that Lincoln, feeling deserted by Speed, recalled his earlier losses and in panic deserted Mary Todd before she too might desert him.

In 1841, during the period when he contemplated suicide, Lincoln told Speed that "he had 'done nothing to make any human being remember that he had lived.'"⁸² Suicide can be a form of revenge, like the child's threat to run away so it will be missed by those who have done it harm. In short, suicide may be imagined as a way of living on in other people's memories just as the lost object lives on in the memory of the potential suicide. After death, the suicide fantasizes, he too will become mourned (remembered). Abraham Lincoln's suicide threats fit this pattern.⁸³

Speed's sensitive response to his friend's cry for help provided Lincoln with crucial therapeutic support. Although he continued to experience depressive episodes, Lincoln made no other threats to end his life. Like Meriwether Lewis, however, Lincoln remained troubled by the severe loss he had experienced and like Lewis he pursued strategies to alleviate his incomplete mourning. Unlike Lewis's, Lincoln's strategies proved to be sufficient, yet death and dying remained one of his central concerns. Throughout the rest of his life Lincoln mourned the early losses he had suffered and he continually seemed in search of an adequate way to resolve the guilt, anger, and anxiety that still accompanied them. What some writers have portrayed as Lincoln's obsession with death may be understood also as Lincoln's attempt to come to terms with these early losses.

Unlike Lewis, Lincoln seemed to have had a genuine opportunity to grieve both publicly and privately for the early losses he suffered. Like many of his literate nineteenth-century contemporaries, Lincoln rejected the existence of an afterlife.⁸⁴ One result, suggests Robert Bruce, was that Lincoln adopted the emerging "romanticism of death," which moved the survivor rather than the departed to the center of mourning rituals.⁸⁵ This reaction to death tended to downplay traditional communitarian participation in favor of private rites confined to family members. For isolated frontier families

like Lincoln's, the ideology of romanticized death often was reinforced by physical isolation. Thus, as death came to mean more to survivors, the privacy of mourning rituals exacerbated loss, anger, and guilt.⁸⁶

Lincoln's romanticizing of death was evident in his repeated anxiety that those with whom he was closest were likely to die. He wrote to Speed in 1842 that "the death scenes of those we love are surely painful enough; but these we are prepared to, and expect to see."⁸⁷ Moreover, he feared that his death was imminent. Two "romantic" poems about death illustrate his response to these issues. The first was written by William Knox, a Scot who died in 1825 at the age of thirty-three, and the other by Lincoln himself.

In October 1844 Lincoln visited the graves of his mother and sister. This was Lincoln's first trip in fifteen years to "the neighborhood . . . where my mother and only sister were buried." The experience recalled a poem that he had "seen . . . once before, about fifteen years ago," the author and title of which he did not learn until he was president. Knox's "Mortality" portrays life "Like a swift-fleeing meteor, a fast-flying cloud, / A flash of lightening, a break in the wave."⁸⁸ "I would give all I am worth, and go into debt," Lincoln wrote enclosing a copy to the editor of the *Quincy Whig* in 1846, "to be able to write so fine a piece as I think that is."⁸⁹ Most scholars concur with Bruce's assessment that the poem "possessed Lincoln's mind throughout his adult life" with an "extraordinary . . . duration and intensity."⁹⁰ Lincoln's first contact with the poem was in 1831 when he was twenty-two. Later he kept a newspaper-clipping reproduction of the poem in his pocket until he had memorized it.⁹¹ In 1850 Lincoln read Knox's lines as a eulogy on the death of President Zachary Taylor. He quoted it to his relatives and to his fellow circuit-riding lawyers in the 1850s. One of them recalled Lincoln often "sitting before the fire . . . with the saddest expression I have ever seen in a human being's eyes." On these occasions, the companion remembered, Lincoln invariably would recite Knox's "Mortality."⁹² Toward the end of his life Lincoln explained that the poem "is my almost constant companion; indeed, I may say it is continually present with me, as it crosses my mind whenever I have relief from anxiety."⁹³

Lincoln's extraordinary attachment to this poem went beyond its expression of the brevity of life. The poem's most compelling images meshed with Lincoln's personal experiences and fantasies

about the death of a young woman—mother, sister, fiancée:

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye,
Shone beauty and pleasure, her triumphs are by,
And the memory of those that beloved her and praised,
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

At one level Lincoln's fascination with the piece rests upon its romantic portrayal of death and its refusal to seek relief from loss in an afterlife. However, it is less certain that Lincoln agreed with the poet's insistence that the goal of life is to "rest in the grave":

So the multitude goes, like the flower or the weed,
'That withers away to let others succeed;
So the multitude comes, even those we behold,
'To repeat every tale that has ever been told.

Lincoln's obsession with Knox's poem should not be confused with his endorsement of its sentiments. Rather its repetition may indicate Lincoln's search for an alternative meaning for his losses. Although the central theme speaks of the need to accept "the death we are shirking," Lincoln's own life history suggests less than total resignation to an end "To the thoughts we are thinking, . . . To the life we are clinging."

Lincoln's poem, "My Childhood-Home I See Again," was inspired by the same graveside visit that recalled Knox's "Mortality." Written from 1844 to 1846, "My Childhood-Home" implies a different response to Knox's opening and closing lines, "Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?" Although Lincoln was saddened by the memories his visit recalled, he discovered also that "still, as memory crowds my brain, / There's pleasure in it too." If there were no actual life after death, "memory" might substitute:

O Memory! thou midway world
'Twixt earth and paradise
Where things decayed and loved one lost
In dreamy shadows rise,"

Memory and Ambition

Lincoln's desire, as he had confided to Speed during the depressive episode of 1841, was "to connect his name with the events

transpiring in his day and generation, and so impress himself upon them as to link his name with something that would redound to the interest of his fellow man." That, he informed Speed, "was what he desired to live for."⁹⁵ If there were no heaven, the only life after death, the only meaning for having lived would be in the memories one left behind. To live after death one's deeds must be truly memorable. Lincoln's recent biographers all have found him to be extremely ambitious.⁹⁶ Along with Bruce, they tie Lincoln's "almost obsessive ambition" to his fear of his own death: "Lincoln found the total annihilation of the self an intolerable prospect." Thus, Bruce finds, he "turned to the idea of survival by proxy in the minds of others. . . . Lincoln's antidote for numb despair was the concept of immortality through remembrance."⁹⁷ "Lincoln's ambition," argues Dwight Anderson, "was rooted in what can only be described as an obsession about death. . . . Ambition provided the means by which immortality could be attained." Lincoln's goal was "to win immortality . . . [and] to live on in the memory of subsequent generations."⁹⁸

Although these same biographers' value judgments differ as to the quality of Lincoln's ambition, they concur with Strozic's evaluation that "Lincoln's driving ambition" was tied to his shame about his own father's "dull . . . character."⁹⁹ His fantasy that Thomas Lincoln was not his biological father, that he was descended on his mother's side from Virginia aristocracy, is similar to a common childhood regressive and nostalgic fantasy, which Otto Rank linked to all heroic mythic constructs:

the substitution of both parents, or of the father alone, by more exalted persons—the discovery will be made that these new and highborn parents are invested throughout with the qualities which are derived from real memories of the true lowly parents. . . . The entire endeavor . . . is merely the expression of the child's longing for the vanished happy time, when his father still appeared to be the strongest and greatest man, and the mother seemed the dearest and most beautiful woman.¹⁰⁰

By the time Lincoln was nine years old he had learned that his father Thomas could not protect him from loss, and subsequent events suggest that Lincoln might have found some solace in such a childhood fantasy.

According to Anderson this translates into Lincoln's conscious

desire to transform the fantasy into reality by becoming father of himself and, ultimately, father of his country by replacing the Constitution of the Founding Fathers with the Declaration of Independence. Quoting Ernest Becker, Anderson compares Lincoln to the child who "wants to conquer death by becoming the *father of himself*, the creator and sustainer of his own life."¹⁰¹ One does not have to go as far as Anderson to conclude that Lincoln's incomplete mourning led him to hope that fame rather than faith would bring life everlasting. Rather than viewing Lincoln's ambition to live in memory after death as a pathological response to the events of his early life, one might conceive of Lincoln's solution as therapeutic.

Lincoln's desires mesh with what Becker describes as the wish for "heroism" that springs from "the denial of death." The wish to be a hero, according to Becker, derives from the fear that after death one will be forgotten. Those that suffer the greatest from this anxiety are those who already have suffered desertion in their lives. Heroism shares with suicide a fantasy of remembrance. In both we uncover a wish to transcend death.¹⁰² The most heroic act that one can imagine of course is to sacrifice one's life for social good—an act that Durkheim labeled "altruistic suicide."¹⁰³

Lincoln, thanks to accident and design, achieved his goal to live on in the memory of others. Before he died he realized that he had approached the heroic, the self-made vision of national paternity. Those who knew him well in the 1860s attested to Lincoln's acceptance of death; some suggested that he welcomed it; others asserted that Lincoln continually risked his own safety.¹⁰⁴ To the extent that these latter analyses are accurate, one might conclude that Lincoln's strategies for dealing with his early losses never surrendered all of their suicidal content. Unique historical circumstances allowed Lincoln to deal with his depressive disorders on the national stage.

⁹⁴ Lincoln, who often questioned his own sanity, dreaded insanity, not least of all because he connected it with anonymity. Juxtaposed to the memories of his dead kin in his poem "My Childhood-Home" was "an object of more dread/ Than ought the grave contains—/ A human form with reason fled." The poem also related the story of a childhood acquaintance, Matthew Geary, who, "At the age of nineteen . . . unaccountably became furiously mad," attempting to kill his parents and himself. During the 1844 visit, Lincoln found Matthew "still lingering in this wretched condition. . . . I could not forget the impressions his case made upon me." Like Matthew Geary, the insane, although avowing death, are forgotten: "O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince/ That keepst the world in fear/ Why dost thou rear more blood ones hence/ And leave him lingering here?" Also see Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnston, 6 September 1846, *Collected Works*, 1: 384–386.

Unlike many others who have experienced incomplete mourning, Lincoln's strategy allowed him to live out his fantasies and for the most part to transform his self-destructive urges into socially acceptable behavior.

CONCLUSION

The life history of Abraham Lincoln provides an example of why the experience of severe early loss does not automatically result in a suicide. To put it another way, although loss often may bring on suicidal behavior, the aim of that behavior is not necessarily self-destruction, rather it is a search for a strategy to deal with guilt, anger, and the desire for revenge so that life can continue.⁸ Completed or "successful" suicide occurs only when alternative strategies fail.

The issues raised by the self-destructive behavior of both Meriwether Lewis and Abraham Lincoln are emblematic of the psychocultural etiology of suicide in America. The strategies each man pursued, while typical of suicidal behavior, were nevertheless shaped by personal circumstances and by the possibilities offered in the larger world that each inhabited. This larger world was, of course, the historically specific world of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America. Thus, the early and subsequent losses that Lewis and Lincoln sustained did not make suicide inevitable; rather it led each man to seek strategies whose possibilities of success were to a great extent determined by forces beyond his control.

⁸Of course, as Freud demonstrated, all neurotic behavior is "overdetermined" and thus suicidal behavior may be informed both by unconscious self-destructive urges and by adaptive/manipulative strategies.

6

THE PSYCHOCULTURAL MEANING OF SUICIDE

CALIFORNIA, Max White's promised land, had failed to measure up to his expectations. Instead of self-transformation and wealth, White found unemployment and loneliness in what he mockingly referred to as "this land of the free." His hopes dashed, he cursed imagined enemies whose greatest sin seems to have been indifference to his plight. He lamented that he had fled his native Hungary and that he ever had been born. Whether or not White exaggerated his predicament, he could no longer imagine a future worth living. A local newspaper labeled him "The Victim of Despair."¹

White was not only a victim of despair; he was also a social statistic of the Depression of 1893. One of the most devastating economic collapses in America's history, the Depression of 1893 challenged opinion-makers both to explain its causes and to warn of its probable effects. One month after White's suicide, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, formulating what turned out to be the most influential of these explanations, located the etiology of the disorder in the closing of the American frontier. With the 1890 federal census as his source, Turner's "Frontier Thesis" (1893) claimed that the nation had lost its traditional "safety-valve" of cheap western lands for its surplus migrant population.²

One corollary hypothesis of Turner's analysis was, that the great influx of immigrants who had arrived in the past decade would out

PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY

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