

LINCOLN LORE

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ANTI-SLAVERY SEEDS IN THE BLUE GRASS

Townsend, William H. *Lincoln and the Bluegrass*. University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, Ky., 392 pp. Price \$6.50.

William H. Townsend's book *Lincoln and the Bluegrass* presents a more descriptive caption in the subtitle "Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky," with Lexington furnishing the setting for most of the episodes presented. In the field of Lincolniana students of history are under special obligation to those authors who provide source books which allow one to make an intelligent approach to an understanding of the Emancipator's development. Townsend's book is such a study.

Kentucky offered a well prepared seed bed for that type of thinking, which not only recognized the constitutional rights of slavery but also advocated that it was a "social wrong and a great political evil." Many of its statesmen as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century were pledged to the "gradual and ultimate abolition of slavery." These men were not timid and retiring individuals but courageous and aggressive exponents, who used the open forum and the printed page to express their convictions.

Fortunately, Mr. Townsend is proficient in the use of colorful terminology which allows the reader to almost witness some of the striking episodes which Abraham Lincoln observed in his visits to Kentucky. Lexington, the early home of his wife, was not only the heart of the Bluegrass, but the kernel of pro-slavery interests as well. The fact that many of the most prominent anti-slavery exponents made their home there also, caused it to become the hot bed of both human servitude and civil war agitation.

This reviewer's residence in Lexington over a period of years and his personal acquaintance with the author for a quarter of a century might disqualify him somewhat for making an unprejudiced appraisal of Mr. Townsend's book. But, on the other hand, familiarity with the geographical background and many personal contacts with descendants of persons mentioned, allow him to subscribe more sympathetically to the value of *Lincoln in the Blue Grass* as a dependable historical source.

Provincialism sometimes causes an author to overemphasize the part a local celebrity may have played in the life of some other great American, but Townsend does not exaggerate Henry Clay's influence in shaping the political philosophy and the slavery sentiments of Lincoln. In fact it would be difficult for any one to go beyond

Lincoln's own generous recognition of how greatly he was under obligation to the "sage of Ashland" with respect to slavery. Lincoln said: "I can express all my views on the slavery question by quotations from Henry Clay." We have Lincoln's own statement, "I was an Old Henry Clay tariff whig" and every student of Lincoln knows that his notions on The American System were patterned after Mr. Clay's Internal Improvement Policy.

There is another Clay, Cassius by name, who is certainly the most spectacular individual in the book. If the reader has not met him he is in for a biographical thriller. Book jackets sometimes are given to exaggerations but when the publishers re-

HENRY CLAY'S WRITINGS

The proposal to edit and publish the letters and papers of Henry Clay is a project in which every student of Lincoln should have a deep interest. He, above all others, was Lincoln's mentor in the field of slavery and political philosophy. Any one who may possess or knows of an original writing to or from Clay should send the date and names of both writer and recipient to Dr. James F. Hopkins, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

fer to Cassius Clay as "fiery" it is a tame characterization indeed. As far as personal contact is concerned Lincoln was much better acquainted with Cassius than with his more famous cousin, Henry. On Lincoln's first visit to Lexington he undoubtedly read an item in the local press setting forth the heroism of Cassius Clay in the Mexican War. Cassius visited the Lincolns in Springfield in 1854 when he was invited to speak in Illinois on the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. At the Chicago Wigwam Convention Cassius threw his influence to Lincoln and a few days later Lincoln commended Cassius for his "unwavering purpose to stand for the right." Cassius campaigned for Lincoln, organized the Clay Battalion and was appointed Minister to Russia by the President.

One person, introduced by Townsend, will be elevated several degrees in the estimation of the reader when he follows the career of Rev. Robert J. Breckinridge of Lexington. In the process of building loyal union sentiment in the north, it is doubtful if there was a single individual outside of the official family at Washington

who contributed more to this end. He became the dynamic temporary chairman of the 1864 convention that nominated Lincoln.

There is one other Kentuckian presented by Townsend, John J. Crittenden, who makes up the Blue Grass quartette of political celebrities who were especially admired by Lincoln. At Cincinnati in 1859 addressing his remarks to the Kentuckians, Lincoln said of Senator Crittenden, "I have always loved with an affection as tender and endearing as I have ever loved any man." It was Crittenden, an ardent Whig, who was the best man at the wedding of Robert Todd, Lincoln's father-in-law. Yet it was Crittenden who seems to have contributed more to the defeat of the Old Whig Lincoln by the Democrat Douglas in the senatorial campaign of 1858 than any other out of the state man.

For those who have read Mrs. Ruth Painter Randall's biography and Irving Stone's novel on Mary Lincoln, there awaits a refreshing and intimate supplement in the pages of Townsend's book, written in the very city where the Todd family lived. One will not only meet Mary as a small girl and young lady, but her parents, kinfolks and associates appear in an historical environment which contributes much to a fuller appreciation of her cultural attainments.

As has already been implied by the emphasis given to the subtitle of the book that it is Slavery and the Civil War which are accentuated in the argument. It appears as if Townsend has produced enough evidence to satisfy the reader that Lincoln's visits to the Bluegrass "gave him a first hand knowledge" of slavery which was unavailable in Indiana or Illinois. Not only did he see slavery at its best, in the sympathetic relation of the mistress and her house servants, but he also saw the slave dealers' pens and coops at Lexington. Apparently Mary and Abraham saw eye to eye on the slavery question.

That section of the book which deals with the Civil War possibly might be entitled "The Bluegrass visits Lincoln" as many Kentucky individuals and delegations called on the President during the hostilities. Townsend places much emphasis on Lincoln's message to Senator Browning when he wrote: "I think to loose Kentucky is nearly the same as to loose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us."