



# Lincoln Lore

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## THE CHRISTIAN'S DEFENCE

*Editor's Note:* Dr. Wayne C. Temple in a very short article which appeared in *The Clarion* (The Parish Newspaper of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois) dated April 24, 1966, announced that the identical copy of *The Christian's Defence* by the Rev. Dr. James Smith which was read by Abraham Lincoln had been presented to the Church of which Dr. Smith had once been the pastor. For many years this valuable book had been the property of Dr. Smith's granddaughter, who resided in Springfield, Illinois. The gift was presented to the church this year by "the descendants" of the Presbyterian minister.

This announcement, when brought to the attention of the editor, reminded him that he had once published an article on *The Christian's Defence* in the August, 1934 issue of *Hobbies Magazine*. The six typewritten page article which originally appeared without illustrations or notes is here presented with both. However, it has been necessary to edit the 1934 article to bring it up to date. In doing this, the editor has consulted Wayne C. Temple's article "Lincoln and the Rev. Dr. James A. Smith" which appeared in the Winter 1964 issue of the *Lincoln Herald*, pages 181 to 183.

Due to the fact that Abraham Lincoln's religion has been exhaustively discussed by many authors, the book entitled *The Christian's Defence*, which Lincoln read, has received extensive study.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the Bible, this work likely influenced his religious life more than any other book. The author of this massive volume was the Rev. Dr. James Smith, a Presbyterian minister, who was formerly the editor of the *Cumberland Presbyterian*. His analytical and unusual way of presenting facts likely appealed to Lincoln's legal mind.

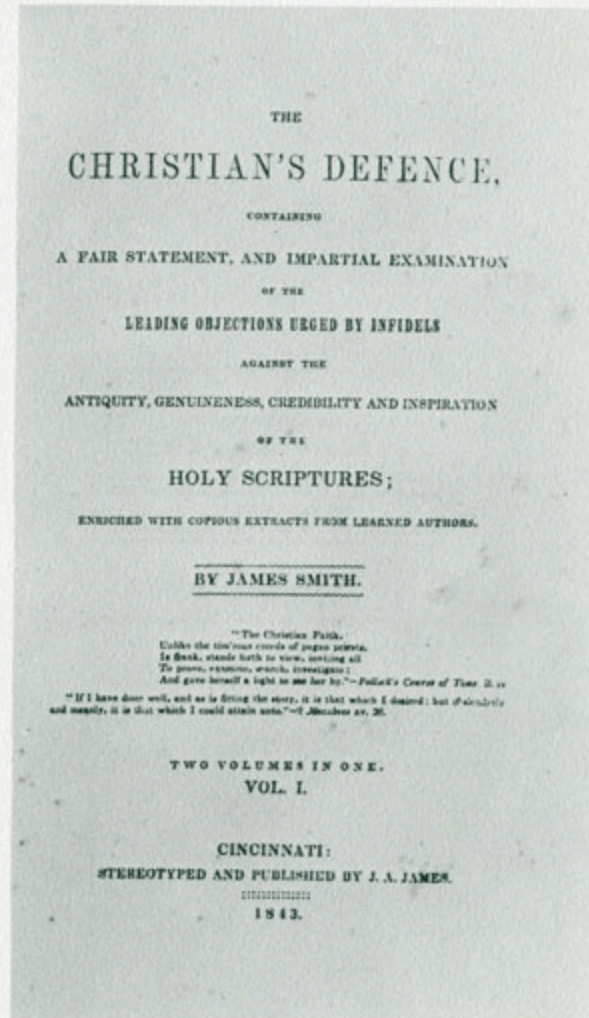
*The Christian's Defence* contains the addresses and written arguments which were presented during the Spring of 1841 by Dr. Smith in a debate with an "infidel" named C. G. Olmsted in Columbus, Mississippi.<sup>2</sup> In preparing this work the author communicated with theologians and friends in Great Britain, who procured and sent him the latest and best materials on this subject.<sup>3</sup> The work is so extensive that it occasions much admiration for the earnestness and industry of the author. A study of the text reveals that Dr. Smith was familiar with both sides of the question. He knew the tenets of Hume, Volney, Taylor and Paine, as well as the theological doctrines of the Christian religion.<sup>4</sup> The debate was so prolonged that nineteen evenings were required for both contestants to present their arguments. After the debates were concluded, a book containing the addresses and dissertations

of Dr. Smith was published in a very limited edition.<sup>5</sup>

Rev. James Smith spent many years of his early life in the South, and it was from Shelbyville, Kentucky that he was called to the First Presbyterian Church at Springfield, Illinois.<sup>6</sup> His pastorate began there on March 14, 1849 and continued until December 17, 1856.

The Lincolns' intimate acquaintance with this minister began when their second son, Edward Baker, died.<sup>7</sup> During her residence in Springfield Mrs. Lincoln had attended the Episcopal Church; but since the rector of her church was absent from the city at the time of her son's death, it was necessary to have the funeral services conducted by some other minister. The Rev. James Smith was asked to officiate and on February 2nd he conducted services for the four year old child. It is said that the Lincolns were so impressed by his comforting words and his religious approach to matters of life and death that they started attending his church. On April 13, 1852 Mary Lincoln became a communicant and the Lincolns occupied pew No. 20.

In late October and early November of the year 1849, the Lincolns visited Mrs. Lincoln's relatives in Kentucky.<sup>8</sup> While in Lexington Mr. Lincoln picked up a book in the Todd library entitled *The Christian's Defence*, written by the Springfield minister. Lincoln started to read the book, but because of the short duration of their visit was compelled to leave the work unfinished. Upon arrival in Springfield, he secured from the author another copy of the same book. He also formed at this time a closer acquaintance with the minister. Perhaps it was this book which led the Lincolns to select Dr. Smith to conduct the funeral services



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation  
Title page of the Foundation's copy of *The Christian's Defence*.

for their son.

The style of composition and the logical arguments of the author appealed to Lincoln. Here, for the first time, he saw the subject rationally presented. He was greatly impressed with the book's contents. Dr. Smith had written as a lawyer, and his presentation of Biblical history interested Lincoln. It is alleged that, after studying the book for several weeks, Lincoln changed his views regard-



From the Collection of Lloyd Ostendorf

James Smith was born in Glasgow, Scotland, May 11, 1801, and died in Scotland on July 3, 1871. At the time of his death he was the United States Consul at Dundee, Scotland, having received his appointment from President Abraham Lincoln. On January 9, 1863, in a note to Secretary of State William H. Seward, Lincoln wrote: "Dr. Smith, mentioned within, is an intimate personal friend of mine."

ing religion. Apparently, Lincoln's comment relative to Dr. Smith's arguments was that they were "unanswerable."

Lincoln's brother-in-law, Ninian W. Edwards, on December 24, 1872 made this statement regarding the book's influence upon Lincoln:

"A short time after the Rev. Dr. Smith became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in this city, Mr. Lincoln said to me, 'I have been reading a work of Dr. Smith on the evidences of Christianity, and have heard him preach and converse on the subject, and am now convinced of the truth of the Christian religion.'"

Additional testimony regarding Lincoln's reading the work of the Rev. Dr. Smith was given in an address by Rev. William Bishop at Salina, Kansas on February 12, 1897. In this address it is stated that Rev. James Smith, in one of his conversations with Rev. William Bishop, said:

"With some suggestion bearing on the right attitude required for impartial investigation, I placed in his (Lincoln's) hands my book (*The Christian's Defence*) on the evidence of Christianity, which gives the arguments for and against the divine authority and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Mr. Lincoln took the book, and for a number of weeks, as a lawyer, examined and weighed the evidence, pro and con, and judged of the credibility of the contents of revelation."

Mr. Thomas Lewis, on January 6, 1873, also made a statement regarding the fact that Lincoln read *The Christian's Defence*:

"Not long after Dr. Smith came to Springfield, and I think very near the time of his son's death, Mr. Lincoln said to me that when on a visit somewhere he had seen and partially read a work of Dr. Smith on the evidences of Christianity, which had led him to change his view of the Christian religion, and he would like to get that work and finish the reading of it, and also to make the acquaintance of Dr. Smith. I was an elder in Dr. Smith's church, and took Dr. Smith to Mr. Lincoln's office, and Dr. Smith

gave Mr. Lincoln a copy of his book, as I know, at his own request."<sup>11</sup>

In a letter written from Cainno, Scotland, dated January 24, 1867, the Rev. Dr. Smith made this statement:

"It was my honor to place before Mr. Lincoln arguments designed to prove the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures, accompanied by the arguments of infidel objectors in their own language."<sup>12</sup>

Ward H. Lamon in his biography states that Lincoln did not read the work of the Rev. James Smith, which he discussed as follows:

"Mr. Smith composed a heavy tract out of his own head to suit the particular case. 'The preparation of that work,' says he, 'cost me long and arduous labor,' but it does not appear to have been read. Mr. Lincoln took the 'work' to his office, laid it down without writing his name on it, and never took it up again to the knowledge of a man who inhabited that office with him, and who saw it lying on the same spot every day for months."<sup>13</sup>

Because of the fact that the book entitled *The Christian's Defence* was published six years before the Rev. James Smith came to Springfield, few people there knew that he was the author of such a work. Apparently, this was the case with Ward Hill Lamon whose writings on the subject of *The Christian's Defence* appear to be rather confused. He evidently did not know the title of the work or the reason for which it was written.

*The Christian's Defence* was first published in a very limited edition, as other subsequent editions were expected to be forthcoming from the press.<sup>14</sup> However, it is thought that the first was also the last and only edition. The entire lot was completely sold before it came from the press and it never came into general circulation in Illinois.<sup>15</sup>

The title page of this excessively rare religious work is as follows:

The/Christian's Defence/Containing/a Fair Statement, and Impartial Examination/of the/Leading Objections Urged by Infidels/Against the/Antiquity, Genuineness, Credibility and Inspiration/of the/Holy Scriptures;/Enriched with Copious Extracts from Learned Authors/by James Smith/(quotation: Pollack's Course of Time)/(quotation: Macabees)/Two Volumes in one/Vol. 1/Cincinnati/Stereotyped and Published by J. A. James/1843.<sup>16</sup>

The first printed page of this work contains advertisements of books published by the press of J. A. James of Cincinnati, Ohio. The first three advertised, namely: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon, *Napier's Peninsular War* by W. F. Napier, and *Rollin's Ancient History* were all read by Lincoln.<sup>17</sup> James Smith, the author of *The Christian's Defence*, endorsed the *Evangelical Family Library* advertised on the same page.

Four printed pages are devoted to the notices of the debate which led to the publishing of *The Christian's Defence*. The four pages contain three exceedingly long letters, all dated during the year 1841 and posted from Columbus, Mississippi. The book was copyrighted according to an act of Congress in the year 1843 by James Smith in the clerk's office for the district court of Kentucky.

On the sixth printed page the work is dedicated as follows:

"To the Honorable Henry P. Brodnax, This Work is Most Gratefully and Most Respectfully Inscribed, by His Friend, the Author, May 11, MDCCCXLIII."<sup>18</sup>

The above inscription is of interest because of the fact that Henry P. Brodnax was very likely an acquaintance of Lincoln's father in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Henry Power Brodnax was admitted as an attorney at the Elizabethtown bar at the April 1796 term of Hardin County Court.<sup>19</sup> During this same year Thomas Lincoln was employed to construct a mill by Samuel Haycraft, Sr., in Elizabethtown.<sup>20</sup> Documentary evidence is available that Henry Power Brodnax practiced law in Elizabethtown during the period that Lincoln's parents resided there.

In a letter written to Samuel Haycraft, Jr., by Mark Hardin, from Shelbyville, Kentucky, February 1871 it is stated that:

"He (Brodnax) became an active, zealous Cumberland Presbyterian, built a church at his own expense, on his own land, and was very active in the service of the church. He had enemies and the house of worship was burned down. Eventually he joined the Old School Pres-

byterian Church. He never married and by his will, as he had received nothing from his family, so he chose to will a large portion of his property to be devoted to the education of the needy, upward of twenty thousand (\$20,000) dollars was appropriated to the Brodnax professorship in the Theological Seminary at Danville (Ky.) some time between the years 1850 and 1860.<sup>101</sup>

Due to the many philanthropies of Brodnax for the cause of religion and religious education, it is easy to see that Rev. James Smith would admire him and might dedicate his work to him. It is very likely that Smith and Brodnax formed their acquaintance in Shelbyville, Kentucky where Smith had a pastorate and where Brodnax practiced law and held court.

Dr. Smith's own copy of the book, the one he loaned to Lincoln, is today extant. As stated in the *Editor's Note*, it is now the property of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois. Other copies of this work should have a permanent place in all extensive collections of Lincolniana, because of its influence upon Lincoln's religious life.<sup>102</sup>

NOTES

1. The author, James Smith, and the book, *The Christian's Defence*, have received extensive discussion by Dr. William E. Barton in his work entitled, *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, George H. Doran Company, New York, N.Y., 1920. See pages 75, 76, 132-136, 156-164, 270, 323-324, 358.
2. C. G. Olmsted was the author of a work entitled *The Bible Its Own Refutation*.  
Smith, James: *The Christian's Defence* preface, page X. The subject of C. G. Olmsted's lectures were: "The Natures and Tendencies of Infidelity" and "The Evidences of Christianity"  
Barton, William E.: *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, page 358.
3. A period of fifteen months was spent in preparation for these debates which continued for nearly three weeks. Smith, James: *The Christian's Defence* preface, page X.  
There is some reason to believe that Dr. Smith's three-week debate with C. G. Olmsted at Columbus, Mississippi might have suggested to Lincoln the idea of a series of debates with Stephen A. Douglas. Barton, William E.: *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, page 76.
4. Smith, James: *The Christian's Defence* introductory page IX.
5. *Ibid*, introductory page XII.
6. Barton, William E.: *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, pages 156-157.
7. The second son of the Lincolns, Edward Baker, was born March 10, 1846.
8. Earl Schenck Miers. *Lincoln Day By Day A Chronology 1809-1865*, Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission, Vol. II, 1849-1860, Washington, 1860, pages 23-24.  
Dr. Barton stated incorrectly that the Lincolns visited relatives in Kentucky "in the Spring of the year 1850, after the death of their little son Eddie." *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, page 156.
9. Barton, William E.: *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, page 165.
10. *Ibid*, page 163.
11. *Ibid*
12. *Ibid*, page 158.

13. Ward H. Lamon: *The Life of Abraham Lincoln from His Birth to His Inauguration as President*, James R. Osgood and Company, Boston, Mass., 1872, pages 498, 499.

From an inscription in Lincoln's hand discovered in a copy of Shakespeare's works, it is evident that Lincoln and Dr. Smith exchanged other books in addition to *The Christian's Defence*. Mr. John Howell, a book dealer of San Francisco, California, in a letter dated May 10, 1930, states:

"Several Years ago I was fortunate to have a copy of Shakespeare belonging to Lincoln with his name on the title page. . . . On the first page was also written by Lincoln 'From Dr. Smith's library.' In another hand was written: 'Bought by him or presented to him by Abraham Lincoln.'"

The above-mentioned book, *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare*, published by James Conner, New York, N. Y., 1835, is now owned by The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D. C. Some Lincoln authorities question the authenticity of the written inscription, even though the volume was sold to a New York City collector for over \$3000. Still another bit of evidence of the esteem in which the Lincoln family held Dr. Smith is the tradition that, following the President's death, one of his gold-headed canes was presented to the family of the Presbyterian minister.

*Lincoln National Life Foundation Correspondence Files.*

14. Several defects are present in the mechanical make-up of the book. These defects are not identical in all of the books. The copy belonging to the Lincoln National Life Foundation has section I of chapter I on page 6 incorrectly marked section II. Section II of chapter I appears on page 23. In the above mentioned copy, pages 139 and 140 are missing; yet there is no break in the text.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The Foundation's copy of *The Christian's Defence*, along with the Winter 1964 issue of the *Lincoln Herald*, depicting Lloyd Ostendorf's drawing of Lincoln and Dr. James Smith near the First Presbyterian Church located at the southeast corner of 3rd & Washington Streets, Springfield, Illinois.

TO  
THE HONORABLE  
HENRY P. BRODNAX,  
THIS WORK  
18  
MOST GRATEFULLY AND MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,  
BY HIS FRIEND,  
THE AUTHOR.  
MAY 11, MDCCCXLIII.

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Rev. Dr. James Smith dedicated his book, *The Christian's Defence*, to Henry P. Brodnax who was very likely an acquaintance of Lincoln's father in Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

In the copy once owned by George P. Hambrecht of Madison, Wisconsin, but now in the collection of Lincoln Memorial University, pages 133 to 140 are missing. They are not torn out, but it is a defect in the assembling of the book.

*Lincoln National Life Foundation Correspondence Files.*

15. "There are three copies in Chicago, one in the library of the University of Chicago, one in the library of McCormick Theological Seminary, and one in my own library. There are copies also in the libraries of Union Theological Seminary, New York; Center College, Danville, Kentucky; the College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky; the Library of Congress, and Lane Theological Seminary, Cincinnati. These, and the one owned by Miss Smith, are the only copies of which I have learned thus far; though doubtless there are others in dusty attics."

Barton, William E.: *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, page 165.

Other copies are owned by The Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee; Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois; First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois and William J. Johnson of St. Paul, Minnesota, who may have presented his copy to the Kansas State Historical Society.

A copy of *The Christian's Defence* once in the library of The Lincoln National Life Foundation had written in ink across the title page: "James Anderson." See Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography, D. Appleton & Co., New York, N. Y. 1888, Vol. 1, page 69.

16. Four pages are devoted to a very full table of contents, and four pages are given over to the author's preface. The first volume contains 312 pages. The title page to the second volume is identical with the title page of the first volume with the exception of the volume number. The appendix contains four printed pages and throughout the work is copiously filled with notes. Leather binding, two volumes in one, 14 illustrations (several colored plates) 8 vo.
17. Houser, M. L.: *The Books that Lincoln Read*, page 12, numbers 29 and 31.  
It is very likely Lincoln knew something of the book entitled *Napier's Peninsular War*.  
Mabbott, Thomas O. and Philip D. Jordan: *The Prairie Chicken*, page 13.
18. "Brodnax afterwards became a Circuit Judge; he lived and died a bachelor, was scrupulously neat, wore short breeches with white stockings, knee and shoe buckles of silver, and kept everything in print;

was polite and attentive to the fair sex, and was urgent in his advice to them not to suffer a wrinkle in their stockings." Mark Hardin of Shelbyville, Kentucky, described Brodnax as follows:

"He had a coat made of white ribbed dimity. The skirts nearly touched the ground, the pockets were on the outside—white cassimere short breeches, knee buckles, silver with weighty sets, in pure glass, or like glass, very fine cotton stockings, hair powdered and tied behind, very light hair, light eyes and thin white skin, finely formed, fully common sized man, always dressed neat, had some peculiarities if not eccentricities, rather holding himself above the commonality."

Haycraft, Jr., Samuel: *A History of Elizabethtown and its Surroundings*, The Woman's Club of Elizabethtown, Ky., 1921, pages 37, 179.

Henry P. Brodnax, while serving as a judge of the Circuit Court at Henderson, Kentucky, had occasion to preside over a case between John James Audubon, the noted ornithologist, and an assailant who had attacked the pioneer artist. According to a Henderson tradition, Judge Brodnax left the bench and said:

"Mr. Audubon, you have committed a serious offence—an exceedingly serious offence Sir—in failing to kill the d— rascal."

Herrick, Francis Hobart: *Audubon the Naturalist*, Vol. 1, pages 257-259.

19. Haycraft, Jr., Samuel: *A History of Elizabethtown and its Surroundings*, page 37.
20. *Lincoln Lore* No. 44, February 10, 1930: "Thomas Lincoln Chronology."
21. Haycraft, Jr., Samuel: *A History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and its Surroundings*, pages 178-179. There is a monument to his memory (Brodnax) which was erected in the cemetery at Russellville, Kentucky in 1859.  
*Ibid*: page 179.
22. In addition to the many references by Dr. William E. Barton concerning *The Christian's Defence*, he reproduced (not in facsimile) the title page and table of contents in his work on Lincoln's religious life.  
Barton, William E.: *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, pages 362-375.

## BELIEVE IT? WHY NOT!

### Assistant Marshal

In a Fourth of July (1839) parade, Lincoln acted as an assistant marshal.

### Boat Race

In October 1849 the Lincolns visited Lexington, Kentucky. A segment of the journey was by boat, and while navigating the Ohio River a race developed between Lincoln's boat and another craft. When Lincoln's boat ran short of fuel, it hitched to a flatboat loaded with wood. Lincoln jumped upon the flatboat shouting "Come on, Boys!" and he and the others pitched wood like deck hands until the wood was loaded. However, his efforts were unavailing for the rival boat passed them.

### Lincoln's Apology

On March 10, 1855 Lincoln apologized to a firm of New York attorneys for not having acknowledged the receipt of a bond they sent him in December. Lincoln wrote: "When I received the bond, I was dabbling in politics; and, of course, neglecting business. Having since been beaten out, I have gone to work again."

### Inconsistent with Dignity

On September 26, 1860 the Prince of Wales passed through Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln wanted to see the royal visitor but as a candidate for the Presidency, he felt that any action on his part would be inconsistent with dignity.