

## GREAT MEMORIAL TO LINCOLN PROPOSED AS GIFT FOR GENERATIONS OF FUTURE

John Drinkwater, Author, Points to Fact That Almost All Those Who Knew Martyr Have Died, and Wants Record of Habits and Associations.



Two Views of Frank McMillen as Abraham Lincoln in Play "The Play in Portland."

BY JOHN DRINKWATER.  
Author of "Abraham Lincoln."

IT'S spell upon the mind, space is strangely like time, and even in these days of miraculous transit an event 3000 miles away has much the same magical coloring for us as an event of 500 years ago. So that when I, an Englishman, walk into a small thriving country town in America and find myself talking to people whose fathers were the founders of the nation, I feel as if I were talking to the fathers of my own race. I feel as if I were talking to the fathers of my own race. I feel as if I were talking to the fathers of my own race.

And already after a far shorter spell than is commonly necessary, the essential figure of Lincoln is disengaging itself from the mass of more or less trivial incident and political chance that went to the making of life. We have, in ever sharpening outline, the story of a man who, working till late middle age, became a lawyer, a statesman, a law practice, a political career, an occasional moment's notice beyond his own narrow circuit, was able in his 50th year to respond to the national call with a combination of executive ability and spiritual singleness hardly equaled in history.

For this it is which gives Lincoln greatness in the world's mind. The story of public service is one strewn with the tragedies of men who, while they carry themselves in their domestic life and in the affairs of their own private calling with credit, when they are called to public office are not big enough for the job and break under the strain. It is idle to blame them; nearly all of us who ensure them would meet with like failure. We, as they do, become so absorbed in the paper facts and generalizations of our office that little by little we would lose contact with the living human factor behind the statistics and the numbers. We would lose the sense of the individual. There is but one man in many millions who has at once the breadth of vision and the personal resilience necessary to the control of a state, and the chances are always against his being chosen. When we pass judgment against the discredited public leader we should do so humbly enough—"There, but for the grace of God, go I."

But when the rare man comes who manifests great executive power and at the same time keeps his spirit daily alive to direct and tender human contact, he has in him the making of a legend. Such a one is Lincoln, more convincing, I think, than any man in the western world since Cromwell, more completely, perhaps, than Cromwell himself, since Lincoln had the larger serenity. And the magical thing today is that in the little community of Springfield you may yet walk side by side, as we were, with this man who already a legend of the world, almost taking his hand. As I stood in the parlor of his simple home a Portuguese exile, returning to the scene of his exile, returning to the scene of his exile, returning to the scene of his exile.

His words could have had no sharper edge of romance had he said that he and John Milton used to buy their bread at the same shop. I went to see Harry Rankin, full of eager brightness in his 80th year. In the book of recollections that he graciously gave me he wrote: "These lines are written by the hand that often grasped Abraham Lincoln's." Taking the gift from him, I seemed to lose my own reality, to have become a figure in an old tale, to be verily living in history. I stood in the open space before

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half the conclusions reached will be wrong. A small and carefully selected committee of Springfield citizens, with perhaps one or two Americans from outside the city, should be formed to examine every piece of first-hand evidence available. Their findings should be put on formal record and every building or landmark that shows to be incontestably associated with Lincoln should be marked with a tablet and as far as possible preserved as a national memorial.

The risks attending this matter are real and immediate. Already, for example, I found differences of opinion between well-informed people in the town as to where Lincoln's various law offices were. The site of but one of the three is marked and it was only by appealing to Mr. Rankin that the matter was settled. This indicates the kind of thing that may, and unless some practical steps are taken at once, certainly will happen. I would not give the impression that his own town is deficient in interest in Lincoln; far from it. There is an abundance of the most loving care, and I am sure that once the idea took root there would be no lack of enthusiasm or judgment to make the already considerable records complete.

The legend of Lincoln is secure; its beauty and its meaning for the world will grow from age to age and these will have their reference in the spirit of man. But the environment from which the legend sprung will have its own durable significance. It would not give the impression that it is preserved with all the added glamour of authenticity. For the imagination can work freely upon and makes its own symbols finely from recorded facts, whatever their melody, but it is impoverished when it has no basis other than mere traveler's foghorn gossip. (Copyright, International Magazine Co.)

the Springfield courthouse, where Lincoln used to foregather with his friends on Saturday evenings for political discussion, and went up from there into the room where he conducted his cases. The room, now in twilight, without the aid of Vachel Lindsay's lovely poem, "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight," which I had just heard from the poet's lips, I was aware of a more than shadowy presence at my side; the imagination so readily supplies the link between yesterday and today.

And the man beside me was not wholly the man who is so exactly recorded in a dozen contemporary portraits and the large anthology of minute and exact descriptions. It was, rather, this man crystallized into the essential significance of himself, seen through the eyes of poets who seek only central realities or by the touch of a sculptor such as St. Gaudens or Barnard, adding symbolic truth to the confusion of external appearances. I was in company with Lincoln, the legend, the mortal man walking now in his immortal habit. The old alchemy had done its work, and man had become greater than himself without losing one breath of human dearness and intimacy in the transition.

And then I was taken out to Oak Ridge, the little hill topped by a great monument that rises above Lincoln's tomb. Here Major Johnson, a veteran of the Grand Army of the Republic, is the quiet custodian, full of the gentle courtesy that so often distinguishes the old age of men who have borne gallant parts in heroic days. Here again was the spell. The American civil war had been as far off a traditional thing to me as our own battle of Edge Hill and Flodden field, and now standing beside the dust and bones that had been Lincoln, with a man who had gone into battle with General Grant, one who had been under arms when word came that Robert E. Lee had sur-

rendered at Appomattox, ending as nobly as he had fought, Lincoln, Grant, Lee, already their ring like names out of Homer, and yet their words seemed still to fall upon the evening air, so soon may a legend shape itself when the pressure of human affairs is acute enough.

It is not seldom that they are, but no moment in modern history seems to me to be comparable in epic quality with the American civil war. The great stories of the world are generally shaped long after the events from which they sprang have passed, but in those fierce American years, 1861-1865, the event was so single in issue, the chief actors so clear in personality that the durable outline of the story began to shape itself in less than a generation. It is about the story of the war that the story of the war is told. It is about the story of the war that the story of the war is told.

Returning to the town, I passed the site of Lincoln's law offices, in one case the actual building. I walked the path to which for nearly 20 years he was accustomed as he went about the few blocks that then stood around the courthouse and were Springfield. Before going to the railway terminus I walked up to look at the building that was the terminus in those days, and again he was there so naturally it seemed among the rest of the Springfield people, strangely compounded of yesterday and antiquity, standing on his car to bid farewell for the last time to his townsmen. He was going to the making of one of the superb chapters of history. My friends. No one not in my situation

can appreciate my feelings of sadness at this parting. Here I have lived a quarter of a century and have passed from a young man to an old man. Trusting in Him, not knowing when or whether I may return, I am confidently hoping that all will be well.

And leaving this enchanted spot of American ground, I wondered, "Milton, thou shouldst be living in this hour," cried Wordsworth in one of his country's darkest seasons. Might not all our western world apostrophize Lincoln today? But while such cries may profit us little enough, they may well be an inspiration if they come from true reverence for a man who is worthy of so admirable an example.

Lincoln cannot return, but what Lincoln was may be a hope for every man