

LINCOLN COLLECTIONS AND LINCOLN BIBLIOGRAPHY

By Daniel Fish

THE master word of my theme is LINCOLN. Some degree of attention is assured to me because of the large place which the subject holds in the affections of the people. However absorbed any of us may be in bookish lore, in the science of literature, in the making of books or in their classification, analysis and description, none can avoid sharing in the universal reverence which that name inspires. Quite aside from his memorable Presidency, Abraham Lincoln was capable of arousing the keenest personal interest. The mystery of the man Shakespeare is scarcely more fascinating. How the latter could emerge from the obscurity of a provincial village, illumine the literary firmament with a glory which has never dimmed, and vanish into darkness again, leaving no scrap of his manuscript save a few nearly illegible and seemingly illiterate signatures, is a perpetual marvel. No wonder that many have attributed his immortal writings to other hands, notwithstanding no other has been found at all qualified to father them. If we knew no more of Lincoln than is known of Shakespeare, if we had only the printed record of such of his words as were intended for the public ear, he, too, would be an unsolved riddle.

Of course, no such phenomenon could occur in the nineteenth century, the age of steam and electricity, wherein even mediocrity could at times command world-wide attention. Yet our knowledge of Lincoln's birth and boyhood is extremely meager. All beyond the little which seemed to him worth reporting is singularly vague. Even his own

statement touching the place of his birth is seriously questioned by citizens of his native State. The picture of his mother is exceedingly dim, and that of his father hardly less so. We cannot trace in his origin or early environment the slightest energy which lifted him from the depths. Yet, barren as that youth seemed to be, devoid so far as the record shows of opportunity or stimulus, who of all Lincoln's contemporaries stands out so distinctly upon the crowded canvas of his century? Hardly more than one, and he that supreme genius of War, who shook all the thrones of Europe and reshaped the boundaries of every civilized nation!

It has been said that biographies are in some measure a test of human greatness. A man or a woman, whose life story has been once written and printed may be called eminent; but one in hundreds of thousands is so honored. Two published biographies, prepared by different hands, indicate a personage of marked distinction. But few of our greatest Americans are commemorated in so many as five separate biographies. Rising to ten, the fingers of one hand would almost suffice to enumerate them. And of the men of twenty biographies scarcely a dozen are noted in all the libraries of the world. Upon this scale of measurement Lincoln ranks very high; you may count his biographies almost to weariness. It was Horace Greeley who uttered that gruesome joke about the "ten thousand attempts at the life of Abraham Lincoln, whereof that of Wilkes Booth was *perhaps* the most atrocious." There are hardly ten thousand, but for a man who lived but five or six years under public observation, and whose death occurred but little more than a generation ago, a hundred and twenty-five full-fledged biographies form a wonderful tribute. I have at least that number, embracing one or more in fifteen different languages, saying nothing of the many brief sketches in book and pam-

phlet form, or the innumerable notices of his life in other publications.

Washington and Franklin are the two Americans of great renown who, next to Lincoln, have evoked the largest volume of personal literature. Each had a long and varied career; both rendered invaluable public services and were popular heroes; and both passed from life before their great successor was born; yet it is true, I think, that a complete bibliography of Washington and Franklin combined would be less voluminous to-day than that of Lincoln at the beginning of this century. This is partly explained, of course, by differing conditions. The Lincoln era was a time of greater facility of printing; there were many more presses, more authors, and more readers; and the awful crisis of the Civil War fixed the attention of the nation and the world. Lincoln was the central figure of that war, and the shock of his assassination, the pathos of his violent taking off in the dawn of a righteous victory, excited every organ of expression. But there has been no reaction. Other Presidents have been murdered, other popular heroes have risen and passed, but the memory of Lincoln abides. The estimates of him uttered from every press and platform out of the mingled grief and rage of the funeral season are more than confirmed by four decades of study and reflection.

And popular interest in the man's personality is the dominant note, not the story of his public achievements. A man six feet four inches in stature, with black hair and beard, but with no other mark of resemblance to the venerated President, is the author and actor of a play which undertakes to delineate wartime scenes in the White House. I have observed an audience as it witnessed this daring spectacle. Not a face manifested approval. The evident feeling was of resentment, as if the attempt were akin to sacrilege.

Something in Lincoln's character appeals to us, creating a sentiment of peculiar tenderness, with which mere hero worship has little concern.

This all-pervading reverence is the occasion for the existence of Lincoln collections and Lincoln bibliography, of which I am asked to speak. Upon the latter branch of the topic I can promise nothing useful to a society devoted to bibliographical science. Protestations of modesty are always suspicious, but I must be permitted to say that the very imperfect list of Lincolniana which bears my name would not have been called a "bibliography" if my publisher had not ruthlessly exerted the authority of his office. A less pretentious title would have represented both the character of the performance and my own feelings concerning it far better.

There are in the country perhaps twenty libraries, societies and individuals actively engaged in the formation of Lincoln collections. Many others are systematically assembling the more important biographies and memoirs or other special classes of Lincolniana. One prominent dealer has on his mailing list the names of five hundred persons who he has reason to believe are buyers of Lincoln literature, though but few of them are to be regarded as confirmed collectors. Aside from those possessed by the Library of Congress and other leading libraries, there are six privately owned collections which approach completeness. Of the contents of four of these (besides my own), I have pretty full knowledge, through co-operation with their owners. The fifth, though it is not far from me, I have not seen, much to my regret. There may be other large collections whose possessors have seen fit to keep their names from public knowledge; but the six I have mentioned, probably, are the fullest repositories of the printed memorabilia.

Before speaking further of these it will be convenient to

consider briefly the various catalogues. In the year of Lincoln's death Mr. William V. Spencer, of Boston, issued 250 copies of a handsome volume in small quarto form, in which were reprinted from the newspapers eighteen sermons and twenty eulogies, speeches and letters, all occasioned by the tragedy. Appended to these was a list showing abbreviated titles of 228 other publications then in the compiler's possession; most of them sermons and eulogies issued as pamphlets. This book, called "Lincolniana," besides its valuable contribution to the memorial literature, contains the first step towards a Lincoln bibliography.

John Russell Bartlett's "Literature of the Rebellion," published in 1866, has a separate list of about 300 sermons, orations and poems issued in commemoration of the illustrious martyr. These two early catalogues, though made up of shortened titles, no doubt have saved from oblivion some interesting items long since classed by the booksellers as "excessively rare."

A more ambitious undertaking dates from the year 1870, viz.: "A Memorial Lincoln Bibliography," published by Andrew Boyd at Albany. This volume was beautifully printed by Joel Munsell and is invaluable for several reasons. It is in two parts, one the work of Mr. Charles Henry Hart, of Philadelphia, whose name is a guaranty of excellence, the other compiled by Mr. Boyd himself, who was a maker of directories. The whole is described on the title page as "Comprising a Collection in the possession of the Compiler." The first part, prepared by Mr. Hart, purports to be "A catalogue of all sermons, eulogies, orations, etc., delivered at the time," meaning those occasioned by the President's death and issued in the form of brochures. About 400 titles are included in this division of the book, all reprinted in full and with remarkable accuracy. Mr.

Hart attempted the unusual task of showing the number of copies printed of each item and, in the case of sermons, of citing the text chosen by the preacher. One cannot speak too highly of this painstaking labor. Having followed humbly in his footsteps—I might have copied him more closely with profit—I may venture to repeat after him the quaint remarks of Anthony a' Wood, quoted from that author's preface to a *History of Oxford*: "A painfull work it is, I'll assure you, and more than difficult, wherein what toyle hath been taken, as no man thinketh, so no man believeth, but he that hath made the triall."

Part two contains about the same number of entries, mostly of a different character, yet relating more or less directly to Lincoln. It exhibits none of Mr. Hart's trained ability, either in the selection of titles or in their arrangement or transcription. Mr. Boyd's admiration for his hero was genuine and admirable, but zeal rather than discretion guided his bibliographical activities. Nevertheless, we owe much to his enthusiasm, for without the fine collection which he laboriously brought together in advance of all others, including, besides the books and pamphlets then current, a great number of portraits, cartoons, engravings, medals and other like materials, many cherished items of *Lincolniana* very likely would have been lost beyond recall.

Twenty years elapsed before another attempt was made to put in accessible form the augmented list of Lincoln publications, my own tentative catalogue of 1900, called "*Lincoln Literature*." The work just mentioned, of course, was the foundation of mine. Andrew Boyd had ceased from his labors, but his collection was intact in the hands of Major William H. Lambert, of Philadelphia, to whom all Lincoln devotees bow as the chief of their tribe. And Mr. Hart, I am happy to say, is still active in more than

one department of letters. With his cordial permission I availed myself of the results he had achieved and followed in part his methods. More than half of the entries in Boyd's "Part Two" were dropped as unsuited to my purpose, but enough additional titles were found in the Lambert collection and elsewhere to bring the total to about the original number of eight hundred.

Since a share of personal interest inheres in all undertakings of this character, I am not trying to disguise my own part in the business. It would be neither convenient nor quite honest to do so, hence I shall speak freely, trusting that allusions to myself will be pardoned, in the interest of directness, if for no other reason. At the time of the publication last mentioned my own collection had been eight years in progress. On my way home from the war in the summer of '65, while yet in the first half of my eighteenth year, I bought my first book, the very first that was paid for out of my personal earnings not a school book or else a dime novel. It was "The President's Words," compiled from Lincoln's writings and speeches by Edward Everett Hale, now venerable and beloved. If that volume had not been lost prior to 1892, it would have constituted at the beginning of that year my entire stock of Lincolniana. It was then that I was asked by a society of young people to address them upon a topic of my own choosing. The occasion seemed appropriate for a popular lecture on the revered Commander-in-Chief under whom I had served for a brief term as a boy-soldier of the Union. In preparation for that task I read two or three of the leading biographies. Whether my hearers were interested or not, my own enjoyment of the study was intense. Memory recalled the days when Lincoln's influence, surviving all the vicissitudes of war and politics, had become supreme, and, most vividly

of all, the terrible anger of the troops when the news of his murder came to us in the camps of North Carolina. The sources of his power over men appealed to me as even more interesting than the mere events of the great struggle through which he had led us. I afterward bought such books about him as were readily accessible, and out of this came the desire to possess an adequate library on the subject. For a considerable time, however, I sought only biographies, of which there was an astonishing number. Often am I reminded of a first visit to the shop of that delightful old man Charles Woodward, in Nassau street, New York, and his vain offer at a few cents a piece of a hundred or more of the pamphlet sermons and eulogies; treasures which have since cost me as many dollars. Needless to say in this presence, the craving for a complete Lincoln library became seated and I began the effort to find out what such a library should contain. A card catalogue resulted, embracing such *Lincolniana* as I could acquire or find; and that led to the printed list of 1900, of which 160 copies were made and distributed.

A leading purpose of that list was to bring to light the many uncopyrighted publications known to exist, but exceedingly hard to uncover. That aim was largely accomplished, but some other consequences followed not quite so pleasing from the collector's point of view. The enterprise of dealers was stimulated no less than the zeal of rivals. Both supplied me with desired information, but prices soared. I would be the very last to decry the services of that gentle mercenary, your merchant of second-hand books, but one of his virtues is slightly overdone; he appreciates the amiable weaknesses of a collector almost too keenly.

In 1903 Mr. George Thomas Ritchie's admirable work, "A List of *Lincolniana* in the Library of Congress," first

revealed the great store of Lincoln material in the Nation's keeping. It purported to be mainly a check-list or inventory of the books and pamphlets on Lincoln then on the shelves of the library, with added references to collected works containing similar writings. These references, it was explained, did not cover the entire contents of the library, no exhaustive analysis of that vast collection being attempted. A considerable percentage of them were drawn from a series of scrapbooks containing sermons, eulogies and the like, clipped from newspapers and not elsewhere published. The entries number in all near a thousand. Many items known to collectors were not then owned by the library, and so, of course, are not in Mr. Ritchie's inventory. On the other hand, however, a number are found there which no previous list had described. The titles are much abbreviated, but it is skillfully done, conformably to the rules which librarians endeavor to follow. In 1906 a second edition was issued, with a few corrections in the plates and a supplement of ten or twelve pages. Judging from the "want lists" in this department currently sent out by the library, great strides have been made within the past two years toward the completing of this national repository of the Lincoln publications.

The accumulation meanwhile of letters and other documents in Lincoln's handwriting, which were unknown to his secretaries in 1894, when they issued the two crowded volumes called his "Complete Works," gave occasion for a new edition. In 1905, by arrangement with the Century Company, owner of the copyright, Mr. Francis D. Tandy, of New York, undertook to republish the Nicolay and Hay compilation, incorporating the matter since discovered. The very liberal scale upon which this enterprise was framed gave both room and fit setting for a new Lincoln catalogue.

I was invited to revise and extend my former list for insertion in the eleventh volume, the twelfth of the series being reserved for an elaborate index. The copy as furnished in July, 1906, embraced 1,080 titles, and twenty-three were afterwards supplied, a total of 1,103. Seventy-five copies of this revision were separately issued, about fifty being sold in that form, while the limited or "Gettysburg" edition of the new "Complete Works" numbered 1,000 copies.

Later in the same year (1906) a privately printed compilation by Mr. William H. Smith, Jr., called "A Priced Lincoln Bibliography," named a sum for which each enumerated item had been sold within the preceding twelve-month, mostly at auction, but many of them refer to collections of biography, political and military memoirs, and other publications not distinctively Lincolnian. The special feature of this work is the pricing, and nothing was included, apparently, the money value of which had not been established by a recent sale. Attempts of this character are praiseworthy, but not promising. The prices given by Mr. Smith vary so widely from some paid by myself that the list gave me but little comfort, and other collectors have told me of similar disappointment. A standard of value can hardly be fixed for such merchandise. The man who is able and willing to pay hundreds of dollars for a two-cent pamphlet may do so, but he of the "predatory wealth" is likely to find that some humble seeker got a better copy for about thirty cents.

Returning now to the privately owned collections, mention will be made chiefly of the five with which I am best acquainted. And as to these, my catalogue of 1906 will be taken as the standard of comparison, because I happen to know that the special efforts of their owners just now is to gather up the 1,103 items therein described. Each of the

five also endeavors, of course, to keep pace with the new publications, of which I have listed upward of sixty. Besides these, if I were to make a new catalogue to-day, about an equal number would be added which are prior in date to the list just mentioned. Perhaps ten of these were purposely omitted, but would be included now in deference to the judgment of others, while the remaining fifty were unknown to me when the published list was closed, two years ago.

The leader in this most agreeable rivalry is my honored friend Major Lambert. As before indicated, he early acquired the collection of Andrew Boyd, the basis of the Hart-Boyd bibliography of 1870, upon which ample foundation he has erected the tallest of the literary monuments to Lincoln. At last accounts he had all but 124 of the titles in the standard list. His nearest competitor lacks nearly twice as many; and if any of us were in danger of outstripping the Major, we would be tempted to hold back a little that he might continue to lead us. But there is no such danger. In June, 1906, this fine collection was seriously damaged by fire, but the zeal and energy of its owner soon repaired the loss, so far at least as the books and pamphlets are concerned. The table, chair and bookcase from Lincoln's Springfield office, which added especial interest to this collection, were completely destroyed.

Major Lambert also has a large number of autograph letters and documents, and many portraits; and, in common with other collectors, he possesses numerous publications bearing upon the Lincoln era, but not to be classified as distinctively Lincolnian. He is much more than a collector; he is a discriminating and capable student. It is largely through his efforts, for example, that the minute history of the Gettysburg address has been preserved and a standard text of that document established. It is quite safe to say

that no man now living is better informed respecting the literature of our subject or can welcome inquirers more charmingly.

In speaking of his "nearest competitor," I had in mind two gentlemen who are neck-and-neck in the race; my latest figures show but two numbers between them. This slight advantage was in favor of Mr. Charles W. McLellan, late of New York City, but now residing at Lake Champlain. It is interesting to note that this genuine Lincoln enthusiast is an ex-Confederate soldier, and that he is most zealously abetted by two sons, who personally have ransacked the bookshops of Europe in the interests of his specialty. They have secured 881 of the standard set, but have gone much beyond the list there set down. Three times as many again of collateral books and brochures, pieces of sheet music, portraits and the like are fruits of their research, besides nearly 150 autographs.

Next to McLellan, if he has not already passed to the front, is Mr. Judd Stewart, of Plainfield, N. J. Though later in the field, his superabundant energy goes far to overcome the handicap. His collection of 877 numbers from the printed list has been formed within the past eight or nine years. And his diligence has unearthed more omitted items, titles antedating 1906 and not in any of the catalogues, than have been brought to my notice by any other collector. Mr. Stewart's success illustrates afresh the truth that your busiest man has the most spare time. His daily work is of a very absorbing character, yet without neglecting any part of it his favorite amusement is indulged abundantly, and in the most generous spirit. I have many reasons for acknowledging his genial helpfulness in the prosecution of our mutual enterprise.

Next to the collections of McLellan and Stewart, in point

of numbers, comes my own, which lacks about 340 of the 1,103 listed titles. Of the supplemental list, new and old, I have about ninety, making my total upward of 850 items. All of the others, it should be remembered, have at least as many out of the unpublished supplement, besides some, no doubt, which I have not yet transcribed.

Finally, my friend Joseph B. Oakleaf, Esq., of Moline, Ill., is rapidly accumulating a fine Lincoln library. He is our junior, both in age and in the date of entry into this competition, but he is no laggard. From late advices I judge that he is likely to surpass me very soon, his total being then 743 of the 1,103 published titles, only twenty short of mine. As the baby of our family, he demands, and of course receives, the favors due to that stage of development, and amply requites them.

Besides the five, there are many collections of the extent of which I am unable to speak definitely. The fullest of these, no doubt, is that of Mr. John E. Burton, whose home is at Lake Geneva, Wis. Years ago he announced himself as the possessor of some 2,800 books and pamphlets relating to Lincoln. More than half of any such number must necessarily fall outside the limits of *Lincolniana* proper. Transcending those limits, so as to include everything dealing remotely with the principal subject, the hundreds might easily be expanded into thousands. Although Mr. Burton is a rather near neighbor of mine, it has never proven mutually convenient for me to inspect his treasures. I anticipate great pleasure and profit from such examination when the opportunity comes to pass.

Without mentioning other names, whereby I avoid the risk of seeming invidious, it is a pleasure to say that numerous correspondents have shown unbounded interest in the work of gathering up and preserving the mass of printed materials

of the kind we are considering. The subject appeals to a surprising number of earnest and intelligent men and women, whose acquaintance I greatly enjoy. We have a modest society of such people, called "The Lincoln Fellowship," whose increasing membership roll embraces many eminent names and whose annual dinner is a feature of the birthday observances.

A chief problem of Lincoln bibliography is the problem of inclusion and exclusion. All the collectors, as before intimated, possess books and pamphlets which are on the border line between *Lincolniana* and the general literature of the Lincoln era. And the dealers in such publications are frequently disposed to press the claims of a doubtful item. It is often very difficult to find a satisfactory reason for either admitting such items or denying them admittance. It goes without saying that the name and fame of the great War President is writ large in every published work which deals at all with the history of his time. To include all such would swell the list to unmanageable proportions. The great War Library of Colonel Nicholson at Philadelphia, which many years since numbered fully 8,000 volumes, might be included bodily without much risk of embracing prints from which Lincoln's name is omitted. This would be almost equally true of the mass of political discussions growing out of slavery and the Civil War. Nobody would assert that all such should be treated as *Lincolniana*, hence the necessity is upon us to discover, if possible, some rule of selection.

I do not profess to have made any such discovery, and if this learned Society can suggest a sound governing principle, one which will point the way infallibly through a jungle of perplexities, its existence will be justified beyond all cavil.

My original purpose and plan have been adhered to with tolerable consistency, just tolerable. Not all of the items

listed were personally examined before insertion, a fact that accounts for the presence of a small number which I would now omit. A few others which I had at first rejected were entered in the second list upon the advice of friends whose opinions are certainly no less trustworthy than mine; and a few more, for like reasons, would be included in a third edition. But, in a matter open to so many doubts, and depending so largely upon the personal equation, anything like a consensus of even the most competent judgment is hardly to be hoped for.

For a statement of the aim and scope of the latest catalogue compiled by me I must refer to the published preface. It is enough to say here that I have not attempted to make an index of all published writings by or about Abraham Lincoln. The periodical literature, which is of vast extent and variety, is wholly omitted, save in instances where the entire contents of an issue relate to Lincoln, or where the Lincoln matter has been reprinted in monograph form. All broadsides, all single-page publications, and all anonymous leaflets not rising to the dignity of brochures are outside the plan. Collected biographies, such as the numerous "Lives of the Presidents," are excluded, along with most other composite works made up in part of *Lincolniana*. Mine is a list of books and pamphlets only, and is intended to embrace all books and pamphlets (and no others) whose origin is traceable directly and exclusively to the life, acts, sayings and death of the man. Variations from that aim are blemishes. Failure to attain completeness in its execution, though unavoidable I suppose, is deeply regretted.

I estimate that a full list of the titles thus limited would number by the end of this year about 1,400. That figure would provide, I think, for a pretty liberal interpretation of the plan. To exceed it would open the door to perhaps

ten times as many more. Next year is the Lincoln Centennial, when a fresh impulse will be given to the production of similar writings. If I could accurately balance the great account to the close of the first century it would please me greatly. I should feel that I had helped to rear a most impressive memorial to the character which best illustrates American manhood; to the hero of my youth, indeed, but more truly of my age; to my revered compatriot and Commander of the battle days.