Abraham Lincoln as a Humorist*

By

A. A. Brill

Abraham Lincoln refused to read biographies because he believed that they were altogether eulogistic. "Biography as written is false and misleading," he told his partner, when he urged him to read a life of Burke which Herndon had bought. "The author of the life of his hero paints him as a perfect man, - magnifies the success of his hero in glowing terms, never once hinting at his failures and his blunders." 1) Abraham Lincoln thus shows us that he is not only a lover of the truth and honesty, as testified by all his conduct, but that he is also a very keen psychologist. For, in order to write a biography the author must have a strong positive or negative attachment to the hero of his book, - in his unconscious he must partially or completely identify himself with his hero. It is, therefore, quite clear that the main object of biography is to idealize the hero of the book, to exaggerate all his virtues and to embellish or omit everything that might throw a shadow of discredit on him. That the same process is at work, albeit in smaller proportions, when one sets out to depict even a few attributes of a great man, has been repeatedly demonstrated.

To preclude any presumption on my part, I will read aloud what flashed through my mind when I asked myself why, aside from the general fascination of this great man, I became particularly


* Read before the American Psychiatric Association at Toronto, June 5, 1931.
interested in him. Perhaps it is my first name, Abraham, which caused the identification. For, when as a college Freshman a few of us foreigners decided to empathize ourselves more deeply into American life by adopting a middle name, Lincoln at once flashed through my mind, and had not an older classmate of the same first name as mine claimed priority to Lincoln for his middle name, I would have adopted it. The humble origin, unconventional behavior, and hard struggle, claimed my interest in this great personality from the beginning of my interest in American history. On three former occasions I made reference to him in my writings.

To speak of Lincoln as a wit and a teller of anecdotes is simple enough. Anyone who has even a very superficial knowledge of the vast literature on Lincoln is well aware of this singular trait, all his biographers speak voluminously about it. My study of his witty productions convinced me, however, that Lincoln’s wit was preponderantly of a special kind. He, to be sure, used all forms of wit, "He saw the ludicrous in an assemblage of fowls," says H.C. Whitney, one of his fellow itinerants. "in a man spading his garden, in a clothesline full of clothes, in a group of boys, in a lot of pigs rooting at a mill door, in a mother duck teaching her brood to swim, - in everything and anything." The absurd anywhere caught his watchful eye. His story telling was at times incessant, inexhaustible. "It was as a humorist that he towered above all other men it was my lot to meet," Gillespie wrote to Herndon. All Lincoln biographers give numerous witticisms attributed to him, which show almost

1) The Empathic Index and Personality, Medical Record, Jan., 1920; Fundamental Conceptions of Psychoanalysis, p.134; Schizoid and Syntonic Factors in the Neuroses and Psychoses, Amer. Jour. Psychiatry, April, 1925.


3) Beveridge l.c. Vol.1, p.520
all forms of wit. Thus, Carl Sandburg mentions the fact that
"No one could ever use the term 'fissimile,' in Lincoln's presence
without his adding 'sick family';" and whenever Lincoln heard the
name mentioned of the pro-slavery party in Kansas, H. Clay Pate,
he would echo, "H. Mud Pate." "When Ward Lamon had a large
section of his trousers torn out in scuffling in front of the
courthouse, and was later acting as counsel in a case the same day,
a paper was passed around among the lawyers asking contributions for
the repair of the trousers, Lincoln wrote, 'I can contribute nothing
to the end in view.'" The same play with words and manifold
application of the same material is also found in the following
two examples furnished by the same authority: When the Supreme
Court, made up of three judges, all from Oneida County, New York,
rulled against Lincoln so he lost his case, he was asked by
S. T. Logan, "How did you like the decision?", and the answer:
"Its all that can be expected from a Oneida (One-idea) court."
Another example is the following story: A judge corrected Lincoln's
pronunciation of the word 'Lien,' as 'lean,' saying it should be
as 'lion.' In a minute or two Lincoln pronounced the word his way,
and again being corrected apologized, "As you please, Your Honor."
But, when he made the same slip and was again corrected, he replied:
"If my client had known there was a lion on his farm, he wouldn't
have stayed there long enough to bring this suit." These and numerous
examples of this type are given by many other historians of Lincoln.
They all aver that Lincoln was an inveterate story teller and joke
maker. As Beveridge puts it, "The absurd anywhere caught his

watchful eye... Any remark, any incident brought from him an appropriate tale.

Many examples of almost all the other forms of wit could be cited, but what interests us particularly here is that form of wit which is designated as humor, which runs through most of Lincoln's stories and witticisms. To make myself clear let me quote the latest authority on this subject. Professor Casamian in his very scholarly and interesting work on this subject states: "To many, no doubt, humor is simply what causes laughter. But, to the majority of those who speak or write more reflectively, there is no humor unless a peculiar shade is superadded to the bare quality of the comic." The author goes on to say that things are made humorous by expressing them with a certain twist, a queer reserve, and inappropriateness, and as it were an unconsciousness of what one feels it to be. "The humorist," according to Casamian, "is primarily a man with an eye for the potential fun of life; but the fun in which he specializes is that which consists of being apparently impervious to fun." Thus, when Hannah Armstrong took leave of Lincoln as he was leaving for Washington to assume the office of President of the U. S., she said as he was going: They'll kill ye, Abe." "Hannah, if they kill me, I shall never die another death." The wit in Lincoln's answer is due to the fact that he treats the act of dying in the same way as any other act, the experience of which may teach one how to behave better a second time. The fact that death is the end of all things, and that one only dies once, is altogether ignored. Death is

3) I.e. p. 5.
treated as if it were a commonplace repetitive act such as eating or drinking. But, let us go a bit deeper into the process of wit. Let us consider the situation in which the wit was produced. Hannah Armstrong was an old devoted friend of Abraham Lincoln. She, like everybody else, knew that the country was in a marked state of excitement, that the whole south was getting ready for something very startling and momentous, and that Lincoln was mortally hated by thousands of people. She justly feared for his life, a fear which was entertained by many others and probably by Lincoln himself. She expressed the situation very bluntly when she said, "They'll kill me, Abe." First he answered, "Well, I'll have to take the risk," or, "I'll have to be careful," his answer would have been quite appropriate, but there would have been nothing funny in it. Instead of agreeing with her feeling of apprehension, he controlled his feeling, repressed the disagreeable thought of danger, and said: "Hannah, if they kill me, I shall never die another death." In other words, he reacted to the painful threat of murder as if it were a question of a threatening indigestion from a certain food. "If I get indigestion, I'll never eat again." Such a mastery over one's feelings through repression in a person who has the capacity, I might say, the gift to "perceive the actual paradoxes of experience, and the agility that allows one to think on two different planes." - the possession of such a mastery over one's emotions makes the humorist. Lincoln possessed all these qualities to the highest degree, and with some variations, most of his witty stories and jokes show these mechanisms. Incidentally, it might be mentioned that Lincoln's answer to Hannah Armstrong recalls almost the same

1) *Maximiu Casamian* l.c. p.6.
answer given by another immortal, the great Socrates. Just before he
Arrest the hodlock he was asked by Crito in what manner he would be
buried. "As you please, if you can hold onto me and I do not escape
you." Here, we have the same unconscious mechanisms. Instead of
lying serious Socrates' answer ignores the futility of death, thus
showing that to him the impending situation was not as terrible as
Crito and his other pupils thought.

But what does the mind gain by resorting to such mechanisms?
Can every mind react to psychic pain in this way, or does such mental
behavior require a special predisposition? Before answering these
questions, let us examine a few more examples from Lincoln's
1) collection as given by Carl Sandburg: A negro barber in Illinois
stepped out of his shop one night to join a crowd gazing at the
luminous light shine of the planet Jupiter. "Sho," said the barber,
"I've seen that thing before. I seen him way down in Georgia."
Lincoln's point was that the negro really told the truth, but he
thought he was lying. That is true as far as it goes, but again
we may ask, 'what is the state of mind of one who acts this way, and
how is he able to produce this witticism?' Let us examine the situation;
The darky sees a crowd of whites gazing at the planet Jupiter.
Not as yet educated enough in the elements of astronomy he could
not quite understand why they took so much interest in the stars,
but he was even more puzzled when he heard that this was a special
kind of a star, the planet Jupiter, concerning which he knew nothing. He could have acknowledged his ignorance and asked for
an explanation, but that is difficult even for a cultured white man.

He, therefore, repressed the disagreeable idea of his ignorance and reacted to it with superiority by exclaiming, "Sho, I've seen that nigger before; I've seen him way down in Georgia." I am not so sure that Lincoln was right in his deduction that the darky knew he was lying. After all, he did see many kinds of stars way down in Georgia; and how many educated people can tell the difference between a star and a planet? However, the basic elements behind the barber's remark was a feeling of inferiority, a feeling of pain because the whites saw something which he had not known, and unlike Socrates', and Lincoln's answer, which were based on repression, the barber consciously lied as if he had said: "Know no, I am not ignorant, I am even superior to you; you are so pleased to see a star, I have seen it long ago."

Both of these examples represent humoristic wit, in both the pleasure of the wit is mixed with pain and like the one of Socrates, the pleasure originated despite the existing difficulty. For, according to Freud, humor is a means of gaining pleasure despite the existing painful affect. "If we are in a situation which tempts us to suppress these affects, in status nascendi, we have the condition for humor." A person affected by misfortune, pain, or disappointment, can obtain humoristic pleasure while the disinterested hearers laugh over the comic situation so produced. By way of further illustration let us examine the following witticism which President Lincoln told on his way to Gettysburg where he delivered his greatest oration.

1) Freud: Wit and the Unconscious, p.371, translated by A.A. Brill
General Pry, his escort, urged his commander in chief to make haste, as there was little time left for the train's departure. Lincoln countered with the story of the convict who was going to the gallows in some town in Illinois. "As he passed along the road in custody of the sheriff, the people, eager to see the execution, kept crowding and pushing past him. At last he called out: 'Boys, you needn't be in such a hurry to get ahead, there won't be any fun 'till I get there.'"

If we do not laugh freely over the remarks of this convict, it is because the humor is more or less blurred by our admiration for him who can make light of his sad plight. For, on seeing this man led to the gallows, we cannot help but sympathize with him, but as our sympathy continues to rise by the anticipation of the ghastly sight, it is suddenly stopped and dissipated by the remarks, "Boys, you needn't be in such a hurry to get ahead. There won't be any fun till I get there." We then smile and say to ourselves, "Far from being miserable, this convict feels as if he were the chief clown in a circus." Our sympathy is inhibited because we realize that he who is most concerned is quite indifferent, and this indifference when transmitted to us spares us from further sympathy and pity. We designate this form of humor as (Gulgenhumer), grim humor. We laugh and get pleasure because we have a sympathetic understanding of the humoristic person; we forget his tragic situation and admire him for deviating from it to ordinary situations of everyday life. In the words of Freud, humor — humoristic pleasure, has its origin in the economized expenditure.

of affects.

The same mechanism prevails in the following Lincoln story given by Sandburg: "And, it was told of various communities that a mob went to the house of a man and took him away and hanged him to a tree. It was a dark night and when morning came they saw they had hanged the wrong man. And they went and told the widow: 'The laugh is on us.'"

Here, too, the tragic situation is inhibited by the topsy-turvyness of the remark, 'the laugh is on us.' The tragedy of having hanged the wrong man with its marked affect is inverted into humoristic pleasure by the fact that the mob deviates from the tragedy to the commonplace and by treating the hanging as some trifling mistake pain is changed into pleasure. To put it psychologically, a depression is changed into an elation, melancholia into mania. When we laugh so spontaneously at these remarks, all thoughts of the unfortunate victim and his pitiful family become inhibited and vanish.

As will be seen by the following story, Lincoln was evidently aware of this mechanism of economy of feeling, for when a drunken Major once leered at Mr. Lincoln and slapping him on the legs said, "Mr. President, tell us one of your good stories," he drew himself up and said with great dignity: "I believe I have the popular reputation of being a story teller, but I do not deserve the name in its general sense, for it is not the story itself, but its purpose or effect that interests me. I often avoid a long or useless discussion by others or a laborious explanation on my own part, by a short story that illustrates my point of view. So, too, the sharpness of a refusal or the edge of a rebuke may be blunted by

1) Freud, i.e. p. 371.
an appropriate story so as to save wounded feelings, and yet serve
the purpose. No, I am not simply a story teller, but story telling
as an emollient saves me much friction and distress." In other
words, story telling, which in the case of Mr. Lincoln meant humorous
stories, served him and others as an economy of feelings.

Moreover, when one studies the life of this great man, one is
astounded at the psychoanalytic insight he possessed. Thus, his
knowledge of mental maxim catharsis as a therapeutic aid is well
shown by the following story: An officer had disobeyed orders, and
Secretary Stanton decided to give him a piece of his mind. "Do so," said Lincoln, "write him now while you have it on your mind. Make
it sharp. Cut him all up." The Secretary of War needed no
encouragement, and what he read to Lincoln was a "bone-crusher."
"That's right," said Lincoln, "that's a good one." "Whom can I
send it by?" mused the secretary. "Send it!" replied Lincoln,"Send it! Why, don't send it at all. Tear it up. You have freed
your mind of the subject, and that is all that is necessary. Tear
it up. You never want to send such letters. I never do."

What is very peculiar about Lincoln's stories and jokes, - his
own and those 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 will

1) Gross: Lincoln's Own Stories.
appear, was so marked a feature of his manhood and so shocking to the
eminient men among whom he did his historic work." And Carl Sandburg
quotes Henry Villard as having written as follows about this subject:
"He, (Lincoln), never hesitates to tell a coarse or even outright
nasty story, if it serves his purpose. More than once I heard him
'with malice aforethought' get off purposely some repulsive fiction
in order to rid himself of an uncomfortable caller." Lamon states
that his indulgence in gross jokes and stories was restrained by no
presence and no occasion. And quoting from Dr. Holland's Abraham
Lincoln': "It is useless for Mr. Lincoln's biographers to ignore
this habit: the whole west, if not the whole country (1866) is full
of these stories.- Again he says, "Men who knew him throughout all
his professional and political life have said that he was the
foulest in his jests and stories of any man in the country." All his
biographers confirm these statements, some of them endeavor to
explain this tendency, others remain silent about it. Looking at this
behavior with present day eyes I cannot be shocked by any of Lincoln's
stories which I read and heard. 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. Furthermore, much of his so called obscenities were
not printed. "They were not fit to print," so that I found very
little material to corroborate what these authors state. We must,
however, accept the statements of his friends and contemporaries, all
of whom maintain that Lincoln seemed to have a fondness for obscene
stories and jests. What does this connote?

---

Investigation teaches that obscene wit is especially indulged in by young, pubescent people, by elderly men, to a great extent by people of all ages when they are sex hungry and are unable to give vent to it; at last, but not least, obscene wit is encountered whenever groups of men and women are isolated and prevented from mixing with the opposite sex — they usually resort to smutty wit. In other words obscene wit is a substitutive outlet for suppressed and repressed sex. People who lead an active sexual life enjoy obscene wit, but only those show a special predilection for it who are sexually unsatiated. Young people following the pubescent age are as a rule sexually hungry, the same is true of elderly widowers who by virtue of their respectable position in society are precluded from obtaining sexual outlets. In brief, any individual who is endowed with the average amount of sex and cannot live it through, not only himself enjoys obscene wit, but he often has the need of imparting it to others. 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, if not terrible passion for women. He could hardly keep his hands off a woman, and yet, much to his credit, he lived a pure and virtuous life. His idea was that a woman had as much right to violate the marriage vow as the man — no more, no less. " His sense of right, — his sense of justice — his honor forbade his violating his marriage vows." Judge Davis said to me, in 1865, "Mr. Lincoln's honor saved many a woman; and this is true to the spirit. This I know on my own knowledge. I have seen Lincoln tempted, and I have seen him reject the approach of women." And, judging by his unhappy home life,

as testified by Judge Davis and others, it is quite reasonable to suspect that marriage offered him only a very meager sex outlet. There is another reason for this predilection. Lincoln was scrupulously truthful. "Men would swear on his simple word," declared Joseph C. Richardson. "What he said could be depended upon absolutely, and Lincoln's name became a synonym for fair dealing." 1) A man of this type could hardly be a hypocrite even in matters sexual. Considering all these factors and the fact that there was little possibility in his surroundings to obtain the vicarious outlets through the drama, etc., so useful and even necessary for modern man, 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. I dare say that had he been brought up in Massachusetts or Connecticut, he could not have been so frank about it. Tendency wit serves primarily as a vent for sex and aggression. In his early life Lincoln sublimated both through hard labor, some of it came out frankly (butchering for farmers). As he grew older and became a lawyer he used tendency wit as an outlet for both. Throughout his life there was not a breath of scandal about his sexual life. The sex instinct cannot be annihilated; when its normal path is obstructed it always finds some by-path.

Puritan New England in colonial times became infected with the psychic epidemic of bundling, which had its origin in the modest state of Connecticut. At worst, Lincoln's use of obscene wit was extremely tame in comparison to the joking one hears now days on the stage and

1) Beveridge.
in the finest social gatherings.

There is no doubt that Lincoln was a very aggressive young man. In his early youth he was famous for his strength with the ax. "He was fast, strong, and keen, when he went against other boys in sports." He was known as the best "rassler" of all, and held the championship of his community in most of the sports of the day. At 16 to 17 years he was known as a first class butcher of beef and hogs for which he was paid by the farmers at 3½ cents a day. His oligogalia is shown in numerous incidents reported by his biographers. Thus, at a very early age, he refused to join his schoolmates in torturing a live mud turtle, and soon, thereafter, he had written a paper against cruelty to animals. At eleven he shot a prairie turkey with his father's rifle and had never since cared to touch a trigger; he was ready to "butcher" a beef or a hog for food, but didn't like to see rabbit blood." All this shows a definite oligogalnic sensitiveness which this young man found hard to repress.

Everybody agrees that young Lincoln was a very powerful fellow who held his own everywhere. It is therefore striking to find that as he grew into manhood, he developed into a quiet, modest, and seemingly docile man, who never used profanity; "although profanity was general and intense." He was never known to swear testifies Wood, which some think well nigh incredible considering his rough surroundings and the fact that even in our protected and cultured environment profanity in some form or other is so widely used in the best strata of society. However, if we consider Lincoln's development from a psychoanalytic view we can readily accept the statement that Lincoln never resorted to swearing and profanity.

1) Sandburg.
2) Sandburg.
3) Beveridge, Vol I, p.82.
For what is the meaning of swearing and profanity? The use of these outlets is nothing but civilized man's substitute for hostile and aggressive acts. Instead of striking or killing, we utter invectives. Emotional control is extremely hard for the average man. Primitive man never indulged in cursing or blessing; they expected nothing from others, and gave nothing. (Most primitive tongues have no word for the modern word "thanks".) As a result of his life's experiences, Lincoln was fully attuned to inexorable reality. "Heavy toil was the only lasting impression made upon him for long years afterwards, when he was one of the leaders of the Illinois Bar, he told Herndon that it was the "roughest work a man could be made to do." He was born humble and was never spoiled by the luxuries of civilization. As one of his English biographers puts it: "But, in any conception we may form as to the growth of his mind and character, this fact must have its place, that to the man himself the thought of his early life was unattractive, void of self content over the difficulties which he had managed conquered, and void of romantic fondness for vanished joys of youth." Such an early environment helped to develop Lincoln into a rugged, aggressive, and independent being with his feet firmly on the ground. As he understood human nature he could act "with charity to all and malice towards none." His sense of fairness showed itself in all his dealings from early boyhood to the end of his days. All this shows that he had the ability to suppress and face reality and this naturally obviated the necessity for cursing and swearing as well as for blessing, yes, even blessing. For, once when all the family had to eat was potatoes, and his father asked 'the blessing.'

Abraham remarked that they were 'very poor blessings.' For a boy of about 15 such a frank and irreverent remark is most unusual.

But, whereas his emotional control seemed quite calm on the surface, his aggression remained in a state of agitation in his unconscious. Now and then it came to the surface. Thus, "As the Whig floor leader, Lincoln was amiable, but merciless," remarks Senator Beveridge. In boyhood he formed the habit of ridiculing other persons through offensive, anonymous writings, a habit which he continued until his Rebecca Letters "against Shields brought him defeat and humiliation. As a lawyer when he considered the Judge's ruling unjust his wrath knew no restraint. An incident of this kind (The Quinn Harrison murder case) is characterized by Hixson as 'terrible blasting, crushing, and withering!' Ridicule in the form of jokes and stories was always his favorite weapon. In other words, his marked aggression (in the form of active and passive algolognia) was always more or less on the surface, having suffered himself at the hands of a brutal father and brutal environments he had, so to speak, a flair for suffering. During the war his generals were in despair on account of the many paroles and respites given by Lincoln; to which he once said, "but it makes me rested after a hard day's work if I can find some good excuse for saving a man's life, and I go to bed happy as I think how joyous the signing of my name will make him and his family and friends." Nevertheless it was this stern and relentless aggression which urged him on to pursue the war to a

1) Beveridge p. 550.

2) Gross 1.4. p. 185
successful conclusion despite black discouragement and enormous human sacrifice.

But what we call the character of a person is nothing but the sum total of his past, particularly early impressions. His father, prawned Thomas Lincoln, was described as the most ignorant boy who could be found in the back woods. From the age 16 until 21, "he roved about, now here, now there, in this country and in that." His maternal grandfather was unknown. Lincoln was well acquainted with the gossip of his mother being an illègitimate child, for "in an unavowed burst of confidence Lincoln told his partner that his maternal grandfather was a 'well bred Virginia planter; and from this source flowed, as Lincoln believed, his noblest powers." Neither his father nor mother could read or write, and while living in Elizabethtown, the most attractive community they ever lived in, they were neither members of any church, nor did they possess a Bible. After a year and a half in Elizabethtown, the only period in his life of sustained and constructive effort, Thomas Lincoln left forever the stir of village or town, and hence forth lived on farms. For many years he moved from farm to farm, often for no reason that could be discovered, and the family continuously lived in abject poverty in the most primitive and gloomy surroundings.

To a psychiatrist Thomas Lincoln was no normally adjusted person. His whole behavior in life would justify the diagnosis of 'constitutional inferiority'. Nancy Banks, his mother, on the other hand, is described as a simple, attractive young woman; she

1) Beveridge
was considered remarkably keen, shrewd, and smart. All testify that she was inordinately kind and affectionate." It is while the family lived in Sinking Spring that Abraham Lincoln came into the world on Feb. 12, 1806, and nine years later his mother died. The impression she made on her only son can only be surmised. As she was of an affectionate disposition we may assume that little time received at least as much love from her as any of her other children. We can be quite certain of this because Abraham carried along his mother's traits to his stepmother, who spoke of him as "the best boy I ever saw. Abe never gave me a cross word or look, and never refused to do anything I requested of him." These two mothers, particularly his own mother, left very good impressions in his mind. Yet Lincoln was never at home with women. "A woman," he said, "is the only thing I am afraid of that I know will not hurt me." I regret that I have not time to enter here into this problem.

From his father Abraham received no love. On the contrary, all evidence points to the fact that Lincoln was treated very roughly by his father - "sometimes a blow from the old man's fist would hurl the boy 'a rod,' he was often knocked down and frequently thrashed, but from all accounts the lad took his punishment in silence, tears were the only outward sign of what he felt and thought."

A. H. Chapman, son-in-law of Dennis Hanks, says: "Thomas Lincoln never showed by his actions that he thought much of his son, Abraham, when a boy. He treated him rather unkindly than otherwise, always appeared to think much more of his stepson, John D. Johnson, than he did of his own son, Abraham, Everybody considered the father's

1) Herndon.
2) Beveridge.
3) Beveridge.
4) Beveridge.
behavior to his son as strange. "The mystery of the father's attitude toward Abraham is deepened by the unanimous and positive testimony to the placid character of Thomas Lincoln." Senator Beveridge, whom I am quoting, gives no reason for this mystery.

From our knowledge of such father behavior we can safely assume that the Oedipus situation on the part of the father was very intense. That the son entertained little love for his father is quite clear. Lincoln seemed to have no interest in his father, in judging by his behavior towards him during his last illness in the winter of 1850-1. One is justified in assuming that his feeling towards his father was bitter, if not hostile. When his father grew steadily worse and it appeared that he would not recover, Lincoln at first paid no attention to the letters written to him by John D. Johnson. When he finally answered Harriet Hanks' letter, his excuse for not writing was "because it appeared to me that I could write nothing which would do any good".

"Say to him that if we could meet now, it is doubtful whether it would not be more painful than pleasant." But that if it be his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before." Small consolation for a dying man from his son! Lincoln's behavior can be explained by the fact that unlike other sons, Lincoln's dislike for his father was perfectly conscious to him. Had it been repressed, as is usually the case, he would have acted like the average mortal; he would have over-compensated for his unconscious hostility and guilt through many acts of kindness and self-sacrifice towards his father.

I regret that I cannot enter here more deeply into the problem of Lincoln's relation to his father, as without which much of his character and behavior must remain obscure, but I must not forget that I am confining my investigation to only one phase of Lincoln's character. Nevertheless it would have been impossible to omit the
the few facts concerning his relation to the parental and especially the father image.

The father plays the leading role in his son's life, and normality, so called, depends altogether on the son's adjustment to his parents, especially the father. Given the average mentality the character of a person depends altogether on his early adjustment to his parents. The whole future adjustment of the son to his teachers, employers, and to the state, depends on his early adjustment to his father. All social fear and authority emanate from the father, he lays the foundation for what we call our super ego. For as I have shown elsewhere the psychic apparatus of man is composed of an unorganized, impulsive Id-mind, the function of which is blind impulsive wishing.

The tendency towards which this wishing strives deals with the two great impulses hunger and sex, self preservation, and the preservation of the species. From the very beginning of childhood this infantile Id-mind must learn through the senses which connect it with the outer world to distinguish between what is good and bad for it. Self preservation demands that all animals should know this. The ego which controls the infantile compulsive wishes is only that modified part of the Id which comes in contact with reality. Normal human beings, however, progress to a higher level and develop the above mentioned super ego, which represents the highest accomplishment of civilization (morals, ethics, and religion). The super ego then confronts the ego in the form of 'conscience' and aggressively strives to control the ego. It treats the ego as the parents or father treated the child. "If you do this, you will be punished, thou shalt not, etc." A man's social behavior depends entirely on the force of his super ego.

With these few remarks on a very complicated subject let us return to our hero. Sandburg states that Lincoln told Joe Gillespie that he never felt easy when a waiter or flunky was around; he could look a murderer in the eye on the witness stand, and be comfortable, but a hotel clerk made him feel sort of useless. At a meeting of Republican editors in Decatur once, he said he felt like an interloper and told "of a woman on horseback on a narrow trail or pass. The woman stopped her horse, looked the man over, and broke forth, 'Well, for the land's sake, you are the homeliest man I ever saw!" The man replied, "Yes, ma'am, but I can't help it," and the woman again, "No, I suppose not, but you might stay at home!". Omitting the analysis of the technique of this story, it may be said that Lincoln identified himself with the homely man, and that this witticism was a reaction to a feeling of inferiority about his own person — a trait which he showed throughout his life. By telling the story he defended himself as it were, against his self-consciousness, and he not only gained humoristic his pleasure thereby, but also furnished pleasure to his hearers. In other words when Lincoln was reminded of his social awkwardness — a feeling experienced by most people not bred to society — and of his unprepossessing appearance his ego would not allow itself to be worried by these unpleasant realities. Yes, he was considered homely, and having always lived in very simple and uncultivated surroundings, he felt out of place in nice society where one sees flunkies and waiters. All this he not only strove to ignore but through his wit he changed it to his advantage. Considering it in this sense, humor signifies a triumph of the ego as well as of the pleasure principle which enables it to put itself over despite the disadvantages of the actual situation.

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. "Yes," said he, "I like it more than many a one else, but I get less of it." But despite all these handicaps he attained the highest ambition of any American. Nevertheless throughout his life he was unable to disburden himself of his depressive moods. According to many authorities of whom only a few are quoted: "Starting along in his eleventh year came spells of abstraction. When he was spoken to, no answer came from him, he might be a thousand thousand miles away."

"The blues took him: coils of multiplied melancholies wrapped their blue frustrations inside of him, all that Hamlet, Khoelath, Schopenhauer have uttered, in a mesh of foiled hopes." Herndon said: "Melancholy dripped from him as he walked," and Mr. Jesse Weik states: Mr. Lincoln told me that although he appeared to enjoy life rapturously, still he was the victim of terrible melancholy. He sought company and indulged in fun and hilarity without restraint or stint as to time; but with by himself he told me he was so overcome by mental depression he never dared carry a knife in his pocket; and as long as I was intimately acquainted with him previous to his commencement of the practice of the law he never carried a pocket knife." Many more authorities I could mention to the same effect, but what interests us here is not so much his melancholy but the relation that this bears to his sense of humor. To any psychiatrist the above mentioned descriptions are quite plain. We know that in the ordinary case of

2) The Real Lincoln, p.112.
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 which showed themselves in his incessant story telling, and in his fluent wit. The dynamics of melancholia, according to Freud, and Abraham represent the struggle between the ego and super ego. The ego is tortured by the super ego, and the unworthiness, inscapacity, and the other self accusations uttered by the patient, are all echo from the remote past when the child was criticised and repreached by the father, his super ego, his conscience. In melancholia, however, the ego admits its guilt and is ready for punishment.

We also know that in all pathological depressions there is a danger of suicide unless a reaction against the depression results, and the patient then merges into a manic euphoric state. 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 harrassed 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. These two natures never became fused within him, they were in constant turmoil and were the source of the many diverse and baffling estimates of his personality. This keen observer, Bob Ingersoll, must have discerned this when he characterized
Lincoln as the "strange mingling of mirth and tears, of the tragic and grotesque, of cap and crown, of Socrates and Rabelais, of Aesop and Marcus Aurelius." Such a mixture in any ordinary individual would have produced a schizoid manic psychosis, but not so in the great emancipator. It is my opinion that Lincoln defended himself against further possibilities of suffering through his sense of humor. 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. I have observed this mode of escape from painful reality in a number of schizoid manic personalities among my own friends who never showed any psychotic disturbances. This is a well known mechanism which has been repeatedly exploited in the theme of the laughing clown. By rejecting some of the infantile demands of reality and allowing the pleasure principle to assert itself humor gives the individual sufficient emotional discharge to either keep him in touch with reality. Thus by telling the story of the Irishman, who said: "In this country one man is as good as another; and for the matter of that, very often a very great deal better" - Lincoln rejected the painful reality of his own humble birth and obtained humoristic pleasure from it. But in assuming a humoristic attitude towards life one reacts like the grownup towards the child to whom trifles appear enormous. The accent is displaced from the ego to the super ego which, so to speak, corrects and even consoles the ego. Lincoln's ego was undoubtedly very much affected by Hannah Armstrong's admonition; "They'll kill, ye, Abe;" There was every reason for apprehension in those portentous days, but the fear was immediately

suppressed, the super ego, as it were, stepped in and said to the ego: "Be a man, do not fear, suppose you are killed? What are you in comparison to this great cause?" The humorist then identified himself with the father, the super ego, and he then said: "Hannah, if they kill me I shall never die another death."

Lincoln was killed as Hannah prophesied, but who can say that his humorous reply, "then I'll never die another death" did not come true? In the heart of his countrymen and the world at large Lincoln lives and will never die.