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NEW LIGHT ON LINCOLN

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That Abraham Lincoln owned the German Language newspaper, the "Illinois Staats-Anzeiger" edited at the time by Theodore Carnezius; that the correspondence of the Civil War President included personal letters to Queen Victoria and to the Czar of Russia; and that Lincoln was interested in at least ten new inventions, are among the discoveries made by his latest biographer, Emanuel Hertz, whose two volumes on "Abraham Lincoln: a New Portrait" were published recently.

Mr. Hertz searched the four corners of the world for new traces of "Lincolniana." He succeeded in unearthing over a thousand new documents relating to Lincoln's life. The new material comes from such distant sources as the Soviet archives in Moscow, the British Museum in London, the small German town of Freiburg and the Museum at Bombay.

There have re-appeared recently so many diverging opinions on the character of Lincoln that it is significant to find that Mr. Hertz with such a mass of new material supports the widely accepted view of Lincoln as a self-made man of great courage, vision and ability. There have been attempts during recent years to paint the man who abolished slavery in the United States in many shades varying from the very defamatory view of him as a man unbalanced and egotistic, to a view of him as a second Messiah.

Even among those who knew Lincoln during his lifetime, there was much difference of opinion regarding his many traits. His fatalism, his idealism and his far-sighted purpose were often misunderstood and successively criticized. There is a typical story of Lincoln riding in a stagecoach with a jovial Kentuckian as his only fellow passenger. The latter offered him successively a smoke, tobacco to chew and a drink from a pocket flask. All were politely declined. When they parted the Kentuckian said good-humouredly; "See here, stranger, you are a clever but queer companion. I may never see you again, and I don't wish to offend you but I want to say this: my experience has taught me that a man who has no vices has damned few virtues. Good-day".

Biographers who attempted to show the "human sides" of Lincoln, have discovered in him many melancholy moods when he was quite willing to believe the Kentuckian's analysis. Those moods are perhaps as characteristic of Lincoln as his early reputation for honesty. It was typical, for instance, for Lincoln, upon delivering his three-minute speech at Gettysburg, which has since been recognized as an American literary masterpiece, to consider the address as a "failure".

There are in his character few traits which are not common to all, only that his feeling and love for the people and country were intensified and his purpose aided by exceptionally clear logic and straightforwardness. If he was casual and untidy at times these characteristics can be explained by his intense devotion to more important affairs; his mind refused to be occupied with trifles in which he had not been trained from youth.

His religiousness has been another subject of controversy. From his actions and general conduct we may call him a true Christian even if in an orthodox sense few people were further from religion. As he once said himself, his code was like that of an old man he had once heard of at a church meeting; "When I do good I feel good, and when I do bad I feel bad, and that's my religion".

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Intellectually Lincoln appears in most of his biographies as a sceptic and a fatalist, accepting little of the teachings of various European and American philosophers and theolgists. But a man's life is not judged by what he accepts or does not accept but only by the results of his lifework. New studies of Lincoln's life have probably removed some of the myths which began to cluster around his personality, and offered a more authoritative likeness of the man whose name is now enrolled highest among the types of American national ideals.

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