



STUDY FOR THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL AT WASHINGTON

The site of the memorial is near the banks of the Potomac, on the axis of the Washington Monument and the Capitol, at the end of the avenue planned to be two miles long and three hundred feet wide. The interior of the memorial will contain a statue of Lincoln and memorials of two of his most notable speeches, the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S SOCIAL IDEALS

BY ROSE STRUNSKY

EVEN in the most cursory review of Abraham Lincoln's life it becomes evident that there was something beyond mere patriotism which inspired him in his efforts to maintain the integrity of the United States. His significance to-day comes from a deeper cause than the "saving of the Union." It lies in the social ideals he represented, and which animated his acts. They are the beacon-lights by which the average American is trying to guide his political course to-day.

Two conceptions were clear in Lincoln's mind when he undertook the war. One, that the Union, based on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, carried out successfully the American

ideal of government, equal economic opportunity for all, which is the basis of American freedom; and, second, that that freedom could not be maintained by a division of the Union. "Physically speaking," he said, "we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them."

Lincoln said this in his first Inaugural Address in 1861, and he acted upon this idea immediately on his accession to power. The West, which was half Southern, and which understood the nature of the Southern better than the East, readily agreed with him. The East, even the most Republican East, could not quite see this one-



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ness of the Union. They had ever before their eyes the outlines of state constitutions and state borders, of their school geographies and histories. They had never known the long, flowing rivers and wide valleys of the West, with the result that they theorized and "believed" in States' rights almost as much as the South. At the time of the war the South urged this belief as a *casus belli*, and the North happened to repudiate it. It never could have been a principle strong enough either to prevent war or to cause war. Both the South and the North had certain purposes in going to war, which were far deeper and more vital than the abstract legal theory that the States had a constitutional right to secede from the Union. To hide their main purpose, the slaveholders successfully swept the South with the cry of "rights." Especially did this cry succeed with the youth, who from adventure rushed to the front at the first bugle-call. "We disbelieved in slavery," they said, "but we fight for States' rights."

There was so much reiteration of the statement that the war was being fought to maintain the principle of States' rights that historians writing soon after give it as one of its causes; but the men who undertook the war understood the facts far better.

It was not the right to secede that was questioned, but the purpose of secession, the kind of government which was to be formed after this right had been gained. No American statesman—not Jefferson, not even Hamilton, not Lincoln—ever disclaimed the right of the people to revolt. Lincoln went so far as to reaffirm this principle in his first Inaugural Address, when he was speaking to a country already at fever-heat over the problems before it. It was patent to the men of the time that a civil war was being attempted, and secession only cloaked an attack of a reactionary class in the Union against the people and their government.

The war was not fought, therefore, on the abstract principle as to whether the South had a right to form its own institutions or not, but over the institutions themselves. It was a struggle between conflicting economic interests, and though it was apparently a war of the sections, it was in the fullest sense a civil war. It was a clash over the control of the ma-

chinery of one and the same government, and not a mere sectional struggle.

No one understood this more quickly and more fully than Lincoln, the best and truest representative of the West. The East was not so quick to see it, and the South showed a far greater hostility to Lincoln, the candidate of the West, than they showed against Seward, his Eastern rival. Over and over again Lincoln said, "There is no line, straight or crooked, suitable for a national boundary-line upon which to divide." The West, he said, belonged not to one State or to another, but to the nation as a whole. This rich region must have egress to the ocean, it must be allowed to develop its resources, it must follow out its natural destiny, which was that of a region peopled by individual small landholders. "It is the great body of the Republic. The other parts are but marginal borders to it."

Emerson, who did not have to be as politic as Lincoln, could express the truth more bluntly—that the Federal Government was put on the defensive. After two years of struggle, he came to see that the battle-field would have been as large with secession permitted as it was with secession fought. "If we had consented to a peaceable secession of the rebels," he said, "the divided sentiment of the Border States made peaceable secession impossible, and the slaves on the border, wherever the border might be, were an incessant fuel to rekindle the fire. Give the Confederacy New Orleans, Charleston, and Richmond, and they would have demanded St. Louis and Baltimore. Give them these, and they would have insisted on Washington. Give them Washington, and they would have assumed the army and navy and, through these, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. It looks as if the battle-field would have been at least as large in that event as it is now."

The truth of this became evident during the war, when the South fostered a North-western Confederacy, which was ultimately to join with it. By its acts it accepted the idea of a civil war as well as the North, and by its attacks upon the National Government was the first to force the struggle in that direction. In one sense the war was the French Revolution of America, with the difference that here it was the aristocrat, the great land-

lord, who undertook the offensive against the small property-holder, in the desperate hope of maintaining an already defeated position.

Fundamentally, however, the two opposing classes that struggled for political power were much more closely allied than the aristocrat and the petty bourgeois of France. The structure of Southern society was simple, and to the student of evolutionary history uninteresting. It was a condition as primitive as Judea, in which the free lands forced the tying down of labor to the soil for the benefit of large landlords. Its history could be worked out by the mere formula even without the aid of specific detail. When it found itself hemmed in by opposing forces, it attempted the time-worn means of a political coup d'état to maintain its power.

Its rival was much more interesting. A breath of the new and the modern permeated its being. The free land of the West, which produced slavery in the South, in the North acted as the safeguard of economic and political liberty. It produced ideals of democracy and economic justice which, though they were never tested by the generations that uttered them sincerely enough, were temporarily in actual application by virtue of the free and generous nature about them. Thus America, with her ideals of the eighteenth century, born of France, could, unlike the sister republic, put them into practice for a period of almost a hundred years, or until the free lands were gone.

It must be admitted that there were contradictions and compromises from the very beginning. The property-ridden constitution, where even slavery was accepted, the class form of government, where suffrage was made dependent on property, and the thwarting of the will of the people by vetoes of the Senate or the President or the Supreme Court, cannot be called pure democracy; yet, despite all this, the ideal of an economic democracy was attainable at the time for the majority, and the crises arising from the compromises and contradictions were for the future generations to solve, and not for the fortunate ones enjoying the bounties of the new society.

There is a manifest lack of statesmanship and a lack of sufficient anxiety for the condition of the future of the nation in the

compromises of the founders of the republic and the men following them, including Lincoln. On the other hand, they had a utilitarian and pragmatic view of their ideals, which saved them from hypocrisy. Only minorities have ever profited by the revolutions that heretofore had come. Actually to demand that the doctrine of equal economic opportunity then in application be put into practice for all time would mean, as we can see to-day, a denial of perpetual ownership to the classes in power, a hopeless demand at the time; for the Revolution and the struggles leading up to the War of Secession, despite the doctrines and ideals which were expounded, were only struggles between first-comers over the ownership and control of property.

The ideal of Jefferson and of Lincoln, who inherited his philosophy, was a nation of small farmers, who might labor for hire in their youth, but who were later to acquire small homesteads for themselves, while their liberties were to be maintained not by vesting them in a majority, but by negating as much as possible the function of government.

This felicitous state actually existed for three quarters of a century, and still existed in Lincoln's time, and it was supposed would continue forever. However, in 1862, Lincoln wrote that "There are already among us those who, if the Union be preserved, will live to see it contain 250,000,000." He counted on the ratio of increase of population that had existed in these first seventy years of the country's founding. How he hoped to maintain the perpetual right of the individual to acquire property freely and the perpetual state wherein a large reserve property, ever in abundance, was to lie unacquired, is not known. Even at a rate of increase in population much lower than he counted upon, the free lands were already gone by 1890.

Lincoln was blind to all this, though even in his day there were men who foresaw the danger of unlimited ownership, and a radical free-soil movement arose, which reached its height about 1850. Lincoln, who remained, as he described himself, "a Western free-state man," and "a Henry Clay Whig," was not in sympathy with this movement. It went further than his natural conservatism would permit him to go. The non-extension of slavery, he

thought, would facilitate the free-soil movement, which it did, and was the first step to that goal of economic equality.

The radical free-soil movement reached its height in Wisconsin, where, in the legislature of 1851, a bill was almost passed which proposed that the homestead should be virtually inalienable on the one side, and on the other that it should be forbidden that any one inherit more than 160 or 320 acres. The general demand of the moment was that all citizens have the right to a homestead, a demand quite feasible at the time, for there was more than enough land for all.

Up to the time of the war, land sold at \$1.25 an acre, supposedly to homesteaders, but more often to speculators and land companies, who later fixed their own price for the actual settler. The history of America is the history of land speculation, in which the most illustrious names are involved, from George Washington to gentlemen in the Senate who dabbled with the lands acquired from the Mexican War. Lincoln, the representative of the genuine homesteaders, stands out remarkably free from the temptation of land deals, though as surveyor he had as much chance for such indulgence as Washington.

During the war, and for a decade after, homesteads were offered absolutely free to all comers, and an attempt to consummate the American ideal of equality was made by this free distribution of land. However, it must have been patent to Lincoln and other American democrats that a "distributive community," as some one called it, could not be maintained when freedom of economic opportunity meant also freedom to accumulate wealth. Within forty-one days after the passage of the Homestead Act, Congress authorized the giving away of 23,500,000 acres of the public domain to private corporations. It also, far from being *laissez-faire*, as was supposed, aided transportation enterprises by offering to guarantee bonds issued by the companies to the amount of \$65,000,000.

The uniting of the Free-soil party with the antislavery factions, instead of being a more radical step for it, was in reality a more conservative one. Instead of looking to the control of wealth as a means of eliminating the feared and obnoxious large landlord class, as in the measure to limit inheritance, it now contented itself only

with the non-extension of that class, and left the principle of free acquisition and inheritance of wealth intact.

Lincoln, who was against the large capitalist, as he was against the landed aristocracy represented by the slaveholder, was not opposed to the giving of land grants and subsidies to railroads, for in this case the land had only a speculative value. Land was given instead of the much more needed money, and the prospective sale of the land to the people of the towns and cities that might be built on that land by virtue of the improved transportation did not necessarily throw the railroads into the large landlord class. Not only, was it argued, were these land grants the means of bringing greater prosperity to the whole community, but they were in truth only lending themselves money, for as each man could have a little homestead, so each man could have a small number of shares in the stock of the railroad company.

Internal improvements were clamored for from the beginning of the century, and the building of roads and canals was forced upon the state governments not for the creation of a plutocracy, but in aid of the small property-holder. Lincoln's first public utterance as a young man of twenty-two was a strong plea for internal improvements, and as a member of the state legislature of Illinois he fostered all the plans in that direction. It was natural, then, that when the small property-owner actually came into his own through the election of Lincoln, he should apply the policies he was using in the state governments to the country as a whole.

The contradiction was not between the practice and the theory, but between the ideal and the theory. The ideal was an equal economic opportunity for all, the theory that small private holdings could consummate that state. Knowing only of the past, the one thing that was feared was the most obvious curse of the past, the large landlord. The revolt against the Old World that animated Jefferson and the Federalists, and was passed on to the generations of Americans following, was the revolt against the large landlord, and the consciousness that through him came all the evils of aristocracy and class rule.

Jefferson had no foreshadowing of a plutocracy. For him the country was an

idyllic state of small farmers, and the city was largely composed of mobs of sailors and journeymen artisans, and a floating proletariat who might at any moment, as long as there was unoccupied land, enter the farmer class.

Lincoln of necessity knew more of the capitalist than did Jefferson, and often he took the capitalist as well as the landowner into consideration. But he did not conceive his full significance. He saw the capitalist born, but he did not see the colossal height, unprecedented in any previous civilization, to which he was to grow. This is not to be wondered at, for the capitalist was born of the conception of the inalienable and individual right to property (business and government therefore being two separate institutions) plus the miraculous factor of human invention. The latter factor was unlooked for and could not have been foretold. It was the unknown quantity that ate up the land much more quickly than Lincoln had calculated, and through monopolies and trusts created a class stronger and more firmly entrenched than the large landlords had ever been, and left the unpropertied and small propertied classes as powerless to acquire property or to enlarge what they had as they had been under the landlord aristocracies of Europe or the South.

Lincoln had not the same excuse for his failure to foresee this as had Jefferson, for already in the fifties the railroads were being laid, patents for thousands of inventions were being issued by the patent office every year, and industries were rising so rapidly that a very large part of the population were becoming working-men. It is difficult to understand on what grounds he based his hope that their condition was temporary instead of permanent. "Nor is there any such thing," he said, "as a free man being fixed for life in the condition of a hired laborer."

With the revolution that was taking place in transportation, the ideal of the small landlord proprietor became translated into the ideal of the small capitalist, so that even the large fortunes of the

Astors and the Vanderbilts were in no way frowned at. There was no fear at the time of overconcentration of wealth. The curious shibboleth that the American social order went from "shirt-sleeve to shirt-sleeve in three generations" helped to color roseate any divinings into the future. The doctrine came of the overthrow of primogeniture, and it was firmly believed that the generation following the one that acquired property would surely lose it, and the third would have to begin with sleeves rolled up, true sons of toil. Thus no class, no aristocracy, not even inheritance, was possible, and an economic democracy was happily established for all time. It took fifty years of monopolies and trusts for the small capitalist to realize that he was being cut off from the spoils, and to view the Rockefellers and the Morgans of to-day with the same alarm that filled the small Western farmer at the sight of the long-stretching tentacles of the large landlord of the South.

But at the time of the war it was not foreseen that in the overthrow of that large landlord class an equivalent class would spring up in the North composed of the large manufacturer, the large railroad man, and the "money magnate," who would own the industries and wealth of the country as firmly as the landlord owned the limited acres of land. With this new capitalist the absorption of property into one class continued, and the American ideal, economic democracy, was again overthrown.

In the restless surge for the "new freedom" that is being expressed to-day, the aims and ideals of Lincoln are being fruitlessly invoked to help pilot the ship of state over the troubled waters. Except for the inspiration of his ideal of equal economic opportunity, Lincoln can no longer help us. He fought a reaction. He saved his country from a counter-revolution, but he kept firmly to the narrow course laid out by the builders. To-day a broader theory than his is needed, in the social control of wealth, to help consummate his ideal of a democratic state.