

With Hate And Love.

LINCOLN AS THEY SAW HIM. Edited and Narrated by Herbert Mitgang. Illustrated. 519 pp. New York: Rinehart & Co. \$6.

By DAVID DONALD

"THE election of Mr. Lincoln will be a national calamity," his home-town newspaper predicted in November, 1860. Lincoln, retorted The Chicago Tribune, "will take to the Presidential chair just the qualities which the country now demands to save it from impending destruction — ability that no man can question, firmness that nothing can overbear, honesty that never has been impeached, and patriotism that never despairs." "President Lincoln is," pontificated The Times of London, "a good-tempered man, neither better nor worse than the mass of his kind — neither a fool nor a sage, neither a villain nor a saint, but a piece of that common useful clay out of which it delights the American democracy to make great Republican personages."

Such are three sample portraits of the Civil War President selected from the hundreds of contemporary editorials and news stories which Herbert Mitgang, of the New York Times Sunday staff, has collected and skillfully woven into a kind of "biography of Lincoln in the words of friends and enemies." Ranging from Lincoln's own hesitant first appearance in print in 1832 to the accounts of his death in 1865, including editorials from nearly one hundred newspapers and magazines, both American and European, "Lincoln As They Saw Him" is a fascinating and valuable book which captures the stridency and acrimony of the Civil War crisis.

MOST newspaper editors were hostile to Lincoln. They called him an "ape," a "fiend," a "feeble, confused and little-minded mediocrity," "a low buffoon," "a vulgar tyrant," an "ourang-outang." Democratic journals condemned the President for irresolution in prosecuting the war and at the same time complained that this "Tory" was too resolutely "putting forth all the powers of the Government to crush out the spirit of American liberty." Lincoln's high-aimed opposition to slavery was branded as nothing but the "natural desire of an ignorant man to atone for mental deficiency by assuming an immense amount of moral firmness." His Emancipation Proclamation was "a monstrous usurpation, a criminal wrong, and an act of national suicide"; it marked him as a "coward, assassin, savage, murderer of women and babies." "The great ghoul at Washington" by "sheer usurpation—audacious, criminal, perjured usurpation," had

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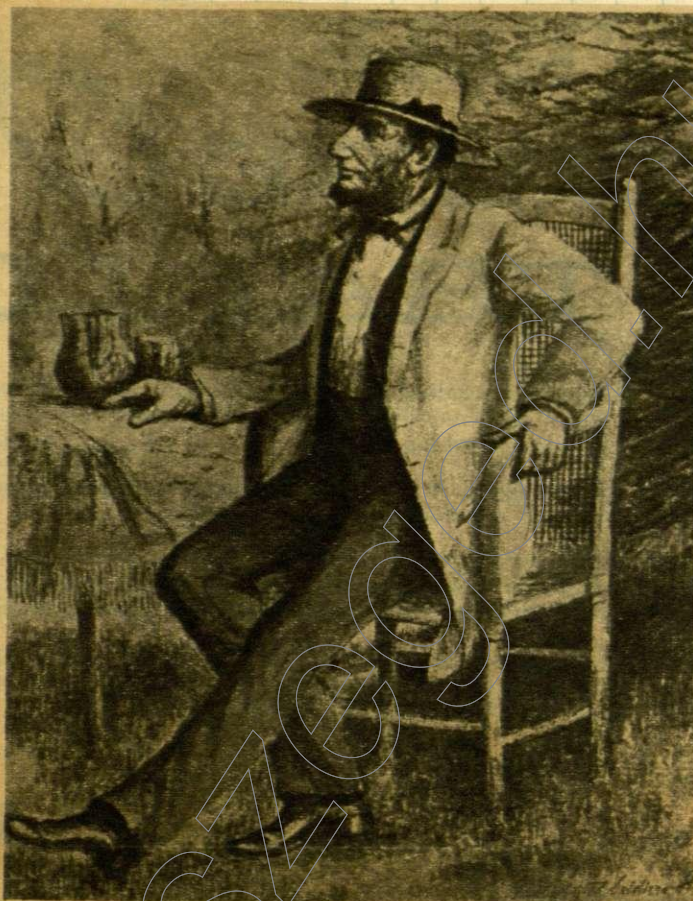


Illustration from "Lincoln As They Saw Him." A newly discovered drawing of Lincoln done by Pierre Morand, a French business agent who visited Washington during the Civil War.

"tricked the country into a war," which he proved "incapable of prosecuting successfully or concluding honorably."

So spoke the editorial voices of Lincoln's opposition. As The New York Times observed in 1864: "No living man was ever charged with political crimes of such multiplicity and such enormity as Abraham Lincoln. He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler over the last agonies of an expiring nation."

Prophecy

FOR a hundred years to come historians will be engaged in placing in their true light the events which are now transpiring. For a century to come military skill will consist in a knowledge of the changes in military science now being wrought: Republican statesmanship will consist in a thorough acquaintance with the principles of government now being contended for and settled in battle. . . . Think of this, and when you cast your vote in November, vote for the unity of the republic, for the rights of man and for the only candidates who represent them—Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois and Andrew Johnson, of Tennessee.—Chicago Tribune editorial, Sept. 24, 1864, in "Lincoln as They Saw Him."

Fortunately, there were other, less frenzied editorial voices, and "Lincoln As They Saw Him" is not merely an anthology of abuse. From the beginning there were newspapermen who wrote of Lincoln as "the embodiment and exponent of our free institutions," "the most unspotted man in the Republic," and "one of the ablest political thinkers of his day." Though most of the press was hostile to Lincoln throughout his Presidency, such influential papers as The New York Times, The Springfield (Mass.) Republican (unfortunately not represented in this anthology), The Chicago Tribune, and Harper's Weekly were consistently friendly and favorable. Few editors joined the enthusiastic partisan who found Lincoln "God-like in his moral attributes, child-like in the simplicity and purity of his character, and yet manly and self-relying in his high and patriotic purpose," but many agreed with George William Curtis' thoughtful appreciation of Lincoln's "unwearied patience, perfect fidelity and remarkable sagacity."

These editorial voices, "reacting with love and hate, advice and contempt, petulance and acrimony," tell us extraordinarily little about Lincoln himself; Hawthorne and Whitman wrote brief sketches of the President, not included in this anthology, that say more than the effusions of a dozen newspaper publishers. But "Lincoln As They Saw Him" does remind us of the bitterness and tension of the Civil War years, and Mr. Mitgang's anthology helps us to see the wartime President as he appeared to his own generation.