



The Women Lincoln Loved

IN our glorification of results, we often forget to appreciate the hidden but compelling forces behind them.

It has been said that back of every man's success stands a woman. Certainly in almost every man's life, women play a vital part. And how constantly is their influence ignored!

We honor and praise the man who creates beauty in song and stone or discovers a new law that enriches our conception of life or invents a mechanism that levels the barriers of time and space; who carves a career of brilliant achievement in spite of obstacles. We speak of his intelligence, his gift, his generous understanding—but rarely do we go back of the success and inquire into its causes. We never ask who gave the inspiring word, the encouraging hand, the sustaining faith.

"All I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel-mother," Lincoln once said to a friend. But there were three other women who vitally affected his spiritual growth and his intellectual development.

His mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln "who gave us Lincoln and never knew," taught him to read and first answered his eager questions. Although death cut short their comradeship, the ten-year-old boy found another wise and gentle spirit in his stepmother, Sarah Bush Lincoln. When his father wanted to stop the foolishness about books and learning she induced him to permit Abraham to study at home as well as at school. Always she encouraged him to read aloud and explain to her the problems that interested him.

When Lincoln went out into the world, he found Ann Rutledge, the beloved of his early manhood, "wedded to him not through union but through separation." Her death just before their marriage left him dazed, empty of ambition. This sorrow colored all his latter days with an abiding melancholy, but he was too strong, too courageous to permit it to destroy him. Like all great natures, he found a new spiritual strength in the struggle for self-control. His grief mellowed into a richer, deeper sympathy with people, a more tender, patient understanding of them.

And out of Mary Todd came inspiration and courage to achieve his youthful ambitions. For in spite of her family's objections to his humble origin, Mary Todd, brilliant, aristocratic, married Lincoln, the rail-splitter. And her faith in him was vindicated twenty years later when he was elected president of the United States.

All four of these women share in and are a part of Lincoln's greatness. They were the most powerful influences in the molding and shaping of the man and his career. Their valuation of life and their aspirations were the secret and noble forces that guided his heart and mind. Out of them came the vision and the courage to keep faith with what he found to be the right. Out of them was born a great and tender spirit with "malice toward none, charity for all."