

INDIANA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY

VOLUME XXVI

JUNE, 1930

NUMBER 2

Albert J. Beveridge: Biographer

BY RICHARD ARNOLD TILDEN

Albert J. Beveridge, lawyer, politician, public speaker and historian, died on April 27, 1927, and left as his contribution to American History two biographies, the second only partially finished. Some critics have acclaimed him a great lawyer and politician, some a scientific historian, and others a genius, whose most surprising gift was his ability as an author. It is the purpose of this paper to determine, if possible, the methods which he used in the writing of his well-known and well-received biographies.

Perhaps the strongest influences in the works of Mr. Beveridge were the result of his pre-literary life and training. From youth, he was surrounded by conditions which influenced his later work. Born October 6, 1862, his boyhood was spent on the farm, first in Ohio and later in Illinois. His early schooling was interrupted by the necessity of supporting himself, as a farm hand, on a railroad, and in a lumber camp.

In 1878, Beveridge began his more advanced education in the high school at Sullivan, Illinois, graduating in 1881. It was at this time that he received a gift that probably changed the whole course of his life. A friendly merchant recognizing what he thought to be ability, offered to give the boy sufficient money to finance one year at college, an offer that was readily accepted. DePauw University at Greencastle, Indiana, became the scene of his future study.

His main field of activity while at college was oratory and debate, beginning in his first year with the winning of a twenty-five dollar prize for delivering the best oration of any member of the Freshman class. His success continued, and with the aid of the prizes won, a few odd jobs, and sum-

mer earnings, he was able to complete his college course, graduating in 1885.¹

After spending a year in the West, presumably to gain experience and regain his health, Beveridge settled in Indianapolis, Indiana, where, with the firm of MacDonald, Butler and Mason, he began the study of law. He advanced with reasonable rapidity in the law, first becoming managing clerk of the law firm with which he was associated, and later, in 1889, opening his own law office.²

He avoided as much as possible the less important things at which a lawyer might work and instead sought a part, no matter how meager, in larger cases. The number of these was not great, but he showed a surprising ability in grasping the questions which had weight with the court or jury. In one case where the evidence of guilt seemed overwhelming, he practically admitted this, but, by a brief sermon upon the text, "the quality of mercy is not strained," induced the jury to let his client, a young man, go free.³

His political life and reputation were founded in 1884, while yet a student, by his speeches and work for James G. Blaine, then a candidate for president on the Republican ticket.⁴ His recognized ability as a forceful speaker, and the ease with which he appealed to the rank and file of voters made him a popular and efficient representative of the Republican state organization and gained for him, in time, some prominence in the party throughout the state.

By the end of 1898, the prestige of Mr. Beveridge was very considerable—had indeed risen to such a point that his friends and associates begged him to become an active candidate for the United States Senate.⁵ He was elected to that position by the Indiana legislature, on January 17, 1899.

Mr. Beveridge entered the political arena just at the time when the question of the disposition of the territory conquered in the Spanish War was assuming importance in the public mind. He was a staunch admirer of the British, and especially of the British Empire, and saw in the existing situation a chance to further extend the power and benefits of Anglo-Saxon civilization. He declared: "We are the trustees of the

¹ DePauw University, Records, 1881-1885.

² *Indianapolis News*, January 11, 1899.

³ *Review of Reviews*, XLII, 430.

⁴ *Indianapolis News*, January 11, 1899.

⁵ *Indianapolis Sentinel*, November 28, 1898.

world's progress; the guardians of its righteous peace. The judgment of the Master is upon us; 'Ye have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things.'"⁶

Without knowing a great deal about the situation, Senator Beveridge formulated a definite plan. In Philadelphia, on February 2, 1899, he expressed his views to the public: "Civil government is to be perfected in Porto Rico, Cuba, is to be annexed because it is to our interest to do so, even if the Cubans do not wish it and are capable of self-government. The Philippines are ours forever. Let faint hearts, if they wish anoint their fears with the thought that some day American administration there may end. But it will never end. It is our duty to govern and administrate for it. We are a part of a movement of a race, the most masterful race of history, and race movements are not to be stayed by the hand of man."⁷

Having announced his policy, Senator Beveridge left immediately for the Far East to gather the necessary facts in regard to the Philippines to support his policy in the Senate. Upon his return to the States he refused to divulge the facts that he had collected, feverishly awaiting the opening of Congress.

The momentous day, for which he was anxiously waiting, came on January 9, 1900, barely one month after his taking the oath of office.⁸ Shortly after noon, Senator Beveridge arose in the Senate, addressing, it is claimed, every Senator in Washington, most of the Representatives, and a full gallery. His oration, lasting well over three hours, was one of the most impassioned pleas for imperialism, backed by one of the most one-sided arguments, ever heard in the Senate Chamber. "We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world," the young and unsophisticated Senator declaimed, and closed with this plea:

President and Senators, accept the plan offered that peace may quickly come and that we may begin our saving, regenerating, uplifting work. Adopt it and this blood-shed will cease when the deluded children of our islands learn that this is the final decision of the representatives in Congress assembled. Reject it and the world, history, and the American people will know where to forever fix the responsibility for the consequences. How dare we delay when our soldier's blood is flowing.⁹

⁶ *Congregational Record*, 56 Cong., 1 Sess., XXXIII, Pt. I, 711.

⁷ *Indianapolis News*, February 16, 1899.

⁸ *Indianapolis Press*, January 9, 1900; *Congressional Record*, 56 Cong., 1 Sess., XXXIII, Pt. I, 705.

⁹ *Indianapolis Press*, January 9, 1900.

His speech was not well received. Laymen and politicians, Republicans and Democrats, all criticized him, but he persisted in further antagonizing them in the advocacy of his beliefs. On March 22, he made an address favoring free trade with our island possessions, which, because of its impolitic nature, secured for the young Republican leader from Indiana the ire of his party, and for a short time forced him to retire from active participation in controversial matters.

By 1902, the young Senator had re-instated himself in the good graces of his party through his ultra-Republican work as a member of the Committee on Territories. During the next few years, under the leadership of President Roosevelt, he associated with the progressive wing of the Republican party. In 1909, he became definitely an insurgent, voting with a small group of Republican Senators against the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Bill. With Beveridge as a candidate to succeed himself in the Senate, the Republicans lost control of the Indiana legislature following the election of 1910, the result being his retirement. In 1912, he was defeated as a candidate for Governor on the Progressive ticket, and again in 1914, he lost when a candidate for the United States Senate.

We have briefly viewed Beveridge the youth, the student, the public speaker, the lawyer and the politician. In all of these roles his tenacity, his partizanship, his semi-idealism, his fluent, though florid oratory, his unwavering and unbroken devotion and support of that particular policy uppermost in his mind at any one time, portrays the man as he was, a lawyer without sustained interest in his profession and a gifted politician. Later, it will be seen that his legal and political training, with the habits of thought that they brought with them, the unconscious bias, strengthened through constant legal and political use, the ingrained desire to support one contention or one hypothesis, at the expense of all others, even without adequate proof, has sometimes seriously affected the historical value of what would otherwise have been of far greater worth.

Beveridge made his first literary venture in 1904, with the publication of a volume on political conditions in the Far East, a volume entitled *The Russian Advance*. This was followed in 1906 by *The Young Man in the World*; in 1908, by *The Meaning of the Times*, a collection of speeches, and *Americans of Today*. In 1915 he published *What is Back of the War*. In

all of these writings Mr. Beveridge's legal and political training is clearly evidenced, and his defense of a single contention adds somewhat to their attractiveness, but also mars their usefulness.

His reputation as an American historian is not based on these earlier efforts in the least, but entirely on his two biographies, *The Life of John Marshall*, and *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*. The first two volumes of his *Life of John Marshall* were published in 1916, the second two in 1919, and *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, in two volumes in 1928, the year following his death.

Beveridge intended his second biography to be a sort of companion to the first, the two to be the "institutional interpretation of America . . . weaving it about the life and career of" Marshall and Lincoln. It was his aim in the two works to have "covered the subject from colonial days to the end of the War of Secession,"¹⁰ but death cut the second biography short at the year 1858. He chose these two men for the central theme of his interpretation because they were, to him, the outstanding figures of the periods.

He wrote when describing Marshall:

We must imagine a man very much like Abraham Lincoln. . . . Marshall and Lincoln were equally good politicians; but although both were conservative in their mental processes, Marshall lost faith in the people's steadiness, moderation, and self-restraint, and came to think that impulse rather than wisdom was too often the temporary moving power in the popular mind; while the confidence of Lincoln in the good sense, righteousness, and self-control of the people became greater as his life advanced. If, with these distinctions, Abraham Lincoln were, in imagination, placed upon the Supreme Bench during the period we are considering, we should have a good idea of John Marshall as Chief Justice of the United States.¹¹

Beveridge, as a writer of history, began his work under a serious handicap. Unlike the majority of the great American historians, he had not studied history intensively, nor had he had any training in the writing of history. It is true that he had received a college education from a small and probably biased Methodist institution in which had been emphasized not the social sciences, but rather the classics and the art of public speaking. He had never had the advantage of graduate work

¹⁰ *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, I, v.

¹¹ *The Life of John Marshall*, IV, 93.

at a larger university nor the opportunity of studying historical criticism, yet he wished "not to be thought less thorough, less accurate, or less scientific than any historical doctor of them all. Therefore he spared no pains in ransacking all the libraries for material, printed and unprinted, bearing on his subject; he studied, sifted, and arranged all this material with much system; and in his presentation, he forestalled all reasonable criticism by giving chapter and verse for almost everything he ventured to say."¹² Further, he religiously attended the meetings of various historical associations that he might learn of the methods and attitudes of historians through personal contact.

In a magazine article, "The Making of a Book,"¹³ Mr. Beveridge attempted to tell of the method by which biography must be written. "Before the story can be told or even planned," he asserted, "the facts—and all of the facts, little and big—must be gathered concerning every character small and great. And you must," he added, "be sure that all these data are truthful. You must be able to prove, and must prove, every statement."¹⁴

In this declaration, Mr. Beveridge stated the essence of historical writing, and his own industry was attested, yet in his historical work he did not always rigidly follow the simple but exacting formula which he himself deemed necessary to the writing of biography.

Contrary to a somewhat popular belief, Mr. Beveridge did most of his own research work. "He was tireless in reading collections of papers still unpublished, in carefully going through files of newspapers preserved in many and widely separated cities, seeking the fact and coloring of the narrative" that he used so skillfully and convincingly. In his own words, he stated the value which he placed upon such minute research:

Facts when justly arranged interpret themselves. They tell the story. For this purpose a little fact is as important as what is called a big fact. The picture may be well-nigh finished, but it remains vague for want of one more fact.

When the missing fact is discovered all others become clear and

¹² *Nation*, CIV, 132.

¹³ *Saturday Evening Post*, CXCIX, 14-15. October 23, 1926.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 184

distinct; it is like turning a light, properly shaded, upon a painting which but a moment before was a blur in the dimness.¹⁵

A large amount of his material was taken from manuscript sources. In the first chapter of his *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, containing one hundred and seventy-four footnotes to thirty-seven pages of text, there are over seventy references to manuscript sources, and forty-four to other primary material, including family bibles, court records, newspapers, autobiographies, and state statutes. The remainder of his references are to monographs and other recognized secondary writings. In one footnote given in support of the paternity of Nancy Hanks, five manuscript sources, two monographs, and one court record are cited.

But careful as Mr. Beveridge was of his citations and of having an adequate foundation for all of his statements, he is not superior to criticism. Mere citations to authority do not in any way prove the validity of the source used, and quite often a reference is made to a totally unreliable source. Mr. Beveridge, in attempting to establish authority for his statements, has frequently trusted too wholeheartedly in a supposed statement of fact found in some contemporary letter or newspaper account. He has not taken the pains, the infinite labor necessary, to be certain of the sources which he cites so carefully.

In that part of his study of Lincoln dealing with the creation of a new party and the phenomenal rise of Lincoln to the presidency, he has limited his sources to the Trumbull correspondence and other local Illinois material, without attempting to verify or check these sources by the use of the correspondence of Chase, McLean, Sumner, Welles, and Washburn, all important actors in the drama.

In several distinct places, his lack of adequate sources has caused misstatements of fact. Take, for example, a statement (II, 388) in regard to Buchanan and the Democratic nomination in 1856. He says of that leader: "He did not expect to be nominated, and it is not certain that he wanted the office at that time." To this statement is not added any reference to specific evidence. A brief examination of Buchanan's writings would have shown that the Pennsylvanian carried on

¹⁵ *Abraham Lincoln*, I, iv.

a somewhat lengthy correspondence with the more prominent southern leaders, stating carefully his position as to slavery, and that he was the recipient of detailed letters telling just how his nomination was to be accomplished.¹⁶ In this instance, Beveridge has evidently accepted pre-convention Democratic propaganda as the basis for his scientific investigation. A few pages further on is the statement that "the outstanding leaders of the new party, like Seward and Chase, did not want to captain that craft on its trial voyage, and they refused to be candidates."¹⁷ "Had Mr. Beveridge gone no further than an investigation of the letters printed in Bancroft's *Life of Seward*¹⁸ he would have found evidence from Seward's own hand to the effect that he wanted the nomination and was bitterly disappointed when he found that it was not to be his."¹⁹ As for Chase, a brief survey of the Chase manuscript for that period would have shown that his ceaseless efforts in forming the Republican Party had only one end in view, to become its leader, and that he, too, was bitterly disappointed when he realized that he could not receive the nomination in 1856.²⁰

Mr. Beveridge has also used as a basic source for his statements the Herndon manuscripts. As a whole, he has used them remarkably well, yet they were early used for the book published in 1872 by C. F. Black; by William H. Herndon, aided by Jesse W. Weik, in preparing his biography of Lincoln; and again in 1923 by Weik himself. But having used for the fourth time these well known manuscripts, it is surprising the number of errors that Mr. Beveridge has made, and equally surprising that he did not attempt to verify this source with other trustworthy material.

Mr. W. E. Barton in a review of the *Life of Lincoln*, says:

Beveridge accepts at its face value the testimony of John B. Helm and Samuel Haycroft as to Nancy Hanks and the boyhood of Abraham Lincoln. Helm and Haycroft were both honest men, yet Haycroft's first letter to Lincoln shows that Haycroft thought Lincoln was the son of Thomas Lincoln by Sarah Bush, and that Haycroft had no recollection of Thomas Lincoln's first wife. Furthermore, it is wholly apparent to the careful student that when these two men recalled those persons who they

¹⁶ A. W. Crandall, Review of Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858 (*Mss.*). Dr. Crandall is Associate Professor of American History at DePauw University.

¹⁷ Beveridge, *Lincoln*, II, 394.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 419-424.

¹⁹ A. W. Crandall, Review of Lincoln (*Mss.*)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

thought were Abraham Lincoln and his mother they really remembered John D. Johnston and Lincoln's stepmother.²¹

Mr. Beveridge, then, has not only failed on occasion to follow his own formula, "You must be able to prove, and must prove, every statement," but has sometimes done worse, giving to the public unproved statements or information based on unverified or misleading sources. This was not intentional. Possibly it was the result of his legal and political training. To a historian nothing is true until adequately proved, while to the lawyer or the politician his own contention, if enforced by seeming facts, is true until disproved by the opposition. Mr. Beveridge, believing these things, and having some foundation for his belief, stated them as true without attempting to verify the sources used, not because he intended to mislead, for his intention, one must believe, was just the opposite, but because his training, which he never fully overcame, had not required him to do so.

Some, indeed, might excuse Mr. Beveridge on the ground that exact detail as to background is not necessary to the accurate portrayal of his hero. But if this excuse is accepted, it contradicts the purpose for which the work was written. He strongly expressed his own views in saying that "biography is a fair example of the care one must take with facts and the arrangements of those facts. Facts about the hero only are not enough; indeed they are hardly a beginning. Moreover, taken by themselves, personal incidents, and all of them, that make up the life of any man or woman, do not mean anything. Standing alone, such circumstances actually may mislead. You must take into equal consideration what others said and did, and everything that happened which influenced the hero or heroine."²²

The possibility that some primary material might not be accurate and that all sources need a critical examination and verification, when possible, seems not to have been often enough in Mr. Beveridge's thoughts. A "fact" too often seems to mean anything that can be traced to a contemporary source; "proof," a mere citation of that source.

Some reviewers rather severely criticized Mr. Beveridge's

²¹ W. E. Barton, "A Noble Fragment", in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXV, 499. Barton wrote *Abraham Lincoln and his Books*, which came out in 1920, and he has published several volumes and numerous articles pertaining to Lincoln.

²² *Saturday Evening Post*, CXCI, 182. October 23, 1926.

Lincoln because of his inclusion of what they believed to be irrelevant material. Nathaniel W. Stephenson²³ doubts that the inclusion of the extensive and thoroughly adequate story of the Kansas episode has in any way helped in the portrayal of Lincoln, nor does he consider the lengthy account of the Dred Scott case, following it through its complete judicial history, necessary as a background. Mr. Beveridge, however, has put forward his own defense:

Any public person worth writing about is but one character in a great drama. Other characters, some of them hardly less important than the hero himself—in certain acts more prominent than the hero himself—also play their parts; and women, too, come on the stage, and what they say and do often gives meaning and direction to the whole plot. Thus human life moves before us.

We see, then, that in reality the story of a public man, to mean anything, to be truthful, or even entertaining, is part of the epic of the nation into which that man's deeds and words were woven during the period in which he wrought.²⁴

The most severe criticism, however, is of his exclusions, or perhaps more accurately, of his treatment of various topics, leaving them suspended or presenting only one side of the controversy. In his study of Lincoln, it is asserted that he has missed the real essentials of the compromise of 1850, and the disputes and beliefs that produced that compromise. Stephenson bemoans the fact that Beveridge, as others, did not realize the distinction between "Unionism" North and South.²⁵ The South in the fifties, Stephenson says, was not concerned about "slavery *per se*, but that vague sense of independence which we have learned to call self-determination. This is essential to Lincoln's story because in 1860 it was the clue to Southern action. And Lincoln was unaware of its existence. The failure to lay the foundation of Lincoln's misapprehension while treating of 1850, is Mr. Beveridge's one serious fault."²⁶

John Spencer Bassett²⁷ has as severe a criticism of Mr. Beveridge's treatment of Marshall. In the whole of his last two volumes, Mr. Beveridge has ceased to be the historian of the people to become the historian of the man, according to

²³ *American Historical Review*, XXXIV, 617. Stephenson published *Abraham Lincoln and the Union* in 1918.

²⁴ "The Making of a Book", in *Saturday Evening Post*, CXCIX, 182.

²⁵ *American Historical Review*, XXXIV, 617.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 619.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, XXV, 516.

Bassett. His "task is to show how the Chief Justice, leading the highest court in the land, set himself against the political tendency of the time and did much to reduce its power." He "should present both sides of the question, showing how events occurred and by what means the opponents justified their position."²⁸ This Mr. Beveridge failed to do, having written his account from the viewpoint of Marshall's friends, leaving out almost entirely the other side of the question.

"From his first chapter," Bassett continues, "he does not describe in what respect Jefferson considered he was justified in opposing the assumption of power by the Supreme Court; he does not see the conscientious fears of those who opposed the power of the Second United States Bank; he does not carefully show us why a large number of people loved the states above a strongly centralized government; he does not do Andrew Jackson the justice to believe that he was sincere in his belief that an independent Indian state should be erected within the state of Georgia."²⁹ Mr. Beveridge certainly does not include these things in his study, and thereby presents a slightly biased account, yet it was but natural that he omitted them. He recognized them as factors, undoubtedly, but his whole life, at least the major part of it, had been spent in the effort to make the Federal government supreme in all fields of endeavor. With his own political background and beliefs always before him, he could not recognize the supreme importance of the non-federalistic forces of the time with which he was dealing. There was to him only one side, the Federalist. Here his unconscious subjectivity has seriously marred his work.

A further criticism by Bassett is that concerning Mr. Beveridge's treatment of Aaron Burr. In the first place, Bassett feels that 272 pages out of approximately 1150 is altogether too much space and too much importance to give to Burr. But aside from the allotment of space, Mr. Beveridge may be challenged in regard to the validity of his facts. Documentary evidence proves that Burr made treasonable propositions to both British and Spanish agents. Alexander Hamilton certainly considered him a man that could not be trusted, Jefferson and Jackson held like opinions, yet Mr. Beveridge

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 515.

sets aside this and the suspicions of contemporaries with the statement that until the time that Burr took up his Western project, he had never committed "a thoroughly dishonorable act."³⁰ Furthermore, Mr. Beveridge asserts that Burr had the intention only of invading Mexico and that Louisiana did not enter into his speculations. By arriving at this conclusion, Mr. Beveridge has done more than any other historian has been able to accomplish, for the contradictions in Burr's correspondence leave no room for a specific statement of his aims.³¹

Mr. Beveridge undoubtedly intended to write accurate, objective history, history that contained the facts, coördinately arranged so as to enable the reader to arrive at a clear and decisive understanding of events, but his objectivity, at times, leaves one the impression of having scanned a series of notes, and at other times it has been lost. The desire to set forth "the facts properly arranged," has been a serious handicap for the author to overcome.

A great many of Mr. Beveridge's mistakes are undoubtedly due to the method that he used in preparing his chapters. He has given us in some detail what he considers the best method of writing:

For permanent use that only which has been rewritten often is fit to print. There is nothing harder than to write a plain sentence, nothing so easy as rhetoric. Sometimes, though rarely, it happens that worthy writing is done suddenly and fast; but this is in seeming rather than in reality. Such work is always the final phase of long experience and thought. In most cases what the writer sets down at first is at best merely an outline of what is finally produced.

When this sketch has been typed, obvious errors of proportion and crudities of statement appear, and alterations must be made accordingly. After three or four such processes a consecutive and engaging narrative is turned out.

Then comes the labor of correcting and enriching this draft by supporting each statement from the mass of data relating to that chapter.

It is found that a sentence is not accurate; and almost always the correction adds color and sprightliness. Whole paragraphs and sometimes whole pages are wrong. The subconscious mind has put in something taught in childhood and believed for a lifetime. Such paragraphs and pages must be stricken out and the truth put in.

This changing and rewriting must be done time and time and time again, in order to set out all the facts, set them out in their true rela-

³⁰ *Life of John Marshall*, III, 287.

³¹ *American Historical Review*, XXV, 516.

tion to one another and, above all, to set them out in their just proportion. Moreover, every fact must be proved to be a fact.³²

In writing his original draft of any chapter, Mr. Beveridge evidently wrote from memory, without the use of notes or other aids. While his constant revision erased many of the errors of the first draft, as he assured us it would, he undoubtedly missed many mistakes in fact and in treatment which his final draft still contains. Perhaps if Mr. Beveridge had lived to revise once more his manuscript before it was sent to his publishers, many more of its errors would have been corrected. There is not doubt that he worked earnestly, through constantly revising his manuscripts, to correct these errors.

Worthington C. Ford who did the final work of preparing the Lincoln volumes for the publisher, makes the following statement:

Having located and obtained what seemed of importance he would write the chapter in its first form, or draft. That was a preliminary stage, for he would work over his material again and again, rewriting the entire chapter many times—a single chapter in the second volume was rewritten fifteen times—until it had taken a shape which appeared to him fairly complete in contents, but still wanting the finish of a last revision. In that form he submitted it to recognized experts in the different phases of the history, asking, or rather urging them to correct misstatements of fact, or wrong inferences, or unconscious bias of treatment.³³

In the interval between the publication of his first two volumes on John Marshall and the publication of the two volumes on Abraham Lincoln, Mr. Beveridge made notable progress toward assuming the attitude of an unprejudiced historical scholar. A careful reading of his *Marshall* reveals no word of sympathy and certainly no understanding of the men opposed to Marshall, who, nevertheless, left a lasting impression on American institutions. This failure to attempt to understand and to give just credit to the ideals and contributions of Marshall's enemies is one of the author's outstanding faults.

Having been but recently defeated in his own political life, it was, perhaps, too much to ask the author to be charitable to his own enemies, and also too much to ask that he

³² "The Making of a Book", in *Saturday Evening Post*, CXCIX, 14, 186.

³³ Statement in *Abraham Lincoln*, I, v-vi.

carry that charity with him into his historical endeavors. Believing in himself, as he did, he could not credit his political opponents with an equal sincerity. This lack of understanding and appreciation was carried over into his first biography. Having a sincere and whole hearted admiration for Chief Justice Marshall, Mr. Beveridge accepted the philosophy and beliefs of the jurist seeing no virtue in opposition to them. He did not attempt to justify Jefferson's fear of the power of the Supreme Court; he did not credit Andrew Jackson with sincerity in the desire to create an independent Indian state within the state of Georgia. Mr. Beveridge failed, in his *Life of John Marshall*, to present both sides of the question, and instead, assumed for himself the power to judge right and wrong, sincerity and hypocrisy.

In his life of Abraham Lincoln, written almost a decade later, Mr. Beveridge revealed that he had made notable progress in his attempt to gain fairness and objectivity. One of his greatest contributions to the history of the period upon which he wrote was not his portrayal of Lincoln, but his study of Stephen A. Douglas. Mr. Beveridge realized here, as he had failed to do when writing the *Life of Marshall*, that two men may hold divergent views and yet both be sincere and honest. In fact, he made particular efforts to understand Douglas and his actions. In writing to a friend while preparing his manuscript he said: "What a rotten deal the post-war historians gave Douglas. The treatment of that wonderful man has been outrageous. Even I, in my collateral investigations, find this to be the case."³⁴ Again he wrote: "... I wanted particularly to talk with you about Douglas. The further I go, the bigger he looms. I suppose that he was guilty of the usual politician's sculduggery; but he was the most consistent of all American statesmen, except the old-timers."³⁵

This desire to give Douglas a square deal is a decided contrast to the author's study of Jefferson and Jackson, and is one of the things that makes his study of Lincoln a far more valuable and worthwhile biography.

Taken as a whole, Mr. Beveridge has written admirable biographies of two great men. But his contribution to histori-

³⁴ Letter of April 17, 1925, from Mr. Beveridge to one of the men who read the manuscript of his *Life of Abraham Lincoln*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, December 22, 1926.

cal writing has not ended there. His minute research and careful study of the lesser incidents have shed a valuable light on the lives of his subjects. "I am distressed and a little bit disgusted to find that the early and middle part of Lincoln's life never has been done, he stated while at work on the first Lincoln volume. "This is notably true of Lincoln in the Legislature and, as I wrote ——— the other day, I am beginning to have a shuddering fear that I may find the same thing to be true when I reach the great period of his life."³⁶ Mr. Beveridge did not live to justify this fear, but his study of Lincoln as a young man, and especially when in the Illinois Legislature, is certainly, as he believed it would be, unique and invaluable.

Again, in his chapter on Lincoln as a lawyer, he has made a distinct contribution. In regard to this phase of Lincoln's life, he made the comment that "All of these cases taken together do not, of course, deserve a line in history and not more than a paragraph in biography, but," he added, "so much sheer rubbish has been written about them that I felt it necessary to treat them definitively and clear them up once and for all. You will see that I have written the account of these cases exclusively from the official records, letters, and from statements of eye and ear witnesses."³⁷

Mr. Beveridge has made mistakes in his study of Lincoln as well as in that of Marshall, but an attitude of fairness and thoroughness, so well expressed in the above excerpt from a letter, has been rigidly adhered to whenever possible. Some of the mistakes, which are not really numerous, might have been corrected, had the author lived to give the chapters the final revision which he deemed so necessary.

These investigations relating to Lincoln as a legislator and to Lincoln as a lawyer are but two of the many minute studies included in Mr. Beveridge's works which raise them far above the average. His careful scrutiny of the less important episodes of Lincoln's life, his study of the Dred Scott case, of the Kansas episode, of the trial of Aaron Burr, may not, as some believe, be indispensable to the biography, but to Beveridge, in his "institutional interpretation," they are necessary,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, April 17, 1925.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, January 3, 1926.

and to the general reader, as well as the scholar they are invaluable.

A summary of these criticisms, and a discussion of the place of Mr. Beveridge in American biography and history writing would be as unnecessary as it is difficult. It is sufficient to say that his lack of historical training left him sadly defective in his choice and use of source material, and that his legal and political training did not lend itself readily to the unbiased judgment necessary to the historian. A comparison of Senator Beveridge's Speech on the Philippine Islands³⁹ with his two biographies would show a striking similarity of treatment, style, and use of sources.

Without overlooking any of his faults, Mr. Beveridge deserves a place among the best of the American biographers, and his contention that biography is history and that "the story of a man" is but "part of the epic of the nation," leaves the world his debtor. The surprising thing is not that Mr. Beveridge made mistakes and errors in the selection and use of his sources, in his inclusions and exclusions, and perhaps in his unconscious biases; but that a man with his training and lack of historical method, could have written works, which taken as a whole, are as fair, as clear, and as worthwhile as his biographies. He completed one admirable work, and part of another. The world was the loser when his untimely death deprived it of the later volumes on Lincoln which he was ready to prepare.

³⁹ *Congressional Record* 56 Cong., 1 Sess., XXXIII. Pt. I, 705-712.