

## Lincoln is Dead!

All day Saturday and Easter Sunday, April 15 and 16, 1865, warm April sun brightened the newly budded oaks and elms in Cedar Falls. In contrast to the brilliant promise of spring, early on Saturday morning the clicking receiver of the telegraph bore vague but foreboding rumors that on Good Friday night President Lincoln and Secretary Seward had been murdered in Washington. These dismaying messages cast a shadow over the hopes for national unity which only the Monday before had flared high with excitement.

Although on that Saturday morning the balmy spring weather and good roads had brought an unusually large number of farmers into town, few people had any heart for business. Farmers disinterestedly deposited their butter and eggs on grocery counters and, without stopping to barter for the usual supply of coffee, candles, and calico, quietly withdrew to join the moody crowds on the board sidewalks. All were trying to down the insistent fear that the reports might prove true. Not until nearly noon was it possible to verify the first rumors. Then the news of Lincoln's assassination was confirmed.

The regular Friday issue of the *Gazette* which had announced the glorious news had scarcely reached its rural patrons when the victory was turned into bitter irony. Grimly the Perkins brothers prepared another extra which boys, only half sensing the calamity, hawked up and down Main Street, crying out, "Lincoln died this morning. Seward is alive."

The extra carried two closely related news items, one national and one local. Except for confirming the death of the President, the broadside could supply only a very few details concerning the assassination at the Ford Theatre. It announced definitely, however, that a union memorial service for the martyred President would be held at three o'clock on Easter Sunday in the Presbyterian Church. For this program a group of citizens hurriedly made the necessary arrangements. Among these no one was more active than George D. Perkins, who had served with the Thirty-first Iowa Infantry and had but recently recovered from a long illness contracted in the swamps of Arkansas.

On that Easter Sunday seventy-five years ago, many pious families in Cedar Falls foreswore their customary and leisurely Sunday dinner. The records show that, in order to prepare the Presbyterian Church for the coming service, they carried

from their shops and homes all the ceremonial accoutrements of mourning that were deemed appropriate emblems of death in the middle years of the nineteenth century. An hour before the service, "the walls, the altar, the pulpit, and the pews bore festoons of black crepe and black muslin." From the walls, pictures of Lincoln, draped with black and surmounted with flags in V-formation looked down upon the audience room. About the communion table and pulpit other flags, "their staffs furled in black, paid tribute to the War President."

By two o'clock men and women began to filter into the quiet church. Members of the choirs of the Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Universalist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches were ushered to seats behind the pulpit. In front of these, the six pastors in ministerial black sat upon straight-backed chairs. Except for the front rows of pews reserved for the Governor's Guards, the church was soon packed to capacity, while outside a silent crowd filled the block from Sixth to Seventh streets. In the preceding four years, the people of Cedar Falls had witnessed too many funerals of soldiers not to feel the finality of death and the implications involved in the loss of the soldier's and the nation's leader.

A part of the service followed the traditions of

a military funeral. Into the silence of the church drifted the sound of muffled martial music and the listeners caught the rhythm of the drum beat and of the soldiers' marching tread as the Governor's Guards passed the church to the open Commons at Ninth Street. There a triple salute of three rounds of ammunition honored the "great departed one". After a subdued command from the officer, the company wheeled north to the church. The silent ones outside noted that a broad band of black crepe encircled the right arm of each Civil War veteran and of each enlisted recruit who had not yet been summoned to the front. Another border of black enshrouded the guard of every gun. From the church door the Governor's Guards, with heads uncovered, moved slowly forward to the seats reserved for them before the pulpit. The company's flag, borne ahead by the standard bearer and placed at the right of the reading desk, was "deeply furled in black habiliments".

The pastor of the Baptist Society, A. G. Eberhart, singer, orator, and evangelist, delivered the memorial address. Beginning in a quiet voice he at first made a controlled effort not to play upon the emotions of his hearers. With deliberation he related the few details which had come over the wires and paid a high tribute to the manhood of the martyred President. He stressed the fact that

the people of the nation had lost a friend. As he progressed, however, he was carried away by the pressing needs of his country. He expressed the conviction of the audience that nothing could be "too severe for the demons of this hellish rebellion or for their apologists and proselytes". In scathing terms he referred to those of the North who would palliate the crime of the assassins. He demanded in the name of heaven that Justice be not sacrificed to Mercy.

As a Christian minister, he tried to reconcile the loss of Abraham Lincoln's guiding power with the Will of Providence. Perhaps unconsciously he repeated in substance the words of Editor Perkins in Saturday morning's extra, "By our faith in Him who doeth all things well we are bound to believe that Abraham Lincoln had finished his appointed work."

The eulogy and benediction over, the flag bearer lifted the furled emblem; the drummer boy touched lightly the muffled drum; and the Governor's Guards, followed by the audience, moved in silence down the central aisle and out into the brilliant April sunlight of Easter Sunday, 1865.

LUELLA M. WRIGHT