

Barnard's Lincoln Unvisited

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I have been deplorably ignorant of George Gray Barnard. I had been asking myself whether any good thing would come out of America. But when I noticed the most vicious, malignant, ill-informed attacks upon him by persons ranging from the utterly obscure and ridiculous to those who ought to have known better, I thought it was time to look into the matter.

The criticisms of Mr. Barnard's Lincoln betray the most senseless and vindictive malice. Some of them are so imbecilic that they condemn themselves. One does not need to know the statue to know that some at least of its critics are beneath contempt.

One remarks "why give Lincoln big feet? By actual measure they were only three inches longer than the ordinary foot." !!! Mr. Barnard (if appealed to on the point) might possibly reply that Lincoln's feet were big because he trod the earth. The truth is that American idealists want Lincoln to look like a cross between Jesus Christ and Evelyn Thaw. It is very unfortunate that Mr. Barnard should have missed this point of view; but he looks very much like William Blake, and apparently has an equally striking similarity in the matter of his thought. It is certainly almost incredible that such a statue as "the struggle of the two natures in man" should have come from America. There is in this heroic group something of what I call "the true American quality." That is the quality of the pioneer, the man who is up against nature and determined to impose his will upon it, the man of ideals painfully stern and impracticable, it may be, but worthy of respect in a certain sense even for that fantastic quality.

Lincoln himself was just such an American. But the spirit of Lincoln is as dead as mutton in an age when the Declaration of Independence can be considered a treasonable document. Commercialism has strangled the beauty of everything, even of vice; and *pari passu* the slime of the Sunday School is smeared over all American thought. I have not seen Mr. Barnard's Lincoln, but I can well believe that it is Lincoln as he was, and is, and shall be, body and soul.