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No. 17.

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# ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

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At a special meeting of the UNION LEAGUE, OF PHILADELPHIA, held at the League House, on the 11th day of January, 1864, on motion of Mr. MORTON McMICHAEL, seconded by Mr. WM. D. LEWIS, the following preamble and resolutions were unanimously adopted:

*“Whereas,* The skill, courage, fidelity, and integrity with which, in a period of unparalleled trial, ABRAHAM LINCOLN has conducted the administration of the National Government, have won for him the highest esteem and the most affectionate regard of his grateful countrymen:

*“And Whereas,* The confidence which all loyal men repose in his honesty, his wisdom, and his patriotism, should be proclaimed on every suitable occasion, in order that his hands may be strengthened for the important work he has yet to perform:

*“And Whereas,* The Union League of Philadelphia, composed, as it is, of those who, having formerly belonged to various parties, in this juncture recognize no party but their country; and representing, as it does, all the industrial, mechanical, manufacturing, commercial, financial, and professional interests of the city, is especially qualified to give, in this behalf, an unbiassed and authentic utterance to the public sentiment. Therefore,

*“Resolved,* That to the prudence, sagacity, comprehension, and perseverance of Mr. Lincoln, under the guidance of a benign Providence, the nation is more indebted for the grand results of the war, which southern rebels have wickedly waged against Liberty and the Union, than to any other single instrumentality, and that he is justly entitled to whatever regard it is in the power of the nation to bestow.

*“Resolved,* That we cordially approve of the policy which Mr. Lincoln has adopted and pursued, as well the principles he has announced as the acts he has performed; and that we shall continue to give an earnest and energetic support to the doctrines and measures by which his administration has thus far been directed and illustrated.

*“Resolved,* That as Mr. Lincoln has had to endure the largest share of the labor required to suppress the rebellion, now rapidly verging to its close, he should also enjoy the largest share of the honors which await those who have contended for the right; and as, in all respects, he has shown pre-eminent ability in fulfilling the requirements of his great office, we recognize with pleasure the unmistakable indications of the popular will in all the loyal States, and heartily join with our fellow citizens, without any distinction of party, here and elsewhere, in presenting him as the People's candidate for the Presidency at the approaching election.

*“Resolved,* That a committee of seventy-six be appointed, whose duty it shall be to promote the object now proposed, by correspondence with other loyal organizations, by stimulating the expression of public opinion, and by whatever additional modes shall, in their judgment, seem best adapted to the end; and that this committee have power to supply vacancies in their own body, and to increase their number at their own discretion.

*“Resolved,* That a copy of these proceedings, properly engrossed and attested, be forwarded to President Lincoln; and that they also be published in the loyal newspapers.”

GEORGE H. BOKER,  
*Secretary.*

# ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

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WHAT will be the place assigned by history to Abraham Lincoln? Will he be recorded in the future as the "gorilla" of the Richmond rhetorician, the "baboon" of the Northern Pro-slavery Democrat, or will he be blazoned in the Annals of the Great Republic as the honest, sagacious, steadfast man who conducted the country through the most fearful perils that ever threatened the life of a nation?

Few of us can forget the feelings of doubt and distrust with which we regarded his advent to the Presidential chair. The system of delegate elections and packed conventions had so long ruled, the politics of the country, that nominations to office had become the sport of party hacks and managers, and no man widely known, or of national reputation, could hope to be selected as a presidential candidate. The mass of the people, immersed in their individual cares, and blindly trusting in the proverbial good fortune of the United States, considered the choice of a President as a matter comparatively unimportant, and surrendered their political duties to the professional wire-pullers, whose livelihood lay in the pursuit and occupation of office. That the choice of the Chicago Convention, therefore, should fall upon a man of whom little was known, was not a subject of surprise. As the representative of a principle, he received the support of his party, and that support, owing to the dissensions of the democracy, was sufficient to elect him.

As events came thickly crowding upon us, in the interval between the election and the inauguration, men inquired more curiously as to the man who was called upon to confront dangers so unexpected

and so unprecedented. That his native energy had elevated him from a youth of poverty and labor was reassuring, and yet the narrow sphere in which his life had mostly been passed seemed to deprive him of the opportunities of familiarity with the great principles and details of statesmanship requisite for the perilous contingencies of the future. That he was universally admitted to be an honest man was satisfactory, yet the training of the Illinois bar did not pre-suppose the ability to grapple with the sternest and the largest questions which, since the great French Revolution, have tasked the intellect of a leader of men.

The January and February of 1861 wore drearily on. Mr. Buchanan's imbecility and pusillanimity depressed the popular heart, until at length we began to ask ourselves whether we really had a country and a nationality; whether "coercion" might not truly be the "heresy" which secessionists proclaimed it; whether the Constitution had provided for its own perpetuation; and whether there was any inherent force in the Federal Union to prevent its dissolution at the first shock of a discontented number. We felt that nothing could be worse or weaker than the existing administration, and yet we knew not whether the incoming one would be better or stronger; while the people, humiliated by the unavenged outrage and unrepressed bravado of rebels, looked vainly around for some rallying point, and, in the sickness of despair at their own impotence, were almost ready to abandon institutions which had proved so powerless to resist the assaults of defiant treason.

At this moment of supreme agony, Abraham Lincoln, new and untried, assumed the Chief Magistracy of the distracted country. Even in the North, a powerful party longed to strike hands with rebellion, and his first foretaste of office was the plot to assassinate him in Baltimore, which forced him to enter the capital by stealth. An empty Treasury, to which timid capitalists offered money at thirty-six per cent. per annum; a navy scattered to the four quarters of the globe; an army cunningly stationed where its most effective strength was at the mercy of traitors; arsenals despoiled and the arms in the hands of rebels; eight States in open revolt; six more trembling on the verge and only awaiting a



decent excuse; furious partisans throughout the North openly threatening armed resistance if "coercion" were attempted; such was the condition of affairs which greeted his accession to office. Nor was this all, for our least dangerous enemies were those who openly threw up their commissions and joined the rebellion. The democracy had left us a legacy of traitors in office, civil and military, who remained in the enjoyment of place and pay for the purpose of serving the enemies of the country. The new President was surrounded with spies and could trust the fidelity of scarce any one connected with the machinery of government.

Thus with doubt, confusion and demoralization around him, with no landmarks in the past to serve as a guide for the present or as a precedent for the future, did Mr. Lincoln undertake the awful responsibilities of his high position. A less resolute man would have shrunk from the fearful trial, or would have fatally compromised the people, who from want of faith in their rulers had begun to lose faith in their institutions and in themselves. Fortunately he had no such misgivings. A man of the people, he had seen deep into the popular heart, and he knew that under the chaotic surface there lay an all pervading love of country which could be moulded into as stern and self-sacrificing a patriotism as ever illustrated the annals of Greece or Rome. Thus relying on himself and on the people, he boldly set to work to restore the Republic.

Men breathed freer as they read his inaugural address. Conciliatory to the South, it closed no door by which erring States could return to their duty, but yet it declared in unmistakable tones that the Union was perpetual, and that the Constitution and the laws should be enforced at every cost. More than all, it breathed an honesty of purpose and an integrity of soul that satisfied even his opponents that the times of chicanery and double dealing were past, and that at last we had a ruler who said what he meant, and who meant only what he felt to be honest and true.

It was a great point gained when the people thus could feel confidence in their chief. It remained to be seen whether they were worthy of the confidence which he reposed in them. The glorious uprising in April proved this, but it also proved more. The bombardment of Sumter was not a more belligerent or rebellious act in

principle than the firing on the "Star of the West" in January, nor so dangerous as the ordinances of secession which eight States had previously adopted. Our forts had been seized by force or fraud, our arsenals had been plundered, our soldiers had been captured, our flag had been insulted and desecrated with every circumstance of ignominy, and yet the North had borne all this like a whipped child, for it had lost faith and was fast losing self-respect. Under Buchanan, the fall of Sumter would but have added another to the long category of wrongs tamely submitted to. Five weeks under Lincoln found the people in a different mood. Faith in him had restored faith in themselves. They again felt that they had institutions to be perpetuated and a destiny to be worked out, and with that feeling came confidence in their right and in their might. The country was saved so soon as the people recognized in their President a man who believed that he could save it, and who honestly intended to do so.

Had Abraham Lincoln done no more than this, he would have merited a place between Washington and Jackson. It is a great thing to lift a nation to the highest level of its duties and responsibilities, and few men to whom, in the world's history, the opportunity has been vouchsafed, have accomplished the task so thoroughly.

This one great fact rendered possible all that followed. While Europe unanimously declared that the Union was hopelessly destroyed, and that any attempt to restore it by force could only lead to universal anarchy, the national credit was restored and our finances were redeemed, notwithstanding the necessity for unexampled expenditure. Great armies were organized with unprecedented rapidity. Arms and munitions of war were accumulated with a promptitude hitherto unknown. A navy was extemporized, which enforced a blockade, pronounced impossible by wondering nations. A diplomacy of mingled firmness and moderation has kept in check, amid bewildering complications, the jealous powers which eagerly sought occasion to complete our ruin. And now, the third year of gigantic war, in drawing to its close, finds the nation stronger and more confident than ever. The rebellion is split in two, and the dissevered parts are each hemmed in on every

side by our victorious forces. It is gathering up its remaining energies for one last despairing effort. If that fails, and if its military strength is broken, it has no reserve to fall back upon, and must yield perforce. Our task will then be to reconstruct the shattered edifice of Southern society, to bind together again in harmonious union the lately warring sections, and to efface by the arts of peace the havoc and desolation inseparable from civil war.

And now the momentous question arises before the American people—to whose hands shall be confided the delicate trust of restoring the Union of our fathers? Not the Union of Calhoun and Polk and Pierce and Buchanan, which mutual distrust rendered a Union but in name. With a lavish expenditure of blood and treasure we have bought the right to demand that in future our country shall be one in feeling and in interest; that no jarring sections shall disturb the general harmony, but that a homogeneous and united people shall enjoy in peace and mutual good-will the priceless blessings which, under God, nature and our institutions rendered possible in our land. Who is there that can secure for us these results for which we have paid so heavy a price?

As Abraham Lincoln, on ascending the Presidential chair, paved the way to a restoration of the Union by establishing a long-forgotten confidence between the Government and the people, so he confirmed that confidence by showing himself the leader of the people and not of a party. If, in this, he has aroused the opposition of extremists who assisted to elect him, it but gives him an additional claim on reasonable men of all parties.

The great duty to which Mr. Lincoln has dedicated himself with rare singleness of purpose is the one thought which engrosses every true American heart—the re-establishment of the Union on a permanent basis. To this, all else for the moment is secondary, and every obstacle in its way must be removed. Few among us, at the outbreak, recognised that slavery was such an obstacle. We all imagined that a moderate display of force, accompanied by evidences that we wished no evil, save to those who had misled our brethren, would soon cause the South to confess its error and to return to those who were ready to welcome its repentance. Our generals were ordered to disturb as lightly as might be the frame-

work of Southern society, and to protect the interests of individuals as no invading army ever guarded them before. Offers of assistance were made to suppress anticipated slave insurrections, and when Fremont in Missouri, and Hunter in South Carolina, undertook to interfere with the relations of master and slave, their acts were promptly disavowed, and they were recalled. Even in July, 1862, a threatened veto was interposed to soften the rigor of a confiscation act, which had a clear majority in the national councils.

The progress of the war dispelled many illusions, not the least of which was, that we could fight with gloves. We recognised that the tyranny of the Southern oligarchy was too strong and all pervading for us to expect aid from Southern Unionists, crushed to the earth and unable to take a step in defence of their rights. We found that slavery was not only the cause of the rebellion, but that, in place of being, as we had supposed, an inherent weakness, it was really a source of strength. Its destruction became, therefore, necessary to the overthrow of the rebel chiefs, and also to the permanency of the triumph of the national cause.

This last consideration, however, was slowly reached, and the Emancipation Proclamation was issued solely as a military measure. In September, 1862, Mr. Lincoln wrote to those who urged him to convert the war for the Union into a war against slavery—

“If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could, at the same time, save slavery, I do not agree with them.

“If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them.

“My paramount object is to save the Union, and not either to save or destroy slavery.”

In these terse sentences are embodied the sentiment which animates the great mass of the American people, and to this sentiment has Mr. Lincoln thoroughly proved his fidelity.

That the Emancipation Proclamation was a war measure, designed solely to destroy the power of rebellious resistance, and not to divert the war from its original design, is easily shown. A hundred days were given before it should take effect, in hopes that the rebels might avert it by laying down their arms. The door

was held wide open for their return, for during those hundred days of grace, and before the repulse of Fredericksburg, in his letter to Fernando Wood, Mr. Lincoln promised "a full and general amnesty," if they would return to the Union and send representatives to the National Congress. Most men will think that this betrays over-eagerness for peace, when they reflect that for more than a year we might have had Davis and Benjamin, Lee and Slidell domineering in Congress, and that the approaching election would have been secured to the slave power by the customary alliance between the South and the Northern Democracy.

The rebels fortunately declined to avail themselves of this error. The hundred days elapsed, and the Proclamation took effect. As an exercise of the war power, it was undoubtedly justifiable. If the slave were regarded as property, aiding by his labor in the support of hostile armies, he could be seized and converted to our own use, like any other article of property. If he were a man, bound to us by community of interests, though inhabiting the enemy's territory, no law of war could prevent our accepting the assistance which he was so eager to tender. Circumstances had forced us to extend to rebels in arms the rights of belligerents, and with those rights they had also to accept the concurrent responsibilities.

The results of the war during the last twelve-month have not shown that the Proclamation was a mistake in military policy.

When Mr. Lincoln recommended the plan of compensated emancipation which was adopted by Congress, he showed that he recognised fully how great an element of future strife lay in the institution of slavery, and how beneficial to the whole country, its abolition would be. Yet he hesitated long to act upon his convictions, and he waited until the people should be prepared to support and endorse his views. Moderate in all his opinions, he wanted a gradual, not a violent change, and long after his Emancipation Proclamation was issued, he provoked the wrath of the radical emancipationists in Missouri, by lending what aid he constitutionally could, to the "conservatives" in that State, who desired that the extinction of slavery should be brought about gradually. Possibly in this Mr. Lincoln was mistaken, yet if so, the error

arose from the desire which he has constantly manifested, to harmonize the conflicting interests of the country, even at the expense of temporary popularity.

The wisest statesman does not disdain to profit by experience, nor can the head of a popular government adopt measures of fundamental change before the people are ripe for them. It is probable that Mr. Lincoln learned much as the war wore on; at all events, the people did, and the conviction became steadily stronger as the forces of rebellion ebbed, that no peace could be lasting which should leave the slaveholders in possession of power to control the States of the South, and to weld them as of old, into one compact body, all powerful for offence or defence. Whole States had been wrested from the enemy, and were in an anomalous condition under military rule. Their position had to be defined, and this definition involved the permanent settlement of the slavery question and the mode by which the war would probably be terminated. These issues had to be promptly met, and upon their sagacious solution depended the destinies of the nation.

Theorists and enthusiasts eagerly contended that the territory won by our arms should be held as conquered provinces; fanatics demanded that the ancient proprietors of the soil should be expatriated, and that their lands should be given to the freedmen; Southern sympathizers urged that no rights had been forfeited by rebellion, and that each State should resume its position untrammelled, that our councils might again be ruled by the chivalry for whom the cohesive power of public plunder could in the future, as in the past, purchase abundance of Northern allies. Moderate men of all parties trembled before the mighty problem, so seemingly insoluble, until the AMNESTY PROCLAMATION came suddenly to relieve their doubts and fears, and to provoke the objurgations of enthusiasts, fanatics and sympathizers.

It is on this great measure that the reputation of Mr. Lincoln as a practical statesman, will chiefly rest. It dissociates the rebel leaders from those who have been entrapped or forced into treason; it modifies the harshness of confiscation laws by maintaining the rights of property of those who return to their allegiance; it points out the way by which the mass of the people can resume

their civil and political privileges ; it preserves the States from external interference, and commits their reform to the hands of their own citizens ; it assures us against any resumption of the quarrel, by making the triumph of the national arms complete the suicide of slavery ; and its exceptions from full amnesty draw the line about as well as it can be done in gross, subject of course to the innumerable exceptions which will be made in favor of those who may hereafter prove themselves worthy of grace. There is no danger, indeed, that a magnanimous people will be disposed to press its victory too sorely. Indemnity for the past will never be required. Security for the future is all that will be asked for, and this will be attained by a few examples, leaving the mass of the leaders to the punishment of their own consciences and the indignation of their outraged and deluded followers.

In the events which have crowded his presidential term, Mr. Lincoln has thus, by adhering with unwavering fidelity to the one great object of restoring the Union, succeeded in impressing upon friends and enemies the conviction of his caution, rectitude, firmness, and honesty of purpose. There are many who have richly earned the gratitude of the people for eminent services rendered to the Republic in the hour of her trials. There is no one who has so signally centered upon himself the confidence of all. There have been mistakes of detail in military, naval, and financial matters—mistakes inseparable from the sudden transition from profound and prolonged peace to civil war upon the largest scale. Yet in the general policy of the administration, in its principles of statesmanship, there have been few errors save those arising from a too generous disbelief in the sincerity of Southern madness. This disbelief the people shared with their rulers, and the policy now admitted to be indispensable would have been impossible at the earlier stage of the war, on account of the popular repugnance which it would have excited.

Had Mr. Lincoln moved faster than he has done, he would have left the people behind him, and lost the support without which no popular government can conduct an exhausting war. Had he moved more slowly, our resources would have been more reduced than they now are, while the rebellion would have been incompara-

bly stronger, and the end would have been more distant than ever. As a MAN OF THE PEOPLE, understanding them and trusted by them, he has proved himself the man for the time. There is no one whose name so spontaneously evokes an instinct of kindly confidence; no one who so thoroughly understands the complicated details of our civil and military difficulties, and no one whose sagacity has shown itself so rarely at fault. If we are to have four or five years more of desperate war, it is barely possible that some military man may be found whose peculiar training may fit him better for the Commandership which is attached to our Chief Magistracy. If, however, the fighting shall be virtually ended by the fourth of March, 1865, and if the next Presidential term is to be occupied in removing the traces of civil war, in binding the nation together in indestructible bonds, in starting it anew on its high career of prosperity, and in forgetting all of the past save the lessons which it teaches—if such are to be the duties of the next four years, then no one can be named who unites, like Abraham Lincoln, the kindness and firmness, the skill and experience, the native sagacity and honesty to bring about an harmonious settlement, and to extort from repentant rebels the implicit confidence which those high qualities have won from all loyal men.







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