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# ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*By* W. H. BERRY









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# ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Address by W. H. Berry  
of Indianola, Iowa

As delivered first, before students of Simpson College  
on May 31, 1893



**B**ORN in poverty, rocked in the cradle of adversity, without pride of ancestry, without school education, with an environment through all the years of his boyhood and young manhood which neither prompted an ambition to nor suggested a hope of anything better than bare existence, such as was enjoyed by the shiftless white population of a Southern clime, through all the years of his early manhood giving no promise of anything better than the average of his surroundings, in the earlier years of his business life giving no promise of being more or doing better than the average man in like situations, reaching almost the half century line of his life before he attracted the attention of any, save those immediately associated with him, and yet in eight short years proving himself a statesman of the highest rank; an executive of unsurpassed ability, reaching the topmost round in the ladder of fame and occupying the proud position of being the most honored and the most sung of all Americans, such was Abraham Lincoln.

The question which has often suggested itself to my mind is, what was there in this man which under the conditions described made such attainments possible?

I doubt not but a similar question has arisen in the mind of each individual who knew Abraham Lincoln or who has studied his character.

To suggest some things which it seems to me are in part the answer to this question is the object of what I may say tonight. That the statements made above are facts I shall in the main assume, but a few words as to some of them.



Abraham Lincoln was faithfully employed until he attained his majority as all sons should be, in the service of his father. His boyhood was spent on a frontier farm in a frontier country, more forcibly stated on a back woods farm in a back woods part of the country. His father was not progressive, even for the time or place in which he lived, on the contrary he was shiftless, with, it would seem, no anticipation that his son would ever be more than he had been, or desire that he should be. Up to the time of his attaining his majority he had not been surrounded by or associated with any better elements of society than were to be found in his own home. After leaving home, his first work of importance, enough to note, was that of building a flat boat, preparatory to taking a trip as a common boat hand down the river to New Orleans. Imagination does not have to be very vivid to enable one to understand the associations into which he was thrown while engaged in flat boating on the Mississippi River. While at New Orleans on this trip he witnessed a scene, which in the light of his subsequent history, and from the statement he then made it would seem moulded all the balance of his life and was the inspiration that grew stronger and stronger until it culminated in the Lincoln of 1861 to 1865.

One morning while he, John Hanks and his step-brother, both of whom were his companions on the flat boat expedition, were taking in the sights of the city they chanced to run upon an auction sale of negroes, just at a time when a mulatto girl was put on the block. She was examined by the bidders like a horse buyer would examine a horse. Lincoln was incensed, and turning from the scene, bid his companions follow him, saying, "Boys, let's get away from this. If I ever get a chance to hit that thing (meaning slavery) I'll hit it hard." Tell me if you can why such a thought



as this was formed in the brain of such a man as you would expect him to have been at twenty-two years of age. To have condemned the traffic in human flesh would have been natural, under such forcible reminder of its inhumanity, but to have been filled with a desire to have opportunity to aid in striking down the very system itself, if not an inspiration then and there, that somehow at some time he would have opportunity, is most remarkable. This was Abe Lincoln the rail splitter and flat boatman in 1831, at twenty-two years of age, with apparently no more prospect of anything better in life for him than awaited John Hanks and John Johnston his companions, men whose names would never have been in type had it not been for their chance association with the man who made that remark.

Nothing in the history of Lincoln indicates that prior to this time he had a serious thought on the question of "African Slavery" in the United States.

The next year after this he is found making his first effort for political preferment as a candidate for the position of representative in the House of Representatives of the Illinois Legislature. I believe that with that scene ambition entered his brain and as well an inspiration that somehow he would have a part in the war on slavery, and a determination to seek honorably place and position which would enable him to act. This first effort for political preferment, however, was not successful, and there was no promise of anything greater in him than the hordes of other unsuccessful office seekers. So his life continued as lawyer and legislator until after 1852. Admitted to the bar in 1837, elected to Congress in 1846, serving only one term and that without distinction, his life was not more remarkable than that of a hundred men of his state, and his ability not more distinguished than



that of the average of his associates at the bar and in politics.

He was not a student in the common acceptation of that word, he was not even a reader of books, either literary, philosophical or historical. In many things he was impractical, and in some ways apparently weak and vacillating. He was given to melancholy and despondency. He was a fairly successful lawyer but it was not because he was brilliant nor because he had large knowledge of the books; his success as a lawyer was chiefly in his ability before a jury. Thus we find Abraham Lincoln in 1854 when he made his first famed contest against the spread of slavery in the territories of the United States, and stood as a candidate for a seat in the United States Senate, before the legislature of the State of Illinois, the representative of that opposition.

Not having votes enough to secure an election he urged his friends to support a democrat, Lyman Trumbull, who agreed with him on that question and that only. Lincoln in this first great political effort of his life had failed, but from that day he was the leader in his own state of the opposition to the enlargement of slave territory in the United States.

In 1858 at forty-nine years of age he stood forth as the leader, not of "Abolition" forces, but of that body of men who believed in fighting slavery lawfully, and within the limits of the constitution of their government.

Mr. Lincoln at that time was far in advance of his party, was fearless in its presence and in the presence of his enemies and was above and greater than his party. He was a party man and believed in waging political contests through party organization, he, however, saw the party with which he had affiliated all his life and



which had made a proud record in his country's history, wrap itself in a blanket of conservatism and seek to compromise with wrong in order to achieve success; he saw its leaders falter and tremble before the arrogant demands of slave-holders and he helped to organize a new party made up of liberty loving, patriotic and fearless men of all the old parties, and lived not only to see that party succeed but to lead it to success and to witness the downfall of great men who had been wise leaders in great emergencies of their country's history, but who failed when confronting the changed condition arising from 1850 to 1860. It would seem from the history of the contest of 1858 that he did not hope to be successful in that campaign, yet he was able in the wake of defeat to maintain his position as leader of his forces in his own state and not only that but to command the place of leader of the forces allied with his, in the country at large.

In two short years more he had forged ahead of the men whose advantages in early life had been the best, whose training in politics and statesmanship had been life-long, and whose experience had extended over the years when Lincoln was an ordinary lawyer, an apparently unsuccessful politician, an under surveyor over an almost trackless prairie, a clerk in a cross-roads grocery, a flat boatman and a rail splitter; one step farther and he stands out the statesman of his generation, and the unsurpassed and it would seem the unsurpassable executive of his own or any other country. Scarcely had this uncouth, uncultured representative of a frontier civilization taken the oath of office as president of the United States until the most intricate questions of diplomacy arising out of our relations to other governments caused by the secession of the Southern States and their demand on foreign powers



for recognition, presented themselves. The educated and polished Seward was Mr. Lincoln's Secretary of State. Mr. Seward had had long experience in the higher walks of public life, he had already made for himself an enviable place in his country's history, as Governor of the Empire State and its representative in the Senate of the United States; he was trained in the arts of diplomacy; he had been Mr. Lincoln's strongest competitor before the convention of their party for the nomination as its candidate for the presidency; his friends had looked upon his defeat by the Illinois rail splitter as almost a disgrace; and by practically all republicans he had been looked to as the man who as Secretary of State was to save the administration from diplomatic snares and give to it dignity and polish.

Mr. Seward was worthy of all the confidence placed in him by his party followers. In the light of these facts how astonishingly strange that the first important diplomatic paper he was called upon to send out should be such as that but for the corrections made in it by the President when it was submitted to him, must have caused most serious foreign complications, and such as would in all probability have resulted in the success of the Southern Confederacy. With the demand by the Confederacy for recognition by other governments came the necessity for general instruction to our representatives abroad, and especially to Mr. Adams, Minister to Great Britain. Mr. Seward drew up his letter to Mr. Adams under date of May 21, 1861, and submitted it to the President for his approval. A careful study of this remarkable paper together with the corrections made in it by Mr. Lincoln will astonish anyone unacquainted with it. The rough places were taken out of it, the harsh sentences were softened; the apparent threats were turned to unanswerable argu-



ments in support of positions taken, demands were changed to respectful yet dignified pleas for rights under the law of nations, and yet no compromise was suggested, no humiliation indulged in, but the position and dignity of the United States government among the nations of the earth was maintained. Says one in writing of this "The work shows a freedom, and insight into foreign affairs, a skill in the use of language, a delicacy of criticism, and a discrimination in methods of diplomatic dealing which entitles the President to the honors of an astute statesman."

Mr. Lincoln died before this history was given to the public. The archives of the State Department have only recently been called upon to disclose their secrets in regard to this letter, and give to the world the exact fact as to who was the diplomat and statesman of his administration.

Account if you can for this ability in Mr. Lincoln. It seems at first absolutely unaccountable, and that you may not be disappointed in the end I remind you that in my judgment it will at the last of this lecture still be unaccounted.

His success as a leader of men, and his ability so signally displayed during his administration as president to harmonize all elements and mould them to his liking, using them for the accomplishment of his ends, may be to a greater degree accounted for.

First, I note his honesty. God has no use in this world or the next for a dishonest man. The man who is insincere, who is not faithful in all relations, who cannot be relied upon under all conditions, whose motives are not pure, who is self-seeking, who says what he does not mean, and means what he does not say, who today is and tomorrow is not, who agrees with you when with you, and is against you when away from you



may be brilliant, may apparently be successful, may "run well for a season" but such a man never has and never can reach the place which Lincoln occupies in the hearts of his countrymen; and in the estimation of the world. The element of honesty in the character of Abraham Lincoln was so marked that it won for him in early life the sobriquet of "Honest Abe." I need not stop to direct your attention to facts in the life of Lincoln to show his possession of this characteristic. No maligner of his honor in the heated times of his public life ever dared to question his sincerity of purpose and motive, or his honest belief that the positions he took were right; or his unselfish desire to do good.

He was abused as all public men are on account of his methods and positions, but no man worthy to be noticed, ever claimed that he was not honest, though mistaken. No man without this element of character has ever attained worthy fame, and never can. The man who is dishonest himself admires honesty in other men, and rewards it with his confidence, and from the dishonest man withholds his confidence. Against such a man the shafts of envy may strike but they shiver and do not harm.

David R. Locke, Petroleum V. Nasby—in writing of this element of the character of Lincoln says: "Douglas was pitted against the most honest statesman in the opposition, a man upon whose face the Creator had set the assurance of absolute unselfish integrity, of one whose outward seeming was a true index of the inward man. Douglas was perhaps as honest as politicians usually are; he had doubtless worked himself up to the point of actually believing the lies which he had fashioned, to subserve his own ends, but Lincoln had never so deceived himself. He was ab-



solutely honest, honest all the way through, and in face and manner satisfied all men that he was so. What might happen to him never influenced either his advocacy or opposition of any measure that might come before the people."

Stephen A. Douglas the giant of the school of politics opposed to that of Lincoln, and the nominee in 1860 for the presidency of one of the political parties then seeking support of its principles, said to a group of Mr. Lincoln's political followers, on the receipt of a dispatch announcing the nomination of Lincoln "Well, gentlemen, you have nominated a very able and a very honest man."

One other evidence of Lincoln's honesty will I notice.

It may not be known to some of you that in the matter of his courtship and marriage he was apparently weak, foolish, and his conduct unbecoming a gentleman, not to say coarse and outrageous. He had loved and won, but death claimed his would-be bride. That sad melancholy that ever after pervaded his life took possession of him after this. In due time, however, he was again under promise of marriage, and this time to Mary Todd whom he afterwards married, the wedding day was fixed the guests were invited, the expectant bride was dressed for the altar, the clergyman was robed, nothing was wanting but a man out of whom to make a bridegroom, and Lincoln was under promise to fill that place. The minutes swiftly sped, an hour had passed, the expectant bride sought the seclusion of her private room, and no doubt the consolation of tears, while friends of Lincoln sought his whereabouts. When found he was almost beside himself, and strict watch was kept upon him lest he might do himself harm, though this so far as known was never threatened.



Other associations were sought for him, and for months he was kept among strangers and surrounded with new associations. A year passed, an explanation followed, a new contract was made, and consummated, and Mary Todd, became as she had expected to have done before, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln.

This most unfortunate affair is but another evidence of the honesty of Abraham Lincoln. He thought he loved, he no doubt believed he did, but as the wedding day drew near he doubted; he had a high and honorable idea of the marriage relation; to doubt with Lincoln was to halt, but he was not brave enough at first to meet the emergency with a direct avowal of his feelings, he dreaded the bringing upon the lady the shame which must ensue, he concluded to carry out his contract, the day came, and as he stood face to face with a dishonest avowal of his love at the marriage altar, and the consequent misery both to himself and his wife, for a life time, he refused, the honesty of his nature prevailed, his courage had not been and was not then equal to the demands made upon it, but he was too honest to marry a woman he did not believe he loved. This seemingly weakest place in his whole life was but another evidence of that trait of his character which was one of the elements of his greatness.

The foundation stone in the character of Mr. Lincoln and that upon which he builded so successfully was not superior brain power, though brains were not lacking, but it was his inherent, absolute, unflinching, unswerving, and always to be depended upon honesty of purpose. Alas! Alas! too few men are possessed of this element of character, but in the men who do possess it, behold the men who reach the highest places in the affections of those among whom they move and by whom they are known.



The rich or brilliant man who has it not may be fawned upon, on account of the sordid advantages hoped for from him, but he is hated and despised, while the poor man who has it may miss the sycophancy that seems to indicate influence and popularity, but his place in the hearts and affections of those who know him is secure; and in his death he will be beloved by his fellow men, and will leave something that will live after him, while the other can take nothing with him nor leave behind him even a memory that will cause a pang on account of his departure.

Lincoln was great because he was honest.

The next element in the character of Abraham Lincoln to which I invite your attention is his humility.

Lincoln's humility was not paraded, it was not of that that oft called attention to kind that affords the strongest evidence of egotism. You have observed the man who is continually reminding you of the fact that he is unworthy, that his opinions are entitled to but little consideration, that his opportunities of improving himself have been limited, that his experience has not been extensive, that while he believes thus and so still he does not wish to insist upon his position against the greater wisdom of others, and you have been impressed all the time with the fact, that to seemingly even disagree with him would wound him in his tenderest part; with the fact that his assumed humility was a pretense and a sham. There is not in a single preserved sentence of all that Lincoln ever said, so far as I know, anything that looks like egotism, or pride of opinion, while on the contrary his actions and his utterances are filled with evidence of the fact that he lived the sentiment of that poem he so much admired beginning "Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud."



His humility was not subservency, no man was more tenacious of his opinions, or faithful to his convictions, but when striking the hardest blows in defense of his positions he did it in that spirit that impressed you with the fact that he was doing it not for any reasons personal to himself, for when such considerations alone existed he was always willing to defer to others, but because he believed success of the right meant good for others, or for his country.

One more comparison with Mr. Douglas. At the opening of one of the debates of 1858, when Mr. Lincoln spoke first, he began by saying "I have had no immediate conference with Judge Douglas, but I am sure that he and I will agree that your entire silence when I speak and he speaks will be most agreeable to us."

Douglas at the beginning of his speech said: "The highest compliment you can pay **me** is by observing a strict silence. I desire rather to be heard than applauded." Says one, "The inborn modesty of the one, and the boundless vanity of the other could not be better illustrated. Lincoln claimed nothing for himself, Douglas spoke as if applause must follow his utterances."

Lincoln was a great man because he was humble.

Lincoln's great common sense and his nearness to the common people will impress itself on any student of his life, as large elements in the success of the man.

He did not, to use his own expression, "over shoot the mark." He aimed at the place he wanted to hit, and shot with a gun of the right calibre for the distance he had to shoot.

Lincoln understood the common people, and he knew that he could make them understand him. His



observation that "You can fool all the people part of the time, and part of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time," was no chance remark, it was the conclusion of a wise man, who had been with the people and knew them. Lincoln did not appeal to the passion and prejudice of the common people; he did not seek to influence them on account of the fact that they were the oppressed and he was the representative of the only class of statesmen or politicians who were their friends; in his appeals to or associations with the common people he was not a demagogue, far from it; on the contrary he appealed to them, as the men who could best and with the least prejudice understand the needs of the hour, and who were intelligent and brave enough and honest enough to act for the general good, to act unselfishly. Mr. Depew says of him, "He knew the people and how to reach them better than any man of his time. I heard him tell a great many stories, many of which would not do exactly for the drawing room, but for the person he wished to reach, and the object he desired to accomplish with the individual, the story did more than any argument could have done. He said to me once, in reference to some sharp criticism which had been made upon his story telling, They say I tell a great many stories; I reckon I do, but I have found in the course of a long experience, that common people," and repeating, "common people, take them as they run, are more easily influenced and informed through the medium of a broad illustration than in any other way, and as to what the hyper-critical few may think I don't care."

Lincoln had not only the experience of his youth among the common people but his manhood had been spent with them. They were not the class of so-called



common people of this day, the adjutators, anarchists, walking delegates, and such like who pose as the common people, they were the intelligent, educated and uneducated, patriotic, but private citizens of the republic. Law abiding, liberty loving and soon thereafter the liberty defending citizens of the republic. With this class of citizens Lincoln walked day by day, arm in arm, he trusted them fully, and they had in him implicit confidence. Lincoln had been thrown with this class of men for various reasons during his maturer years more than many other men of positions and business similar to his. A most unhappy domestic relation had driven him much of the time away from his home, and forced him to find recreation at the hotels and around the public places in the city of Springfield; he had travelled the circuit with the Judges in the practice of his profession, being a man of clean habits not given to dissipation of any kind, he had mingled with the sturdy manhood of the frontier, until he thoroughly understood the habits and thought of that element of citizenship and trusted it, he knew it and knew how to sympathize with it.

Lincoln was a great man because he was one of the people and trusted them.

Lincoln was slow in arriving at general conclusions, but fearless in support and tenacious of his position when once taken. No man can attain to permanent greatness as a leader of men, or benefactor of his people either as statesman, theologian or any other public life, who seeks to do his work in the dark, or who without consideration arrives at conclusions, or who vacillates.

In his first race for a political office the following was his first speech, and so far as known the first political speech of his life. "Fellow Citizens, I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln.



I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the Legislature. My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I am in favor of a national bank. I am in favor of the internal improvement system, and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected I shall be thankful; if not it will be all the same."

In twenty-nine years from the date of the delivery of this speech he was President.

When a candidate for the legislature in 1836 he wrote the following letter as his avowal of principles.

"New Salem, June 13, 1836.

"To the Editor of the Journal:

"In your paper of last Saturday I see a communication over the signature of 'Many Voters' in which the candidates who are announced in the Journal are called upon to show their hands. Agreed. Here's mine: I go for all sharing the privileges of the government who assist in bearing its burdens. Consequently, I go for admitting all whites to the right of suffrage who pay taxes or bear arms (by no means excluding females).

"If elected I shall consider the whole people of Sangamon my constituents, as well those that oppose as those that support me. While acting as their Representative, I shall be governed by their will on all subjects upon which I have the means of knowing what their will is; and upon others I will do what my own judgment teaches me will best advance their interests.

"Whether elected or not, I go for distributing the proceeds of the sales of public lands to the several States to enable our State, in common with others,



to dig canals and construct railroads without borrowing money and paying interest on it. If alive on the first Monday in November, I shall vote for Hugh L. White, for President.

“Very respectfully,  
“A. Lincoln.”

I stop to note in passing this seeming statement of his position on the question of woman suffrage. Mr. Herndon, his law partner for many years, and the biographer of his private life prior to the time of his election as president, states that years after this he announced his positions on questions of moral and social reforms as follows: “All such questions,” speaking of temperance, “must first find lodgment with the most enlightened souls who stamp them with their approval. In God’s own time they will be organized into law, and then woven into the fabric of our institutions.”

I cannot, however, follow Mr Lincoln through his political career to point out his fearlessness, frankness, and courage in defense of principle, one more and only one in this line. He was nominated as the candidate of the republicans of Illinois for the United States Senate in the summer of 1858. It was known that Mr. Douglas would be his competitor.

The eyes of the nation were upon the contest. Mr. Lincoln knew before the convention met that he would be nominated, and had carefully prepared the speech to be delivered in accepting the place; he knew as no other man knew the importance to him of this contest, and its importance to the cause of human liberty. Of profounder thought, and deeper insight than Seward, Greeley, Phillips or Sumner, he measured the probable results of that campaign, and he saw that its success



did not depend on his election, he might be elected and the cause for which he wrought be defeated; he might be defeated and the cause be placed in the highway of success. A weaker man would have, as all his friends did, argued that unless Douglas was defeated all would be lost; that it was necessary to follow that middle path, such as some men in some parties in Iowa now urge, that would gather back those who were lost, and hold others who were in danger of straying, that success now was the one thing desired even though it was at the expense of a temporary compromise of principle.

Lincoln did not lose sight of the fact that defeat in the honest defense of a righteous cause may mean delay, but that it leaves the defenders with solid foundation on which to stand, and but nerves them for future contests; while success in a dishonest defense of even a righteous cause enervates and disgraces the defenders so that they are not in condition to use or hold the positions gained. The speech delivered by Mr. Lincoln at the meeting held after the convention adjourned has passed into history as "The House Divided against itself speech."

It contained this paragraph: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South."



This was not the first time he had uttered this sentiment, but it was the first time it had been spoken as authority and as a sentiment by which its author was willing to live or die politically.

It was first spoken in the campaign of 1856 at Bloomington, Ill., but owing to the earnest protest of Judge Lyle T. Dicky and others he consented not to repeat it in that campaign.

Before the day of the convention he submitted the manuscript to his partner, Mr. Herndon, who in commenting said: "It is true, but is it wise or politic to say so?" Lincoln's response to this was "That expression is a truth of all human experience, a house divided against itself cannot stand, and he that runs may read. The proposition also is true and has been for six thousand years. I want to use some universally known figure expressed in simple language, as universally well known, that may strike home to the minds of men in order to raise them up to the peril of the times. I do not believe I would be right in changing or omitting it. I would rather be defeated with this expression in the speech, and uphold and discuss it before the people, than be victorious without it."

Before delivering the speech he called together a dozen or more of his friends, both personal and political, and read and submitted it for their criticism. Some condemned it, not one approved the using of it, one said the doctrine was ahead of time, one that it was a fool utterance, using an adjective more forcible than elegant, another that it would drive away a good many voters fresh from democratic ranks, only one approved. After all had expressed themselves Mr. Lincoln arose from his chair, and said "Friends, this thing has been



retarded long enough. The time has come when these sentiments should be uttered; and if it is decreed that I shall go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth, let me die in the advocacy of what is just and right."

Friends criticised, enemies rejoiced, because they felt that the announcement made would be their sharpest weapon in the combat then on. One complaining friend in his own office censured him, he had been patient amid it all, but arising at last to the grandure of a very god he said to him, "If I had to draw a pen across my record, and erase my whole life from sight and I had one poor gift or choice left as to what I should save from the wreck I should choose that speech, and leave it to the world un-erased."

The sublimity of this speech under all the circumstances is unsurpassed in the world's history, it marked an epoch in the history of his country, and no one can doubt that Lincoln felt then and knew then that it would do so, and feeling all the responsibility to himself, to his country and to his race, he carefully measured the consequences and like a hero did his duty.

This was Lord Nelson at Trafalgar; the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo, Leonidas at Thermopalea, Joseph before Pharaoh, Abraham on the mountain top.

When the ages have passed, and the history of the world shall be purged of all but the great mountain peaks in the record of the centuries, then, as it seems to me, shall the people of the earth behold shining bright as any other page which records human activities, that which relates this speech with its attendant circumstances, a message which sounds as if it were inspiration, and which on account of its results would



seem to have been a message from the very Throne of God.

The plaudits of a nation afterward sounded in his ears, the hosannas of a race lifted from bondage into freedom, had rung through all the land, the star spangled banner had been carried in his hand through a long and terrible war, until he had placed it triumphant over every rampart in the land, and subdued the greatest rebellion of any time, the nation was at his feet, his enemies were praising him. The world looked on, in wonder, and admired and praised, but I believe the proudest moment in the life of Abraham Lincoln, the moment when he felt and was most like a god was when in the library of the old State house at Springfield, he was able, like Job, to refuse the advice and consolation of his friends, and with the help of God, stand forth humbly, yet heroically and say. "If it is decreed that I should go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth, let me die in the advocacy of what is just and right."

Lincoln was great because he was true, because he loved right more than fame.

The great heart of the man contributed not a little to his great success. I cannot stop to particularize. The fact that in the presence of want, misery and woe his heart was not the heart of a man, but of a tender, loving mother, is not the least to be admired element of his character. To relieve the unfortunate, change tears to smiles, and sorrow to mirth were great objects of his living. Here I cannot refrain from quoting bodily and at length an account given by Joshua F. Speed in writing of Mr. Lincoln as he knew him. Mr. Speed was the friend of his youth, and of his mature years, and what he relates occurred on the occasion of a visit to the President about ten days before his last



inauguration, and when he had been sent for by Mr. Lincoln. He says: "When I entered his office it was quite full, and many more—among them not a few Senators and members of Congress—still waiting. As soon as I was fairly inside, the President remarked that he desired to see me as soon as he was through giving audiences, and that if I had nothing to do I could take the papers and amuse myself in that or any other way I saw fit till he was ready. In the room when I entered, I observed sitting near the fireplace, dressed in humble attire, two ladies modestly waiting their turn.

"One and another of the visitors came and went, each bent on his own particular errand, some satisfied and others evidently displeased at the result of their mission. The hour had arrived to close the door against all further callers. No one was left now in the room except the President, the two ladies, and me. With a rather peevish and fretful air he turned to them and said, 'Well, ladies, what can I do for you?' They both commenced to speak at once. From what they said he soon learned that one was the wife of one and the other the mother of two men imprisoned for resisting the draft in western Pennsylvania. 'Stop,' said he, 'don't say any more. Give me your petition.' The old lady responded, 'Mr. Lincoln, we've got no petition; we couldn't write one and had no money to pay for writing one, and I thought best to come and see you.' 'Oh,' said he, 'I understand your cases.'

"He rang his bell and ordered one of the messengers to tell General Dana to bring him the names of all the men in prison for resisting the draft in western Pennsylvania. The General soon came with the list. He inquired if there was any difference in the charges or degrees of guilt. The General replied that he knew of none. 'Well, then,' said he, 'these fellows have suffered



long enough, and I have thought so for some time, and now that my mind is on the subject I believe I will turn out the whole flock. So, draw up the order, General, and I will sign it.' It was done and the General left the room. Turning to the women he said, 'Now, ladies, you can go.' The younger of the two ran forward and was in the act of kneeling in thankfulness.

'Get up,' he said, 'don't kneel to me, but thank God and go.'

"The old lady now came forward with tears in her eyes, to express her gratitude. 'Good-bye, Mr. Lincoln,' said she, 'I shall probably never see you again till we meet in heaven.' These were her exact words.

"She had the President's hand in hers, and he was deeply moved.

"He instantly took her right hand in both of his, and, following her to the door, said, 'I am afraid with all my troubles I shall never get to the resting place you speak of, but if I do I am sure I shall find you. That you wish me to get there is, I believe, the best wish you could make for me. Good-bye.' "

"We were now alone. I said to him, 'Lincoln, with my knowledge of your nervous sensibility, it is a wonder that such scenes as this don't kill you.' He thought for a moment, and then said in a languid voice, 'Yes, you are to a certain degree right. I ought not to undergo what I so often do. I am very unwell now; my feet and hands of late seem to be always cold, and I ought perhaps to be in bed; but things of the sort you have just seen don't hurt me, for, to tell you the truth, that scene is the only thing today that has made me forget my condition or given me any pleasure. I have, in that order, made two people happy and alleviated the distress of many a poor soul whom I



never expect to see. That old lady,' he continued, 'was no counterfeit. The mother spoke out in all the features of her face.'

“ ‘It is more than one can often say that in doing right one has made two people happy in one day. Speed, die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower when I thought a flower would grow.’ ”

That, however, which nerved the arm of the great President, and enlightened his brain, and made him truly great, being the source of all else that was good and great in him was his unbounded, unswerving faith in God. His supreme confidence in the statement that “The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.” I know that recently men have claimed and undertaken to prove that he was not a believer in a Supreme Being, or in the Christian religion. Such men are not worthy to look upon his consecrated dust, and if he were living would not be worthy the latchet of his shoes to loosen. I was acquainted in my boyhood with a man who had unbounded faith in God, who believed that he was not only the creator of the universe and all that therein is, but who believed, and lived that belief, to the very day of his death, that God exercised a special supervision over the affairs of men, and nations, who believed and thoroughly believed that it was not at all unlikely that God would reward the good and faithful and needy man by causing two ears of corn to grow upon a stalk where only one would have been but for that interposition, and believed it just as truly as he believed that he replenished the widows' cruise of oil and who believed that every book, chapter, verse, and word of the orthodox Bible was the inspired



word of God. This man was and had been for many years an abolitionist.

Mr. Lincoln was not as radical on that question as he would have liked; his home was and had been for many years within thirty miles of the home of Lincoln, and he had known of him, and perhaps met him years before he was thought of for president of the United States. After the election of 1860, and after the Southern states had begun to secede, and war seemed inevitable this man was impressed with the fact that he must see and talk with Mr. Lincoln before he left Springfield for Washington. Those who knew the man did not doubt the object of that visit. If there was to be war, he believed that God was in it, and it would be His way to punish the nation for the crime of slavery, and to abolish it. His good wife expostulated with him, but to no avail, to be impressed with a sense of duty, was to him a command from the Almighty, and he obeyed.

The visit was made, the important part of what occurred has never been told, and the good man, so far as I know, carried the secret with him to the grave. This much and no more he related and I have heard him relate it often. He called at the room where Mr. Lincoln was to be found by his visitors, he was seated with others in the outer room, and bid to await his turn, and in due time was shown into the private room with Mr. Lincoln alone. After passing the courtesies of the day, Mr. Lincoln said, "Well, Uncle, what will you have." He told him who he was and where he was from, and that he was not there to ask for any office for himself, or friends, but simply to have a talk with him.

This reminded Lincoln of an incident that happened to him years before, in the vicinity where his visitor



resided, and he proceeded to relate it. Here the curtain fell. The visit was ended and the visitor departed for his home. From the day of that visit this man had the utmost confidence in Lincoln as President of the United States, and commander in chief of its armies.

I do not believe he ever from that time entertained a doubt of the safety of the republic, so long as Lincoln was at the helm. Less than absolute assurance that Lincoln believed in and trusted an overruling Providence would not and could not from his very nature have satisfied that man. I have but little doubt but that in the quiet of that room that day the two men kneeled in prayer, and God was there, but let what may have occurred there, the after confidence of that visitor in Mr. Lincoln is satisfactory evidence to me that he was confident that Lincoln would not trust alone in his own strength in the tasks he was so soon to undertake.

We are not left, however, to conjecture from such evidence as this as to Lincoln's views of the Bible, Christ, and God. The time for his departure from Springfield for Washington to assume the duties of his high office had arrived.

Lincoln had been impressed in one of those ways which seemed peculiar to him that he would not live to return to the State of Illinois; he had spoken of this to his friends, and they protested against such thought, and characterized it as an illusion; not in harmony or keeping with the popular idea of a President. "But it is in keeping with my philosophy," was his reply. With these feelings and under these circumstances he found himself on the morning of February 11, 1861, with his family and suite at the station in Springfield bidding farewell to home and friends. The party was on board the cars, the hand of the conductor was



raised to signal the train to start, when Lincoln stepped to the platform and "waved his hand to command attention." A hush fell on the people as they stood there on that bleak wintry morning, and Mr. Lincoln said.

"Friends: No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail.

"Trusting in Him, who can go with me, and stay with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

Such words as these never fell from the lips of an honest man who did not believe in a God, and a God who answers prayer, let him who will charge Abraham Lincoln with duplicity.

In a few days and from the East portico of the capitol at Washington he pronounced his first inaugural and took the oath of office. After speaking of the differences between the North and South and addressing himself to his dissatisfied fellow countrymen, he said, "Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulties. . . . You have



no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect, and defend it." These words are not the words of an atheist.

I cannot stop to call up, nor can you stop to listen to a recital of the many utterances of Lincoln's or a reference to his many acts which are inconsistent with any other theory than that he was a true believer of the Bible, and what it taught of the essentials of religion, or he was a base hypocrite.

I hasten forward to two more of his sublime utterances to which I must call your attention.

The battle of Gettysburg was the battle of the war of the rebellion; on free soil, in open hand to hand conflict, the flower of both armies contended for three days. Victory finally rested on the banners of the Union forces, and Lee with the Army of Virginia was driven back into slave territory.

From that day the field of Gettysburg was hallowed ground to every lover of the starry flag.

Lincoln was called upon to speak on the occasion of the dedication of Gettysburg Cemetery, November 19, 1863, and from his lips fell that day most eloquent words; words that will inspire patriotism in the hearts of men while civilization endures, words that will live so long as history is preserved; words that will cause man, for all time, to better appreciate the heroic deeds of his fellow men. Listen to them.

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now, we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and dedicated, can long endure. We are



met on a great battle field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men living, and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

When all that Ingersoll or Renan have ever written or spoken shall have been forgotten, still will these words be blazoned on the pages of history, and in the minds of men.

Then in his last inaugural how like a very god he spoke.

Discussing the anticipations of the contending factions he said: "Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other.

"It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from



the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not that we be not judged.

“The prayer of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. ‘Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.’ If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of these offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern there any departure from those Divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so, still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

For sublimity of thought, for grandure of expression, this, it seems to me is unequaled in anything written or spoken in our native tongue. Can it be possible, I repeat it, **can it be possible** that there



breathes a man who even in his zeal in the persecution of the Christian religion can so stultify himself as to claim for a single moment that Abraham Lincoln was not a firm believer in a Supreme Being, a God, and a God who noted the actions of men and nations, and as well the sparrow's fall; a God who heard and answered prayer?

Ingersoll said of Lincoln that "Fame never reached higher than his brow when putting its laurels on the brow of any human being," and yet he claims that he was not a believer in the Christian's God. Lincoln was false, a sham, and a pretender and unworthy this high eulogy from Mr. Ingersoll or Mr. Ingersoll is mistaken in his estimate of his faith. As well might it be claimed that the rivers do not flow to the sea, that like does not produce like, that day does not follow night as that the former is correct, the latter must be true.

Lincoln was a great man because of his unbounded faith in God, and the justness of his judgments.

Honest, humble, and full of human sympathy; true to every conviction of right, to himself, his country and his God; these are the elements of character which made Abraham Lincoln great.

God chose him, and when his work was done God took him. The three great statesmen of the world's history, Abraham, Moses, Lincoln.



The following was added to the above when the address was delivered February 9, 1909—Lincoln Centennial, at Guthrie Center, Iowa:

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**T**HE celebration of the Centennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln will not, however, be as profitable as it should be, if we fail on being reminded of what he was and what he did, to be, prompted to a higher patriotism. We are living in an intensely commercial age; success in life is measured by the number of dollars accumulated and a man's influence is measured by his holdings in stock, bonds and lands; ambition is for riches, the government is looked upon as an organization whose chief use is providing means for the making of money; the high minded citizen who would rather be poor and right than rich and wrong is too hard to find. The men who are willing to profit from the wrong doing of the organization are too plentiful. The per cent of men who will hold you up on the highway and take your money is no greater than in former ages; the per cent of men who will take advantage of business conditions that will enable them to hold you up in trade and commerce and rob you of your possessions is greater. The worst criminals in the land are not in the prisons. In the old days the slave owner profited by the sweat of his fellow man but it was humane treatment compared with the slavery some men now suffer under the guise of law and in the name of good government. Because I characterize conditions in strong terms do not jump at the conclusion that I believe all men are bad or that high minded and unselfish patriotism has entirely fled the country, nor that I have lost hope in my country's future.



I believe that more than ten patriots the number of righteous that would have saved Sodom and Gomorrah will be found. Our land is rich in natural resources, the plains of Mamre, the valleys of the Euphrates, the sunny fields of Greece never offered to men the advantages that are ours in this land of sunshine and rain, of mountains and valley and forest and plain; of cold and heat, of fruitful soil and hidden mountain treasure. Stretching from frozen North to torrid zone, from sea to sea, is an intelligent energetic people the majority of whom are the result of the mingling of the blood of the best from all lands and all climes; all these things combine to make us a people of extreme wealth and consequently all too soon a people dwelling in luxury and ease and to cause those who cannot reach this condition to be dissatisfied, complaining, disturbing and rebellious. The safeguard against all this is cultivation of a citizenship guided by a patriotism that considers tomorrow more than today; that prompts man to live for the good of others rather than himself, that will fight for the right at the expense of personal defeat. It will not do to say that this is utopian, it is not. We honor the memory of a man who was all these, he led a band of men who grew up in the first half of the 19th Century in this land, who were all these, and when others who were not prompted by such highminded ideas saw that government was threatened and realized what right was, they rose in their might prompted by the same motives and following the leadership of the immortal Lincoln saved the flag and the Constitution with all they stand for to posterity. Egypt, Greece, Rome, all fell a prey to the canker worm of luxury and riches. The Christian religion lives and grows because its true advocates follow as nearly as they may the example of the Great Teacher. Our



government if it endures the ages, and live it must, will endure because it follows the example of both the Great Teacher and the humble unselfish, sacrificing Lincoln.

The greatest honor we can pay to the memory of Abraham Lincoln today is to rekindle the fires of unselfish patriotism on our altars and go forth to practice what he taught, and to walk in his footsteps.



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