Lincoln

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THE HERO SERIES

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BY

SAMUEL G. SMITH

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Abraham Lincoln

An Address delivered before the Loyal Legion, St. Paul, Minn.

Abraham Lincoln

As an epoch of human history becomes remote, there is visible to the eyes of those who see the figure of some man who is recognized as its great embodiment. The golden age of Greece is summed up in Pericles. Julius Cæsar was the supreme expression of an age of power and law. The great Cromwell interpreted the English protest against every form of despotism. At this distance from the sixties and that great, sad struggle, it is apparent that the colossal form rising above all others is the weird figure of Abraham Lincoln.

Thinkers have set themselves to measure and estimate this man. Orators and poets have competed in the effort fitly to voice his praises. But who and what was he? If the statesman must possess constructive genius to frame constitutions, to multiply statutes, and to meet emergencies with orderly policies, then was the higher order of statesmanship denied him. If technical knowledge, engineering skill, strategic ability, and acquaintance with the

management of masses of armed men be essential to the soldier, then was he no man of war. If it be necessary to the orator that he have imagination and passion, our hero was no orator, wizard-like though the spell was which he laid upon men. Born in lowliness too familiar to be described; reared under surroundings only to be called civilized by courtesy; denied access to schools or libraries, he was certainly no scholar.

In the marvel of what he was not, men in the despair of analysis have said, The man must have been inspired. He also was a prophet of God. But if a prophet must needs be a mystic and a seer, one gifted to speak the first burning message of new truth, then, neither in any religious nor in any civil sense was Abraham Lincoln an inspired man.

Seward was the statesman, Grant the soldier, Sumner the scholar, Phillips the orator, and Garrison was the prophet of the new birth of the Nation.

But who and what was our hero? I name him the authentic exponent of his generation, the incarnation of the highest purposes and activities of his time.

Homer gathered into himself the heroic histories of Greece, and is named the world's greatest poet. Michael Angelo, master of all arts, became the representa-

tive of the world's beauty. Greater than these, the Isaiah of the Captivity cried out, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low;" and he is known as the world's prophet of unquenchable hope. But, born on the soil of the first free nation of earth, nursed by its growth, rocked by its storms, could be found, and only here, the incarnation of civil and religious liberty; and here was born and developed the world's most conspicuous patriot—Abraham Lincoln.

He belongs to the school of Kossuth, Mazzini, and Garibaldi; but beyond them in heroic mold, and larger still, far beyond them, in the character of the people he represented, he yet surpasses them and all men of his class in human history, because to the patriot's heart he united the sagacious judgment of the man of affairs and the mighty hand gifted to bear rule.

The age in which he lived called him, the struggles in which he took part fashioned him, and the Genius of History anointed him for the great destiny to which he was called. It is not in sowing and in reaping, nor in the making of crowded cities, nor in ships floating a vast commerce on the seas, that a nation grows great. It is by her passions and emotions, her conflicts and her sorrows, that she learns the way to achievement. It was

after the fair-haired Greeks had flung back the uncounted thousands of Persians, settling forever the seat of power in the Occident, that Athens gave birth to her statesmen and philosophers, her artists and her poets. It was after France had been shaken by the storm of her revolution—"Truth clad in hell-fire"—that she overran Europe under the first Napoleon. So it was the birth-time of greatness when America was torn for thirty years by the death struggle of two opposing forces—a struggle that found its way, not only into the halls of legislation and the busy seats of trade, but into the remotest hut on the frontier, and shook with the noise of strife even the solitudes of the prairies and the mountains. Then it was as the expression of the Nation's agony and victory, that Abraham Lincoln walked forth among men, the miracle of the nineteenth century.

The best foundation of greatness is a certain sensitiveness of soul. By it the poet receives the beauty of his world, and perceives the dramatic quality of human action. It is the same power by which the mathematician is impressed by numbers and relations; and the saint has imprinted upon him the austere beauty of holiness. Neither poet nor mathematician nor saint, Abraham Lincoln was the sharer with them of this wonderful power of the

sensitive soul. But neither beauty nor virtue in the abstract moved him; his nature was open only to the touch of human life. It was this strength of his that made him the ready prey of the tears of woman and the sorrows of any little child; but it was the power by which he was able to receive impressions of men and understand them; to comprehend the motives of the human soul, and to predict human action; and to interpret not one class alone, but all classes of society. Above all men of his time, he knew what was in man. It was this quality which manifested itself in his grotesque humor and grim pathos. Human life is both a tragedy and a comedy; he felt it in its completeness. But mirth and melancholy are twins, light and dark, that are cradled in every great soul. It was so with Mirabeau, with Cæsar, with Shakespeare, with Abraham Lincoln. In his later years his humor was not a joy, but a weapon. Men saw a flash of light, and only knew it had been a sword when some falsehood lay pierced at his feet.

In the growth of his years he passed through clarifying processes, which exalted his receptive power to great uses, and made him the embodiment of all the better forces of the Nation's life and experience. But he was always a natural leader of men. He embodied every condition in which he

was placed, and his companions, of whatever sort they were, recognized his power, and owned his mastery. This was equally true when he wrestled with the boys in the backwoods at Cleary's Grove, and when he strove successfully with statesmen and diplomats at the Nation's Capital. It is a mistake to speak of Abraham Lincoln as ever having been an obscure man. He may have been obscure from the provincial point of view of Boston or New York; but he was never obscure. Whether in the woods of Indiana, or on the still ruder frontier by the banks of the Sangamon; whether keeping store in New Salem, heading the "Long Nine" in the Legislature at Vandalia, riding the circuit with his fellow lawyers, or on the stump in political campaigns, he was never obscure. He was always a leader. He was as great as his situation, and this was as true of him in Illinois as it was in Washington. He lived under a constantly-widening horoscope. He sprang full-armed to meet his career. His life was a constant evolution and manifestation of inherent greatness.

The first glimpse of him in public life certainly shows him only as a possibility. He is not far the other side of twenty, and he has nominated himself for the Legislature. To start the campaign he goes to Pappsville for a political meeting. As a

mere incident he takes hold of the most stalwart of several rude fellows who are trying to make a disturbance, and literally hurls him twelve feet. At length he has a chance to speak. There he stands, six feet four inches in his stockings, with the longest arms and legs imaginable on a man. The future chief figure of his century certainly makes a most singular appearance. Look at him. He wears a mixed jeans coat, claw-hammer style, but so short that he can not sit on it. He has on tow-linen pantaloons, also six inches too short, but showing his indigo blue stockings to advantage, which terminate in indescribable low shoes. He wears no vest, has on one suspender, carries a straw hat something the worse for wear, and proceeds to make his maiden speech. Now listen:

"Fellow-citizens,—I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by my 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 an internal improvement system and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same."

The report of the speech may or may not be exact. It is, no doubt, sufficiently

so to enable us to have a fair picture of his entrance into public life. From such a rude beginning he became one of the most effective speakers who ever addressed American audiences on political subjects.

But at a very early period he showed signs of his coming greatness. When again a candidate for the Legislature, he was replied to by a Mr. Forquer, who said it was his duty to "take the young man down." Never was biter bit after a severer fashion. This Mr. Forquer had changed his politics a short time before, and almost immediately was appointed register of the land-office. He then proceeded to build a good house, and protected it with the only lightning-rod known in Springfield. When Mr. Forquer was through, Lincoln rose in reply, closing with these words:

"I desire to live, and I am ambitious for place; but I would rather die now than, like the gentleman, live to see the day when I would change my politics for an office worth three thousand dollars a year, and then feel compelled to erect a lightning-rod to protect a guilty conscience from an offended God."

Of course, Mr. Forquer and his lightning-rod had achieved immortality in that neighborhood.

It was at the Legislature in 1834 that Abraham Lincoln, for the first time, met

Stephen A. Douglas. No record is left us of the first impressions which each made upon the other—the antithesis of each other in almost every point of personal and social character and position. For nearly thirty years they were conspicuous rivals; and among the many forces that operated powerfully to stimulate Mr. Lincoln, there was perhaps none second to the great brain and sturdy strength of his remarkable antagonist.

But the years have gone by. Lincoln has achieved personal and political distinction. He has had a look at Washington during two years as congressman. At last his clear vision has come to recognize distinctly the nature of the crisis that threatens the Nation. By general consent he is recognized as the leader of the Republican party in the State of Illinois; and, though defeated for the Senate in 1855 by Lyman Trumbull, no other candidate is suggested in the next contest with Stephen A. Douglas. There is an immense distance between the first speech of his career and the speech in Springfield to the Convention which named him as standard-bearer in the memorable struggle for a seat in the United States Senate. That speech is familiar to you all, and that paragraph which is said to have defeated him for senator, only to have elected him Pres-

ident, was the utterance not only of a clear vision, but of a strong soul.

"A house divided against itself can not stand. I believe this Government can not permanently endure 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."

But the most noteworthy scene was not the meeting of the Convention where this speech was delivered; it was in that far more significant gathering held the night before in the library of the State-house, where, in a little conference, the nature of which is well known to men in practical politics, he read his speech to a dozen personal and political friends, and asked their judgment upon its wisdom. When he finished reading that important and immortal paragraph, one of them is said to have remarked with a great deal more emphasis than polish, "That is a damn-fool utterance;" and this was a terse and irreverent expression of the sentiments of the conference. But this was a time when the children of this world were not so wise in their generation as the child of light. In wrath the man rose like a great colossus above them all, and said:

"Gentlemen, the time has come when these sentiments should be uttered; and if

it be decreed that I 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."

In those words spoke the warrior, the martyr, and the saint.

The most conspicuous faculties by which Mr. Lincoln brought his fine and capacious nature into the service of life were his conscience and his judgment. These are the most important organs in the structure of every soul. His moral consciousness was as clear and undoubted as his intellectual perceptions were just and sane. As a lawyer he could make no success of a case in which he did not believe, though it might have strong legal grounds. On the other hand, if the case engaged his moral sense, though the law might be against him, his tremendous force often overpowered both judge and jury, and secured the verdict. The same thing was true of him in his political speeches. He must believe intensely the doctrines of the campaign, or he could not proclaim them. He was not so versatile as his rivals, and he made a strange figure on the American platform. Truth, justice, righteousness, were too masterful for him; he could never be merely the servant of the hour. But it was because of this higher obedience that he was able to be-

lieve implicitly in himself, and was able to compel at last the abiding faith of the American people. Once again it would appear that the child of light has a wisdom of his own.

Was Mr. Lincoln a Christian? Many words and some bitterness have attended the discussion of the question. Judged by merely dogmatic or even conventional standards, he certainly never was. But if, to be a Christian, a man must believe with all his soul that there is a God who made and rules the world; that a sense of duty is the supremest law for every human soul; that only in obedience to that law can any cause finally succeed; that sacrifice and self-sacrifice are not too dear a price to pay for truth and righteousness, then, to the depths of his great soul, was Mr. Lincoln a Christian man. His religious conviction deepened and widened as the years went by until its expression reached the climax in that matchless passage of the second inaugural, where he says:

"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 up by the bondman'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, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' "

Either Abraham Lincoln was the most skillful theatrical performer on any political stage, and even a greater rhetorician than he was an actor, or these words confess a consciousness of the providence of God as profound as that of Job or Paul.

In addition to an irresistible conscience he had, also, a powerful and sagacious judgment. His conscience taught him to be true to what is eternally right; his judgment bade him consider what is immediately and practically possible. Judgment and conscience were the two reins by which he drove his chariot of power along the highway of greatness. Here is the key to his apparent hesitation in the emancipation of the colored race. As he understood it, it was a war for the Union, and not for emancipation. He hated slavery with an everlasting hatred; but he was also the responsible leader of a great people. He was one of those masters of men who feel the responsibilities of power in a deeper way than the privileges of power. He says in a letter on the subject to A. G. Hodges:

"It was in the oath which I took that I would, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the

United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath, nor was it my view that I might take the oath to get power, and break the oath in using the power."

Here is a lesson that many of the children of this world might learn from the wisdom of the child of light. But the delay was not alone a matter of conscience, it was a question of judgment as well.

Better than all the fiery sons of Massachusetts he understood the dangers that lay in the border States of Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri. He waited until victories in the field could control the border States, until the rising tide of opinion rolled with resistless power in the Northern States, and when at length the necessities of the struggle, the conditions of public opinion, and his high sense of duty combined to bring conscience and judgment into harmonious action, he knew that the hour of God had struck; and with the pen of emancipation he touched the fetters of the slave, and in the clangor of their falling was heard the psalm of the Nation and the music of the world.

In all the wide domain of affairs Mr. Lincoln made the practical application of a few great truths bring him decision. His philosophy of history was a faith in the providence of God. His political sagacity

and foresight was his faith that the masses of the American people could, in the final judgment of any great question, be fully trusted to be faithful to the right, as it should be given them to see the right. These foundations enabled him to surpass in practical power many men of wider experience and greater knowledge. So it came to pass that in intellectual activity he was not so much a man of processes as he was the child of vision. He was not a logician in the ordinary sense, yet his statements are often both illustrations and arguments. Speaking of the labor question he says shrewdly, "I always thought that the man who makes the corn should eat the corn."

And, in spite of economics, the plain wisdom of the plain man seems to be the last word that may properly be said.

Scan his life, and see how this great man grew. He comes from the woods of Indiana to the banks of the Sangamon, from the flatboats of the Mississippi to the store in New Salem, from surveying to law, from the politics of a county to the management of a State, from the chieftainship of a political party to the Chief Magistracy of a great Nation in the throes of a supreme struggle for its life. Heavier and heavier burdens were laid upon him year by year. He lifted them, and he

grew under them. In every place he was the master of all men. Shrewd politician may he have been, but great savior of the Nation did he become. He may have began as a sage, but he ended as a saint. He himself ripened while he toiled and suffered. He was, indeed, the lonely and sorrowing servant of the Nation. The iron entered his soul, and broke his body. The storm plowed furrows in his face, and his shoulders were bent under the burdens that he bore. Horace Greeley, after seeing him, said he could not live through his second term as President. Such are still the pains of redemption.

The birds of prey, hungry for the Nation's life, plunged beak and claw into his bosom. He flinched not, nor faltered; again and again he beat them back; there he stood until the skies cleared, until peace touched the land with her beauty, and liberty claimed for her own every man, woman, and child from sea to sea. See him complete at last, our Nation's hero, victor over poverty, isolation, heredity, environment, ignorance, difficulties unutterable, and whatever enemies may perplex a human life. There he stands! Calm, valiant, victorious, a mighty man. Nor is this all. He was, most of all, a historic man, strangely called and devel-

oped under the providence of God to be the foremost exponent of the human passion for liberty in all ages.

And what think you? When the bullet of a half-crazed assassin in abject folly struck down this man unto his death, think you that he perished forever from God's universe? Think you that a life developed by such labors and sorrows was of no more worth than to mingle with the unthinking dust from whence it sprang? I can not believe it. I can not believe that nature, so difficult in her processes, and so parsimonious of her materials, should end at last in the destruction of a soul which most amply fulfills her noblest aims. How abject a dénouement which would rob the drama of life of all unity and purpose!

No, this man was immortal, and with the mighty spirits of all time he rose out of his pain and warfare to the serene thrones of the universe, where the sons of God live on forever and forever.

And not only Abraham Lincoln, but the company of all our sainted and heroic dead crowd thick upon our memory. They fill the air about us. They are, indeed, a cloud of witnesses urging us to take up their tasks and complete their triumphs. Let me close, therefore, with the

words of our Nation's greatest soul remaining for us as a perpetual inspiration:

"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 the cause for which they here gave their last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain; that the Nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Words of Lincoln

Words of Lincoln

"Come what will, I will keep my faith with friend and foe."

"I do not impugn the motives of any one opposed to me."

"It is no pleasure to me to triumph over any one."

"I shall do my utmost, that whoever is to hold the helm for the next voyage shall start with the best possible chance to save the ship."

"I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom."

"My early history is perfectly characterized by a single line of Gray's Elegy:

'The short and simple annals of the poor.'"

"Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between them and the Almighty."

"I know that the Lord is always on the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this Nation should be on the Lord's side."

"I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for that day."

"We can not escape history."

"The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance."

"God must like common people, or he would not have made so many of them."

"Of the people, when they rise in mass in behalf of the Union and the liberties of their country, truly may it be said: 'The gates of hell can not prevail against them.'"

"Unless the great God . . . shall be with and aid me, I must fail; but if the same Omniscient Mind and Almighty Arm . . . shall guide and support me, I shall not fail; I shall succeed."

"I authorize no bargains [for the Presidency], and will be bound by none."

"The reasonable man has long since agreed that intemperence is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of all evils among mankind."

"I am indeed very grateful to the brave men who have been struggling with the enemy in the field."

"For thirty years I have been a temperance man, and I am too old to change."

"That we here highly resolve that . . . this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the Government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

"I appeal to you again to constantly bear in mind that with you [the people], and not with politicians, not with Presidents, not with office-seekers, but with you, is the question, Shall the Union and shall the liberties of the country be preserved to the latest generation?"

"If all that has been said by orators and poets since the creation of the world in praise of women were applied to the women of America, it would not do them full justice for their conduct during the war. . . . God bless the women of America!"

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God

gives us to see the right, let us strive on to 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 orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

"This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it."

"I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence."

"No men living are more worthy to be trusted than those who toil up from poverty —none less inclined to take or touch aught which they have not honestly earned."

"Let us have faith that right makes might; and, in that faith, let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it."

"There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law."

"Many great and good men, sufficiently qualified for any task they may undertake, may ever be found, whose ambition would aspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial, or a Presidential chair; but such belong not to the family of the lion or the tribe of the eagle."

"Nowhere in the world is presented a Government of so much liberty and equality."

"Gold is good in its place; but living, brave, and patriotic men are better than gold."

"Let none falter who thinks he is right."

"All that I am, all that I hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

"The way for a young man to rise is to improve himself every way he can, never suspecting that anybody wishes to hinder him."

"Suspicion and jealousy never did help any man in any situation."

"Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say, for one, that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow-men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."

"Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man's nature—opposition to it in his love of justice."

"Stand with anybody that stands right. Stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong."

"Revolutionize through the ballot-box."

"If I live, this accursed system of robbery and shame in our treatment of the Indians shall be reformed."

"This Government must be preserved in spite of the acts of any man, or set of men."

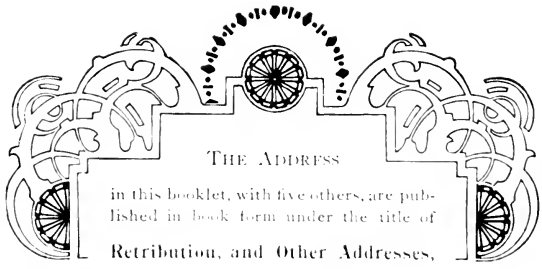
"Many free countries have lost their liberty, and ours may lose hers; but, if she shall, be it my proudest plume, not that I was the last to desert, but that I never deserted her."

"Any people, anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing Government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable and sacred right—a right which, we hope and believe, is to liberate the world."

"At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined, with all the treasures of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not, by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years. At what point, then, is this approach of danger to be ex-

pected? I answer, If it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It can not come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a Nation of freemen, we must live through all time or die by suicide."

"Passion has helped us [to preserve our free institutions], but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason—cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason—must furnish all the materials for our support and defense. Let those materials be molded into general intelligence, sound morality, and, in particular, a reverence for the Constitution and the laws; and then our country shall continue to improve, and our Nation, revering his name, and permitting no hostile foot to pass or desecrate his resting-place, shall be that to hear the last trump that shall awaken our WASHINGTON. Upon these let the proud fabric of freedom rest as the rock of its basis, and as truly as has been said of the only greater institution, 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"



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AND OTHER ADDRESSES

By SAMUEL G. SMITH, D. D., LL. D.

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