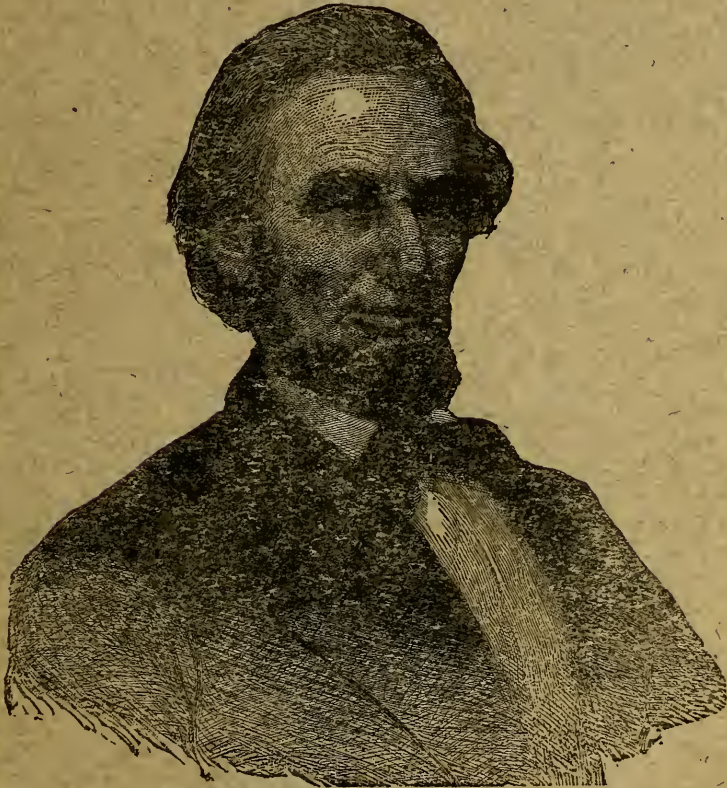


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Abraham Lincoln



Address Delivered in Memorial Hall, Toledo, Ohio,

February 12, 1918

BY

JAMES M. ASHLEY

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Abraham Lincoln

“How humble yet how hopeful he could be;
How in good fortune and ill the same,
Not bitter in defeat nor boastful in success,
Thirsty for power nor feverish for fame.”

Two names in America's wonderful history will forever serve as beacon lights to those who love liberty and their fellow men. George Washington, soldier, statesman, father of his country; Abraham Lincoln, master pilot of the ship of state, inspired leader of men, whose matchless statesmanship aroused and directed the heroic men who saved the Union, removed the blight of human slavery from our midst, recreated a nation of free men; a nation destined, under the providence of God, to become the greatest of commonwealths, in whose fate the welfare of mankind is involved, a nation ever slow to anger but with high courage to maintain the right. Destined to win victory, not as brutal supermen, as we in horror behold today the attempt made in stricken Europe, through seas of blood and oceans of tears, but as fellow men, all children of a just God, by excellence in the gentle arts of peace, with malice towards none and charity towards all.

Born in 1809, dying in 1865, the life and work of Abraham Lincoln embraced a period in the life of the nation equal in importance to that in which Washington and Hamilton battled, thought and toiled for twenty-five years to the end that, from a small beginning, there should spring a mighty people, secure in their liberty and in the fruits of their toil, with a constitutional government strong but just and gentle in the administration of written laws made by and for the people; invincible in war against foreign foes; fit to serve not only as a beacon light to the oppressed of other lands, but ready, able and willing to aid in the extension of the blessings of that liberty to the men of other races and other climes.

Less than sixty years ago the institution of human slavery hung like a pall over this fair land. The national life of our people was one of uncertainty, of dread, of apprehension, before the coming conflict of two irreconcilable civilizations.

In the Southland were nine millions of Anglo-Saxons and four millions of negro slaves. There feudalism was revived, that relic of barbarism that held the humanity of Europe in its yoke for the four hundred years known to historians as “the dark ages;” transplanted to the New World, where, nourished by a wealth of virgin soil, fed by the unrequited toil of the slave, led by men of a world-conquering race, trained in the leadership of thought and action, with a settled, aggressive policy, it threatened the domination of the New World. Cotton was King, and the wealth of the growing commerce of the world was accumulated at a pace never known before. The slave baron, brainy, courageous, daring, skillful in statecraft, faithful to his policy and leaders, had, aided by powerful politicians of the North, seized and dominated the national government, and was fast encroaching upon our national life. The shadow and the dread of a recurrence of the centuries of the dark ages rested heavily upon the heart and conscience of the Nation.

In the greater Northland another civilization had arisen, based on the greatest liberty to the individual consistent with the maintenance of order, and had, as its basic truth, the principle that all men were created with equal rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness under the protection of constitutional law. It was based on free labor, on contracts enforceable by law. It was nourished in the log school house; and the lives of its men and women were enriched by the living truths that came in lines of rude eloquence from the lips of the earnest men who carried the gospel truths from one rude hamlet to another. The brave and energetic the oppressed of all lands, came with glad hearts to help create a mighty commonwealth. This civilization soon produced inventors. Canals, the steam engine and the railroad, vast and powerful machines, soon harnessed the power of nature, and the slave labor of the South was soon equaled and then surpassed in productiveness, and twenty millions of free people were ready to defend their civilization, even in an appeal to the God of battles. Cotton, tilled by slave labor, was no longer king. Corn, wheat, the products of the factory—the results of the toil of free labor—became greater in value and brought to the many men of the North more of the necessities, the conveniences and the luxuries of life, and the education to enjoy them, than cotton brought to those of the South. Two mighty civilizations stood face to face. The great conflict was near at hand. One or the other must perish.

Abraham Lincoln, of all the men of the North, was best fitted by nature and equipped by training to lead in this great conflict for the preservation of free institutions and the maintenance of that national union necessary to conserve the energies of a great people in their onward march towards a higher civilization.

Born and reared amidst the hardships of a rude and turbulent frontier—his education in a log school house in the bare rudiments did not exceed a year. But in his speeches and writings he displayed a style distinctive of his individuality; the structural order, clearness, sense of proportion, ease, simplicity—that gave classic quality to his utterances. Few men had so little of what is commonly regarded as oratory; and few have so constantly approached the high literary art everywhere apparent in his work. He early evidenced a passion for books and reading. Of these days his good old mother says, "Abe was a kind and dutiful son to me and I always took particular pains when he was reading, not to disturb him." He had access to a library of less than twenty volumes—but he managed to read through every volume within a circuit of sixty miles.

This passion for knowledge so strongly displayed in Lincoln is not uncommon—but the clear thinking he soon developed turned everything to account, and was uncommon. His self-education in the art of expression soon gave him a reputation both as a talker and writer. In his speech especially he developed a command of primary and universal elements of interest in human affairs which became to him later a source of his greatest power. It was his deep and profound feeling on the public questions of the days before the war that carried him beyond the realm of mere oratory and gave to his words a finality of expression only seen in the noblest art.

Lincoln and Douglass met in joint debate on the plains of Illinois in the fall of 1858. Lincoln said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe this government cannot permanently endure half-slave and half-free." Douglass declared in reply "that he did not care whether slavery was voted up or voted down." But Mr. Lincoln did care—the heart and conscience of the nation cared—every honest man in the world cared.

The result of this memorable contest made Mr. Lincoln one of the leaders of his party, and finally in 1860 resulted in his nomination as the Republican candidate for President and in his triumphant election. Attempted secession and armed rebellion followed. In the eleven cotton States the National authority was denied and the peaceful administration of National law ceased. The conflict of the two great civilizations of this continent commenced. President Lincoln called to his Cabinet all of his late rivals—Seward and Chase were the leaders—and announced as the policy of the Administration “that the Union must and shall be preserved;” that even war was preferable to disunion and anarchy—for there would have been not only one division but many. The Southern leaders refused all peace overtures, and fired on Fort Sumter. The call to arms was sounded throughout the North—all unwilling to believe that war was possible—and a million men sprang to arms, to defend the Flag, to protect the Union, and finally to crush out rebellion and slavery.

By virtue of his office Abraham Lincoln became the Nation’s leader—by virtue of his abilities its savior. As chief executive of the Nation, intrusted with the duties and responsibilities of a great government during the greatest civil war that has ever cursed mankind, he achieved greatness of the first rank. From the day of his inauguration to the tragic close of his life the mental and physical strain upon his vital force were beyond conception. There was in his mental make-up a marvelous blending of sunshine and sorrow—of earnestness and apparent levity, of humor, of hopeful prophecy, but of inexorable logic; and he did his work simply, grandly and well.

He was without commercial training; yet in determining a financial policy to sustain the Government during this period of vast expenditure, although he relied much upon his great Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, it was his decisive “aye” that approved the gigantic plans. And in the conduct of the foreign affairs—often on the verge of war with both Great Britain and France—he relied upon his accomplished Secretary of State, William H. Seward; even there he was the master director of things to be done and left undone. Peace abroad was necessary to success at home, and peace with honor was maintained. But in domestic policies he was alone in his greatness. By a singular tact, ability and patience, he held the loyalty and support of the border States of West Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri. When it is realized that these States put 250,000 of the best of soldiers, familiar with the people and the fighting grounds, into the Union armies, the importance of this triumph can be understood, since it rendered possible the early successes in the West that gave the men of the North the courage to continue to the end.

Government by party had continued for many years. He was the chief of the Republican party—composed of many different and differing types of men—and party rule was to continue. He needed them all, the Nation’s life depended upon radical and conservative uniting to do the necessary things through and under the forms of civil law. The leadership that brought together a majority of the North and held them for united political action during this four years of defeat and victory was a matchless leadership, broad, kindly, but determined, and determined that the rebellion should be subdued, that the Union should be restored, and that no dictatorship should mar this great triumph.

He knew nothing of military affairs; yet the early disasters of the war forced him to acquire this knowledge, since he must finally decide all things, and at the close of that terrible ordeal he was the equal of any of his great generals. As a statesman he so guided the acts of gov-

ernment, often tempted by the emergencies of disaster and defeat, that the Constitution not only withstood the storm safely, but was made stronger, better fitted, for the government of a great people than it was when he came to the Presidency. All of the essential and vital functions of government were conducted in accordance with the civil law of the land, through Constitutional methods, as authorized and directed by the representatives in Congress freely chosen by the people.

With the end of the long and bloody war came the tragic end of this kindly old man, merciful always, just, as his duty required, and without the pride or arrogance of power. But before he left us to join the great dead he gave to us a message. It was at Gettysburg, on the first anniversary of that great battle that he said simply and grandly:

Four score 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 the Nation, or any nation so conceived and so 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 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 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 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 their full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that those 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, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

The Civil War has passed into history and the people of the North and the South have come year by year, and more and more clearly, to recognize their common destiny and their common duty to the greatest of commonwealths, under whose protection and leadership mankind may be lifted up to higher planes of thought and action by the shining example of Constitutional law made by and for the people of the great Republic.


In this conflict, grand, terrible, but final, for the preservation of the Union, the upholding of the express and implied powers of the Constitution, the name and fame of Abraham Lincoln, great leader of the thoughts and actions of men, a controller of events, who during all the tremendous conflict used all his marvelous power to the limit of human possibility, will, so long as that Constitution endures, be recognized as its preserver, and as worthy of a place in the Nation's temple of fame beside that of Washington.

And when the martyr's crown was pressed upon his brow and he passed into the valley and the shadow of death, there remained for us the immortal heritage of great duties fulfilled, a nation saved, the memory of a most orderly mind, of highest courage, of a gentle but firm hand, of ardent patriotism and a love for his fellow men that passeth human un-

derstanding, to guide us through the storms of this strange world where we dwell as in a twilight zone groping our uncertain way.

The name and fame of Abraham Lincoln has become a milestone for all humanity, in its slow progress towards a better life under the reign of the higher law to come with the ages, a higher law justly administered for all humanity, of which Abraham Lincoln was the immortal prophet.

J .M. ASHLEY.



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