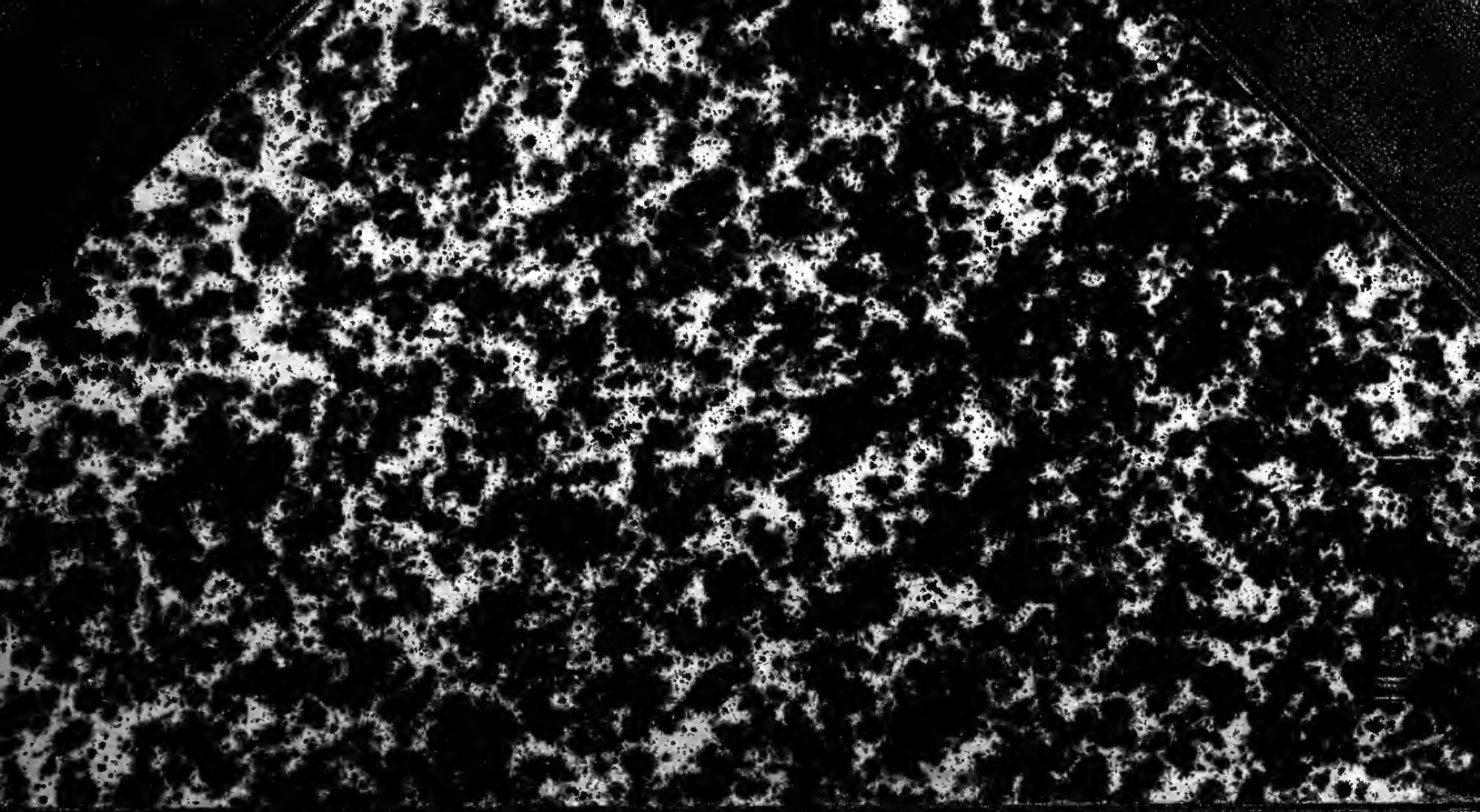

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

AN ADDRESS

GEORGE H. YEAMAN

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An Address

BEFORE THE COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF COLORADO, MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES

BY

GEORGE H. YEAMAN

DENVER, COLORADO, FEBRUARY 13, 1899

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

The Commander, Hon. Julius B. Bissell, proposed the toast: "Abraham Lincoln, the Best Product of Universal Opportunity," and introduced the Hon. George H. Yeaman, of New York, who responded.

Mr. Commander, Companions of the Order of the Loyal Legion.

Ladies and Gentlemen—The study of the life, character and public services of Abraham Lincoln is of national import to us and bears a message to the whole human race. He *was* the best product of universal opportunity. If Lincoln be now second to any figure in American history, it is only to him who was pronounced "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his fellow citizens." But there is a lesson, a perpetual message, in the life of Lincoln closer to the people than any found in the life of Washington—one that will keep the two side by side so long as the history of the American republic shall be read. And if, in the far distant future, our noble language shall meet the fate of others and be no longer spoken among

men, it is a question whether, when read as a dead language, the account it will give of Lincoln will not prove of more interest to mankind than the story of any man of our Anglo-Saxon race. His struggles and his services will partly account for this, but it will be largely owing to that irresistible movement of all mankind towards personal and political freedom, self-government, legal equality and universal opportunity of which movement he was himself both an effect, and in turn a potent, propelling cause.

Born in an unhewn log cabin, in the wilderness, the bare-footed, tangle-haired boy, by turns frolicsome and serious, grew up to be the stalwart rail-splitter, the flatboat man, a volunteer in an Indian war, village postmaster, country store keeper, surveyor, lawyer, member of the legislature, never successful in money getting, a congressman, then introduced to the nation by his debates with Douglas and his Cooper Union speech at New York, became president of the United States, conducted the country through the greatest civil war in history, was a better campaign strategist than some of his generals whose tactics won notable victories in pitched battles, emancipated four millions of slaves, and was the leading mind and actor in saving the Union and the national life. And he, who, in the midst of war said, "Government must be by ballots, not bullets," fell under the bullet of an assassin. Such a history can never cease to interest mankind.

In no other country, under no other institutions, could a child so born and so reared, a youth struggling

under such disadvantages, have achieved such a career and performed such services to his country and to mankind, and the fact be regarded as normal. In England it would have been a bare possibility, but a prodigy.

That career and those services are the best fruits of the principles of natural and political rights expressed in the Declaration of Independence, and the best vindication of American institutions.

I have been asked to give some personal reminiscences of Mr. Lincoln. I think it is a question whether this has not been overdone; but I shall mention a few not hitherto made public, only because I think they illustrate his character.

Meeting him going down the stairway in the evening, after a greeting with his usual kindness, he asked me if I could not return next morning. Of course I would, "I would not think of stopping you as you are going out." "Yes," said he, "I would not like to stop now, if you can come back another time conveniently. I am just going to hear a pullet crow." And, with his silvery, ringing laugh, added, "I am going to hear Miss —— lecture." This is an instance of that innate love of fun-making, which some of his own friends thought was carried too far. But it was his nature to be both homely and good-humored, and to draw illustrations from nature's storehouse. Arguments on serious matters were often addressed to others in the form of a jest or an anecdote leaving no

sting behind. The argument was always visible through the rough garb of the backwoods anecdote.

Examining a large military map hanging against the wall, Mr. Lincoln approached me and pointed out where the Mississippi river once made a horseshoe bend, nearly a complete circuit, around which he went on a flat-boat in descending the river, and pointed out where the river broke through the narrow peninsula, while he was at New Orleans, making a new channel through which the pilot, on the up journey, guided the steamer, where it was dry land on the down trip.

The president of the United States was not ashamed thus to allude to that incident of his early life as a wage-earner, an honest laborer. He was not ashamed of his early struggles, and in his eminence and success showed no pride or vanity. The lesson of his life, his success, and his greatness, his message to every child born under the American flag, is not to blush for lowly or humble origin, nor to be discouraged by early difficulties and struggles; but to discover the spark within, and, under our universal opportunity and the legal equality of our institutions, nurse and expand that spark into a broad, noble light and a genial warmth for all mankind.

A squad of rollicking young blades started off to join the Confederate army, but had not yet entered its service, and on their way met a boy on horseback carrying the United States mail. They confiscated the horse, tore open the mail bag, scattered the letters on

the road, and soon found themselves in the embrace of a squad of Union cavalry. The legal situation was, of course, critical enough. Their parents asked me to intercede. When the case was laid before the president he looked thoughtful and remarked that it was a pretty serious thing. I said it was; but I hoped it would not occur again. He replied there were too many violations of the law going on—he thought they ought to be stopped. I still pleaded for mercy to the boys. He then said, "I will turn these boys out on one condition." "What condition, Mr. President?" "That you *pledge your personal honor* that they will behave themselves in the future." "Mr. President, that is a hard saying. I do not know these boys personally; I know their parents; they are Southern sympathizers, but are good, respectable people. I believe that the boys have now been so badly frightened that they will keep the peace in the future." He looked thoughtful, hesitated and said, "Well, we'll try this once, but if these boys cut up any more shines, you must not come back to me again in their behalf." "Yes, Mr. President, if they cut up any more shines, I will come back to you, but I will come back to insist that the law take its course." And he signed an order for their release. "With malice towards none, with charity for all."

On another occasion I called and found the usually genial, sparkling, anecdote-telling president the most serious, intent and melancholy looking man that

I ever beheld. His appearance gave me positive pain. He was alone, at his desk, hard at work, and I promptly offered to retire and call again. "No, sit down; I'll be through shortly." While waiting, his little son partly opened the door and said, "Papa, mamma says the company will soon assemble." I arose and again offered to retire. "Please be seated; we'll get to it directly." He was working hard; his face showed more than earnestness; it showed anxiety, sadness, melancholy indescribable. Disasters had come in the field, and it was not all harmony among his supporters. While waiting, his barber entered the room. I again offered to retire. "No, just excuse me one moment;" and he rose, quickly threw off his coat, seated himself in one chair and stretched his long legs across another. The barber lathered his face and commenced stropping a razor, when that tired, overburdened president of the United States turned his face towards me and gently asked, "Now what can we do?" I told my mission. It was answered promptly, kindly, decided correctly, and I, wondering, went my way. We need not compare this with the court etiquette of emperors and kings. We need not ask if Washington, or Adams, or even Jefferson, would so have received a visitor on business. But it was Abraham Lincoln, manifesting by his appearance and his manner great mental stress, the heavy responsibility he was carrying, and yet his patient, earnest desire to hear everything that might be presented to him through proper

channels, about either public or personal matters. If it was informal, it was intensely conscientious, human and democratic.

In what did Lincoln's strength and statesmanship consist?

His success and services make no precedent for elevating to high station untried men merely because of those personal qualities that endear them to others and inspire personal confidence. This would be to invite disaster. There must be proved ability. Lincoln's nomination for the presidency was no blind experiment inspired by heedless enthusiasm. He had proved his ability by his debates with one of the greatest political debaters of the age, by his Cooper Union speech, and by what he said to the convention that nominated him.

If we may compare him with others, he lacked Washington's imposing dignity and stately manners; he lacked the majestic presence and massive reasoning of Webster; he had not the exalted philosophy and the resplendent rhetoric of Burke. But he had all their faculty of analysis, and he excelled them in the faculty of statement—statement that is its own logic —its own proof—the faculty of statement that is the highest and best quality of the lawyer, the judge and the statesman. His judgment did not wait upon slow, ponderous reasoning. It was the quick, clear, incisive process of luminous *common sense.* Conclusions reached were expressed in *statement* never excelled.

Others have excelled him in different directions. But in the highest qualities of executive talent, combined with expression that seemed to exhaust the capacity of our language for both beauty and strength, he has had no equal in American statesmanship.

If this faculty and habit of convincing statement was an unconscious following of the bent of his own mind, it was well. If it was conscious art it was art of a high order. Many minds will resist an attack by gradual approach, one logical trench after another, that would surrender with enthusiasm to a laconic, brilliant, concrete statement of truth. I know not which moved him. But Abraham Lincoln, always honest, was not devoid of art. He was skillful and masterful in handling and controlling men, and no public man of America has been so shrewd, unless it was Ben Franklin. And how can an untaught man exercise art in oratory and in composition? By self-teaching, by self-study, seeing mankind reflected in himself. The people saw themselves reflected in Abraham Lincoln.

The great epoch of American history in which he took the leading part was an evolution of long coming, and furnished the emergency that called for his qualities. Emergencies may illuminate qualities; they do not make greatness, but give it opportunity. This detracts nothing from Lincoln's greatness. A chief element of his power was his intense humanism, his visible, throbbing, felt closeness to his "plain

people." He needs no myth-making hero worship, and he is best treated as a man and not as a demi-god.

We do not overlook the services of great generals and an army of heroic volunteers. The part they performed was indispensable. But they needed the support of public sentiment. Washington created and directed public sentiment from the camp, with a halting, captious Continental Congress in his rear, and a Conway cabal on his flank. Lincoln created public sentiment, encouraged the discouraged, restrained the impetuous, was *leader* in the highest and best sense. And it is a curious, hope-giving fact that the mass of the people discovered his qualities and worth, his fitness to lead, while brilliant journalists and wise politicians of his own party were, in all honesty, doubting and criticizing.

Washington and Lincoln were alike in this: The victims of vituperation, envy, bad faith and personal assault, neither ever degenerated into cynicism or misanthropy. This was not the stoicism of indifference. They were not indifferent. They were human and keenly sensitive. It was the higher courage of faith in the ultimate verdict of mankind. The highest courage of which human nature is capable, a magnanimity at once tender and firm, is the courage to believe in the ultimate justice of human nature, and to continue to serve and to love mankind, while smarting under the injustice of contemporaries and erstwhile friends. Many of the revolutionary fathers were good, honest

haters. Washington, though incapable of malice, did occasionally hate for a season, his innate magnanimity soon resuming sway. Lincoln differed and suffered without animosity.

He had a great, distinct, strong personality; but he also had the advantage of a great historical emergency,—and we shall fail to understand him and his course in that emergency, without considering our past history and some of the great actors in the political struggles which culminated in Appomattox.

From the inception of our government, before its foundation, in the early stages of the revolution, in the structure and operation of the Articles of Confederation, in the trouble, confusion and inefficiency that reigned between Yorktown and the adoption of the Constitution, fitly called "The Critical Period," in the deliberations of the constitutional convention, in the great and doubtful effort to have the new Constitution adopted, and from 1789, when it was adopted, down to 1861, at the outbreak of the civil war, there were woven and imbedded in and running all through the current of our political history two causes of strife—*slavery,* and *the relations of the states to the federal government.*

Mr. Lincoln was always opposed to slavery. His opposition, as expressed in the debates with Douglas, would indicate adherence to conservative lines. He would only prevent the spread of the institution. Other views came later and in the light of events that

compelled more radical measures. And here it must be noted that in our early history the opposition to slavery did not come solely from the North. Thomas Jefferson and other noted Southerners were outspoken and undisguised in their condemnation of the institution. The first draft of the Declaration of Independence in his handwriting contained as an item of complaint against Great Britain, the encouragement of the slave trade against the wishes of the colonies. This was stricken out upon the advice of others.

The other element of discord, discussion and compromise was the status of the colonies under the confederation and after independence had been achieved, and the relations of the several states to the federal government under the Constitution. Upon one side was the desire for a strong national government; upon the other was the fear of concentrated and consolidated power in the nation, and an earnest, almost fierce, desire to preserve state autonomy, to an extent incompatible with national functions.

Hamilton may be taken as the representative of the idea of a strong nationality; Jefferson, as the representative of the idea of the sufficiency of the state governments, and with just as little power as possible given to the federal government. Hamilton's transcendent talents were the principal factor in securing the adoption of the convention's plan of government. It was known to be not altogether to his liking. In his judgment, it yielded too much to the states. He

was the greatest constructive genius American statesmanship has produced; and, thanks to his exposition of the instrument while advocating its adoption, the Federalist became the storehouse of constitutional law and political science, to be enlarged and elaborated by Webster and Marshall. He builded better than he hoped, for his later fear that he might live to see the Union fall to pieces was not realized.

Jefferson's jealousy and fear of concentrated power in the national government may have been an error of judgment, but was not a crime. The whole history of English liberty had been the history of resistance to concentrated and irresponsible power, the history of the increase of the power and self-government of the people acting through their chosen representatives in the commons. The same fear of power caused Patrick Henry and many other noted patriots to resist the adoption of the Constitution. We are apt to forget how hard and protracted that struggle was; how narrow the escape from failure, and to forget the patriotism, the character and talent arrayed against that compromise scheme of the convention as finally submitted for adoption. Notwithstanding the partial compromise of opposing views, the causes of dissension remained, if not in the language of the instrument, yet in the history of its formation and adoption.

Jefferson's mind dwelt too exclusively on the historic danger of concentrated, unchecked power.

Hamilton's mind dwelt too exclusively on the defects of the articles of confederation, the workings of which would have been ridiculous if not so serious and disastrous. Each had wisdom, but each was human and was inspired by fear; each feared a different danger, and allowed his fear to carry him too far towards the opposite extreme. One would have given too much power and restraint by the nation over the states; the other would have given the states too much check on the operations of the national government.

The Virginia and Kentucky resolutions of '98 and '99, declared the right of each state to judge for itself of infractions of the national Constitution, which they defined as a "federal compact." This is the doctrine of nullification. The doctrine was elaborated by Mr. Calhoun, the most astute logician in our political history, into the right of voluntary withdrawal from the Union, defined as a voluntary confederacy of independent sovereign states. This is the doctrine of secession.

Jefferson threw his influence against slavery, against entail and primogeniture, in favor of religious freedom, the divorce of church and state, in favor of both elementary and higher education, and he was the prophet on this continent of the inalienable rights of man. Hamilton became the earliest and most skillful architect of constitutional, responsible, limited, national gomernment; a government co-existent with the state governments, a government that could act,

command and enforce its commands within its limited province, not merely asking for the consent of sovereign states to national and international measures of common interest to all.

In the convention Franklin finally signed and persuaded others to sign, not because he thought it perfect, but thought it better than none. It was better than he thought; it was better than Hamilton thought; it was better than Jefferson thought. But it did not avoid the bursting of the storm, the seeds of which were embedded in our political history.

It was in the nature of things that this fond idea of state autonomy, state interests, state rights, state sovereignty, the ultimate right of independent state action, should draw to, and ally with itself, any temporary, local fear, protest, interest or passion. In my own native state it found its first ally in the intense feeling about the use and navigation of the Mississippi river, and a suggested union with Spain, or the conquest of Louisiana. Alliance with opposition to the alien and sedition laws approached more nearly to a principle affecting the whole country, the invasion of personal liberty by executive power. In the eastern states this feeling of statehood next found an ally in opposition to embargo and non-intercourse laws, and aversion to the war of 1812. Next came as an ally, the local opposition to tariff legislation; and finally came the inevitable and last alliance with slavery; after that institution had

died at the North, but, by a singular fatality, had been for a time strengthened at the South by the cotton gin, otherwise an enormous gain to mankind. Always the idea of the state *"my state,"* its right and power, was the *permanent force,* and always something temporary was the irritating incident. I apply the word *temporary* to slavery itself. We thus have the genesis of the great sectional issue; on one side, state rights, in its extreme form, allied with slavery; on the other side nationality, allied, in the main, not uniformly, with the anti-slavery feeling.

It is thus seen that the seeds of the great civil war were woven into the warp and woof of our political history, and I have always been persuaded that while slavery had a large influence, it was only an incident, and that the greater cause was the historical conflict of opinions about the relations of the states to the nation.

This bird's-eye view of our political history prepares us for an estimate of Lincoln's statesmanship, and the nature of his services. He was as ardent a democrat, in the political and non-partisan sense of that term, as applied to the legal and political equality of persons, as Jefferson himself,—but he rejected Jefferson's extreme defensive measures. He was as earnest a nationalist as Hamilton; but he rejected all excess of concentration and consolidation. He adopted all of the safe and good from the principles of each and rejected the extremes of each. There was danger

that the Union might be lost. There was danger that in saving the Union, the exasperated passions and the fierce heat of civil war might permanently impair, if they did not consume, statehood.

What he saw in the Constitution, what he directed a great war to maintain and perpetuate, was an "indissoluble union of indestructible states." This combination, the selection of the good and exclusion of the erroneous, and the self-poise to do this in the midst of a great civil war, was statesmanship of the highest order. The result, as we now have it, is the largest and most successful system of dual government, national and local, co-existent and harmonious, ever established by any people.

In this he was aided, no doubt, by the expositions of Webster and Marshall. But it is one thing to expound in the senate or on the bench, and a harder thing to save from the conflagration of civil war. He restrained as much as he urged. If not the first of American statesmen to point out the true combination, he certainly was the most efficient, and saved it under the greatest difficulties.

In the beginning of the war he would have gladly saved the nation without destroying slavery, could that have been done, leaving the institution to that slow decay to which it was already doomed. But when slavery seemed to stand an obstacle in the way of saving the nation's life, he struck down the obstacle.

His policy, as expressed to the convention which nominated him, was to "arrest the further spread of slavery, and place it where the public mind *shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction.*" Extinction how? By those gradual, moral, economic influences and legal measures under which it had become extinct at the North, and, to close observers, was already showing signs of decay at the South. The feverish desire for expansion was one of those signs. When statesmen said that geographical confinement would result in local and domestic danger, they should have gone further and admitted, as they vaguely felt, that the institution carried and nursed its own inherent and ineradicable danger.

Nothing is plainer than that such a measure as the emancipation proclamation had not entered his mind when he was first called to the presidency, and would at that time have been firmly rejected. His debate with Douglas and his earlier statements of policy in the beginning of the great civil conflict, and after armed conflict was seen to be inevitable, clearly looked to as little disturbance of the existing order of things as possible, as did his approval, in 1861, of a resolution of congress declaring that the war was not waged to overthrow the institutions of the Southern states. The declaration did not calm the South.

In the second year of the war, when it had reached colossal proportions, he said: "My paramount object is to save the Union, and not either to save or destroy

slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that."

And as the combat deepened, and it became more and more evident that abolition would be a gain of both political and military strength, and secure the success of the Union arms, and thereby attain his "paramount object" of saving the Union, then came the proclamation, and afterwards the Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment, abolishing slavery.

Being myself next to the youngest member of the house, elected from a slave state, and in favor of the preservation of the Union, without conditions, yet, like the people who sent me, I clung to the Constitution as my political bible. My first effort in the house was an earnest, conscientious argument against the constitutionality of the emancipation proclamation and against its wisdom as a war measure. But when the anti-slavery amendment was offered, I voted to place the seal of constitutional law upon universal freedom. Yet it took some years of reflection and of retrospective consideration to become convinced, as I finally did, that in the matter of the proclamation, as a war measure and a necessity, Abraham Lincoln was right and I was wrong.

Before a shot was fired he saw the tendency of the age, he read the judgment of the civilized world, he saw already fully developed the last alliance, the al-

liance of the loved and potent idea of state rights with a matter of vast local interest. Yet he would, if possible, save the Union, the nation, without destroying slavery. That seeming to have become impossible, he met the emergency, rose to the occasion, assumed the responsibility of action. And through the ages to come the history of the Union and freedom under the Union will hold up to the admiration of mankind, as the greatest saving influence in our greatest danger, the character, the firmness, the homely sayings, the freedom from passion, the singular common sense, the almost divine charity, of Abraham Lincoln. He piloted the nation and the states through that storm and landed them safely, each strengthened with all the wisdom of Hamilton, of Jefferson and Franklin, with their extremes and unwisdom thrown overboard. He did not originate, but he saved; and the wisdom of interpreting, reconciling and saving was not less than the wisdom of compromising and building.

Lincoln's mind never ceased to grow. Through life he had perceptivity, receptivity, elasticity, and therefore, through life, he had expansion and growth. He grew more rapidly in the midst of the clash of arms and the wreck of armies than at any period of his life. But to his glory be it said that in the midst of civil war, that furnace which usually excites and looses all of the bad, all the devilish, in human nature, Lincoln never lost his genial sympathy with mankind, all mankind, the South included, nor his

sturdy, abiding confidence in the people, and their ultimate judgment, the South included. And his was not the pretended confidence of a flatterer. He told the rugged truth in his own homely style when he said, "You can fool some of the people all the time, you can fool all the people some of the time, but you can not fool all the people all the time." That was the basis of his confidence. No demagogue could or would have spoken such words.

He continues to grow in the public estimate of his greatness and services. A generation has now passed away since his career ended in the meridian of his faculties. As year by year adds its distance between now and the far-off then, as the lengthening vista of time still carries him and his work further and further away, the law of natural and historic perspective seems reversed, and his character, his genius, his services, his very image, instead of converging more and more towards an invisible point, seem to grow, expand, and give a brighter, a broader and a lovelier light and warmth from the receding distance.

It has been said that he was inconsistent. Yes and no—with emphasis on the *No*. He was inconsistent as every man is who continues all his life to grow. Inconsistent with the letter of past expression. Consistent with wider views, with present convictions under existing facts; consistent with duty and an earnest desire for the public good, consistent in general aim, the "paramount" end, seizing oppor-

tunity, equal to emergency, rising with the occasion. The debate with Douglas and the earlier expressions as president did not point to the final anti-slavery war measure, nor even to the Thirteenth Amendment. But history gives no example of a written constitution of government *making any adequate provision for conducting a vast civil war to save the political life and the territorial unity of the nation.* In some respects and for some purposes; *Inter arma silent leges.* Men of Lincoln's mould apply the maxim limited and restrained by *Salus populi suprema est lex.* In statesmanship, literal consistency with the letter of past expressions is littleness of mind and lack of courage. Had Bismarck been literally consistent, the Germany of to-day would not exist. Had Gladstone remained literally consistent, the greatest measures and greatest thoughts of that greatest English statesman of this century would have been lost to a free and progressive people. Jefferson once thought and said that the Constitution conferred no power to acquire foreign territory. And he was a strict constructionist. But for all that he bought Louisiana of Napoleon, and thereby added to our domain an empire much larger than the original thirteen states. Had he not done so, we should to-day have been confronted by a foreign power on the whole length of the Mississippi river as our western border, a power embracing the exit of that stream into the gulf. In this Jefferson was inconsistent with a previous opinion, but consistent

with the interest, the safety and the greatness of the republic.

Others acquired the contiguous territories of Florida, Louisiana, Texas, California, Colorado. Lincoln has forever bound them together as one territory, one people, one nation. And the people more than admire him; *they love him.* Without distinction of party, they love his memory with a love that knows no sectional lines. And the North is not ungenerous. Believing that the great commanders of the Confederate armies were mistaken, the people of the North are to-day proud of the American blood, American genius, American valor and American grit and staying power of Lee, Johnston, Johnson, Jackson, Longstreet and Wheeler. General Wheeler's literal inconsistency is the kind of higher and broader consistency the people of America, both North and South, admire and love to honor.

Allusion has been made to the great and enduring lesson of Lincoln's life, character and services. That lesson is applicable to our present situation. Some of us are Republicans, some Democrats, some Populists, and a few of us *Mugwumps.* But we are all for our country first, and for party next, and for party only as a means to secure what we deem our country's good. Some are for a high protective tariff, some for tariff for revenue only, and some for free trade. Some for the yellow metal, some for the white metal, some for both, side by side, and some for greenbacks. Each is

entirely consistent with himself and agrees quickly with his adversary in accepting all he can honestly get of any color, which shows how much smaller our questions are than those with which Lincoln had to deal.

His message to us is to conduct all political controversies, not for personal, or partisan, or sectional interests or aims, but with a view to the common good of our common country. If you feel in earnest, debate with "animated moderation," with self-restraint, forbearance, and respect for opponents, accepting defeat with composure and victory without exultation; and whatever betide parties, questions, candidates and policies, deal with results and with each other "with malice towards none, with charity for all." Restrained and guided by this sentiment, each party will sometimes win and sometimes lose, but the country will always win and forever preserve the great end that "Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."