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ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

A MEMORIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

HON. LEONARD MYERS.

JUNE 15th, 1865,

BEFORE THE

UNION LEAGUE OF THE THIRTEENTH WARD.

PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY KING & BAIRD, No. 607 SANSON STREET.
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A D D R E S S .

IN the beautiful spring time—on two exquisite days of last month—Washington witnessed a sight to which history furnishes no parallel. Two great armies—rivals only in deeds of unsurpassed heroism against a common foe—passed in review before the chiefs of the nation whose unending gratitude they had earned, and the leaders who had guided them to victory.

Heroes of a hundred battles, fierce, long-contested, and sanguinary, no holiday attire won for them the deep feelings which, at times, found vent in tears, at times broke forth in wild cheers and applause. But as they swept by in serried ranks, with measured and veteran tread, their tattered banners, riddled by hostile bullets till the shreds alone remained, were mutely eloquent of the deadly fray—of privations and destruction and death. Saviours of their country, amid the emblems of their success and the wreaths showered on them by a grateful people, they proudly trod through the Capital of the nation restored by them to Union, prosperity, and peace.

The warriors of the Potomac were there—of the Seven Days' and Fredericksburg, Antietam and Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, and Petersburg—the conquerors of Richmond! Nor they alone; the Armies of the Tennessee and Georgia followed, the bronzed mowers of the South, whose advance, world-renowned, fighting and marching, from Atlanta to Savannah, from Savannah to the sea, had led them across the plains and citadels of treason, through its very stronghold, back again to the metropolis of the Union.

Alas! no; all were not there: for, beyond the living armies whom chance or locality deprived of the glory of being present, the thinned ranks, the shattered flags, the

occasion itself, told too plainly that almost countless thousands of them were sleeping the sleep which knows no waking, marshalled now among the hosts of the Eternal.

They rest in the marshes, by the forests and streams of Virginia; the air of free Pennsylvania and of freed Maryland breathes gently above their graves. Struck down in sight of three great States, Lookout Mountain stands an eternal monument to their memories. Their head-boards dot the beautiful valleys of the Shenandoah and the Cumberland; their blood consecrates the ramparts of Forts Donelson and Fisher and Nashville and Vicksburg. Shiloh and Stone River, Olustee, Murfreesboro', and Chickamauga are eloquent of the great dead, and the Mississippi gurgles a requiem above thousands of those who fell that this great Father of Waters should float in peace to the ocean, a bond of strength between the sections of our happy land, henceforth united and free forever.

Would to God this were all! Let the massacred of Fort Pillow and Plymouth—let the murdered of Libby and Belle Isle and Andersonville tell the rest.

And as the pageant tramped past, filled with these memories of the dead, the glance quickly turned to the main stand, whence all these living were reviewed—turned restlessly, hoping, as it were, against hope—picturing one tall form, a beaming eye, a radiant smile, which it seemed should have been there. Ah! the embattled dead were not the only absent; for he, the civic hero of this strife for liberty, this triumph of the right, Abraham Lincoln, twice chosen ruler of a free people, had fallen by the bullet of the assassin, a martyr like them in the cause of Freedom, his place here vacant like theirs, but gathered with them in a greater review, where praise is perfect and reward everlasting.

Great occasions call forth the qualities of true greatness. Genius frequently culls opportunities for itself, but adversity is the crucible which tries men, and when the storm comes and the waves run high and the passengers begin to

despair, the quiet faith, and bravery, and skill of him who guides the vessel through in safety, marks him distinguished among his fellow-men.

Such an one was Abraham Lincoln. His life covering nearly all of the present century, he stands in moral grandeur the foremost man of his time.

The past four years have been years of sad realities, of almost incredible romance, too. The stride of a century was not expected to do so much. More history has been crowded into them than will be told in tenfold their time.

Four years ago American slavery falsified the Declaration of American Liberty; to-day that slavery is dead and waits but the forms of burial. Four years ago the art of war, known to us in earlier struggles, seemed to have been forgotten; now, the most warlike people of the earth, we again relapse into the pursuits of peace, secured to us by the ordeal of battle.

Four years ago, civil strife, the cruelest test of a nation, long predicted, long warded off, had not yet fairly burst upon our hitherto fortunate land; but it came in all its fury, and with the world as spectators, some confiding, but more predicting disaster and political destruction, we have passed through the fiery furnace, not unscathed it may be, yet purified and regenerate. Republican institutions have stood the trial. The sovereignty of the people—the right of the majority to rule, asserted in the beginning, has been vindicated to the end, even through rivers of blood. The Flag was the shibboleth, but on its starry folds, in storm and sunshine, still floated “the Union”—“the People!”

And all along this terrible struggle every eye was bent, every thought turned to him who was at the helm—now in doubt or despondency, now in hope and confidence.

Remembering that a soft answer turneth away wrath, the cavil and the sneer fell harmless at his feet. With thanks for those who approved, he kept steadily onward. True as the needle to the pole, he only sought the salvation of his country, never forgetting the priceless legacy committed to

his keeping, never doubting the justice of his cause or its final triumph, never taking a step backwards. And so he won the goal amid the hosannas of his countrymen.

Permitted, as it were, from the top of Pisgah, to see the promised land, although not destined to enjoy the peace he had aided to gain, he lived long enough to understand the full fruition which awaited the people he loved. It seemed that his mission was accomplished—a life complete, rounded to a perfect close. Thus, in the language of his last beautiful inaugural, “with malice towards none, with charity for all,” while tempering justice with mercy, he fell beneath the blow sped by the accursed spirit of slavery, which, in its death throes, was to have one last great victim, that it might be marked out for the hatred of mankind forever.

Who was this victim of a cruel conspiracy; this ruler, faithful to his trust; this patriot, loved by a nation?

It has become fashionable to say that Abraham Lincoln was elevated from comparative obscurity to fill the Presidential chair. Such, however, is not the fact. In our immense expanse of territory—single States larger than some of the chiefest powers of Europe—it were no wonder, indeed, if the rarest qualities had made no ripple beyond the city or State which they graced. In the great West the wand of the enchanter could scarcely have been more potent than the pioneer’s axe, and the spirit of progress which has wielded it. Towns are teeming where but a few years since were only forests. Civilization has no more beautiful abode. There Literature and Art drink inspiration from the fountain of nature, and the statesman, pausing only to glance at the past, seems privileged in dwelling on the borders of a prosperous future. Bright names are there which have scarcely reached us, and we of the East have as many unknown to them. Mr. Lincoln’s fame, however, had become National before the Chicago Convention placed him in nomination. Still better, that fame sprang from his own home, widening gradually, and deepening as it went.

It is true he was a poor boy, without adventitious aid,

without collegiate teachings, when the West was yet a wilderness; but it is also true that he had long before overcome those "twin jailers of the daring heart—low birth and iron fortune." The spoiled children of wealth may fill the chief places in other countries; but if you will search the records of achievement in this, those carved highest on the rock will often be found to have reached the elevation by just such struggles as his.

Mr. Lincoln was always a leader. No matter what his undertaking, from the very first he had the public confidence. It is not a little singular that he who died the civil commander-in-chief of the armies and navies of the Republic, having guided their policy through a perilous war, should have commenced his career an enlisted soldier in the Black Hawk war, even then chosen captain.

At the age of twenty-five elected to the Legislature of Illinois, he was returned four successive terms, in all eight years; was six times a Presidential elector; in 1846, was brought into the broader arena of national politics by an election to Congress—the only Whig member from his State—and took a prominent part in the discussions of that body. Withdrawing his name as a candidate for United States Senator in 1854—declining a nomination for Governor when success was certain—receiving one hundred and two votes for Vice-President in the Philadelphia Convention which nominated John C. Fremont, his name was destined to a wider nationality through his remarkable debates with Stephen A. Douglas, when, in 1858, as candidates for the United States Senate, it was agreed that a Legislature should be chosen pledged to one or other of them. The popular vote was with Lincoln; a small majority of the districts, however, chose Douglas Representatives. Yet this great canvass, in which the people of a State hung upon his clear reasonings, his eloquent advocacy of the right, his powerful analysis, his admirable illustrations, made Mr. Lincoln's defeat a veritable success. The selection of the National Convention, he became the choice of

the people—his own great speech at the Cooper Institute being the key-note of the campaign. Since then Abraham Lincoln has passed into history, and the pen of the historian can trace no more eventful period of any age or clime than that of his Presidency.

Let it not, then, be said that any body of men withdrew him from obscurity to confer their honors on him. By his own untiring energy; by his sagacity and knowledge of human nature; by his professional acquirements; above all, by his purity of purpose and the high promise of his manhood, he had lifted himself gradually upward, and they found him near the topmost rung of the ladder. He came up to the Jeffersonian standard—honest and capable.

No man before had so won the love of his fellow-beings; no death had ever so stricken a nation. Civilization still stands aghast at the foul wrong, "the deep damnation of his taking off;" and two continents mourn above his grave.

I remember well on his first nomination, a friend wrote me from Illinois, "Mr. Lincoln is more beloved than any man in this State." What was then a river became the ocean. The instincts of the popular heart rarely err. Men knew him as "Honest Abe." Straightforward, candid, always truthful, he was widely sought as an advocate, for juries were in the habit of believing him; and so when the arena grew wider, the people were his jury. He communed with them, and generally won the verdict. This was for no mere effect, but from the very essence of his nature.

The same characteristic marked him to the last. As President he had no secrets from the public longer than secrecy was demanded. He pleaded with the erring, reasoned with the doubting, poured forth his hopes to the trusting; an earnest, honest man. If the way was dark, he illumined it by homely illustration; if the path was thorny and the rest hung back, by quaint analogy or parrying query, he convinced them it was still the best; and keeping the heaviness of his heart to himself when disaster and wrong

were uppermost, the side he took seemed ever the brightest and proved so in the end.

How he appealed to the South in the eloquence of his first inauguration:—"My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject * * * the Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break the bonds of our affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearth-stone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

How he implored the border slave States, in the cause of humanity, still to save themselves by adopting compensated emancipation while there was time:—

"To the people of those States I now earnestly appeal—I do not argue. You cannot, if you would, be blind to the signs of the times. I beg of you a calm and enlarged consideration of them, ranging, if it may be, far above personal and partisan politics. This proposal makes common cause for a common object, casting no reproaches at any. It acts not the Pharisee. The changes it contemplates would come gently as the dews of heaven, not rending or wrecking anything. Will you not embrace it? So much good has not been done by one effort in all past time as, in the providence of God, it is now your high privilege to do. May the vast future not have to lament that you have neglected it."

What more withering reply than his interrogatory to the Vallandigham committee?—

"Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wily agitator who induces him to desert?"

What plainer statement of the negro-enlistment question than this:—"And now, let any Union man who complains

of this measure, test himself by writing down in one line, that he is for subduing the rebellion by force of arms, and in the next that he is for taking 130,000 men from the Union side, and placing them where they would be best for the measure he condemns. If he cannot face his case so stated he cannot face the truth."

His most querulous friends, his bitterest opponents, were still deemed worthy of reply; and though his condescension alarmed the timid, he always stooped to conquer, for his pen was trenchant and the people at large were his confidants. The Peace Conference, so much deprecated, proved a master stroke of policy. It gave the last moral blow to the Rebel cause. It strengthened the arms of our soldiery, and when it was over Mr. Lincoln confided every word of it to an anxious country.

It is not necessary to dwell upon his most beautiful attribute. Janvier's touching poem of the "Sleeping Sentinel" has crystallized one only of his many acts of mercy. I never knew him to deny the prayer that a soldier's life might be spared. In fact, it was always difficult for him to refuse an appeal to his feelings. Many a weary load he lifted from many a weary heart—many a stain placed on the brow of some brave boy for a brief desertion did he wipe away—many a tear of joy started at his bidding. One instance I shall not soon forget. A Southern mother had left her babe, hurrying North to her husband, a prisoner and dying. She came too late, and in her agony turned back towards the only being left her on earth; but at Washington a barrier met her in the shape of a general order from the War Department.

Week after week she had waited, buoyed up by a mother's hope. At last the papers said some ladies had received passes to go South. I called upon the President, and urged a permit in the case mentioned. He listened sympathetically, but motioned a refusal, when I ventured to speak of what the papers had recorded. "Ah," said Mr. Lincoln, "this only shows that I should not have

violated the rule;" and he wrote the lines which made one more being happy.

The last order he gave on that sad 14th of April was for the discharge of a rebel prisoner upon his taking the oath. The request was endorsed by a distinguished member of Congress, then Senator, to which Mr. Lincoln added, "Let it be done." And then he told him a beautiful story of some children who went to an island to gather flowers, and how one, in being carried over, had slid gradually into the stream, and how he at first had refused their requests, but his feet had touched the water, and now, when Peace seemed so near, and everything looked bright, he could refuse no longer, but was being borne along in the stream too. Even then, when his heart was filled with pardon, the coward plot of those for whom it throbbed had culminated, and his feet were already laved by the waters of eternity.

His sense of justice was ever uppermost—justice to the rights of labor; justice to the whole people; justice to him who was fighting the people's battle; and if he erred, it was still on the side of mercy. Early in the war he forebore to fill vacancies on the Supreme Bench, lest he might disable himself "from doing justice to the South on the return of peace." In like manner, much as he wished it otherwise, there was a long pause before using the war power to free the slaves, from a dislike to deprive innocent as well as guilty of their alleged possessions. As the Rebellion was the fruit of an aristocracy, he kept constantly as its antidotal argument the value of popular institutions. "Labor," he said, "is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed." He declared the war "essentially a people's contest," to maintain that Government "whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men."

While fully recognizing the great results effected by the patriotism of the People, at no time were the nation's defenders forgotten by him. In his first special message

decrying the treachery of many officers, he gloried that "no common soldier or common sailor was known to have deserted the flag." In no appropriate place did he omit to thank them, and never more appropriately than just one year ago at the Fair in this city. For, said Mr. Lincoln there, "say what you will, after all the most is due to the soldier, who takes his life in his hands and goes to fight the battles of his country." In the hospitals his presence was among the gentlest—in the camp and at the front his words were among the kindest—mingling with the people, doing good everywhere.

No incumbent of the Presidential chair was ever so much seen by, so well known to, the people. From morning till night he bent attentive ear to their hopes and fears, lightened their cares, redressed their grievances: as though the lessening of their burthens lifted the heavy weight of cares from his heart too.

Long years to come, many a fireside, in every corner of the land, will be gladdened by the story of his kindnesses. Old men will gather attentive listeners about them as, in telling the tales of the great Rebellion and its downfall, the sacrifices of the masses, the heroism of those who battled for the Right, they add how they saw and spoke with the good President, picture his winning smile, and mayhap hand to their children's children a line from his pen.

Naturally, visitors from his own West seemed always welcome—though it were hard to say who was most welcome; but his vivid descriptive powers, his wonderfully illustrative memory, seemed then best brought into play. Calling once late in the day, I found a clergyman from Illinois, who had waited, fondly hoping for an interview. He had voted for Mr. Lincoln twice, but never saw him, and begged an introduction, if but for a moment. I at once obtained the privilege, and had no cause to regret it. Familiar with every section of the State, he astonished his visitor by his minute description of localities and manners, giving even the number of votes cast in many counties of

his section, and his face lit with enthusiasm as with eloquent tongue he described their undulating valleys, their pleasant rivers and waving prairies. My new-made acquaintance grasped my hand warmly at parting, and said he had food for a dozen sermons.

Such a President could not be aught but a good husband and father, and all of this he was—passing from the care of the nation only to the happiness of the family circle. But above all other traits in the character of Abraham Lincoln—trusting still to Providence, invoking the Divine aid for himself and his country in everything—was his distinguished love of freedom. It may have been instilled—it seemed to be inborn. Recognizing, obeying the laws which prevented interference with slavery in the States, he never acquiesced even by silence in their justice—always opposing its extension. As early as 1837, he recorded his belief on the Journals of the Legislature of Illinois, that slavery is “founded on both injustice and bad policy.”

In 1848, he declared in Congress, “I am a Northern man, or rather a Western Free State man, with a constituency I *believe to be*, and with personal feelings I *know to be*, against the extension of slavery.” His votes are all so recorded. In 1858, with prophetic vision he foretold that the nation could not live half slave, half free; and if not yet the Apostle of Liberty, was soon chosen as the Champion against Slavery extension.

Only last year he wrote, “If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel.” What followed Mr. Lincoln’s election is too fresh in the memory to need repetition.

How slavery struck at the life of the Republic—how little by little old fears and prejudices died away,—and the slave was liberated and the black man allowed to fight—how this just ruler, true to his oath, endeavored above all to save the Union—how traitors mistook leniency for weakness, and having broken the covenant, found at last it no longer shielded them—and how, after timely warning,

he issued the great Proclamation of Emancipation, hereafter to be more renowned than Magna Charta—striking the shackles from millions of human beings—breaking the bonds of slavery at a blow.

It has been urged that Mr. Lincoln was too conservative, too slow to act. In his own words, willing to adopt new views “so fast as they appeared to be true views,” he claimed to have been controlled by events, not to control them; but having decided once, he was firm as the rock.

Read his masterly letter to the Illinois Convention: “The Proclamation as law either is valid or is not valid. If it is not valid, it needs no retraction. If it is valid, it *cannot be retracted any more than the dead can be brought to life.*” And again, in his message to Congress, he declared that if its sacred promise was to be withdrawn, *another, and not he,* must be found to do the deed.

As the war progressed, some grew faint-hearted; but he never—nor faltered, nor swerved an instant from his great object—the preservation of the Union. He often said he would rather die than surrender the principle which lay at the foundation of our liberties or the Government entrusted to his keeping, preferring, if God willed, to continue the contest “till all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil should be sunk, and till every drop drawn with the lash should be paid by another drawn with the sword.”

He died in the very fulness of a well-spent life, laid upon the altar of his country; just when a nation’s thanks and a nation’s love seemed to encircle him; when the sneer had died upon the lip, and a world had learned to know the greatness of his heart and intellect; when he had demonstrated that among freemen there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet, and accomplished the task which he truly foreshadowed had devolved on none other since the days of Washington.

The world contains no like record. A whole people stricken in the midst of the joy of victory and peace to

the innermost depths of grief, flags suddenly draped, the song of triumph hushed. Such sorrow never before trembled along the electric wire.

They took him back to his home in the West by the route which, but little over three years since, he traversed amid the shouts of a people; they laid him in the great Hall of Independence he so revered, while from the belfry above the solemn dirge floated away into the night; and ever as he was borne onward to his resting place, through pageants of unutterable wo, millions came quietly out to gaze upon his bier, or catch a glimpse of that dear face, and women laid flowers upon his coffin, and strong men wept like children.

Time may mellow the grief, but the gratitude of a nation will endure forever. Those who were dear to him must be cared for by his countrymen. Above all, let his death waken us to a new life, that henceforth treason shall be branded—a crime without a name—never in another generation to disgrace the land; and when public virtue, and unsullied honor, and high principle need a synonym, let us remember

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.



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