

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN


Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

MEMORIAL MEETING

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
MARCH 4, 1861, TO APRIL 15, 1865

Born February 12, 1809, in Hardin (La Rue) Co., Kentucky
Assassinated April 14, 1865; died April 15, 1865, at Washington, D. C.
Enrolled by Special Resolution April 16, 1865

“The Afterglow of Abraham Lincoln’s Life”

COMPANION LIEUT. JAMES A. WORDEN, D.D.

“THE AFTERGLOW OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN’S LIFE”

BY COMPANION LIEUT. JAMES A. WORDEN, D.D.

Afterglow came as a revelation to the speaker in the far northwest in the year 1886. A July sun had gone down beyond the coast range, which stretches as a giant dyke between the Pacific Ocean and Puget Sound.

Two travelers, on their railway journey northward, had been thrilled by the sight of snow mountains of that region in the State of Washington, especially in the afternoon by the distant vision of that monarch of American mountains, Mount Tacoma, which has this peculiarity—it can be clearly seen in all its towering majesty from its base on the ocean level to its summit, which is almost three miles high.

Tired and hungry the tourists hurried to the dinner awaiting them, and then slowly strolled out to the hotel veranda. As they were without a guide, they anticipated only the sight of oncoming darkness, but were surprised at an overwhelming vision; an unearthly light was radiating from Mount Tacoma’s brow, which contrasted with the gloomy shadows on the coast mountains and with the dark waters of the Sound. In the heavens, from the timber-line downward, all was hidden, but what were those strange fires raging from the top of Mount Tacoma, extending down its 3000 feet of snow? Whence the glitter as of burning pearls and opals, of diamonds and jacinths, amethysts, and all the precious stones named in the 21st Chapter of St. John’s apocalypse?

Had the Kingdom of God appeared upon earth; had heaven’s glory descended on the lofty peak? They stood in silent awe, for it was their first and most unobstructed vision of the afterglow of Mount Tacoma. While life and thought and being last, that mental picture shall never fade from their minds.

Nature is a mirror of the spirit world. There is a law of the afterglow in the material world, according to which the sun that has gone down beyond the visible horizon still shines on special lofty heights; not only shines, but causes that summit to radiate in colors and shades never seen on rock or snow, which gather up and purify and concentrate a myriad sublimated hues and change the clouds or rocks, ravines or cliffs with celestial illumination.

So there is a law of soul afterglow according to which, when life sinks into the ocean of the past, the light from the sun behind the sun, flaming from the

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Private 74th Ohio Infantry October 14, 1861; Sergeant December 30, 1861; First Sergeant November 17, 1862; discharged to accept promotion February 24, 1863.

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Chaplain of the Commandery May 6, 1903-1908; May 7, 1913-1916.

World’s Creator and Lord, seemingly hiding the little facts and incidents of life, multiplies and transfigures the real experiences and struggles and aspirations of those that are gone from earth into their divine elements, and all appears as did that Holy One and just on Mount Hermon when His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became glistering, exceeding white so as no fuller on earth can whiten them.

The proof and reality of this has passed the observation of every companion of the Loyal Legion who saw and carries forever its demonstration in the chambers of imagery of his mind. There was a background to this afterglow of deeper darkness than ever gloomed on ocean or on shore, and that black night had succeeded a day of exalted gladness.

That day occurred in April, 1865, when General U. S. Grant and his invincible army of the Potomac, headed by Generals Sheridan, Hancock and other intrepid leaders, had compelled General Robert E. Lee to surrender at Appomattox. That masterpiece of generalship had ended four long years of the camping, marching, marching, trench digging, battling, praying, agonizing in long Gethsemanes which men call war, but which General Sherman called Hell. Let us reverently say all this had been finished by Jehovah of the Armies. Northern soldiers were like those who dream, or as the Hebrew poet puts it, “Their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with singing.”

It is a singular, a unique feature of this rejoicing that every soldier realized the near presence and fellowship of his President, ABRAHAM LINCOLN. Every officer seemed to have known him as an elder brother, or as an affectionate father. Had not each of them responded to his call,

“We’re coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more,
By Richmond’s bloody tide,
To lay us down for freedom’s sake
Our brother’s bones beside.”

Was ever gladness on earth like that of the millions of men who had warred for four years? It was too deep and too high for human expression; nothing could tell it out but the sacred music set to the highest Psalmody, “Old Hundred,” and “Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow.” The only appropriate reply to the question, “Have you heard from Appomattox?” was “Alleluia! Alleluia!”

Patriotism and Christianity combined. Love of God was one with love of the flag. When the Union was forever preserved, free government forever maintained, and slavery forever destroyed.

Then, then one muffled pistol shot in Ford’s Theatre, Washington, one shriek of anguish from a woman’s voice, “They have slain the President!” One melodrama of a murderer, leaping from the box to the stage, and in the confusion escaping on horseback, the echo of whose feet were heard in the hush of the theatre.

Victory was changed into defeat; life’s cup of joy into bitter death; the light of heaven into the assassination of Hell! Was ever sorrow like unto the sorrow of bronzed warriors, weeping for a trusted commander, shot down by the bullet of an assassin in his hour of supreme victory? Was ever sobbing like that of brave knights in the grief of despair? What will be the effect of all this on the army?

What is that in the sky? What is that strange light that shines with a beam that was never on sea or land or snowclad mountain? Gently it drew

weeping eyes and mourning hearts from the pale form of the murdered President. What was it? Was that Jehovah's Shechinah, which in the olden time shone in the tabernacle in the wilderness and acted as the pillar of cloud and of fire which guided Israel across the Red Sea? It was seen to illuminate the President's catafalque as it lay in solemn splendor in the White House, as it was borne amidst the lamentations of a mighty nation through Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and the great cities of our land, and as it at last deposited its precious dead in the sepulchre in Springfield, Illinois. Companions of the Loyal Legion, that was the first outshining of the afterglow of ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S life.

This afterglow seemed to enswathe the very heavens until it swept the horizon of the whole round world. It blazed in newspapers, weekly, daily; magazines, monthlies, quarterlies; editors, reporters, correspondents, all classes and conditions of writers caught its light and spread the illumination. The orations, addresses, lectures, poems, scintillated with LINCOLN'S renown. Scores running into hundreds, hundreds into thousands of publications—literary, political, historical, biographical, religious—appeared with irrepressible spontaneity. Col. Nicholson declares that the number of all kinds of volumes devoted to LINCOLN in all the varied aspects of his life and achievement and characteristics number four thousand five hundred.

This in America alone, but the afterglow speedily lightened the continent and the lands beyond the ocean, merrie England, bonnie Scotland, Wales, Ireland, the sunny land of France, Germany, Switzerland and its Alps, Italy—land to memory and to freedom dear, land of the melting lyre and conquering spear; the vast Empires of Russia, China, Japan; the civilized world rejoiced in the afterglow and brought forth their memorials, chaplets, wreaths and laurels, and helped to beautify LINCOLN'S memory, and it will be difficult to find a corner of the earth, the Deserts of Sahara or of Arabia, where some of its light did not percolate. The marvel of it all is that for fifty years the afterglow of LINCOLN has grown year by year:

"These echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow forever and forever."

A still profounder wonder attended LINCOLN'S afterglow. Naturally the soldiers of the Union Army presumed that from the war's very beginning they had appreciated ABRAHAM LINCOLN; had carried LINCOLN in their very hearts. Were they not well informed that he was thinking, planning, helping every general in the field; that his nights were nights of prayer for them, and especially in battle that, like Moses of old, when Israel was fighting Amalek, their commander-in-chief was on the hill of supplication?

"Still the unceasing prayer was prayed,
And still the uplifted hands were stayed."

How was it possible that the soldiers could honor or revere him more highly! His death wrought the impossible. Only the setting sun can make Mount Tacoma's afterglow. So ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S martyrdom. The soldiers of the north were loyal with the loyalty of soldiers to the fame of Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Meade, Thomas, McPherson, Farragut, Porter and all the heroes in the war's calendar. But the sacrifice of the martyred LINCOLN touched their inmost souls with personal sorrow and compassion—a sympathy melting their affection. It reminds one unavoidably of the Divine attraction of the Cross of Christ.

There were other millions in this land who rivaled even veteran soldiers and sailors in appreciating the afterglow of LINCOLN'S life, for there were millions and millions who knew ABRAHAM LINCOLN as their actual liberator from the unspeakable anguish and humiliation of slavery, and as the fulfiller of all their prayers from generation to generation.

Companions of the Loyal Legion, our numbers are decreasing, but the numbers of those who feel grateful to ABRAHAM LINCOLN for literal freedom—the poor, tragic race of negroes—are increasing, and the depth of their gratitude their reverence and love simply passes knowledge. I am thankful to Almighty God that before his assassination PRESIDENT LINCOLN was made to feel the deep thanks of the African race. For instance, when Colonel McKaye and Robert Dale Owen, who had been sent to North Carolina to investigate the condition of the freedmen, were reporting to him how the colored people honored, revered and loved him, MR. LINCOLN was greatly touched and said impressively, "It is a momentous thing to be the instrument under Providence of the liberation of a race."

Millions of white men and women, constituting the vast majority of the inhabitants of this country, will dispute the claim of any others to feel a greater reverence and love for LINCOLN than they, will dispute the claim of any others more highly to appreciate his transfiguration by afterglow. I refer to the common people who have experienced the deep bitterness of labor all their lives. To these heavy laden toilers ABRAHAM LINCOLN comes as near as a brother, and his glory is at once a comfort and a prophecy of what they and their children shall have as their reward at last, either here or hereafter. The flashes of the afterglow most clearly reveal the story of LINCOLN'S early privations, the poverty of his birth; his boyhood's life in the log cabin; his bearing the yoke of labor in his very early youth; his lack of anything like comfort in his childhood's home; the fact that in all his life he had not enjoyed more than twelve months of school. His childlike inventions to aid his reading and ciphering on the little cabin floor in front of the fireplace. And as the farmers' boys and girls see the picture of all this, only adding to the fame of LINCOLN, they love him more as a fellow-sufferer for the trials he endured.

This is why the heart of mankind is irresistibly attracted to that one of the very greatest who can be touched with the realization of their hard lot. In this day of labor and of labor struggles, LINCOLN'S afterglow is hailed by all the sons of toil as the most complete glorification of labor.

We may say that ABRAHAM LINCOLN touched all forms of true life—the noble profession of law are strongly attracted toward him, who honored their calling as an honest lawyer.

True politicians recall the fact that LINCOLN entered the ranks of politicians long before he was thirty years old, not too proud to fight for the cause that to him seemed right and true, and disdaining to train in any crowd whose fellowship degraded.

Literary classes, editors, authors, poets, artists in the high art of expression look with admiration peculiar to themselves on this afterglow, for ABRAHAM LINCOLN, despite all that men call his lack of education, in his letters, addresses, State papers, proclamations, especially his second inaugural and his Gettysburg oration, approves himself to them as past grand master of the noblest, most genuine literary touch and style. This humble rail-splitter of the west, in a word,

is joined in a universal fraternity with men of all sections, callings, schools, from that of a farm hand and a flat-boatman on the Ohio and Mississippi to that of earth's sublimest leaders.

PERSONALITY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

We hasten particularly to consider this most vital element in the afterglow, and begin by asking, what does the celestial illumination tell of the character of President LINCOLN as a Statesman?

It is universally recognized now that President Woodrow Wilson, however we may differ from him in politics, is one of the very greatest historians that has written upon the development of our country. Before his elevation to the Presidency this great historian, from the thorough and lofty investigations of his study, wrote these words:

"He would be a rash man who should say he understood ABRAHAM LINCOLN. No doubt natures deep as his, and various almost to the point of self-contradiction, can be sounded only by the judgment of men of a like sort—if any such there be. It is as if nature had made a typical American and then had added with liberal hand the royal quality of genius, to show us what the type could be."

And in this connection President Wilson quoted these lines, written concerning ABRAHAM LINCOLN:

"Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes,
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame—
The kindly, earnest, brave foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil—the first American."

And adds, "It is a poet's verdict, but it rings the authentic tone of the seer, and it must be also the verdict of history."

Perhaps the most important question in this connection is, whence came ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S personality and power? We sweep aside all the attempts to answer, coming from those, as Woodrow Wilson calls them, not of the LINCOLN sort. We will listen to our beloved ex-President, William McKinley, who was of like sort, and he positively affirms:

"The war had brought the people and LINCOLN to a nearer realization of our absolute dependence upon a Higher Power, and had quickened his conception of duty more acutely than the people could realize. The purposes of God, working through the ages, were perhaps more fully revealed to him than to any other. He was the greatest man of his time, especially approved of God for the work he gave him to do. History abundantly approves his superiority as a leader, and establishes his constant reliance upon a Higher Power for guidance and support."

Hear the verdict of men of like sort, repudiating all merely material development in producing our "first American." Mr. Henry Watterson, one of the greatest editors of our country, was, as I remember, a Confederate soldier, and is now, perhaps, one of the very greatest leaders in the Democratic Party, and words of appreciation from him should have every ounce of weight inherent in them.

In 1895, in Chicago, he, being somewhat of the like sort, gave this reply to the question: Whence came the greatness and power of our martyred President?

"Born as lowly as the Son of God, in a hovel; reared in penury, squalor, with no gleam of light or fair surroundings; without graces, actual or acquired; without name, or fame, or official training, it was reserved for this strange being to be snatched from obscurity, raised to supreme command at a supreme moment and entrusted with the destiny of a nation.

"That during four years, carrying with them such a weight of responsibility as the world never witnessed before, he filled the vast space allotted to him in the lives and actions of mankind, is to say that he was inspired of God, for nowhere else could he have acquired the wisdom and the virtue.

"Where did Shakespeare get his genius? Where did Mozart get his music? Whose hand struck the lyre of the Scottish ploughman, and stayed the life of the German priest? God, God, and God alone, and as surely as these were raised up of God, inspired by God, was ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

And a thousand years hence no drama, no tragedy, no epic poem will be filled with greater wonder, or be followed by mankind with deeper feeling than that which tells of his life and death. If LINCOLN was not inspired of God, then there is no such thing on earth as special Providence or the interposition of Divine Power in the affairs of men."

All agree that Honorable John Hay was one of the greatest Statesmen of the age, and perhaps no man knew our martyred President more intimately than he, and John Hay wrote: "LINCOLN, the greatest character since Christ."

Tolstoi, the most distinguished Russian seer and author, is known to have said of LINCOLN, "He was a Christ in miniature."

What demonstrates the literal truth of Tolstoi's words—"LINCOLN was a miniature of Christ?"

I. He, as few who have lived in the Christian centuries, embodied the essentials of the life of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven as limned for us by the Lord in his beatitudes:

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven." ABRAHAM LINCOLN was sincerely humble, and, in his simplicity, sublime.

2. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." ABRAHAM LINCOLN was a man of sorrows for his own sins, and for the sins and sorrows of men.

3. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S one life-quest was after divine righteousness.

4. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." LINCOLN'S life was devoted to the relief of the sufferings and wrongs of mankind.

5. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." LINCOLN carried the pure flower of a stainless life.

6. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." One of LINCOLN'S life tasks was to bring peace to individuals, families, communities and the nation.

7. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven." ABRAHAM LINCOLN bore persecution for righteousness, even to assassination.

What the world in this time of war needs is "Peace on earth—good-will toward men."

Not only according to the four Gospels—according to Matthew, according to Mark, according to Luke, and according to John, but another, the same Gospel according to ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

"I know a land that is sunk in shame,
Where true hearts faint and tire;
I know a name—a name—a name
Can set that land on fire.
Its sound is a brand, its letters flame.
I know a name—a name—a name
Will set that land on fire!"

