

CELEBRATION OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH
OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ADDRESS

OF

HON. FRANK M. NYE
OF MINNESOTA

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1909



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Frank M. Nye
M. C.

SPEECH
OF
HON. FRANK M. NYE.

Mr. TAWNEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my colleague [Mr. NYE] may address the House for thirty minutes on the subject of Abraham Lincoln.

The SPEAKER. Is there objection? [After a pause.] The Chair hears none, and the gentleman from Minnesota is recognized for thirty minutes. [Applause.]

Mr. NYE. Mr. Speaker, I did not anticipate this high honor. Through the kindness of the chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs [Mr. SHERMAN of New York], I had expected to address the committee briefly on this fitting subject, on this one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln.

How far the character and public service of Abraham Lincoln have become a part of our national life no one will undertake to say. We know but little of the source of real power. We associate it with external pomp and parade. We think of gathering armies, of magnificent navies, of gleaming swords and clashing steel, of roaring artillery, of waving banners and beating drums; but these are not the sources of real power. Human judgment is often swept from its throne by the spectacular and by transitory appeals to the mere passions of men. But these are but bubbles and foam on the ever-flowing sea of time in which great actions and great events follow in succession. We are prone to look out upon the world and to think that the outer phenomenon of things is the real. We confuse substance with show. Not long ago I read an admirable lecture on the subject of substance and show. We think all sub-

stance is bulk, is that which is subject to measurement; but after all, as the great teacher Paul says:

The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal.

And this man whose lecture I read spoke of the outer phenomenon of things, the scholastic as distinguished from that reverence of thought which leads men intuitively to that which inspires, rather than mere scholasticism.

The tree, the oak that has stood for a hundred years and dared the tempest and the storm, we think of as it appears outwardly, mere bulk or form, but substance really is that which creates and produces and classifies. The real substance of the tree is unseen. It is that which winds its rings about it year by year, glues the bark to the stem, sends its living leaves to the heavens and its roots far into the earth. It is unseen. The scholars tell us that in the whole vegetable world there are but three or four elements or gases—I think the oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, and carbon. The catalogue is not so important; but there is a reverence of thought which might lead us to wonder and adore the infinite intelligence and love which takes this common stuff and works it up into all the manifold manifestations of beauty and life, which makes it an orange here, an olive there, a pine here and an oak there, a dahlia here and a violet there. This is the real substance, the intelligence and power that is, after all, the real. This is the substance; all else is but a part of the show of things, only the outer phenomenon. In human society the same great law is true, whether it be the church, the fraternal organization, or whatever it be; it is not its number, not its form or ceremony or ritual, but its spirit and its life, expressing itself in the daily lives of men. This is substance. And what is a nation? Not the outer phenomenon, not wealth or commerce or mines or fields. There is back of it all a spirit which is the real nation and which constitutes the enduring republic. "Things that are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal." I present to you to-day what I believe to be a type of that better, interior, and unseen life and spirit of this Republic, and I find it personified in the life and character of that great man whose

love for his fellow-men made him the wonder of his day and the wonder of all coming centuries. [Applause.] A celebrated divine in America some time ago, in a discourse upon the subject of truth, maintained that truth was so vital, so immortal in its characteristics, that it expressed itself in man physically in good health, morally in honesty, and intellectually in sagacity. I have thought of this idea much in connection with the life and character of Abraham Lincoln. Sound to the core, honest by birth and principle, realizing that a dishonest dollar would curse the man who got it, knowing that the great law of compensation would assert itself throughout all the ages, and that sooner or later we must pay the penalty for the transgression of it, this man was before all men, in my judgment, in America devoted to the cause of truth, and he would sacrifice all, even life itself, that he might be faithful to it. Truth expressed itself even in this man physically. The great men of the ages have been outdoor men, men who loved the winds that blow over the prairies and make music in the forests; the streams, the valleys, and the hills, furrows and fields, woods, mountains, and plains.

This man, somehow, was the companion of all that a great and infinite God has created. He felt a brotherhood for all things, and even the blood that flows in the violet was kindred to him. He loved the truth, and it found expression in the man physically. As to its expressing itself morally in honesty, I need not comment upon this great character, for he was preeminently and soundly honest, scrupulously exact in all business matters, leaving the country store at night to correct a little matter of change with a customer; in all things obedient to that great command of rendering an equivalent for that which we receive.

Soundly honest, this man is an illustration of the principle of which I speak—in intellect sagacious, clear, his vision almost unerring and prophetic, profound in his thought, clear and chaste in language and expression, his words as direct as the rays of light and, as some one has said, candid as mirrors reflecting the perfect image of his thought. His letter to the Widow Bixby, who had lost five sons on the field of battle, is

one of the dearest things in all literature. No scholar can parallel it, no student can eclipse it. Clear in thought, clear in his ideals of government, this man is an illustration of the fact that devotion to truth in life leads to intellectual sagacity. The cardinal principle of his political faith was expressed by the statement that "right makes might."

But the virtues are correlated. One follows another. They never appear singly. We are deceived when we think we see a single virtue and that men excel in one and have no others. Following this love of truth and honesty was courage, noble and sublime. Against the counsel of his party in a time when the Republic was torn by a great moral question, he had clearly seen that this Nation could not endure half slave and half free; and almost taking his life in his hand, he dared to assert it and to maintain it. His dearest friends counseled against it and said it would be ruinous to him and to his party. He said:

As to me, it makes little difference. This is as I see it. It is a voice within me which I must utter, let the consequences to me be what they may.

But there is a greater quality back of all these. The gifted and eloquent Colonel Watterson said, in his most admirable lecture on Lincoln, "Lincoln was the only man in public life who could have come to leadership in 1861 unembittered by the great slavery controversy." Neither North nor South was there among the ranks of men one who was not more or less inflamed by the spirit of his day. This leads me to speak of the finer and infinite quality which he reflected in his sublime life and toilsome career—love. This man was large enough to love all the universe, the men of all races and all countries. Born in the South, his heart was with his people; his conscience with the cause of human freedom and progress. He might, figuratively and almost literally, be said to have held for four perilous and painful years in one hand the North and in the other the South, thereby to bind and cement these angered sections of our land into a brotherhood as eternal as the word of God Himself. [Applause.] In this quality we have touched the heart of the Infinite.

Coming up from the wilderness of obscurity and poverty and pain, feeling the agonies of struggle, acquainted with labor and toil and hardship, he felt for and loved all men.

Love as the basis of a state has never yet been tried. Statesmen have not advocated it; no one has dared to trust it; but the time will come when we will see, or our children or children's children will see, that this is the one potent and omnipotent force of all the universe, and that a nation or a state founded upon that which Lincoln lived must forever endure. This and this alone will enable men to solve the problems, to rise above the fever and contention of life, as the eagle rises above the breaking storm and soars in an atmosphere untouched by tempest. This is the wonderful quality of Abraham Lincoln. With little opportunities of school or education, self-taught, self-disciplined, this man intuitively loved all men. And when we had emerged from the thick darkness of our national distresses, as we had hoped, into the light of a national—not sectional—victory, this man, repeating what he had often said, "Malice toward none and charity for all," flung over his wounded country the mantle of love and mercy. [Applause.]

It is a sublime lesson. It has written itself in the interior life and soul of this Republic, and it will live when quarrels over tariff and navies are dead. It will live to assert the eternal truth of the principles which he lived and which he taught.

Mr. Speaker, other luminous and living stars shine in our national firmament; but high in the dome, clear and ever clearer to the patriot's vision, is this refulgent and transcendent orb, lighting the pathway of advancing civilization, growing brighter and brighter, unto that perfect day when universal peace shall reign, "When nation shall not rise up against nation, and men shall learn war no more." [Loud and long-continued applause.]

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