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EULOGY

ON THE

Death of Abraham Lincoln,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

CITY COUNCIL AND CITIZENS OF LOWELL,

At Huntington Hall, April 19th, 1865,

BY HON. GEORGE S. BOUTWELL.

PUBLISHED BY RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL.



LOWELL:

STONE & HUSE, PRINTERS, COURIER OFFICE, 21 CENTRAL STREET.

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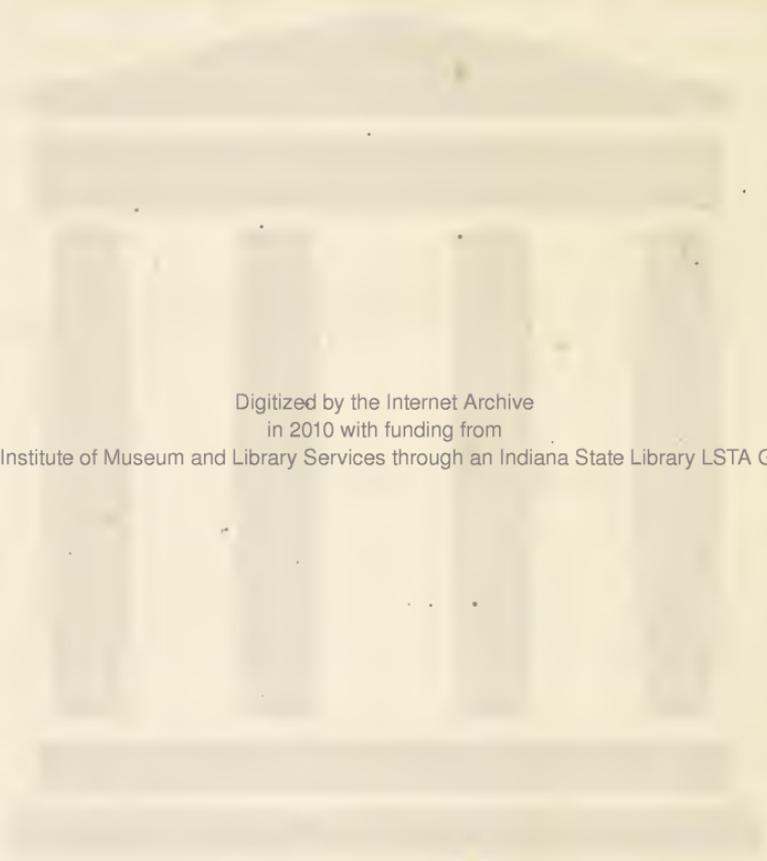
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E U L O G Y .

THE nation is bowed down to-day under the weight of a solemn and appalling sorrow, such as never before rested upon a great people. It is not the presence of death merely,—with that we have become familiar. It is not the loss of a leader only that we mourn, nor of a statesman who had exhibited wisdom in great trials, in vast enterprises of war, and in delicate negotiations for the preservation of peace with foreign countries; but of a twice chosen and twice ordained ruler in whom these great qualities were found, and to which were added the personal courage of the soldier and the moral heroism of the Christian.

Judged by this generation in other lands, and by other generations in future times, Abraham Lincoln will be esteemed as the wisest of rulers and the most fortunate of men. To him and to his fame the manner of his death is nothing; to the country and to the whole civilized family of man it is the most appalling of tragical events. The rising sun of the day following that night of unexampled crime revealed to us the nation's loss; but, stunned by the shock, the people were unable to comprehend the magnitude of the calamity. As the last rays of the setting sun glided into the calm twilight of evening, the continent was stilled into silence by its horror of the crime and its sense of the greatness of the loss sustained.

If we believe reverently that God guided his chosen people in ancient times, that He was with our fathers in their struggle for independence, we are likely also to believe that in the events transpiring in this country the Ruler of all the earth makes his ways known to men in an unusual manner and to an unusual extent. If God rules, then are not all men, even in their imperfections and sins, in some mysterious way and under peculiar circumstances the doers of His will? To the human eye Abraham Lincoln seems to have been specially designated by Divine Providence for the performance of a great work. His origin was humble, his means of education stunted. He was without wealth, and he did not enjoy the support of influential friends. Much the larger part of his life was spent in private pursuits, and he never exhibited even the common human desire for public employment, leadership and fame. His ambition concerning the great office that he held was fully satisfied; and the triumph of his moderate and reasonable expectations was not even marred by the untimely and bloody hand of the assassin. During the canvass of 1864 and with the modesty of a child he said, "I cannot say that I wish to perform the duties of President for four years more; but I should be gratified by the approval of the people of what I have done." This he received; and however precious it may have been to him, it is a more precious memory to the people themselves.

His public life was embraced in the period of about six years. This statement does not include his brief service in the legislature of the State of Illinois, nor his service as a subordinate officer in one of the frontier Indian wars, nor his single term of service in the House of Representatives of

the United States nearly twenty years ago. In none of these places did he attract the attention of the country, nor did the experience acquired fit him specially for the great duties to which he was called finally. He was nearly fifty years of age when he entered upon the contest, henceforth historical, for a seat in the Senate from the State of Illinois. This was the commencement of his public life, and from that time forward he gained and grew in the estimation of his countrymen. At the moment of his death he enjoyed the confidence of all loyal men, including those even who did not openly give him their support; and there were many, possibly in them it was a sin, who came at last to regard him as a Divinely appointed leader of the people. The speeches which he delivered in that contest are faithful exponents of his character, his principles, and his capacity. His statements of opinion are clear and unequivocal; his reasoning was logical and harmonious; and his principles, as then expressed, were consonant with the declaration subsequently made, "that each man has the right by nature to be the equal politically of any other man." He was then, as ever, chary of predictions concerning the future; but it was in his opening speech that he declared his conviction, which was in truth a prophecy, that this nation could not remain permanently half slave and half free.

In that long and arduous contest with one of the foremost men of the country, Mr. Lincoln made no remark which he was unable to defend, nor could he, by any force of argument, be driven from a position that he had taken. It was then that those who heard or read the debate observed the richness of his nature in mirth and wit which charmed his

friends without wounding his opponents, and which he used with wonderful sagacity in illustrating his own arguments, or in weakening, or even at times in overthrowing the arguments of his antagonist. And yet it cannot be doubted that for many years, if not from his very youth, Mr. Lincoln was a melancholy man. He seemed to bear about with him the weight of coming cares, and to sit in gloom as though his path of life was darkened by an unwelcome shadow. His fondness for story and love for mirth were the compensation which nature gave.

In the midst of overburdening cares these characteristics were a daily relief; and yet it is but just to say that he often used an appropriate story as a means of foiling a too inquisitive visitor, or of changing or ending a conversation which he did not desire to pursue.

During the first French revolution, when the streets of Paris were stained with human blood, the inhabitants, women and men, flocked to places of amusement. To the mass of mankind, and especially to the inexperienced, this conduct appears frivolous, or as the exhibition of a criminal indifference to the miseries of individuals and the calamities of the public. But such are the horrors of war, the pressure of responsibility, that men often seek refuge and relief in amusements, from which in ordinary times they would turn aside.

In Mr. Lincoln's speeches of 1858 there are passages which suggest to the mind the classic models of ancient days, although they do not in any proper sense rise to an equality with them. His style of writing was as simple as were his own habits and manners; and no person ever

excelled him in clearness of expression. Hence he was understood and appreciated by all classes. The Proclamation of Emancipation, his address at the dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg, and his touching letter to the widowed mother who had given five sons to the country, are memorable as evidences of his intellectual and moral greatness.

His speeches of 1858 are marked for the precision with which he stated his own positions, and for the firmness exhibited whenever his opponent endeavored to worry him from his chosen ground, or by artifice, or argument, or persuasion, to induce him to advance a step beyond.

His administration, as far as he himself was concerned, was inaugurated upon the doctrines and principles of the great debate. He recognized the obligation to return fugitives from slavery, and it was no part of his purpose to interfere with slavery in the States where it existed. It must remain for the historian and the biographer, who may have access to private and personal sources of knowledge, to inform the country and the world how far Mr. Lincoln, when he entered upon his duties as President, comprehended the magnitude of the struggle in which the nation was about to engage.

The circumstance that his first call for volunteers was for seventy-five thousand men only, is not valuable as evidence one way or the other. The number was quite equal to our supply of arms and materials of war, and altogether too vast for the experience of the men then at the head of military affairs. The number was sufficient to show his purpose;—the purpose to which he adhered through all the

trials and vicissitudes of this eventful contest. His purpose was the suppression of the rebellion, both as a civil organization and as an armed military force, and the re-establishment of the authority of the United States over the territory of the Union. There yet remain in the minds of men who were acquainted with Mr. Lincoln in the spring and summer of 1861, the recollection of expressions made by him, which indicate that there were then vague thoughts in his mind that it might be his lot under Providence to bring the slaves of the country out of their bondage. But however this may have been, he never deviated from his purpose to suppress the rebellion; and he conscientiously applied the means at his command to the attainment of that end. Thus step by step he advanced, until in his own judgment, in the judgment of the country, and of the best portion of mankind in other civilized nations, the emancipation of the slaves was a necessary means for the successful prosecution of the war. Mr. Lincoln was not insensible to the justice of emancipation; he saw its wisdom as a measure of public policy; but he delayed the proclamation until he was fully convinced that it offered the only chance of averting a foreign war, suppressing the rebellion, and restoring the Union of the States.

In the great struggle of 1862, Mr. Lincoln exhibited a two-fold character. He was personally the enemy of slavery, and he ardently desired its abolition; but he also regarded his oath of office, and steadily refused to recognize the existence of any right to proclaim emancipation while other means of saving the republic remained. He sought the path of duty and he walked fearlessly in it. Until he was

satisfied of the necessity of emancipation, no earthly power could have led him to issue the proclamation; and after its issue no earthly power could have induced him to retract or to qualify it. When an effort was made to persuade him to qualify the proclamation, he said, in reference to the blacks, "My word is out to these people, and I can't take it back."

It has been common in representative governments for men to be advanced to great positions without any sufficient evidence existing of their ability to perform the corresponding duties, and it has often happened that the occupant has not been elevated, while the office has been sadly degraded. It was observed by those who visited Mr. Lincoln on the day following his nomination at Chicago in June, 1860, that he would prove, in the event of his election, either a great success or a great failure.

This prediction was based upon the single fact that he was different from ordinary men, and it did not contain, as an element of the opinion, any knowledge of his peculiar characteristics. History will accept the first branch of the alternative opinion, and pronounce his administration a great success. To this success Mr. Lincoln most largely contributed, and this in spite of peculiarities which appeared to amount to defects in a great ruler in troublous times.

Never were words uttered which contained less truth than those which fell from the lips of the assassin, *sic semper tyrannis*, as he passed, in the presence of an excited and bewildered crowd, from the spot where he had committed the foulest of murders to the stage of the theatre, from whence he made his escape.

Mr. Lincoln exercised power with positive reluctance

and unfeigned distaste. He shrunk from the exhibition of any authority that was oppressive, harsh, or even disagreeable to a human being. He passed an entire night in anxious thought and prayerful deliberation, before he could sanction the execution of Gordon, the slave-dealer, although he had been tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. There is but little doubt, such was the kindness of Mr. Lincoln's nature, that he desired to close the war, and restore the Union, without exacting the forfeit of a single life as a punishment for the great crime of which the leaders in this rebellion are guilty.

Could this liberal policy have been carried out, it would have been the theme of perpetual eulogy, and its author would have received the acclamation of all races and classes of men.

Mr. Lincoln had not in his nature, or in the habits of his life, any element or feature of tyranny. He had no love of power for the sake of power. He preferred that every man should act as might seem to him best; and when in the discharge of his duties he was called to enforce penalties, or even to remove men from place, he suffered more usually than did the subjects of his authority. It is easy to understand that this peculiarity was sometimes an obstacle to the vigorous administration of affairs. But on the other hand, it must have happened occasionally that these delays led to a better judgment in the end.

Mr. Lincoln was, in the best sense of the expression, an industrious man. Whatever he examined, he examined carefully and thoroughly. His patience was unlimited. He listened attentively to advice, though it is probable that he

seldom asked it. For nearly fifty years before he entered upon the duties of President he had relied upon himself; and it is said that in the practice of his profession he never sought opinions or suggestions from his brethren, except as they were associated with him in particular causes. He had the acuteness of the lawyer and the fairness of the judge. The case must be intricate indeed which he did not easily analyze so as to distinguish and estimate whatever was meritorious or otherwise in it. He saw also through the motives of men. He easily fathomed those around him, and acted in the end as though he understood their dispositions towards himself.

He appeared to possess an intuitive knowledge of the opinions and purposes of the people. His sense of justice was exact, and if he ever failed to be guided by it, the departure was due to the kindness of his nature, which always prompted him to look with the compassion of a parent upon the unfortunate,—the guilty as well as the innocent. He was cautious in forming opinions, and disinclined to disclose his purposes until the moment of action arrived. He examined every subject of importance with conscientious care; his conclusions were formed under a solemn sense of duty; and while that sense of duty remained he was firm in resisting all counter influences. In unimportant matters, not involving principles or the character of his public policy, he yielded readily to the wishes of those around him; and thus they who knew him or heard of him in these relations only were misled as to his true character.

No magistrate or ruler ever labored more zealously to place his measures and policy upon the sure foundation of

right; and no magistrate or ruler ever adhered to his measures and policy with more firmness, as long as he felt sure of the foundation. His last public address is a memorable illustration of these traits of character.

The charmed cord by which he attached all to him who enjoyed his acquaintance even in the slightest degree, was the absence of all pretension in manners, conversation or personal appearance. This was not humility, either real or assumed; but it was due to an innate and ever present consciousness of the equality of men. He accorded to every one who approached him, whatever his business or station in life, such hearing and attention as circumstances permitted. For himself he asked nothing of the nature of personal consideration. In the multiplicity of his cares, in his daily attention to cases touching the reputation and rights of humble and unknown men, in the patience with which he listened to the narratives of heart-broken women, whose husbands, or sons, or brothers had fallen under arrest or into disgrace in the military or naval service of the country, he was indeed the servant and the friend of all.

The inexorable rules of military discipline were sometimes disregarded by him; he sought to make an open way for justice through the forms and technicalities of courts martial, bureaus and departments; and it is not unlikely that the public service may have received detriment occasionally by the too free use of the power to pardon and to restore. But the nation could well afford the indulgence of his over-kind nature in these particulars, for by this kindness of nature he drew the people to him, and thus opinions

were harmonized, the republic was strengthened, and the power of its enemies sensibly diminished.

Mr. Lincoln never despaired of the republic. During the dark days of July, August, and September, 1862, he was not dismayed by the disasters which befel our arms. His confidence was not in our military strength alone; he looked to the Lord of Hosts for the final delivery of the people.

Following this attempt to analyze Mr. Lincoln's intellectual and moral character, it remains to be said, that neither this analysis nor the statements with which it is connected, furnish any just idea of the man. He was more, he was greater, he was wiser, he was better than the ideal man which we should be authorized to create from the qualities disclosed by the analysis. And so possibly there will ever remain an apparent dissimilitude between the appreciable individual qualities of the man and the man himself.

Mr. Lincoln was a wise man, but he had not the wisdom of the ancient philosophers, who declared it to be the knowledge of things both divine and human, together with the causes on which they depend; but he was rather an illustration of the proverb of Solomon:—"The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom."

Mr. Lincoln must ever be named among the great personages of history. He will be contrasted rather than compared with those with whom he is thus to be associated; and when compared with any, he is most likely to be compared with the Father of his Country. If this be so, then his rank is already fixed and secure. In many particulars he differs from other great men. When his important public services

began he was more than fifty years of age, while Cromwell was only forty years old when called from retirement, and most eminent men in civil and military life have been distinguished at an earlier age. He had no military experience or military fame. He was taken from private life and advanced to the Presidency upon a pure question or declaration of public policy—the non-extension of slavery. He entered upon his great office in the presence of assassins and traitors, and from that day to the day of his death he dwelt in their presence and faithfully performed his duties. He conducted the affairs of the republic in the most perilous of times. In the short period of four years he called three millions of men into the military service of his country. During his administration a rebellion, in which eleven States and six millions of people were involved, was effectually overthrown. But the great act which secures to his name all the immortality which earth can bestow, is the Proclamation of Emancipation. The knowledge of that deed can never die. On this continent it will be associated with the Declaration of Independence, and with that alone. One made a nation independent, the other made a race free.

There are four million of people in this country who now regard Abraham Lincoln as their deliverer from bondage, and whose posterity, through all the coming centuries, will render tribute of praise to his name and memory. But his fame in connection with the Proclamation of Emancipation will not be left to the care of those who have been the recipients of the boon of freedom. The white people of the South will yet rejoice in the knowledge of their own deliverance through this gift to the now despised colored man.

And finally, the people of the United States, of the American continent, together with the whole family of civilized man, shall join in honors to the memory of him who freed a race and saved a nation.

What fame that is human merely can be more secure? What glory that is of earth can be more enduring? What deed for good can be more wide spread?

The knowledge and influence of the great act of his life will extend to every continent and to all races. It will advance with civilization into Africa; it will shake and finally overthrow slavery in the dominions of Spain and in the Empire of Brazil; and at last, in that it saved a republic and perpetuated a free representative government as an example and model for mankind, it will undermine the monarchical, aristocratic and despotic institutions of Europe and Asia.

What fame that is human merely *can be more secure*? What glory that is of earth *can be more enduring*? What deed for good *can be more wide spread*?

Yet this great act of his life rested on a foundation on which all may stand. In the place where he was, he did that which, in his judgment, duty to his country and to his God required. This is indeed his highest praise, and the only eulogy that his life demands.

That he had greater opportunities than other men was his responsibility and burden; that he used his great opportunities for the preservation of his country and the relief of the oppressed is his own glory.

Had Mr. Lincoln been permitted to reach the age attained by Jefferson and Adams, his death would have produced a profound impression upon his countrymen.

Had he now in the opening months of his second administration fallen by accident or yielded to disease, the nation would have been bowed down in inexpressible grief. Every loyal heart would have been burdened with a weight of sorrow, and every loyal household would have felt as though a place had been made vacant at its own hearth-stone.

That he has now fallen by the hand of an assassin is in itself a horror too appalling for contemplation. Had the deed been committed in ancient Greece or Rome we could not now read the historian's record without a shudder and a tear. All those qualities in the illustrious victim which we cherish were spurs ever goading the conspirators on to the consummation of their crime.

His love of country and of liberty, his devotion to duty, his firmness and persistency in the right, his kindness of heart and his spirit of mercy were all reasons or inducements influencing the purposes of the conspirators. Neither greatness nor goodness was a shield. Had he been greater and better and wiser than he was his fate would have been the same.

In this hour of calamity let not the thirst for vengeance take possession of our souls. But justice should be done. The circle of conspirators is already broken and entered by the officers of the law, and mankind will finally be permitted to see who were the authors and who the perpetrators of this great crime. For the members of this circle, whether it be small or large, and whomsoever it may

include, there should be neither compassion nor mercy, but justice and only justice. Judged as men judge, this crime is too great for pardon. The criminals can find no protection or harbor in any civilized country. Let the government pursue them with its full power until the last one disappears from earth. Vex every sea, visit every island, traverse every continent, let there be no abiding place for these criminals between the Arctic seas and the Antarctic pole.

This justice demands as she sits in judgment upon this unparalleled crime.

One duty and one consolation remain. He who destroyed slavery was himself by slavery destroyed. Whoever the assassin, and however numerous the conspirators, love of slavery was the evil spirit which had entered into these men and taken possession of them. Slavery is the source and fountain of the crime, and all they who have given their support to slavery are in some degree responsible for the awful deed. Let, then, the nation purify itself from this the foulest of sins. And this is our duty.

In the Providence of God, Mr. Lincoln was permitted to do more than any other man of this century for his country, for liberty, and for mankind. Mr. Lincoln is dead, but the nation lives, and the Providence of God ever continues. No single life was ever yet essential to the life of a nation. This is our consolation and ground for confidence in the future.

