

Lincoln, The American

by

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Governor Frank O. Lowden of Illinois delivered the following address before the Middlesex Club at the Hotel Somerset in Boston, Mass., Wednesday evening February 12, 1919:

Principles rather than policies appealed to Abraham Lincoln. All great questions seemed to him to involve some moral quality. It was his habit, therefore, to resolve them into their simple fundamentals. It thus happens that many of his words are as apt and forceful to-day as when they were first spoken by him. Your Club has recognized this fact and has made "Lincoln, the American," the theme of the evening. In harmony with this thought, I shall try to put before you some of the things for which Lincoln stood, which directly apply, as it seems to me, to the grave problems with which we and all the world with us are now confronted.

A hundred and ten years ago to-day, two men were born. Both have been dust for many years. Yet each played a large part in the Great World War that we hope has reached its close. These men were Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln. Darwin devoted his life to the study of material things. In that world in which he lived he found heredity and environment to be the controlling facts. Out of his study came the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. The savants of Germany made that doctrine the corner-stone of a new philosophy which they called Kultur.

According to Kultur, the world belonged to the strong and to the strong alone. Might was right, and the world was in the relentless grip of physical force. Justice, gentleness, righteousness were words invented by the weak to protect themselves against the strong. To pity a foe was weakness; to spare him was a crime. Kultur was a denial of the moral law; was a blind faith in the power of the laws of life which Darwin had declared.

On the same day, in a cabin in Kentucky, Abraham Lincoln was born. If heredity and environment had been all there was in human life, we never should have heard his name. While Darwin delved in rocks to find vanished forms of life, Lincoln studied men. He learned to know men. By them his sympathies were quickened; the moral depths of his being were stirred; the right and wrong of human conduct engaged his deepest thought. Just as the laws of physical being unfolded under the eye of the great scientist, so the laws of the moral universe disclosed themselves to the great man. It was said that Darwin

could take a single bone of some extinct and unknown animal and reconstruct that animal perfectly. Lincoln at the same time could take a single wrong to society and reconstruct society, to the everlasting benefit of all. Lincoln never read *The Origin of Species*, but he knew that, under the moral law, an injury by a superior race to an inferior reacted upon itself. He said—"This is a world of compensation and he who would be no slave must consent to have no slave. And those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves and under a just God cannot long retain it." Unconsciously, Lincoln became the interpreter of the moral laws of society, just as Darwin became the interpreter of the physical laws of life. Therefore, to Lincoln all men had the inalienable right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Lincoln was as much at home amidst the play of moral and spiritual forces as was Darwin in the realm of mere matter. It was this moral grandeur to which Lincoln attained that made him the wisest of all men. For, after all, wisdom is largely a product of character. Men may be intellectually brilliant, indeed brilliant beyond compare, and yet be utterly lacking in wisdom. Where other men had views, Lincoln had convictions. Convictions come from the heart and not from the brain. And so if there comes a question of human liberty, of human rights, one may turn to Lincoln for an answer without inquiring as to the particular year in which he wrote. There is a perfect harmony running through all his utterances.

It is not strange that as Kultur was partially founded upon the doctrine of Darwin, so the Allies found their chief inspiration in the life of Abraham Lincoln. For this great contest was a war between the material forces of the world, upon the one hand, and the spiritual forces on the other. Where the Central Empires found comfort in *The Origin of Species*, the statesmen of England and France, and of Italy and the United States read the Gettysburg speech and the Second Inaugural, and so they renewed their faith and refreshed their courage.

Darwin and Lincoln! Darwin announcing the survival of the strong! Lincoln declaring that when being mounted up to man, love also came into the universe to shield the weak! Lincoln insisting that when the laws of the physical universe and of the moral universe clash, those of the moral universe will prevail! Thank God, our soldiers, on a score of immortal battlefields in the last two years, have proven that Lincoln was right. The victory which we celebrate is the victory of spiritual forces over the things of earth.

Lincoln truly served mankind because he loved mankind. Genuine service must always spring from the promptings of the heart, and is never a product of the will alone. It was your own poet Lowell who said:

“How beautiful to see
 Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
 Who loved his charge, but never loved to lead.”

And so he couldn't help giving his tenderest thought to the working man. He cared for him because he cared for all men. All are familiar with his significant saying that the Lord loves plain people because He made so many of them.

With reference to the age-old question of labor and capital, he declared—“Labor 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. Labor is the superior of capital and deserves much the highest consideration.” This is but another way of saying that society should chiefly concern itself with the lot in life of the average man. And this is but saying, in another form, that Lincoln was a lover of humanity. The Declaration of Independence, to which, again and again, he turned in his thinking, included not only the right to life and liberty, but the right to the pursuit of happiness as well. And it is interesting to note that though Lincoln emphasized the right to liberty—for slavery was the dominant issue at the time—he never referred to the Declaration, so far as I can find, without coupling with the right to liberty, the right to the pursuit of happiness. Life means much; liberty means much; but both fail unless life can be lived and liberty enjoyed under conditions of well-being. Any form of government is but a means to an end, and that end is the happiness of the individual. I am sure that in our almost a century and a half of existence, since that great day of Independence, more men have lived happy lives in our country and under our form of government than in any other in all the history of the world.

But the happiness and well-being of the average man and woman must be steadily advanced if our institutions are to endure. The economists may explain, the statesmen may excuse our failure to accomplish this, but the fact remains that our civilization will fail if the well-being of the men and women and children of America shall not continuously improve.

This cannot be, however, in my opinion, if we destroy private initiative in industry. For every invention, for every improved process made under the stimulus of private initiative, though the inventor may profit, society profits immeasurably more. A steadily reducing amount of human labor is all the time required to produce the necessities of life. If we shall abandon the ancient landmarks and substitute for private initiative and private industry a socialistic state, the progress of mankind will be arrested and retrogression will set in. Again Lincoln speaks to us: it is a message for to-day—“The legitimate object of gov-

ernment is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all or cannot so well do for themselves in their separate and individual capacities. In all that the people can individually do as well for themselves, government ought not to interfere." He also warns us—"let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

Lincoln was above all a great American. Indeed, it was that same poet of yours, whom I have already quoted, who said of him—"new birth of our new soil, the first American."

All his life he hated slavery, but he loved his country more. He accepted battle not to free the slave but to save the Union. With sad heart, but with steadfast courage, he faced the greatest war the world had ever seen to keep the flag of his country—and not of the world—flying in the sky.

There are those who believe they can see somewhere high in the sky a shadowy banner, upon which is written the word "internationalism." To some this far-away flag seems white and to others red. They believe, that this flag is to supersede the flag of all the nations of the earth. That time may come, but it will come only when men shall cease to love their own, when they shall care for others' families equally with their own. In the meantime we can serve humanity best by serving our own country first.

Lincoln said: "I do not mean to say that this general government is charged with the duty of redressing or preventing all the wrongs in the world; but I do think that it is charged with preventing and redressing all wrongs which are wrongs to itself." These words might indicate that Lincoln was not interested in humanity beyond our own borders. This is not so. All through his writings runs the thought that our cause was the cause of humanity. In his speech at Gettysburg, he did not say—"Let us highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish" *from the United States*, but "from the earth." His vision circled all the globe. His great heart was beating in sympathy with mankind everywhere. But he knew that the surest way to help the world was to cherish our priceless heritage at home. He knew that if we could preserve intact the liberties and institutions which we called our own, that was the greatest service we could render to mankind.

How well he wrought I doubt if even he himself could fully understand. The condition of mankind the world over has been constantly improving, due to our influence and our example. The American Republic has been an inspiration to the lovers of liberty everywhere. It is

the last and best hope of the world and he who would imperil its future by excess of love for other peoples and other lands is recreant not only to his country, but to mankind everywhere. The Republic, during its almost a century and a half of existence, has had a mighty influence throughout the world. Its power has come from its success as a self-governing nation. Our influence has run around the globe because we have contented ourselves with being an exemplar to, rather than a ruler of mankind.

Lincoln did preserve the Union and free the slaves. That Nation which he saved had grown so powerful in a little more than fifty years that it was able, in the supreme crisis of civilization, to turn the tide of the great world conflict. And as he prayed, so now we may have faith to believe that "government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish *from the earth.*"

