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LINCOLN MEMORIAL ADDRESS



SPEECH

OF

HON. BURNETT M. CHIPERFIELD

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 12, 1917

*With sincere regards
B M Chiperfield*

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Many years have come and gone since the Earth last saw the beloved form of the great Emancipator.

Although now they almost equal in number the allotted span of the life of a man, not a single laurel that was placed upon his brow by the loving hands of a grateful people has been withered or faded under the destroying hand of time.

The passage of the years has but added to their freshness and luster, and his memory has become the more fixed and established, until today we again gather in reverence, to do homage to the deeds and achievements of the Nation's greatest—Abraham Lincoln.

In the state from which I come, as well as in the other commonwealths of the nation, his greatness is not forgotten, nor are the deeds which he performed lost to remembrance, nor is their glory lessened and though he has long since passed to the glorious company of the immortals, yet in truth he now liveth and speaks, wherever the thought of liberty finds lodgment in the mind of man.

As the gray twilight brings the day to a close, on the broad prairies of Illinois, mothers draw their little ones to their knees, and tell in tones of affection o'er and o'er again the entrancing story of the life of this great man. And as the tale holds the youthful listeners spellbound, she does not dwell on the battles of years gone by, but speaks she of his humble origin; of the devoted mother who guided his childish steps; of the struggling youth; the sturdy and determined manhood; and the just and loving heart that found vast expression in the beneficent life that gave to us a most

precious legacy—the memory of the greatest and most loved man since the days of the Saviour of the world—the memory of the humble rail splitter of the prairies of Illinois.

Others may speak of Lincoln the leader, the statesman, the President, but I speak this day of Lincoln the humane, of Lincoln the man, and the life that has endeared him to all liberty loving citizens of the world.

At this day we cannot understand the severity of the struggles by which he rose, or the bleak barrenness of his life, which he describes as “The short and simple annals of the poor.” In after years he could not bear to speak of those days and so far as his words are concerned they are a sealed book.

In all the length and breadth of the land today, there is not poverty such as he knew. It is not accurate for men to say that his life was the common lot of the sturdy pioneer of those days for this is not correct.

Why, I cannot tell, but so it is, that when a great work in the affairs of nations is to be accomplished and a great man required, the early scenes of his life are almost invariably laid amidst the humblest surroundings, and in homes where love must supply the greater part of the needs of childhood days. It was so with Gideon, David, Luther, Garfield, Webster, Grant, Edison and many others, and so it was, although to a much greater degree with Lincoln.

Reared in a cabin that was inferior to the shelter of the animals on the farm, housed in a structure that was for a long time without windows, doors or a floor and that was not even enclosed on all four of its sides, here his early years were spent. The furnishings meager and cruelly crude were hardly worthy of the name; his resting place was a bed of leaves laid upon a rude support of poles. Here dwelt and developed the indomitable spirit of the lad, who, while his heart

was oftentimes saddened though not embittered by the privations he experienced and the hardships he endured, suffered not his courage to fail.

Here it was that he learned the vast sympathy and the broad affection, for his fellow-man, that a mansion or a palace does not seem to favor or create.

The church wisely reverences the humble cradle and abode of the Saviour, and the American people find inspiration in the life of the youth who, like the chrysalis, outgrows his humble surroundings and emerges triumphant with a character glorious and beautiful.

And so with the lad of poverty, he triumphed, until at his death the world stood silent and the monarchs of the earth bowed their heads in grief and laid their tributes upon his bier as he made his last journey, silent and still, by night and by day, through the unbroken ranks of sorrowing citizens, to the old home, in the heart of Illinois, where now his sacred dust reposes, a precious trust of the people of that State.

Between the humble home and the last imposing spectacle lay a life of love, devotion and service. In it all is not found one day of selfish ease or idle self-indulgence. No anchorite ever lived more humbly or toiled more vigorously to attain the goal, that was to be his.

To me it is a delight and a privilege to trace in imagination his triumphant, though weary steps.

Love and service—attended with the highest devotion to duty marked his course. His guide and counsellor in those days of privation was a wonderful mother, whom he loved with all the devotion of his boyish heart and of whom he said: "All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." When the summons came to the rude hut, and called her from earth away, it left the lad bereft and alone, and none could bring him comfort.

It was the first staggering blow to a life that already well knew sorrow.

Father and son with their own hands hewed out the rude casket, and winding her in her humble shroud, they laid her away forever from the sight of man, to await that glorious day of awakening when instead of one of the humblest of the earth, she would be welcomed to the life beyond as the heroic mother of the world's noblest.

Denoting the steadfastness of his devotion and purpose and the strength of his affection, the lad grieved day by day because no words of consolation and benediction had been spoken over the last resting place of his loved one, until learning that a man of God was at a distant point, months afterward, he trudged his weary way over hill and dale and through the lonely forest that the mother might have Christian burial, and gladly brought to her grave a holy man to perform the last rites and there speak the words of comfort and peace.

As the Virgin mother of God is remembered by the faithful, so is lovingly adored by the people of the land, the mother of Abraham Lincoln, and to all mothers who toil and struggle in sacrifice, through poverty and hardship, that their children may start the world aright, she stands in their vision as a patron saint, a guiding light and a glorious inspiration.

The struggles of his boyhood days and their biting poverty left a melancholy impress on his mind and soul.

It gave to him, for his entire lifetime, the sensitive heart of a child.

He could see no wrong done, or hurt come to any living thing without himself being hurt.

He sorrowed with the sorrowful and his tears fell with those who had been wounded and broken on the march of life.

His soul responded to the sufferings of the world.

Through his bitter experiences no man could better understand than he, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, and this sympathetic comprehension animated and guided his every act.

In all the record of his life, no mean deed is written and in the story of his career as orally preserved by tradition in the state from which I come, there does not remain even the suggestion that he was capable of a selfish or unworthy act.

As only a starved soul could yearn, he desired affection and when this was given to him by Anne Rutledge it was returned with an ardor that was great. Many say that Anne Rutledge is a myth. I have visited her grave near the town of Old Salem, where it is said that after her death, Lincoln came often in sadness and would not be consoled. It is repeated that at one of these times, he said that the true inscription for her resting place should be "Here lies the body of Anne Rutledge and the heart of Abraham Lincoln."

Ofttimes he was oppressed with grief and for days he would seem to be crushed by it. At such a time he once said, "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were distributed among the whole human family there would not be a cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forbode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better it seems to me."

With his sensitive nature he sought the love of those with whom he was brought in contact. Their esteem and good opinion sustained, encouraged and supported him. Without it he was cast down and disheartened. His reward—and the only one he sought—was the approval of his countrymen. And in later years the knowledge that he was at variance with a great section of the land, caused him the most poignant grief.

It is worthy of much comment that although Lincoln as he states—had the advantage of only six months of school, and no opportunity for what is sometimes called higher education, that he was a man of great and profound knowledge.

Perhaps not widely versed in the details of the arts or sciences, yet he knew men. He knew their thoughts and minds and souls and the motives which animated them. He knew their strength and their weakness. He was brother and father to all mankind and knew their sorrows and their trials. To them he could speak in simple words that touched their deepest sensibilities and could play upon the chords of their emotion in language plain it is true, but with words that lived and breathed; in language that stands to this day as an unparalleled example of literary style.

If you ask where he attained this power the answer, it seems to me, is easy to give.

He and his forbears were born amid surroundings where life was stern and where each day was an actual struggle for existence.

Under these conditions speech was as plain as the method of life. There they employed the good old Anglo-Saxon of a century past.

They stripped from their meagre vocabulary all effete and soft words and left remaining only those that were strong and vigorous and of these they did not employ many.

The Bible was almost the only book and its influence upon their speech was marked. Lincoln used words that were dynamic in their vigor. The addition of a syllable to a sentence was to him a matter of profligacy.

Each phrase was cut to the last degree and thought was given expression in sentences that were strong, direct and filled with meaning.

Lincoln used the monosyllable whenever possible, and

his sentences oftentimes were almost entirely made up of these elementary words. When he spoke to the people in these simple terms they listened to him gladly as they did in days of yore to the Man of Galilee, whose words were also plain and touched the hearts of all.

In this simple style Lincoln said:

“I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light I have. I must stand with anybody that stands right; stand with him while he is right and part with him when he is wrong.”

And so again they were employed by him in making this prediction.

“The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battle field and every patriot grave to every living heart and hearth stone, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched as they will surely be by the better angels of our nature.”

And it was in these same words of common speech that he astonished and charmed the world when, in their marvellous beauty he paid his tribute on the field of Gettysburg, to the men of the land who had given their lives that the nation might live forever.¹

In all of his preparation for his life work, he was thorough and painstaking to the last degree. One day he was confronted with the word “Demonstrate.” Asking himself what it was to demonstrate, he went to his dictionary and saw that its meaning was “to make clear.” He asked himself the question, if he could demonstrate and “make clear” and his answer was that he could not. Thereupon he laid aside the study of law, upon which he had commenced some months before, and took up the study of Euclid, and

¹This famous speech consisted of about 300 words. Of these, 204 were words of one syllable.

did not again return to the law until he had mastered the first five books of Euclid's great work.

So it was in all his acts.

Thoroughness was his rule and upon this solid basis did he build his life.

The way that Lincoln traversed in public life was not an easy one. Probably no man who ever attained great prominence has tasted as bitterly of defeat as did he.

In 1832 he was defeated for a seat in the Legislature of Illinois.

In 1848 he was defeated for renomination to Congress, to his great discouragement.

It then seemed to him, and so he said, that he believed that his public career was forever ended and that there was no further public service for him.

In 1849, he was a candidate for Commissioner of the General Land Office, but was defeated because Daniel Webster cast his influence in favor of another candidate.

In 1854 he was a candidate for United States Senator, but after a time withdrew in favor of Judge Trumbull.

In 1856 he was a candidate for Vice-President, but was not named by the convention.

At that time he said:

"I have the cottage at Springfield and about \$8,000 in money. If they make me Vice-President with Seward, as some say they will, I hope I shall be able to increase it to \$20,000 and that is as much as any man ought to want."

In 1858, he was a candidate for the Senate of the United States, but was defeated by Judge Douglas, although he carried the popular vote of the State by 4,000.

His was a brave and indomitable heart.

He was not dismayed or crushed by these successive defeats, although his campaigns were made at a great sacrifice.

Lincoln was a comparatively poor man and just what the sacrifices were can best be told in his own words to the Republican State Committee of Illinois when he was told by them that there was no money to pay outstanding bills.

He wrote the committee as follows:

“Yours of the 15th is just received. I wrote you the same day. As to the pecuniary matter, I am willing to pay according to my ability, but I am the poorest hand living to get others to pay. I have been on expense so long without earning anything that I am absolutely without money now for even household purposes. Still, if you can put up \$250 for me toward discharging the debt of the committee, I will allow it when you and I settle the private matter between us. This, with what I have already paid, and with an outstanding note of mine, will exceed my subscription of \$500. This, too, is exclusive of my ordinary expenses during the campaign, all which, being added to my loss of time and business, bears pretty heavily on one no better off in world’s goods than I, but, as I had the post of honor, it is not for me to be over nice. You are feeling badly, ‘And this too shall pass away, never fear.’ ”

And after the long struggle came the great victory and he sat in the seat of the mighty.

But this did not change a single fiber of his kindly nature. The mountain crest meant no more to him than the lowly valley.

When power came and greatness was his, he wore his honors modestly, without arrogance or ostentation, and humility and kindness marked his course.

He was to the nation Father Abraham, and with

mekness and might, affection and care, he led his children through the valley of the shadow, safely into the fold of peace and tranquillity.

No greater tribute can be paid to the wisdom and worth of the opinion of Lincoln than is paid today by those who use him and his words as the final and supreme argument in favor of some proposed plan or movement.

It is demonstration to the minds of many, when it can be said, "Lincoln favored these things."

But while the tribute is great the name of Lincoln is not always worthily employed.

Those who seek to destroy and break down the vital principles of our Government do not hesitate to invoke his name, as an aid in the accomplishment of that purpose.

By the frenzied orator of the curb, who inveighs against all government, his auditors are told that Lincoln stood for absolute freedom of thought and action and that he had no regard for the limitations of law.

They are not told, however, that Lincoln stood for freedom of speech and action, *only under the Constitution and the law*. They are not told that in speaking of this freedom of speech he said:

"Yes, we will speak for freedom and against slavery as long as the Constitution of our country guarantees free speech, until everywhere in this wide land the sun shall shine and the rain shall fall and the winds shall blow upon no man who goes forth to unrequited toil."

The things for which he stood and which he attempted to do were *in the name of the Constitution*, and to this instrument—as he construed it—he was wholly devoted.

The reckless and hair-brained experiment in government possessed no attraction for him, nor was he inclined to adopt a plan merely because it was new and untried, but going hand in hand with this conservatism was the ever-present desire to so adapt the Constitution that it would respond to the changing needs and requirements of the people.

While regarding with reverence the precedents of the past, he also sought to be acutely conscious of, and responsive to, the economic demands of the present.

As he was intensely human in all his aspects of life, so did he make a sympathetic and human interpretation of the Constitution, where the rights of men were involved, which, while not always strict or entirely logical, still made for the uplifting and the welfare of the people of the land.

With such a construction of the Constitution of the United States, by those in power, the people of the nation will not quarrel. It is radical changes in our forms of government, not authorized by the Constitution, that will be met with condemnation.

Those who find comfort in the denial of a God, or of a Supreme Being frequently claim Lincoln as one who shared their views and approved their lack of belief.

No greater or more foul slander could be uttered against this man.

Lincoln walked hand in hand with God for many years before his death, and there is no act of his life that warrants the claims so advanced.

It may be that he could not define a particular creed that entirely and closely fitted his views, but his steadfast belief in a God and His divine power to guide and shape the affairs of men was touching.

There is hardly an utterance of Lincoln, that has been preserved, that does not speak of this belief and faith.

On one occasion, early in life, when his father was about to pass away Lincoln wrote this letter:

“I sincerely hope father may recover his health, but, in all events tell him to remember to call upon and confide in our great and good and merciful Maker, who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow and numbers the hairs of our heads, and he will not forget the dying man who puts his trust in Him. Say to him that if we could meet now it is doubtful whether it would be more painful than pleasant, but that if it be his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before, and where the rest of us, through the help of God, hope ere long to join them.”

His state papers are filled with appeals to God and the statement of his belief in a Supreme Being, and his reliance upon His aid and assistance.

His trusting faith was like that of a little child who confidently puts his hand in that of a loving Father and walks the path with a sublime trust and without fear.

One cannot fail but be impressed with the startling fact that the entire achievement of the life of Abraham Lincoln, that has caused the generations to remember him, were accomplished and performed in barely fifteen hundred days.

If, from his life were taken the actions and deeds embraced in those days his name would barely be known outside of the counties of Illinois, where his activities had been.

When defeated for the Senate by Douglas, it seemed to the doubting many, that his career was done—

but the defeats of the past were, to him, only the foundations on which he builded his future triumph.

His trials and struggles and sorrows had refined his soul until the dross was gone and out of his bitter experience came forth a Man—apparently called of God—to guide the people of the land, both North and South, out of the horrors of war to the place where, re-dedicated by the blood of a hundred fields, they stood a united and an invincible people.

One lesson taught by Lincoln that may be helpful at the present day was his determination to stand steadfast before the Nations of the World for the rights of America.

Although opposed by the bravest of the brave at home, he did not fail to courageously speak for the dignity of the country when it was assailed from abroad, and like our own President in the crisis of today, he spoke in the name of our Nation for the preservation of its rights.

The poet has told in inspiring lines of the response, that the people of the land will make to such an appeal, and it was no more true when penned than it is today.

This whole nation will respond in arms, and bear any hardship that may be imposed, no matter how severe, whenever a wrong that involves a national principle is inflicted by a foreign foe.

If the call to arms should come—which God forbid—truly it can be said:

Up the hillside, down the glen,
Rouse the sleeping citizen:
Summon out the might of men:

Like a lion growling low,
Like a night storm rising slow,
Like the tread of unseen foe.

It is coming—it is nigh:
Stand your homes and altars by;
On your own free thresholds die.

Clang the bells in all your spires;
On the gray hills of your sires
Fling to Heaven your signal fires.

O, for God and duty stand,
Heart to heart and hand to hand,
Round the old graves of the land.

Whoso shrinks or falters now,
Whoso to the yoke would bow,
Brand the craven on his brow.

Freedom's soil hath only place
For a free and fearless race—
None for traitors false and base.

Perish party, perish clan:
Strike together while ye can,
Like the arm of one strong man.

How marvelously like the ministry of the Saviour of the world were the beneficent years of this great leader of men.

How like the passion of the Son of God was the martyrdom which he suffered, that all men might be free, and better yet be free with the Nation united.

For him the zenith of his career had been reached, and, like Moses, he stood upon the height and viewed the land regenerated, but which he might not enter—and then, on Good Friday, the day that the Christian world was sorrowfully observing the crucifixion of the Christ, God took him, even though the evening of his life had not yet come, for his task was done.

Yea, he was taken, if it can be so said of the death of the clay that formed his body, but there was left

the undying spirit of this great man, to lead and protect the people of this Nation, by the wisdom he displayed, for many generations to come.

Great men have come and gone since Lincoln fell, and many have attained high places in the Nation, but it is rarely that one, when his power was at the greatest, attained the wonderful influence over the people of the land, that has been manifested, and still continues to be manifested, until this day, by the memory of Abraham Lincoln.

That influence has guided the nation when the hand of living man has faltered, for being dead, yet he speaketh to the souls of men, with power and conviction.

And so, today, as a Representative of the State of Illinois, I pay an humble tribute to the life and work of her great son.

Into his hands they gave all that was best and dearest.

To him they entrusted the sacred honor of the Nation and never did he fail that trust.

In his death they honor him and preserve his memory.

In the Hall of Representatives at Springfield only two portraits are found.

On the one hand is that of Douglas, who in the hour of stress, clasped hands with his old-time political opponent and who held up the arms of Lincoln as Aaron did, of old.

The place of Douglas is secure in the affections of the people of the Prairie State.

From the other side of the Hall, looks down the towering form of Abraham Lincoln and there the people of the State come and stand with tearful eyes, gazing into the kindly face of this great man, and as they depart they take away an inspiration to better and more fully discharge the duties of citizenship.

Our State has taken his ashes and his fame and his memory to its heart.

One it will guard and the others it will proclaim until the Father of Waters no longer runs to the sea and until time is no more.

Not without thy wondrous story,
Illinois, Illinois,
Can be writ the Nation's glory,
Illinois, Illinois,
On the record of thy years,
Abram Lincoln's name appears,
Grant and Logan and our tears,
Illinois.

In one of the most beautiful parks, in the City of Chicago, stands a wonderful monument, erected to commemorate the life of this, one of the world's greatest men.

It is builded beside the great inland sea, whose ceaseless surf sounds a requiem by night and by day.

The first rays of the rising sun rests upon it in rosy salutation, and here again they pause in benediction ere the night closes down.

To this spot the people come as they might to a shrine of freedom.

Here they pause and linger.

Here gather the poor of whom Lincoln said, "God must have loved them or else He would not have made so many of them."

At the base of the statue the little children play.

Here kings and princes and rulers have sent their wreaths and floral tributes to be laid at the feet of the imposing figure that, motionless and silent, ever looks toward the great city.

In loving remembrance this memorial has been

built, by the people of Illinois, to honor its first citizen, Abraham Lincoln, the martyred President.

On its base, chiseled deep into the lasting granite, is one of the greatest sentences in the English language and from its perusal we can gain the secret of the power and see the faith that animated Lincoln and gave him the courage to perform his task.

There may be found a motto that any man can live by, and that can be adopted by a nation in its hour of need.

These are his words—noble and courageous :

“Let us have faith to believe that right makes might and firm in that conviction, let us to the end dare to do our duty as God gives us to see it.”

Words of mine can add nothing to the veneration in which this wonderful character is held by the people of the land, both North and South.

He is loved and revered and his fame grows more secure as the generations pass.

I cannot refrain, however, from adding as a far greater tribute, than any I can pay, that which was penned of Lincoln by a sweet singer.

It seems to me that it is a sublime epitomization of the character and the life of this man.

The color of the ground was in him, the red earth;
The tang and odor of the primal things—
The rectitude and patience of the rocks;
The gladness of the wind that shakes the corn:
The courage of the bird that dares the sea,
The justice of the rain that loves all leaves;
The pity of the snow that hides all scars;
The loving kindness of the wayside well;
The tolerance and equity of light that gives as freely to
The shrinking weed as to the great oak flaring to the
wind—

The grave's low hill as to the Matterhorn
That shoulders out the sky.

And so he came
From prairie cabin to the Capitol,
One fair ideal led our chieftain on.
Forevermore he burned to do his deed
With the fine stroke and gesture of a king
He built the rail pile as he built the State,
Pouring his splendid strength through every blow,
The conscience of him testing every stroke,
To make his deed the measure of a man.

So came the Captain, with his mighty heart;
And when the step of earthquake shook the house,
Wrenching the rafters from their ancient hold,
He held the ridge pole up and spiked again
The rafters of the Home. He held his place—
Held the long purpose like a growing tree—
Held on through blame and faltered not at praise
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a kingly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

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