

A LINCOLN MEMORIAL ADDRESS

Sermon by Rev. Eli McClish, D. D., Chaplain of National Soldiers
Home, California, February 4, 1917

(Scripture and Comment: Moses had been leading the children of Israel until they came in sight of the land of promise." And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephriam, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea; and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, this is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day. And Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended." Deut. 34:1-8.)

The audience joined in singing the grand old song:

Faith of our fathers! living still
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword:
O how our hearts beat high with joy
Whene'er we hear that glorious
word!

Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death!

Our fathers, chained in prisons dark,
Were still in heart and conscience
free:

How sweet would be their children's
fate,

If they, like them, could die for thee!
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death!

Faith of our fathers! we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife:
And preach thee, too, as love knows
how,

By kindly words and virtuous life:
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death!

It will be one hundred and eight years tomorrow since Abraham Lincoln was born in a little cabin in Kentucky. After some time his father moved over into Indiana, and then when he was about twenty-one, with an ox-team, he drove from Indiana over across the prairies of Illinois. He became a clerk in a store; a postmaster, carrying his mail in his hat from one neighbor to another. It was also special delivery at that time, and Abraham Lincoln delivered the letters, a great many of them. He became a captain in the Black Hawk war; then a surveyor,—a representative in the State of Illinois, finally a representative in Congress from Illinois. Then he held a great debate with Douglas. Then he was made President in 1860, carried us through the war, and when he came in sight of the land of peace and union, he just got a view of it, as Moses got a view of the promised land, and was taken from us.

I wonder how many of you can remember the locality where you were when you heard that Lincoln was killed? (Fully 200 hands went up). It went like a universal shock all over this broad land. Men and women and little children wept. Right in the

hour of victory, when the flag was fluttering and hearts were lifted in thankful praise, there came the shocking news that an assassin had shot the President to death. We have been continuing to think of him through all these years, and tomorrow we are to have a memorial service in recalling his character and career.

But I intend to talk to you today somewhat about this great character, that is being quoted by the nations of the old world. If they can get a word to encourage them in any position they take, they quote Abraham Lincoln, and feel fully justified in holding their position on his word. Why is he so revered? The first thing I think is because he had physical strength, and was able to bear the burdens that were put upon him. We did not have much athletics in college in those days. Indeed, we did not have anything scarcely except bull pen, town ball and base goal. We could run and jump and wrestle and throw and do an immense amount of heavy work with axes and mauls and mattsacks and grubbing hoes in clearing land. Abraham Lincoln had a wonderful physique. He never came in contact with a man that could handle him. It was customary in those days for the young men of the community to try out, any new young man that came into their midst. The Clary Grove boys selected their strongest young man to lay Lincoln on his back. He soon found he had met more than his match. Then the whole crowd had to pitch in and help to handle "Abe." Lincoln saw it was unfair, but laughed at it. It was sufficient to know that no one of them could do it. So he became a good fellow with those boys.

Holland said at one time that Lincoln picked up a barrel of whiskey by the chimes, lifted it up and took a mouthful of it from the bung hole, then set it down. He spit out the whiskey and said he had never taken a swallow of it in his life. It takes a good deal of strength to do that. When he was a clerk in a store a large bully came in and began to talk roughly before women who were present. Lincoln cautioned him to refrain from talking thus before the ladies. He became somewhat boisterous. When the ladies went out he commenced on Lincoln. Lincoln said: "I do not want to whip you, but if nothing will do you but a trouncing I suppose I will have to give it to you. He crushed him down and then pulled some smart weed and rubbed it in his nose and eyes and mouth until he cried like a baby. Then Lincoln got some soap and water and made him wash, and he went away as Lincoln's friend. He was a physical giant, six feet and four inches tall with bone and muscle. And it was a physical frame beginning on the soil of Kentucky, then growing among the tall timbers of Indiana, where he had a chance to grow by the poplars and oaks, and sycamore trees. Then he turned out in the prairies of Illinois, where he had a chance to broaden and expand.

Where he lived he was loved. He was called "Honest Abe." That meant something to everyone that went in the store where he worked. One day he found he had over-charged a woman six and a fourth cents and he walked two or three miles to give her back the change. When he had charge of a postoffice and the inspector came he could immediately account for every cent. He was courteous, honest, sincere,—a friend of everybody. He said it had been his aim in life never

to plant a thorn in the bosom of any human being. So his people sent him to the Illinois legislature, and he began his work among them. It was in that legislature that he quieted a man who was technical, fault finding, and afraid that something would be done that was not constitutional. We have them in literary societies, and colleges and in legislatures, who are ready to block everything. Some one asked Mr. Lincoln if he could not stop his fault finding, saying it was always in his eyes and nowhere else. One day after the man made a speech with his usual pessimism and fear that things were not constitutional, Mr. Lincoln arose and said: "That reminds me of my old neighbor near Salem. He prided himself on being a fine rifle shot. He saw a squirrel on a nearby tree. He fired at it but it did not move. Again he shot and it never stirred. His son said: 'Father, what are you doing?' His father said: 'What have you been doing with this gun?' He said: 'I have done nothing with it.' Now, this old fellow had heavy eyebrows, and a stray hair was hanging down over his eyes. As the son came out, his father pointed and said: 'Don't you see the squirrel there on the side of the limb?' The son saw nothing there, but turning to his father and looking closely, he saw on one of those hairs over his eye a very suggestive thing, and said: 'Father, it is not a squirrel on the tree, but a house on your eyebrow!'" From that time on the old constitutional fault finder was squelched. His trouble was all in his own brow.

Mr. Lincoln wanted to go to the Senate, but he withdrew in favor of another. Then he and Mr. Douglas were nominated,—he by the Republicans and Douglas by the Democrats. They held a series of seven debates beginning in the northern part of Illinois and going down as far as Galesburg. Douglas was a great debater, but in clearness of statement and pointed, practical illustration, it was generally conceded that Mr. Lincoln excelled. However, Lincoln was in the minority, and Douglas was elected. I read those speeches a few years ago simply to see if Mr. Lincoln had uttered any statement he would like to retract if he looked Douglas in the face today. There was not a word of bitterness, not an epithet, nothing like low politics. He was calm, passionless, and with a clearness of vision that brings inspiration to our own day. Douglas was adroit.

Lincoln had grown not only physically, but intellectually. He attended school only about a year. He had little or no opportunity to go. He made the newspapers and books he read, his school. He paid for what he got intellectually. He tells us that when he was a boy about the only thing that ever greatly provoked him was to hear men talk in such a way that he could hardly understand what they meant. He would go to his own room when a boy and try to say over in his own language the thoughts he had heard that day. He would walk the floor in order to take time to express himself the best possible. He studied expression in the highest sense. Then he was a reader. He read the Bible, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Aesop's Fables, and the Life of Washington until he was thoroughly familiar with them. I suppose many of his stories were helped and encouraged by his reading of Aesop's Fables.

Mr. Lincoln is sometimes reported to have told vulgar stories, by men that never had the honor of hearing him. James G. Blaine said: "Mr. Lincoln's stories had meaning to them. They were significant. They were not the retailing of double-meaning stories." They were pure and practical.

When Mr. Lincoln began the study of law he ran across the word "demonstrate." He took his dictionary. He found there was a mathematical demonstration and a moral demonstra-

tion. He did not understand the full meaning. He went home and took up the study of geometry, and said later, "I mastered the first six books before I took up a law book again. I had demonstrated every problem in the first six books. Now that I have studied Euclid and mastered them, I think I know what "demonstrate" is, and I will go on and study law." You will not find one man in ten million who will do that much work for the result. Afterward when Lincoln was a candidate for President, Horace Greely and Thoreau Weed were amazed at his diction.

When Lincoln was speaking in New England a professor of rhetoric of Yale college followed him around, listening to his speeches, and then would go back to lecture to the students on the power of Lincoln as a public speaker. It was large because this man had advanced step by step by actual hard work in intellectual training. One day he went into the war department. The adjutant general showed him a record of a widow in New England who had lost five sons on the field of battle. He wrote a letter then to Mrs. Bixby, a wonderful expression of sympathy of the nation that these sons had died to save. That letter has been engrossed at Oxford University, England, as a classic of elegant diction. There is no such paper from any one on the other side—Gladstone, or Burke never wrote such a document. The London Spectator said, in speaking of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address: "This is the greatest state paper we have ever read."

He read Shakespeare. He read poem after poem, and said what impressed him most were four lines from Oliver Wendell Holmes:

"And the mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he had pressed in
their bloom,
And the names he loved to hear
Had been carved for many a year on
the tomb."

Afterwards, Holmes said, "I am the last leaf on the tree." Now this man was busy hunting out from Shakespeare and Burns, and others, their best, and then coined it anew in state papers that still live in their beauty and strength. He was marvelous in his statement of things. Some one has said: "There are three measures of men intellectually. First, there is the man who can make an argument and bring his authorities to prove it. A little higher than that is the man who makes an argument and bases it on great principles, and builds up his argument on them. And greater still is the man who grasps an idea and states it so clearly that men, when they hear it, immediately feel the truth of it. That was Abraham Lincoln's method.

How did he come to be President? There were a number of candidates, you remember. They had been grooming Mr. Seward in the east for a year and felt he was to be the next president. Other of Ohio thought they would have Chase. Others were interested in a man from Missouri. At last they met in convention. They talked it over. There was intense enthusiasm. There were perhaps ten thousand people outside the convention hall, besides those inside. They took the first ballot. Mr. Lincoln had been named by the state of Illinois about a month before at one of their conventions. They believed he had backing enough to be President on account of what he did to Douglas. When he was defeated by Douglas in the race for the Senate, he said: "I feel like a big boy that stubbed his toe. I am too big to cry, and it hurts too much to laugh." So Lincoln stayed at home and his delegates went to the convention, and there were so many friends of Lincoln around that there was a regular mob of enthusiasm. If the convention had been held in New York Seward might have been elect-

ed. At the first ballot Lincoln had 102 votes and Seward had 175 and 1-2, and the others scattered,—some for Bates from Missouri, and some for Cameron of Pennsylvania. They talked it over and there was a good deal of feeling that many men from Ohio would go to Lincoln rather than to Seward, and probably the men from Pennsylvania might go for Lincoln. They cast the second ballot and Abraham Lincoln was elected. They turned loose a pigeon that flew around over the audience, carrying its emblem of cheer. Then they produced a rail wrapped in bunting. Lincoln said he never made a rail in his life, but that here was no use of denying it.

Now, what did he do with those distinguished men?—the men from Missouri, Pennsylvania and New York? When he was elected he appointed Seward as his Secretary of State,—the man who had been his chief rival. He selected Chase as Secretary of the Treasury,—who had been another of his rivals. He selected Cameron of Pennsylvania, another rival, as Secretary of War, and he appointed his rival from Missouri as Attorney General. So he went around gathering up every man that had been his rival and said: "Come in. If your friends think you are competent to be President, then come in and help me to do the work of this great nation." Now, that was wonderfully good sense,—to hold these men right to him and to unite them in his cabinet. Afterwards, Chase became ambitious and thought he would like to be president and was put out of the treasury. Then he did his best to defeat Lincoln, but Lincoln appointed him Chief Justice of the United States,—a higher position than President, if possible. Some said: "Mr. Lincoln, don't you know that Chase has been bitterly opposed to you?" He said, "Yes, I know it, but he will make a good Chief Justice, and I am going to appoint him anyhow." There was no bitterness in his bosom.

Well, the time came after he was elected, for him to go to Washington. Lincoln said practically nothing during the winter of 1860 and 1861. He did not have the country back of him, like our President has. There are a few garrulous ones now. I notice that Senator Works entered a wail, but we would expect that from him. When Mr. Lincoln was thinking of what he could say, many asked when he would utter a policy. He was feeling of Maryland, and Tennessee, and Kentucky, and Missouri. That brilliant man—Breckenridge, was on the border. Mr. Lincoln was keeping still lest he might start some word that would cause these states to go South instead of going North, or being neutral. The newspapers raked him unmercifully because he did not utter a policy. He stood in the West then. They said: "Speak out!" He said: "Do one thing at a time, and the big thing first. The big thing is for me to be in the Presidential Chair before I tell you what I am going to do." There were threats that he would never be nominated. When he went to Washington seven states had called themselves out of the nation. In those seven states only three places were found where the flag was floating—from Fort Sumpter, Key West, and Fort Pickens. The South had taken possession of the arsenal and arms. The troops in Florida took possession of the forts there as did others in Louisiana and Ft. Jackson, and they took possession of the Mint at New Orleans with over a million dollars of the government's money in it. The troops of Arkansas had taken charge of the arsenal at Little Rock. The Rebel Flag floated over all of these. Twelve thousand Union troops were stationed at Washington. The Rebels at Washington said that to have troops quartered so near the Capital would interfere, and yet they were waiting to go out and enroll un-

der another flag. Breckenridge of Kentucky arose one day to make a speech. When he closed Colonel Baker of California stepped forward and began conservatively, yet with a burning eloquence that was never answered, as he hung the hide of that Rebel Brigadier that was staying inside the line to receive helpful information for the South. Some of our foes in the Senate stayed until ordered out.

Think of the task before Mr. Lincoln! First his keen insight was required to clearly lay before Congress the full meaning of secession. He must show that the right of one state to secede from the Union was to plant the seeds of death and destruction like a deadly cancer in the government that would allow it. In his first message he said: "In this act, discarding all else, they have forced upon the country this issue—immediate dissolution or blood; and this issue embraces more than the fate of the United States. It presents to the whole family of men the question whether a constitutional Republic, a government of the people by the same people, can, or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes. Whether discontented individuals, too few in number to control the administration according to the organic law, can always, upon the pretenses made in this case, or in any other pretenses, or arbitrarily without pretenses, break up the government, and thus practically put an end to free government upon the earth. It forces us to ask: 'Is there in all Republics, an inherent and fatal weakness? Must a government of necessity be too strong for the liberties of its people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?'"

The President concluded his message with these words, worthy of the man and the great task before him: "Having thus chosen our own course without guile, and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear, and with manly hearts."

This message clarified the atmosphere. Like a bugle note, it stirred the whole North. It arrested those who were hesitating and restored enthusiasm and order to all hearts. And they followed him steadily in victory and defeat until Lee surrendered to Grant, and every arm of Rebellion was laid down.

Note the wisdom of Lincoln in dealing with the Democrats, who were in sympathy with the South. There were war-Democrats and peace-Democrats in those days. Douglas was a noble type of the former. His speeches in the Senate and in the Legislature of Illinois in the spring of 1861 was of immeasurable value to the administration of Mr. Lincoln. A conspicuous Democrat on the other side was a distinguished citizen of Ohio, a member of Congress and a candidate in 1863 on the Democratic ticket. His copperhead speeches in his state became so detrimental to the cause of the Union that he was arrested and tried by a military commission and sentenced to imprisonment during the war in Fort Warren in Boston harbor. Of course this stirred to great intensity the feelings of his sympathizers. They claimed that his arrest was because his speeches were damaging the political prospects of the administration or the personal interests of the commanding general. This the President denied. He added, "If Mr. Vallandigham was not damaging the military power of the country, then his arrest was made on mistake of facts, which I would be glad to correct on reasonable, satisfactory evidence. I understand the resolutions sent for my consideration were passed by Mr. Vallandigham's friends in a meeting in favor of suppressing the Rebellion by military force—by armies.

Long experience has shown that

armies cannot be maintained unless desertion shall be punished by the severe penalty of death. The case requires, and the law and the Constitution sanction this punishment. Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier-boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of the wily agitator who induces him to desert. This is none the less injurious when effected by getting father or brother or friend into a public meeting and there working upon his feelings until he is persuaded to write the soldier boy that he is fighting in a bad cause, for a wicked administration of a contemptible government, too weak to arrest and punish him if he should desert. I think that in such a case to silence the agitator and to save the boy is not only constitutional, but is withal a great mercy." This argument not only touched the chords of public feeling, but appealed to the common sense of the people. The Albany committee was effectually answered.

Mr. Lincoln has disapproved the sentence of the committee for imprisonment and commuted it to one sending Mr. Vallandigham beyond our military lines to his friends in the Southern Confederacy.

Then Ohio anti-war Democrats formed a committee, eleven of whom had been members of Congress, who presented the case of Mr. Vallandigham's release and return to his home. The reply of Mr. Lincoln was as wise and felicitous and conclusive as the one to the Albany committee. He expressed a willingness to grant their request to release the agitator without asking pledge, promise or retraction from him, and with only one simple condition. That condition was that "The gentlemen of the committee themselves, representing as they do, the character and power of the Ohio Democracy, will subscribe to three propositions: First, That there is now a rebellion in the United States, the object and tendency of which is to destroy the National Union, and that in your opinion an army and navy are constitutional means for suppressing that rebellion. Second, That no one of you will do anything which in his own judgment will tend to hinder the increase or favor the decrease or lessen the efficiency of the army and navy while engaged in the effort to suppress that rebellion. And, third, That each of you will, in his sphere, do all he can to have the officers, soldiers, and seamen of the army and navy, while engaged in the effort to suppress the Rebellion, paid, fed, clad, and otherwise well provided for and supported." Duplicates of these propositions went to the committeemen that each might retain one and sign the other and return the same to Lincoln. To subscribe was to justify the arrest of Vallandigham: to refuse to subscribe was to place themselves before the people of Ohio in an attitude of hostility to the vigorous and successful conduct of the war on which the fate of the Union depended. They refused to sign and were laughed at by the public.

In the autumn of 1864, Mr. McClellan was nominated by the anti-administration Democrats. With high-sounding declarations, the platform declared the war a failure. The convention had scarcely reached home from Chicago when sweeping victories crowned the armies of the Union. Farragut sailed through the guarded entrance of Mobile Bay and captured that rebel stronghold of the South; Sherman broke through the shell of the Confederacy by capturing Atlanta, and Sheridan was on his way to the victories of Winchester and Fisher's Hill. Within two days from the hour when this peace-at-any-price convention closed, Mr. Lincoln was able to issue a proclamation of thanksgiving in all the churches for the great Union triumphs. Mr. Seward said in a public speech: "Sherman and Farragut have knocked the planks out of the Chicago platform."

These events showed the people

that the promoters of the Chicago convention were guilty of utterances that were unpatriotic and mischievous and they received at the polls the defeat they deserved.

Through these years the great Lincoln soothed and sustained by an unflinching faith in God and the people, pushed the cause of the union to the end.

To one who said, "Mr. President, I hope the Lord is on our side," he replied, "I am not interested in that, but I pray that not only I but this nation may be on the Lord's side for that is right and will prevail."

To men and a disloyal public press which misrepresented him and misrepresented his words, he said: "I do the best I know how, the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so unto the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference."

He was a type of the common virtues written in capitals. His humanness touched all men. He said his life when nominated was found in one line of Gray's Elegy, "The short and simple annals of the poor." Let Edwin Markham, our California poet, characterize him:

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 in the
wind—
To the grave's low hill as to the mat-
ter horn
That shoulders out the sky."

To the low as to the high: Great, good, honest, faithful—Abraham was the friend of every man in this world. He lived his life, and his life is an inspiration to every soldier. I sometimes wonder why he was shot. I do not know. He loved the soldiers so well. He said once, "I would gladly change places with the humblest private that stands on picket, or wraps himself in a blanket at the front, but I must bear my own responsibility." I am not sure but there was a sort of fitness, that after the work was done, that he, as a martyr, might stand up by the side of a half million men and say, "You gave your life for the Union, and I have given mine." When that bullet pierced his head there was none to help but the flag. The assassin waved his hand and said, "Thus be it to all tyrants!" A few yards away was the assassin's horse and saddle. He went on, and when nobody else would do it, that blessed old flag entangled his foot and he fell, breaking his leg, and was therefore captured. He passed from mortality to immortality and with 4,000,000 slave shackles at his feet he stands among the immortal.

(Prayer: Gracious Lord, we thank thee that it is our privilege to be associated in thought and in great purposes with one so noble who from the common soil and the cabin home worked himself up until he stands among the tallest men that ever stood in this Christian era, in breadth of intellect, in depth of heart, in calmness and sweetness of purpose. Bless us as we meditate on his life for the sake of Christ. Amen.)

Reported by Rev. E. W. Mecum.

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