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Lincoln's Birthday

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1918



Edmondson

PUBLISHED BY

AMERICAN ARMY AND NAVY Y. M. C. A.

for use in connection with the 109th Anniversary of Lincoln's
birth, which will be celebrated February 12, 1918.



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LINCOLN'S ADDRESS

at the Dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg

NOVEMBER 19, 1863

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honoured dead we may take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here 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, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE MAN AND HIS WORK.

(The following sketch is based upon an address delivered before the City Club of Philadelphia on February 12, 1917, by Franklin Spencer Edmonds, Esq., and is reprinted by permission).

No time is wasted that is spent in the study of biography, and no study of biography can be complete that does not carry with it an intimate knowledge of the life, achievements and sayings of Abraham Lincoln. I shall not attempt to go into the full story of that life, but merely to rehearse some of the well-known facts of his career.

Abraham Lincoln was born of an humble family in Hardin County, Kentucky, on February 12th., 1809. His young manhood was spent in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. He was the product of the pioneer conditions in the West. His grandfather had been killed by the Indians while at the plow. His father had made the clearing where their home was located. The house of his nativity is said at that time to have had neither door, nor floor, nor window, although later on, as the circumstances of the family improved, these luxuries were added.

His boyhood was spent in a district where there was no formal organization of society, and where only for a single winter was there anything like ordinary schooling. Yet in that stubborn kind of an environment, personality could grow. He found books, and it is said that until he was nineteen his reading had been confined to these :

Aesop's Fables,
Robinson Crusoe,
Weems' Life of Washington,
Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress,
The Bible,

A volume of the statutes of Indiana, which contained as a preliminary a copy of the Constitution of the United States and a copy of the Constitution of the State of Indiana.

In one of his campaign biographies, the biographer added Plutarch's Lives, and Lincoln sent for him and told him that his statement was not true, or rather, " It wasn't true until your biography came out, because when I saw it I at once got a copy of this work in order that I might make your statement good ".

Now, these books do not form an extensive library, but there is something there for the imagination, there is something for patriotism, there is something for the training of the legal mind, and with the aid of these books Lincoln seems to have grasped a complete philosophy of life. The hardship of early pioneer life was most strenuous. He tells the story himself of how he would come home after the day's work in the woods was done, and cipher away with a piece of charcoal on the back of a shovel, and then when he was through, he would shave it off so as to have the wood fresh again next night for the same task. We cannot imagine what this life means, for such things as these one cannot imagine without the experiencing. Yet after all his mind was growing, and that is the main thing.

Another story of his early life is typical. In the days when he was a lad, if he heard a man say anything that he could not fully understand, it fretted him. If there was an argument at home or at the country store, and a word or expression was used in familiar discourse that he could not understand, it made him angry; and he made inquiry and kept on inquiring until he felt sure he understood the meaning and logic of the statement, and he was not satisfied unless he could bound it on the north and bound it on the south and bound it on the east and bound it on the west. Whatever the thought was, he kept after it until he understood what was meant. This tendency upon his part furnishes the secret of the wonderful clarity of vision which characterizes his view of life and affairs. Later on he became the ablest spokesman of this nation in explanation of the principles of American life, because of that wonderful clearness that made him see clearly and state concisely the fundamentals of the problems of our national life.

When he was nineteen he went down the Mississippi

on a flat boat, taking a load of produce which was sold in New Orleans. There, for the first time, he came into touch with the institution of human slavery. He saw the slave market, men and women, flesh and blood, being sold at auction, and he remarked to one of his colleagues who was with him on this trip, " If ever I get a chance to hit that thing, I will hit it with all my might. "

He came back to the North with some little doubt in his own mind as to what he would try to make of himself. He had learned a little about surveying ; his Father had been a surveyor, and he had made some profit for himself out of his knowledge. For three years he served as post-master in New Salem, and that produced a slight income for him. Twice he tried the experience of a storekeeper, the second time failing through the improvidence of his partner, which left a load of debt upon him for fifteen years, — the National Debt, he jocularly called it. Out of his earnings each year he laid a certain portion aside for that debt until finally all of it was redeemed. So he attempted one thing after another, at one time planning to become a blacksmith. He served in the army in 1832, in Black Hawk's war, and was captain of his company. When the Company was paroled he lost his commission, but he went back and enlisted as a private. He did what there was to be done, with what ability he had. Finally his mind was turned toward law. He found the facilities for legal study, and about 1836 or 1837 he was admitted to practice at the bar of Illinois, and then he went to Springfield, which place he made his residence thereafter.

During that period Lincoln had become very much interested in public affairs. From 1834 to 1842 he served in the Illinois State Legislature, and twice he was the candidate of the Whigs for the Speakership of the House of Representatives. This was a considerable distinction for a young man. He was practicing law in Springfield, and very soon found himself in touch with the Anti-Slavery party in every part of the State. Even when he was under thirty years of age there were signs that Lincoln was recognized as a coming man among

the Whigs of that day. He became a candidate for Congress and was defeated the first time. In 1847 he ran again and was elected, and served one term in the House of Representatives; but with the exception of that period of two years, was a practicing lawyer during the period from 1842 to 1861, working at his profession as hard as he could to make a living, and with a constantly increasing interest, as I say, in public affairs.

As a member of the Bar, Lincoln is said to have had one of the large practices in Illinois. It was not necessarily a highly remunerative practice, not as remunerative, for instance, as that of some of the other attorneys of the day; yet it enabled him to pay his debts and make a living. There is record of at least one fee of five thousand dollars (\$5,000) which was paid to him. He was the counsel for the Illinois Central Railroad in a certain action, and when he presented his bill they refused to pay it, claiming that it was too large. He brought suit against the railroad company, and the jury gave him the verdict, and we know the bill was paid. There is also the record of the Illinois Supreme Court of Appeals showing that in most of the important cases of the time Lincoln came in on one side or the other. He must have succeeded as a practitioner because of his first hand knowledge of men, and because his clearness of public expression gave him unusual strength before a jury. His reliance upon fundamental principles enabled him to argue in the Appeal Courts with a considerable degree of success. Eventually he became concerned in the McCormick Reaper case which involved one of our former Philadelphians, George Harding, patent lawyer, whose family became the proprietors of the Philadelphia Inquirer. The McCormick people charged an Illinois corporation with being infringers of their patents, and the alleged infringers had retained Edwin M. Stanton, George Harding and Lincoln. The case was to be heard in Cincinnati, and at the last moment it was discovered that only two attorneys on each side would be allowed to speak. Stanton decided to eliminate Lincoln. Lincoln had come up from Illinois fully prepared, and he was, of course, considerably disappoint-

ed. On his way home he said to a lawyer with whom he was travelling, " I am going back to Illinois to study law. " His friend said, " What do you mean by that? You are a successful practitioner now. " Lincoln answered, " But I am going back to study law nevertheless. The college men are beginning to invade the West. We have been pioneer lawyers with little reading, basing our practice on experience, but the college men have gotten West of the Alleghenies, and I am going back to study so that I may be ready to meet the competition. "

He was a successful practitioner, yet with an increasing bent for public affairs. When he came back from Congress he had not become especially prominent. But a few years later came that series of developments which re-opened the great Slavery issue — the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which had made a dividing line between free and slave territory ; the Dred Scott decision, wherein the Supreme Court practically said that the slave owner might take his property, his slaves, to any territory of the United States, and they were still slaves. That re-opened the whole question again, for in the Missouri Compromise Congress had fixed the boundary between slave and free territory, and if that law was ineffective, it became an open question as to whether the great territories of the Northwest should become slave or free. Into that question Lincoln threw all the strength and enthusiasm of which he was capable.

The leading Democrat of Illinois was Stephen A Douglas. Between them there had been some rivalry for many years, personal and political rivalry, which culminated in 1858, when both became candidates for the United States Senate. In order that the questions at issue might be clearly understood, Lincoln proposed to Douglas that they should debate together in several towns in Illinois, and so each announced the principles for which he stood, and challenged the principles of his adversary.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858 represent the highest point of political debating skill that has yet been reached in the history of American politics. These two

men went to town after town. First Lincoln would speak and Douglas would answer, Lincoln being given an opportunity to close the argument; and the next night their positions would be reversed. The great question which was before the people of the State to decide, when it came to electing one candidate or the other, was this, as Lincoln very soon saw: Was it possible to prohibit the taking of slaves into the territory of the United States in the Northwest? That was the question which every-one was confronted with, and Lincoln put it to Douglas at the first opportunity. To say that slaves could be taken into that Northwest territory was to say that it could be opened for occupancy by slave holders, who would take their slaves with them and try to establish the territory as slave states, as had been done by the slave holders in the case of Kansas and Nebraska. Whereas on the other hand, if the law could prevent the territory from being made slave, there was the opportunity for the people of the free states to save it on behalf of the principle of freedom. When Lincoln put the question, Douglas answered that he recognized that under the Federal law the taking of slaves into that free territory was permitted, but inasmuch as the existence of slavery depended upon local laws and regulations, it was possible for the people of the locality immediately concerned to prevent the spread of slavery in their midst.

When Douglas had made that answer Lincoln's friends said, "his answer is so adroit that he will defeat you for the Senatorship." To that Lincoln's response was, "Yes, but he has defeated himself for the Presidency." It was apparent that there was a strong line of cleavage developing between the Northern Democrats and the Southern Democrats on the question whether Congress or the people could prevent the taking of slaves into the territories; but the Northern Democrats held that by local police regulations the spread of slavery might be prevented, whereas the Southern Democrats held that slavery was an institution permitted by the Constitution, and that a man had the right to take his property, that is to say, a slave, wherever he pleased. It was upon that

dilemma and his answer that Douglas won the Senatorship from Illinois, but later on, in 1860, when the Democratic National Convention was held, the Northern Democrats who supported Douglas could not bring the Southern Democrats to his aid, and as a result the Convention split, and two candidates for the Presidency were nominated by the Democratic Party. Abraham Lincoln, the minority candidate of a new party, was elected under our Electoral College system.

The story of the Civil War ought to be known intimately by every one who counts himself as an American citizen. I quote from a German philosopher who had been in our country in the fifties and came back in the sixties, who said, "When I was in the United States in the fifties I made up my mind that the American people would not permanently endure: — a race grown so material, so earnest in seeking after wealth, caring for so little except their own gain, to my mind is not yet worthy of survivorship in the battle of life." Ten years later he wrote: "When I see the change that has been wrought in the American character, when I see the capacity for self-sacrifice which has been developed, I have reached the conclusion that the nation which is capable of such things is capable of the best that fate can give."

Now that change was wrought by our Civil War. It was wrought by four years of strife in which the best blood of the land on both sides was poured out like water; but as the result of the pouring out of the blood there came eventually the universal acceptance of the principles and ideals of freedom, everywhere secure because of the sacrifice of blood and treasure.

In that struggle it was the heroic part of Abraham Lincoln to be the leader. I do not want to take up the details of the Civil War. Suffice it to say that the first three years was a period of unpreparedness at both ends of the line. If there is one thing on which military critics are agreed, it is that if the United States of America had had a regular Army, trained and efficient, of seventy-five thousand men in 1861, there would have been no episode at Fort Sumter, there would have

been no Bull Run, and there would have been no civil war. It took a year of war to get armies organized ; it took another year to get the plan of campaign formulated. Read, if you will the history of 1861, 1862 and 1863, and with the exception of very few campaigns you will find that when the armies fought a battle they rested four or five months after it, for they needed that period to become re-equipped with munitions and with soldiers. Lincoln had to make an army. He had to hold together the spirit of the North. He had to find generals. It was not until 1863 that his search was successful, but when he did find a man whom he could trust, then his interference with the military and naval policy ceased entirely. In 1864 Grant was made general in charge of all of the armies, and he started his campaign against Richmond.

As soon as he started out, working his way around to the South and approaching Richmond from that point, Stanton began to fear that he had not left soldiers enough to protect Washington. Here there was quite a point of issue because that had been the question which had originally caused the difference between Stanton and McClellan. Stanton insisted that Grant ought to send one or two corps back to protect Washington ; Lincoln listened to all he had to say and then said, " Now, Mr. Secretary, you and I have been trying to run this war for three years, and sometimes we have had good success and sometimes we have not had good success. Now, we have sent across the mountains and we have brought Mr. Grant on here, as Mrs. Grant calls him, and we have said to him, "You know more about this than we do, and we have placed you in charge ; we give you all the aid we can to work out your plans. Now, Mr. Secretary, it looks to me as if this were Mr. Grant's business, and we had better leave it to him. "

From the time he summoned Grant, to the successful conclusion of the war, he trusted him implicitly, he gave him all power and all available resources, and in every way aided him to the successful culmination of the military strategy.

Then came the end. Four years of the most tremendous sacrifice and anxiety, four years of the greatest pressure that had ever been borne by an administrative leader, and then complete success. And, almost immediately thereafter, the tragedy which has enshrined him forever in the affections of the American people. As Lincoln expired, Stanton exclaimed: "Now he belongs to the ages." Stricken down in the moment of victory, he gave another illustration of that principle which is asserted by religion and yet is equally true in politics, that "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

Without referring longer to the details of Lincoln's life, I want to draw attention for just a moment or two to some of the characteristics which I think may fairly be attributed to him. In the first place, Lincoln saved the nation without straining the institutions of the country. To my mind, that is the most remarkable tribute that can be paid to any public ruler. Whenever there is war, the executive has enormous powers placed in his hands. It is a time for quick decision and action, and somebody must be there who is ready to spend money and say this shall be done or this shall not be done, this man shall be called out, and so on; and it is entirely possible under the pressure of such circumstances for a government to become imperialistic without the people recognizing the change. That is what happened in France between 1799 and 1805, when the pressure of outside attack was such that a strong central government was imperatively necessary, and France became an empire without the people realizing the change that was taking place in the structure of the government.

Not so with Abraham Lincoln. He realized that this country was committed to a peculiar kind of problem, and that problem was the maintenance of a government in which all of the people took part. So he regarded himself from the beginning to the end as a representative of the people. Over and over again when the time would come for action, he waited until the people understood the action that was to be taken, and then he

took it as the representative of the entire nation, rather than as an imperial ruler of the people. To have saved the country, and yet to have allowed our free institutions to survive, — there is no greater service from the point of view of America than just that.

In the second place, I think that too much cannot be said of Abraham Lincoln as the man who has given expression to the fundamental ideals and aspirations of the American people with a perfection of expression such as has never been surpassed. I have been amazed at the way in which time after time it is Lincoln whom we quote when we want to say something that expresses the deepest sentiments of our political thinking, and our British friends are passing through exactly the same experience. The London Spectator for December 9th, 1916, quoted this from Lincoln, on the objects of the war: —

“ We accepted this War for an object, a worthy object, and the war will end when that object is attained. Under God I hope it will never end until that time. ”

That quotation from Lincoln was used by Mr. Lloyd George as the keynote of his speech in the House of Commons at the time he was replying to the German overtures for peace.

I want to read also the letter which in printed form is hung on the wall of the Library of Merton College, Oxford, with the inscription beneath that this is one of the choicest specimens of English prose known to the authorities of the college. It is the letter of President Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby.

DEAR MADAM, I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the an-

guish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

May I also direct your attention to the two addresses which stand at the very highest point of eloquence in the English language. In Lord Curzon's book on "Parliamentary Oratory", he says that there were only three great speeches delivered in the Nineteenth Century. The first was William Pitt's announcement to the House of Commons of the victory at Trafalgar; the second was Lincoln's Gettysburg oration, and the third was Lincoln's Second Inaugural.

The man who could come to the end of a period of warfare, with such an exclamation of charity for the other side as is set forth in the Second Inaugural, comes indeed of heroic mould.

It seems to me today that we cannot do better than make ourselves acquainted with the spirit that lies at the basis of Lincoln's addresses. Lincoln was not a pacifist, as the term is ordinarily applied today. He saw clearly that there were certain principles which were worth fighting for, and the principle of unity was one of them. He had the vision before him of a great nation, and he recognized that a division into two distinct confederacies shattered the vision. Sooner than that should happen, it was far better that the country should pass into war. Yet it was to be a popular war, not a war forced by the ambition of any ruler, but an effort on the part of a whole nation to achieve righteous ends. Therefore he explained the issue and defined the terms, speaking again and again, explaining proposals or circumstances, until at last, largely through the sheer force of his personality and the power of his clarifying language, he succeeded in raising the American people to his stature. That was a tremendous achievement. It was his thought that the people's war might be a

popular war, for clearly understood principles, universally accepted, self-sacrificing, a willingly borne struggle, without hatred for the other side. My thought about this conception of the civil war is that this is the greatest achievement that the Christian religion has made during the nineteen centuries since it was first proclaimed.

At a time like this, when we are asking for the greatest talent and the finest leadership that our country is capable of affording, we do well to turn our thoughts to the example of the man who has given us our largest and most wholesome conception of what " American " means.



LETTER TO HORACE GRESLEY

AUGUST 22, 1862

I have just read yours of the 19th instant, addressed to myself through the "New York Tribune."

If there be in it any statements or assumptions of fact which I may know to be erroneous, I do not now and here controvert them.

If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not now and here argue against them.

If there be perceptible in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it, in deference to an old friend whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

As to the policy I "seem to be pursuing," as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt. I would save the Union. I would save it in the shortest way under the Constitution.

The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be, — the Union as it was.

If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them.

If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them.

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and not either to save or to destroy slavery.

If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.

What I do about slavery and the coloured race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union.

I shall do less whenever I shall believe that what I am doing hurts the cause; and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause.

I shall try to correct errors where shown to be errors, and I shall adopt new views as fast as they shall appear to be true views.

I have here stated my purpose according to my views of official duty, and I intend no modification of my of expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free.

THE SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

MARCH 4, 1865

Fellow-countrymen, At this second appearance to take the oath of the Presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, — all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war, — seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were coloured slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it...

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, — let us strive on to finish the work we are in: to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.



