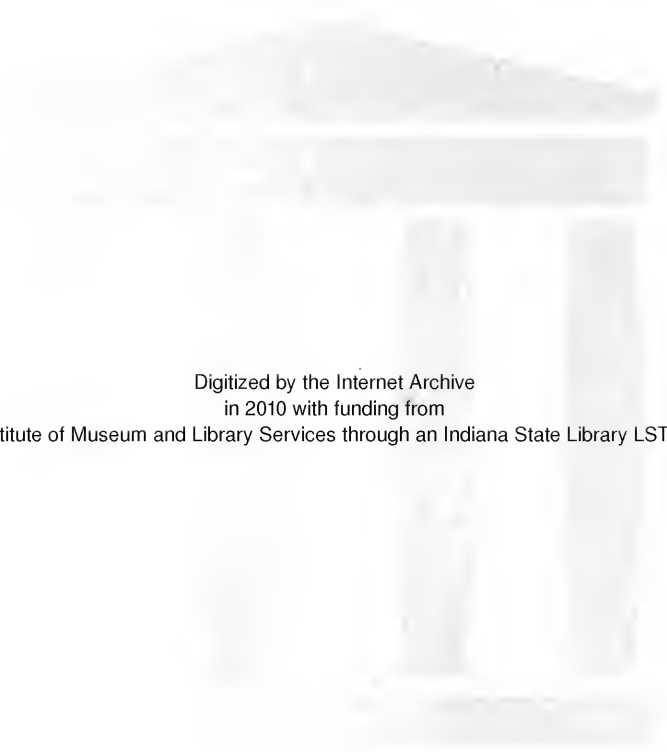


OBSEQUIES
OF
PRESIDENT LINCOLN

AN ORATION DELIVERED IN
NEVADA CITY IN 1865 BY
DAVID BELDEN

(Printed at the request of some California friends.)

The Marysville Herald Press
Marysville, California



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The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

Obsequies of President Lincoln

Fellow Citizens: It has been well said that revolutions do not retrace their steps—never go backward—and most fully has this saying been verified in the political revolution that for the last four years, with unparalleled majesty and augmenting force, has swept over this land; that with changing opinions has wrecked alike the cherished traditions and political organizations of the past, and in the fierce furnace of civil war has melted and moulded rival sections and opposing factions into one common and united people. In its onward march it has not shrunk at the menace of foreign power; it has not faltered in the presence of defeat, nor paused at the syren voice of delusive peace; but making of the obstacles in its path new incentives to exertion, with the watchwords Freedom and Union upon its banners, the great revolution, as deep as the sea, as resistless as the ocean tides, has borne America and her destinies onward, in majestic progress, to her present high and secure position. Over the myriad graves of her unnamed heroes she has not paused in idle lamentation, but pressing forward has raised their monument with a reconstructed Nation, and secured their fame and enshrined their memory in the gratitude of the future generations.

But to-day, with victory upon all her banners and triumph through all her borders, the Nation may well pause by the ashes of the noblest of her murdered sons; and America, all radiant with the splendor of past achievements—thrice resplendent in the bright dawning of prospective peace—may well shroud herself in the sable habiliments of woe, and give one short, sad day of the Nation's life to the memory of the man who gave his life for the Nation. But in this her hour of mourning she takes no backward step. Within the cloud that enshrouds the land the revolution still ripens, the tempest slumbers and the lightning sleeps. Let those whose parri-

cidal hands have spread this pall over the Nation's joys and hopes beware the bursting storm! But to-day is sacred to grief. We dedicate it to sorrow, not to wrath. To-day the Nation follows Abraham Lincoln's honored ashes as a mourner, not an avenger. In sad, yet grateful retrospect—gratitude that he has been, and sorow that he is no more—she recalls his many virtues, and enshrines him forever in the Nation's memory.

What was Abraham Lincoln to us, or to the world, that to-day at every hearthstone throughout the land, from lordly mansion to squalid hovel, there is mourning and lamentation, as though in each its first-born lay dead? By what strange magic has this man so possessed the hearts of this people, that to-day each mourns his loss as though with him we buried a cherished brother?—that without him to share the triumph, the glories of the past grow dim, and the hope, of the future dark and doubtful?

That we may properly estimate our own loss, that we may do justice to the memory of the illustrious dead, we shall briefly review the career of Abraham Lincoln, and show that his own great deeds, the task of his life, the work of his own hands, has raised to his name and fame a monument more lofty and enduring than the Pyramids; and that while the truth and the rights eternal as their Author, shall endure, foremost on their bright heraldry his fame is secured forever.

Abraham Lincoln was peculiarly the man of the people. Debarred in early life those advantages which fortune bestows upon her more favored children, untrained in the scholastic subtleties of the schools, unpracticed in the polished dissimulations of courts, the stalwart woodsman of the frontier brought to the battle of life little save an energy that never slackened and an integrity that never swerved. Uncouth and unpolished, he entered the arena of intellectual strife with giants for his competitors, and distanced all his rivals, reaching the very pinnacle of national honor and preferment, with

his name a household word for honesty and integrity. The champion of the oppressed when the oppressor was all powerful; the advocate of freedom when slavery was the worshipped idol; fearless in his weakness, magnanimous in his strength; it was well for the country and well for humanity that such a man thus spotless and self-reliant, thus fearless and merciful, was called to the Chair of Washington. Treason and Imbecility had preceded him there; Rebellion and Assassination welcomed him to his high position. The ashes of Washington were trodden by the feet of traitors and the armed hosts of treason menaced the National Capital. The nation's emblem was trampled in the mire, and its defenders sealed their devotion with their blood. Over the whole land lowered one dark cloud, lightened but by the lurid flames of civil war. With a betrayed country, a bankrupt treasury and a distracted nation, Abraham Lincoln assumed as its Chief Executive, the reins and the relics of power, and like another Moses stood between the people and the destruction that threatened the land; and the plague was stayed.

He kindled the patriotism of the loyal States, till the north was one blaze of enthusiasm; and the gray-haired veterans of former wars and beardless youths answered to his call until the nations of the earth looked on aghast at this uprising of a great people. He fashioned its wild zeal into disciplined valor, and a million armed men in martial array attested the hand of the master. He unloosed the frozen springs of trade, and at his bidding public credit rose from the dead. The country woke from its stupor, and the insurrection that had marshalled its hosts for Northern fields of plunder, halted dismayed. While the crowned robbers of Europe, exultant over our downfall, and hastening to rehearse the partition of Poland with the fragments of the great American Republic, deferred their schemes of plunder to a more auspicious occasion. For four years, with Lincoln at the helm, the Republic struggled on through the varying fortunes of war, through the

tangled wiles of diplomacy with secret, treacherous foes, and doubting, fearful friends, with discredited generals, depleted armies, disordered finances—four years of such toil, such exertion and such sacrifices as earth, with all her blood-stained heroes, had never witnessed—undismayed by disaster, he organized victory in the very jaws of defeat, and infused his own indomitable confidence when all else despaired. Careless of his own fame, but watchful for the public interests, he removed from exalted positions the idols of the people when he found them wanting—and taught the soldiers that led the armies of the Nation, that success was with him the gauge of merit. Diplomacy sneered at the rough speech and homely exterior of the backwoods President, and fastidious critics questioned his literary taste and cavilled at his Messages; but the people to whom he spoke, for whom he acted, needed no interpreter for the President's language nor for his deeds. They knew that with the burden of an empire on his mind, Abraham Lincoln shared with them all their sorrows and sympathized with all their griefs; and when some white-haired father or aged mother made a weary pilgrimage to Washington to learn from the President of their boy starving in some Southern dungeon, and they looked on his sad and careworn face, and listened to his words of comfort and of cheer, they felt their own sorrows lightened and their griefs assuaged by the kind sympathy of their President. The man of the people in the White House as on the frontier, he raised them up and kept them with himself by the irresistible magnetism of an honest purpose and a heartfelt sympathy. He was spared to us to see star after star of our constellation return from its wild wanderings, ere his own should be lost in the brightness of the coming day—to see that the evils that menaced his loved country were past. The second Father of his Country, the hero in disaster, merciful in victory, a martyr in triumph, like Israel's Law-giver, to him it was given to lead his people through the Red Sea of conflict, and the wilderness of suffering, but to find his own grave at the very

gates of the promised land, which he was indeed suffered to behold but not permitted to enter.

His mission accomplished——

“It came, his hour of martyrdom
 In Freedom’s sacred cause has come,
 And though his life hath passed away
 Like lightning on a stormy day,
 Yet shall his death hour leave a track
 Of glory permanent and bright,
 To which the brave of after times,
 The suffering brave, shall long look back
 With proud regret: and by its light
 Watch through the hours of Slavery’s night
 For vengeance on the oppressor’s crimes.”

The Emancipation Proclamation we scarce appreciate. It has revolutionized the whole social system of the country—I might say of the world. Slavery with its baneful and poisonous influences, had twined itself about all the institutions of the land. For over half a century four millions of slaves and twenty millions of blind, abject worshippers of slavery had dragged this hideous Juggernaut in triumph over a people that boasted their freedom. The pulpit attested its Divine origin; venerable jurists affirmed its legality; moralists maintained its purity, and even those who recognized its infamies were the ready apologists for its crimes, until this monster, begotten of avarice and indolence, and itself the fruitful parent of lust, violence and all iniquity, well nigh ruled the land. In the national councils its voice was supreme, and State legislation conformed itself to its slightest caprice. It closed the avenues of instruction to the negro in States where slavery was never known, and hunted its hapless victims wherever American soil offered the fugitive shelter or rest. When the South had no more to ask for this her cherished bantling, and the North could concede no more, slavery resolved to ruin where it could no longer rule; and with armed rebellion at the South and cowardly traitors at the North, it threw off its disguise, showed itself the hideous monster that it really was; stabbed at the heart of a mother that had nourished it, and inaugurated the rebellion now in its death agony. The President was lenient to a fault; magnanimous until further con-

cessions would have been a weakness. He tendered the olive branch again and again; it was met with derision; his profers of amnesty and pardon with contempt and scorn. At last he resolved upon a war of extermination—not against the deluded people, but against the evil spirit that had entered and possessed them. Invoking upon this deed the judgment of posterity, he emancipated a race, and gave to Freedom a continent. The judgment of the world upon this great act is already recorded, and the generations to come have but to attest it. The Nation stands sponsor to this deed, and accepts it as her own, while policy and patriotism, justice and humanity all, *all* approve it, and crown its great author the champion of Human Freedom, the Benefactor of the race. Henceforth there is no North, no South, with their vengeful feuds and sectional hatreds. It was slavery drew the dark and bloody line, and with the curse that created it, it has gone forever; and in this great consummation Abraham Lincoln stands forth the Regenerator as well as the Father of his rescued country. While Bunker Hill and Yorktown must divide a Nation's honor with the red fields of this great struggle, Mount Vernon must share with another hallowed shrine—with a Mecca nearing the setting sun—that homage which Freemen ever pay to the martyrs of Liberty.

And for the murderer—the wretched assassin—how little has he accomplished! How much survives his bloody work! The struggle of the nation was over; the burden and heat of the day were past; the great mission of the President well-nigh accomplished; the rebellion suppressed; slavery abolished; the Union restored, a grateful nation would have decked its hero and savior with laurel, when assassination bestowed the crown of martyrdom. To the nation and to freedom he had dedicated himself; it but remained that he should attest his fealty with his life and seal the priceless legacy with his blood—stricken down at the very moment of success, when his power to achieve was only equalled by his magnanimity of purpose.

What hand shall now restrain the sword of justice, wielded by the resistless power of the nation—what amnesty may yet be offered to the misled South—the future can alone determine. With her sword broken, her shield beaten down, her armies vanquished, her chieftains captives, her very helplessness might compel compassion and induce forgiveness; but for the system that inaugurated this war, that has filled the land with mourning and drenched it with blood, there is no oblivion, there can be no forgiveness. Upon the altar of Slavery lies our last, our purest sacrifice; and in the sorrow of to-day and the retribution of to-morrow—the altar and the idol must perish forever. It was for free men that the noblest of freemen has fallen; and the land that to-day receives the ashes of our dead is forever hallowed to freedom—a freedom in which, through the bright record of his life, the man we mourn forever lives; lives through the coming centuries of peace and prosperity, in which his country's fame shall fill the world while her commerce whitens the seas; lives in the future of a mighty nation, reunited by his efforts, cemented with his blood; lives in the gratitude of a race whose fetters he has broken and whose feet he has guided from bondage and captivity to freedom and liberty. To such a life this earth is a monument and not a sepulchre; and through the long vista of coming years the gathering ages bring new honors, humanity a deeper devotion to his name and his cherished memory. And we may thus—

“——recall his fate without a sigh,
 For he is Freedom's now and fame's—
 One of the few immortal names
 That were not born to die.”

To-day, while a weeping nation bears his honored ashes to the silent grave, while in every hamlet the nation's ensign droops in clouded sky, mute symbol of the nation's woe, while the wail of the people pierces the Heavens, and this precious blood, most foully shed, cries from the earth—go forth the funeral pageant. Let memory and grief marshal the mourning train! March first, rebellious South, close to your

victim, nearest to his bier! Well may manacled crime, that shrinks from justice and hopes for mercy only, mourn our dead leader, for he was indeed merciful! The hand death palsies but half unsheathed the sword, and ever offered the olive branch of pardon; and the last utterance of the lips that death now seals was for yourselves forgiveness! Well may you weep bitter tears of remorse for the past and for the just retribution of the future! Stand forth, scarred and battle-stained veterans of a hundred bloody fields, with trailing arms and muffled drum join the sad cortege. It was for your triumphs he was slain, and in your glory he has found a grave. Your companion and leader in the hour of the nation's dread peril, it was given to him to rejoice in your triumph and welcome the peace won by your valor and victories. It was with you he passed through the dark gloom of the nation's night.

And now, soldiers, the spared heroes of our country, in the bright light of the coming day; and in the land that his constancy and your valor has redeemed, lay your comrade and chieftain to rest forever. Let woman and childhood be there to garland his honored grave; it was for them, for us that he fell—upon the altar of OUR COUNTRY that he was sacrificed. Let them mingle their tears with hers who mourns him a widow, with the orphans who lose in him a father. Let the freedman be there with his broken chain—the noblest garland that can wreath the Liberator's tomb. Let every race and the children of every clime—the oppressed of every land—join in his obsequies; it is gratitude should awaken grief, and humanity bids them come as mourners to the tomb of the holiest martyr of Humanity.

“Follow now as you list. The first mourner to-day
 Is the Nation whose Father is taken away.
 Wife, children and neighbor may mourn at his knell;
 He was lover and friend to his country as well.
 For the stars on our banner grow suddenly dim
 Let us weep in our darkness, but weep not for him;
 Not for him, who departing leaves millions of tears;
 Not for him, who has died full of honors and years;
 Not for him, who ascended Fame's ladder so high.
 From the round at the top he has stepped to the sky.”

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