

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE CONGRESSMAN.

Speech of John L. Cable, Member of Congress from Ohio, Broadcasted
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Mr. CABLE. Throughout this broad land of ours and in many remote spots in the Eastern as well as the Western Hemisphere, I doubt if there is a person living who does not know of Abraham Lincoln, the greatest character of his age. We all know of him as the great emancipator and the foremost thinker of his time, but how much do we know of Lincoln as a Member of Congress? In fact, how many of us even remember that he ever served in the House of Representatives?

All sides and periods of Lincoln's life are worthy of study, but inasmuch as the great work which he did in later years was so magnificent it totally eclipsed his political life from young manhood until he came into national prominence.

Lincoln, always a man of the people, the truest type of American statesman, served one term in the Thirtieth Congress of the United States. He did not seek reelection by reason of a friendly understanding that existed in his district among the members of his party, the Whigs. Although but 37 years of age at the time of his election, he came to Congress skilled and proficient in the art of politics and statesmanship, acquired by experience and his keen insight of human nature.

By no means was Lincoln an amateur at holding public office. In addition to being captain of a company of Sagamon County Rifles, he had served two terms in the Illinois State Legislature and was the Whig candidate for speaker each term; he was deputy county surveyor; postmaster at New Salem, Ill.; he had made two campaigns for Congress before being successful; he had served as a member of the Whig State central committee, and in addition was on the Harrison electoral ticket in 1840 and on the Clay ticket in 1844.

But little has been recorded of his life in Washington as a Member of the House, but it is known that he occupied a seat in the Chamber in the center of the last row on the left-hand side. With eight other Members he boarded with a Mrs. Spriggs, whose house was located on the spot now occupied by the fountain in front of the Congressional Library.

He served on the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, of which Joseph M. Root, of Norwalk, Ohio, was the chairman. He also was a member of the Committee on Expenditures in the War Department.

Abraham Lincoln is best known for his untiring and successful fight against slavery. He will always be known as the Great Emancipator. He carried this fight into the halls of Congress. Fifteen days after the session began a memorial against slave trade in the District of Columbia was presented to Congress by residents of the District. A motion to lay the memorial on the table, or, in other words, to kill it, was made. Lincoln by his vote saved it, as the result of the roll call stood 97 to 97, the Speaker also voting in the negative, thus permitting it to be considered by the Judiciary Committee.

Following this Lincoln introduced a bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. It provided that the question should be determined by a vote of the white male citizens over 21 years of age who had resided in the District for more than a year. The owners of the slaves were to receive full cash value for their loss from the United States Treasury and the slaves a certificate of freedom. A board, consisting of the President, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of the Treasury were to pass upon the value of the slaves. Also Lincoln's bill provided that all persons born of slave mothers were to be free.

Lincoln's record in Congress showed that he also favored adjusted compensation for soldiers. At the time he took his seat in the House all the battles of the Mexican War had been fought, but the American Army was still in Mexico. The records show that Lincoln voted for all measures favorable to the soldiers and their families. At one time he introduced an amendment after obtaining the floor to grant bounty lands to men who had served as privates in the Mexican War. He also suggested that bounties be given to all volunteers of the War of 1812.

Lincoln also favored Federal aid for the construction of highways. In his single term as Congressman he made less than a dozen speeches, and one of his most important talks was a reply to the President's veto message against improvement by Federal aid.

"If the Nation refuses to make improvements of the more general kind because their benefits may be somewhat local," said Lincoln, "a State may for the same reason refuse to make any improvement of a local nature because its benefits may be somewhat general. A State may well say to the Nation, 'If you will do nothing for me, I will do nothing for you.'"

In the same speech he said: "This Capital is built at the public expense and for the public benefit; but does anyone doubt that it is of some peculiar local advantage to the property owners and the business people of Washington? Shall we remove it for this reason? And if so, where shall we set it down and be free from the difficulty? To make sure of our object shall we locate it nowhere, and have Congress hereafter to hold its sessions, as the loafer lodged, 'in spots about'?"

Lincoln was always active for the party workers. Then, as well as now, there were men who deserved reward for their efforts, and Lincoln was always ready to see them rewarded, as he was a good party man. He often reminded

Cabinet members in his persistent, good-natured way that a vacancy should exist in various departments, as the place was now held by one who had failed in the proper discharge of any one of the duties of his office. Then, again, the records show that Lincoln would call the department head's attention to the fact that some Democrats under their employ were distinctly partisan and openly opposed the election of Gen. Taylor. Lincoln also brought charges against the Democratic postmaster of Springfield, Ill., on the grounds of political activity. He also insisted, inasmuch as he and a Col. Baker were the only Whigs from Illinois, that they be consulted before any appointments were made in that State.

Even in his single term in Congress Lincoln gained great popularity, and his wit, his command of the English language, and his ability to attack his political enemies on the floor of the House brought him much attention. The Congressional Globe tells us that "he was able to obtain the floor amongst many competitors." At one time Lincoln stated that he wanted to make a general talk, but that he would give way to take up the question which was pending. However, for fear that he would not talk there were cries throughout the House of "No! No! Go on."

His unfailing frankness and honesty at one time brought him a rebuke from a Member of the House when the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads had reported out a bill which authorized the Postmaster General to enter into a contract with the railroads to carry the mails. This was but a month after the session began. Lincoln rose and said: "I have made an effort for some few days since to obtain the floor, but have failed. The Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads is composed of five Whigs and four Democrats. The report has met the approval of all Whigs and all Democrats except one. I want to say further than this"—

At this point he was interrupted by a Member who gave Lincoln to understand that it was not in order to ever mention on the floor of the House what had taken place in the committee.

Lincoln then said: "If I have been out of order in what I have said, I take it all back so far as I can."

At this there was much laughter. He then continued: "I have no desire, I assure you, gentlemen, to be out of order, although I can never keep long in order."

Some Members of Congress, if mentioned in history at all, are known by a law that bears their name. Not so with Lincoln. No such law exists, as far as I can find; neither is one needed. His fame will be perpetuated long after the laws of his Congress are repealed or forgotten. The services he rendered in the House aided in his broad comprehension of the needs of the Nation that followed. His bills were few. They chiefly dealt with the problems of the Post Office Department. He prepared reports on other bills reported out by the committee. One permitted the postmasters at county seats to take subscriptions for newspapers and periodicals.

Lincoln recognized the power of the press and the need of newspapers, for he said in his report: "Our republican institutions can best be sustained by the diffusion of knowledge and the due encouragement of a universal spirit of inquiry and discussion of public events through the medium of the public press."

The logic of his debates in the House could not be answered. Courage, honesty of purpose, just dealings with his fellow men, both in Congress and out, made him the one great figure of the age.

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Sincerely
John L. Cable
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