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ABRAHAM LINCOLN



HIS LIFE,
SAYINGS
AND
SPEECHES.



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In 1859 a friend of Lincoln wrote, asking for some biographical particulars. The following is the exact letter Lincoln wrote in answer. It is extremely interesting, as he outlines his life down to the point where he became a figure of national importance. This letter is given in place of the regular historical sketch:

I WAS born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families, second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks. . . . My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County Va., to Kentucky about 1781 or 1782, where, a year or two later, he was killed by the Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest.

My father (Thomas Lincoln) at the death of his father was but six years of age. By the early death of his father, and the very narrow circumstances of his mother, he was, even in childhood, a wandering, laboring boy, and grew up literally without education. He never did more in the way of writing than bunglingly to write his own name. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. It was a wild region, with many bears and other animals still in the woods.

There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond readin', writin' and cipherin' to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood he was looked upon as a wizard.

Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three. But that was all. The little advance I now have upon this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk war; and I was elected Captain of a volunteer company, a success that gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the Legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten the only time I ever have been beaten by the people. The next, and three succeeding biennial elections, I was elected to the Legislature. I was not a candidate afterward. During the legislative period I had studied law and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846 I was elected to the lower house of Congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig in politics, and generally on the Whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again.

If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said that I am in height six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and gray eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.

A. LINCOLN.

Closing Words of the Inaugural Speech

Delivered at Washington, March 4, 1861.

“My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time.

If there be any object to hurry any of you, in hot haste, to a step which you would never take deliberately, that object will be frustrated by taking time—but no good object can be frustrated by it.

Such of you as are now dissatisfied still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and on the sensitive point, the laws of your own framing under it, while the new administration will have no immediate power, if it would, to change either.

If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied, hold the right side of the dispute, there is still no single reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulties.

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you.

You can have no conflict without being yourself the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect and defend” it.

I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bond of affection.

The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation

At the commencement of the war, the President had been repeatedly and strongly urged to liberate the slaves. He declared the paramount object is to save the Nation and not either to save or destroy slavery. On New Year's day 1863 the President issued a preliminary proclamation which provided that any state that choose to return to the Union, its slaves were not to be set at liberty by the final proclamation.

“And by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States and parts of States are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin the people so declared to be free, to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence, and I recommend to them that in all cases, when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known that such persons of suitable condition will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, invoke the considerate judgement of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my name, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty seventh.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

By the President :

William W. Seward,

[CLOSING PARAGRAPHS]

Secretary of State.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Delivered at the dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg, November 19, 1863.

It seems incredible at this day that Lincoln's Gettysburg speech proved a disappointment, not only to Lincoln, but to many who heard it. On the return trip to Washington, he said: "That speech fell on the audience like a wet blanket. I ought to have prepared it with more care." He, himself, failed to appreciate the sublime sentiment of the few words he had hastily scribbled that morning with a lead pencil on a pad in the railway carriage. Time has proved them equal to the sayings of any man who ever wrote his mother tongue.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on 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 battle field 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 beyond our poor 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 honored dead we 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, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Lincoln's Yarns and Stories.

Mr. Lincoln remarked to a Senator who took him to task for always answering a question by a story :

"They say I tell a great many stories; I reckon I do, but I have found in the course of a long experience that common people, take them as they run, are more easily informed through the medium of a broad illustration than in any other way, and as to what the hypercritical few may think, I don't care."

Grant's Whiskey.

A committee once waited on the President and urged the removal of General Grant on the ground that he drank too much whiskey.

"By the way gentlemen," rejoined Mr. Lincoln, "can any of you tell me where Gen. Grant procures his whiskey? Because if I can find out I will send every general in the field a barrel of it."

What he would do with Jeff Davis

When, after the war, Lincoln was asked what he was going to do with Jeff Davis, he replied:

"A boy bought a coon which, after the novelty wore off, became a nuisance. One day he sat down completely fagged out. A man passing asked the matter.

"'Oh,' was the reply, 'the coon is such a trouble to me.'"

"'Why don't you get rid of him?' said the man.

"'Hush,' said the boy, 'don't you see he is gnawing his rope off? I'm going to let him do it, and then I'll go home and tell the folks that he got away from me.'"

Freedom from Vices.

Some one complimented the President on having no vices, neither drinking or smoking.

"That is a doubtful compliment," answered Lincoln. "I remember once when sitting on a stage in Illinois, and a man next to me offered me a cigar. I told him I had no vices. He said nothing, but smoked for some time and then grunted out: 'It's my experience that folks who have no vices have few virtues.'"

Too Much Tail.

Gen. Grant told the following story :

"Just after receiving my commission as lieutenant-general, the President said to me :

"At one time there was a great war among the animals and one side had a great difficulty in getting a commander. Finally they found a monkey named Joko, who said that he thought he could command their army if his tail could be made a little longer. So they got more tail and spliced it on.

"He looked at it admiringly and then he thought he ought to have still a little more. This was added, and again he called for more. This splicing process was repeated many times, until they had coiled Joko's tail around the room. He continued to call for more and they continued to wind the additional tail around him until its weight broke him down.

"I saw the point and replied: 'Mr. President, I will not call for more assistance unless I find it impossible to do with what I already have.'"

Mercy For a Soldier.

An old man whose son had been court-martialed in Gen. Butler's army and sentenced to be shot visited the White House. A cloud of sorrow came over the President's face as he replied.

"I am sorry to say I can do nothing for you. Listen to this telegram: 'President Lincoln, I pray you not to interfere with the court-martial of the army. You will destroy all discipline among our soldiers. B. F. Butler.'" "

Mr. Lincoln watched the old man's grief, and then exclaimed: "By jingo! Butler or no Butler, here goes!"

Then he wrote: "Job Smith is not to be shot until further orders from me. A. Lincoln."

"Why" said the old man, "I thought it was to be a pardon."

Mr. Lincoln smiled: "Well, my old friend, if your son never looks on death until further orders come from me to shoot him, he will live to be a great deal older than Methuselah."

His "Glass Hack"

President Lincoln had not been in the White House very long before Mrs. Lincoln became seized with the idea that a fine new barouche was about the proper thing for "the first lady in the land." The President did not care particularly about it one way or the other, and told his wife to order whatever she wanted.

Lincoln forgot all about the new vehicle, and was overcome with astonishment one afternoon when, having acceded to Mrs. Lincoln's desire to go driving, he found a beautiful barouche standing in front of the door of the White House.

His wife watched him with an amused smile, but the only remark he made was, "Well, Mary, that's about the slickest 'glass hack' in town, isn't it?"

It will please the Little Woman.

Lincoln had been in the telegraph office at Springfield during the casting of the first and second ballots in the Republican National Convention at Chicago, and then left and went over to the office of the State Journal, where he was sitting conversing with friends while the third ballot was being taken.

In a few moments came across the wires the announcement of the result. The superintendent of the telegraph company wrote on a scrap of paper: "Mr. Lincoln, you are nominated on the third ballot," and a boy ran with the message to Lincoln.

He looked at it in silence, amid the shouts of those around him; then rising and putting it in his pocket, he said quietly: "There's a little woman down at our house would like to hear this; I'll go down and tell her."

His Passes to Richmond not Honored.

A man called upon the President and solicited a pass for Richmond. "Well," said the President, "I would be very happy to oblige, if my passes were respected; but the fact is, sir, I have, within the past two years, given passes to two hundred and fifty thousand men to go to Richmond, and not one has got there yet.

The applicant quietly and respectfully withdrew on his tiptoes.

His Financial Standing.

A New York firm applied to Abraham Lincoln, some years before he became President, for information as to the financial standing of one of his neighbors. Mr. Lincoln replied:

"I am well acquainted with Mr. _____, and know his circumstances. First of all, he has a wife and baby, together they ought to be worth \$50,000 to any man. Secondly, he has an office in which there is a table worth \$1.50 and three chairs worth, say, \$1.00. Last of all, there is in one corner a large rat hole, which will bear looking into. Respectfully,

A Lincoln.

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