

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE GREAT LEADER OF MEN

HIS ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST STRUGGLE SET FORTH BY CARL SCHURZ

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No American can study the character and career of Abraham Lincoln without being carried away by sentimental emotions. We are always inclined to idealize that which we love—a state of mind very unfavorable to the exercise of sober critical judgment. It is, therefore, not surprising that most of those who have written or spoken on that extraordinary man, even while conscientiously endeavoring to draw a lifelike portrait of his being, and to form a just estimate of his public conduct, should have drifted into more or less indiscriminating eulogy, painting his great features in the most glowing colors and covering with tender shadings whatever might look like a blemish.

But his standing before posterity will not be exalted by mere praise of his virtues and abilities, nor by any concealment of his limitations and faults. The stature of the great man, one of whose peculiar charms consisted in his being so unlike all other great men, will rather lose than gain by the idealization which so easily runs into the commonplace. For it was distinctly the weird mixture of qualities and forces in him, of the lofty with the common, the ideal with the uncouth, of that which he had become, and that which he had been, that made him so fascinating a character among his fellow-men, gave him his singular power over their minds and hearts, and fitted him to be the greatest leader in the greatest crisis of our National life.

He possessed an uncommon power of clear and compact statement, which might have reminded those who knew the story of his early youth, of the efforts of the poor boy, when he copied his compositions from the scraped wooden shovel, carefully to trim his expressions in order to save paper. His language had the energy of honest directness, and he was a master of logical lucidity. He loved to point and enlighten his reasoning by humorous illustrations, usually anecdotes of Western life, of which he had an inexhaustible store at his command. These anecdotes had not seldom a flavor of rustic robustness about them, but he used them with great effect, while amusing the audience, to give life to an abstraction, to explode an absurdity, to clinch an argument, to drive home an admonition. The natural kindness of his tone, softening prejudice and disarming partisan rancor, would often open to his reasoning a way into minds most unwilling to receive it.

Yet his greatest power consisted in the charm of his individuality. That charm did not, in the ordinary way, appeal to the ear or to the eye. His voice was not melodious, rather shrill and piercing, especially when it rose to its high treble in moments of great animation. His figure was unhandy, awkward, and the action of his unsteady limbs awkward. He commanded none of the outward graces of oratory as they are commonly understood. His charm was of a different kind. It flowed from the rare depth and genuineness of his convictions and his sympathetic feelings. Sympathy was the strongest element in his nature. One of his biographers, who knew him before he became President, says: "Lin-

coln's compassion might be stirred deeply by an object present, but never by an object absent and unseen. In the former case he would most likely extend relief, with little inquiry into the merits of the case, because, as he expressed it himself, it 'took a pain out of his own heart.' Only half of this is correct. It is certainly true that he could not witness any individual distress or oppression, or any kind of suffering, without feeling a pang of pain himself, and that by relieving as much as he could the suffering of others he put an end to his own. This compassionate impulse to help he felt not only for human beings, but for every living creature. As in his boyhood he angrily reproved the boys who tormented a wood turtle by putting a burning coal on its back, so, we are told, he would, when a mature man, on a journey, dismount from his buggy and wade waist-deep in mire to rescue a pig struggling in a swamp. Indeed, appeals to his compassion were so irresistible to him, and he felt it so difficult to refuse anything when his refusal could give pain, that he himself sometimes spoke of his inability to say 'no' as a positive weakness. But that certainly does not prove that his compassionate feeling was confined to individual cases of suffering witnessed with his own eyes. As the boy was moved by the aspect of the tortured wood turtle to compose an essay against cruelty to animals in general, so the aspect of other cases of suffering and wrong wrought up his moral nature and set his mind to work against cruelty, injustice and oppression in general.

The situation which confronted the new President was appalling; the larger part of the South in open rebellion, the rest of the slaveholding states wavering, preparing to follow; the revolt guided by determined, daring and skillful leaders; the Southern people, apparently full of enthusiasm and military spirit, rushing to arms, some of the forts and arsenals already in their possession; the Government of the Union, before the accession of the new President, in the hands of men some of whom actively sympathized with the revolt, while others were hampered by their traditional doctrines in military life, and really gave it aid and comfort; their irresolute attitude; all the departments full of 'Southern sympathizers' and honeycombed with disloyalty; the Treasury empty and the public credit at its lowest ebb; the arsenals ill supplied with arms, if not emptied by treacherous practices; the Federal Government of insignificant strength, despised over an immense surface and deprived of some of its best officers by defection; the Navy small and antiquated. But that was not all. The threat of disunion had so often been resorted to by the slave power in years past, with such vehemence, and even with the promise of a reward in victory they had just achieved at the ballot-box and spoke of compromise. The country fairly resounded with the noise of 'anti-secession meetings.' Excessions of fire resolution from determined anti-slavery men were in the air, but they were for a while

President Roosevelt's Tribute to Lincoln

From the Review of Reviews, February 1909

The White House, Washington, January 1, 1909.

To the Editor of the Review of Reviews:

The deeds and words of the great men of the Nation, and above all the character of each of the foremost men of the Nation, are one and all assets of inestimable value to the Republic. Lincoln's work and Lincoln's words should be, and I think more and more are, part of those formative influences which tend to become living forces for good citizenship among our people. There is one of his letters which has always appealed to me particularly. It is the one running as follows:

Executive Mansion, Washington, Nov. 21, 1864.

To Mrs. Birney, Boston, Mass.

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 word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering 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 anguish 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,

A. LINCOLN.

Any man who has occupied the office of President realizes the incredible amount of administrative work which the President has to deal with in time of peace. He is of necessity a very busy man, a much driven man, from whose mind there can never be absent for many minutes at a time the consideration of some problem of importance, or of some matter of less importance, which yet causes worry and strain. Under such circumstances, it is not easy for a President even in times of peace to turn from the affairs that are of moment to all the people and consider affairs that are of moment to but one person. While this is true of times of peace, it is of course infinitely more true of times of war. No President who has ever sat in the White House has borne the burden that Lincoln bore, or been under the ceaseless strain which he endured. It did not let up by day or by night. Ever he had to consider problems of the widest importance, ever to run risks of the greatest magnitude; and ever through and across his plans to meet these great dangers and great responsibilities was shot the woof of an infinite number of small worries and small annoyances. He worked out his great task while unceasingly beset by the need of attending as best he could to a multitude of small tasks. It is a touching thing that the great leader, while thus driven and absorbed, could yet so often turn aside for a moment to do some deed of personal kindness; and it is a fortunate thing for the Nation that in addition to doing so well each deed, great or small, he possessed that marvelous gift of expression which enabled him quite unconsciously to choose the very words best fit to commemorate each deed. His Gettysburg speech and his second inaugural are two of the half dozen greatest speeches ever made—I am tempted to call them the two greatest ever made. They are great in their wisdom, and dignity, and earnestness, and in loftiness of thought and expression, which makes them akin to the utterances of the prophets of the Old Testament. In a totally different way, but in stronger and most human fashion, such utterances as his answer to the seceders immediately after his second election, and this letter which I have quoted above, appeal to us and make our hearts thrill. The mother to whom he wrote stood in one sense on a loftier plane of patriotism than the mighty President himself. Her memory, and the memory of her sons whom she bore to die for the Union, should be kept green in our minds; for she and they, in life and death, typified all that is best and highest in our National existence. The deed itself, and the words of the great man which commemorate that deed, should form one of those heritages for all Americans which it is of inestimable consequence that America should possess.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

almost drowned by a bewildering confusion of discordant voices. Even this was not all. Potent influences in Europe, with an ill-concealed desire for the permanent disruption of the American Union, eagerly espoused the cause of the Southern seceders, and the two principal maritime powers of the Old World seemed only to be waiting for a favorable opportunity to lend them a helping hand.

This was the state of things to be mastered by "honest Abe Lincoln" when he took his seat in the Presidential chair. "Honest Abe Lincoln," who was so good-natured that he could not say "no," the greatest achievement of whose life had been a debate on the slavery question, who had never been in any position of power; who was without the slightest experience of high executive duties, and who had only a speaking acquaintance with the men upon whose counsel and co-operation he was to depend. Nor was his accession to power under such circumstances greeted with general confidence even by the members of his party. While he had indeed won much popularity, many Republicans, especially among those who had advocated Seward's nomination for the Presidency, saw the simple "Illinois lawyer" take the reins of government with a feeling of little short of dismay. The orators and journals of the opposition were ridiculing and lampooning him without measure. Many people actually wondered how such a man could dare to undertake a task which, as he himself had said to his neighbors in his parting speech was "most difficult" than that of Washington himself had been.

But Lincoln brought to that task, aside from other uncommon qualities, the first requisite—an intuitive comprehension of its nature. While he did not indulge in the delusion that the Union could be maintained or restored without a conflict of arms, he could not foresee all the problems he would have to solve. He instinctively understood, however, by what means that conflict would have to be conducted by the government of a democracy. He knew that the impending war, whether great or small, would not be like a foreign war, exciting a united national enthusiasm but a civil war, likely to fan to uncommon heat the animosities of party even in the localities controlled by the Government; that this war would have to be carried on, not by means of a ready-made machinery, ruled by an undisputed, absolute will, but by means to be furnished by the voluntary action of the people; that it would have to be conducted by the people, through their representatives, voluntarily taxing themselves; trusts of extraordinary power to be voluntarily granted; and war measures, not seldom restricting the rights and liberties to which the citizen was accustomed, to be voluntarily accepted and submitted to by the people, or at least a large majority of them;—and that this would have to be kept up not merely during a short period of enthusiastic excitement, but possibly through weary years of alternating success and disaster, hope and despondency. He knew that in order to steer this Government by public opinion successfully through all the confusion created by the prejudices and doubts and differences of sentiment distracting the popular mind, and so to propitiate, inspire, mould, organize, unite and guide the popular will that it might give forth all the means required for the performance of his great task, he would have to take into account all the influences strongly affecting the current of popular thought and feeling, and to direct while appearing to obey.

This was the kind of leadership he

intuitively conceived to be needed when a free people were to be led forward en masse to overcome a great common danger under circumstances of appalling difficulty,—the leadership which does not dash ahead with brilliant daring, no matter the odds, but which is intent upon rallying all the available forces, gathering in the stragglers, closing up the column, so that the front may advance well supported. For this leadership Abraham Lincoln was admirably fitted,—better than any other American statesman of his day; for he understood the people, their needs, their loves and hates, their prejudices and their noble impulses, their weaknesses and their strength, as he understood himself, and his sympathetic nature was apt to draw their sympathy to him.

Lincoln's views and feelings concerning slavery had not changed. Those who conversed with him intuitively upon the subject at that period knew that he did not expect slavery long to survive the triumph of the Union, even if it were not immediately destroyed by the war. In this he was right. Had the Union achieved a decisive victory in an early period of the conflict, and had the seceded states been received back with slavery, the "slave power" would then have been a defeated power,—defeated in an attempt to carry out its most effective threat. It would have lost its prestige. Its menaces would have been hollow sound and ceased to make any one afraid. It could no longer have hoped to expand, to maintain an equilibrium in any branch of Congress, and to control the Government. The victorious free states would have largely overbalanced it. It would no longer have been able to withstand the onset of a hostile age. It could no longer have hoped, but slavery had to be in order to live. It would have lingered for a while, but it would surely have been "in the course of ultimate extinction." A prolonged war precipitated the destruction of slavery; a short war might only have prolonged its death struggle. Lincoln saw this clearly; but he saw also that in a protracted death struggle it might still have kept disloyal sentiments alive, bred distracting commotions, and caused great mischief to the country. He therefore hoped that slavery would not survive the war.

But the question how he could rightfully employ his power to bring on its speedy destruction was to him not a question of mere sentiment. He himself set forth his reasoning upon it, at a later period, in one of his inimitable letters. "I am naturally anti-slavery," said he. "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember the time when I did not so think and feel. And yet I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act upon that judgment and feeling. It was in the oath I took that I would, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath. Nor was it my view that I might take an oath to get power, and break the oath in using that power. I understood, too, that, in ordinary civil administration, this oath even forbade me practically to indulge my private abstract judgment on the moral question of slavery. I did understand, however, also, that my oath imposed upon me the duty of preserving to the best of my ability, by every indispensable means, that Government, that Nation, of which the Constitution was the organic law. I could not feel that to the best of my ability, I had even tried to preserve the Constitution if, to save slavery, or any minor matter, I should permit the wreck of government, country and Constitution all together." In

the Nation and permitted no step backward in spite of its limitations. It was the actual abolition of slavery. Thus he wrote his name upon the books of history with the title dearest to his heart,—the liberator of the slave.

There never has been a President in such constant and active contact with the public opinion of the country, as there has never been a President who, while at the head of the Government, remained so near to the people. Beyond the circle of those who had long known him, the feeling steadily grew that the man in the White House was "honest Abe Lincoln" still, and that every citizen might approach him with complaint, expostulation or advice without danger of meeting a rebuff from power-proud authority, or humiliating condescension; and this privilege was used by so many and with such unswerving freedom that only superhuman patience could have endured it all. There are men now living who would today read with amazement, if not regret, what they then ventured to say or write to him. But Lincoln repelled no one whom he believed to speak to him in good faith, and with most judicious purpose. No good advice would go unheeded. No candid criticism would offend him. No honest opposition, while it might pain him, would produce a lasting alienation of feeling between him and the opponent. It may truly be said that few men in power have ever been exposed to more daring attempts to direct their course, to sever censures of their acts, and to more cruel misrepresentation of their motives. And all this he met with that good-natured humor peculiarly his own, and with untiring effort to see the right and to impress it upon those who were far from him. The conversation he had and the correspondence he carried on upon matters of public interest, not only with men in official position, but with private citizens, were almost unceasing, and in a large number of public letters, written ostensibly to meet some complaint or person of importance, he addressed himself directly to the popular mind. Most of these letters stand among the finest monuments of our political literature. Thus he presented the singular spectacle of a President who, in the midst of a great civil war, with unprecedented duties weighing upon him, was constantly in person debating the great features of his policy with the people.

It is true, the death of this gentlest and most merciful of rulers by the hand of a mad fanatic was well apt to lead to the conclusion that the determination of those who loved him, and to make his memory the object of peculiarly tender solicitude. But it is also true that the verdict pronounced upon him in these days has been affected little by time, and that historical inquiry has served rather to increase the admiration of his noble character, his virtues, his abilities, his services. Giving the fullest measure of credit to his great ministers,—to Seward for his conduct of foreign affairs, to Chase for the management of the finances under terrible difficulties, to Stanton for the performance of his tremendous task as War Secretary,—and readily acknowledging that without the skill and fortitude of the great commanders, and the

heroism of the soldiers and sailors under them, success could not have been achieved, the historian still finds that Lincoln's judgment and will were by no means governed by those around him; that the most important steps were owing to his initiative; that his was the deciding and directing mind; and that it was pre-eminently he whose sagacity and whose character enlisted for the administration in its struggles the countenance, the sympathy and the support of the people. It is found, even, that his judgment as military matters was astonishingly acute, and that the advice and instructions he gave to the Generals commanding in the field would not seldom have done honor to the ablest of them. History, therefore, without overlooking or palliating, or excusing any of his shortcomings or mistakes, continues to place him foremost among the saviors of the Union and the liberators of the slave. More than that, it awards to him the merit of having accomplished what but few political philosophers would have recognized as possible,—of leading the Republic through four years of civil conflict without any serious detriment to its free institutions.

To the young generation Abraham Lincoln has already become a half-mythical figure, which, in the haze of historic distance, grows to more and more heroic proportions, but also loses in distinctness of outline and feature. This is indeed the common lot of popular heroes; but the Lincoln legend will be more than ordinarily apt to become fanciful, as his individuality, assembling seemingly incongruous qualities and forces in a character, the simplest and most unique and most lovable, was so time grand and his career so abounding in startling contrasts. As the state of society in which Abraham Lincoln grew up passes away, the world will read with increasing wonder of the man who, not only of the humblest origin, but remaining the simplest and most unpretending of citizens, was raised to a position of power unprecedented in our history; who was the greatest and most peace-loving of mortals, unable to see any creature suffer without a pang in his own breast, and suddenly found himself called to conduct the greatest and bloodiest of wars; who wielded the power of government when stern resolution and relentless force were the order of the day, and then won and ruled the popular mind and heart by the tender sympathies of his nature; who was a cautious conservative by temperament and mental habit, and led the people into sudden and sweeping social revolutions of our time; who, preserving his homely speech and rustic manner even in the most conspicuous position of that period, drew upon himself the scoffs of polite society and then thrilled the soul of mankind with utterances of wonderful beauty and grandeur; who, in his heart the best friend of the defeated South, was murdered because a crazy fanatic took him for its most cruel enemy; who, while in power, was beyond measure lampooned and maligned by sectional passions and an excited party; who, around whose life a legend of heroism and grandeur has grown, which they have since never ceased to do—as one of the greatest of Americans and the best of men.

Lincoln: A Remarkable Essay

BY CLARK E. CARB.

Abraham Lincoln was the drollest man I ever saw. He could make a cat laugh. Never was another man so vivacious; never have I seen another who provoked so much mirth, and who entered into rollicking fun with such glee. He was the most comical and jocular of human beings, laughing with the same zest at his own jokes as at those of others. I did not wonder that, while actively engaged in party politics, his opponents who had seen him in these moods called Abraham Lincoln a clown and an ape.

Abraham Lincoln was the most serious man I ever saw. When I heard him protest against blighting our new territories with the curse of human slavery, in his debates with Senator Douglas, no man could have been more earnest, none more serious. In his analysis of legal problems, whether in the practice of his profession or in the consideration of state papers, he became wholly absorbed in his subject. Sometimes he lapsed into reverie and communed with his own thoughts, noting nothing that was going on about him until aroused, when perhaps he would enter into a discussion of the subject that had occupied his mind, or perhaps break out into laughter and tell a joke or story that set the table in a roar.

When I saw him at Gettysburg as he exclaimed, "That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that the Nation shall, under God, 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!"—when I heard him declare in his second inaugural address, "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondsmen's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said 3000 years ago, so still it must be said, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right"—as I looked upon him and heard him utter these sentiments, upon these occasions, Abraham Lincoln was the most solemn, the most dignified, the most majestic, and at the same time, the most benignant human being I ever saw.

Rochefoucauld says that "gravity is a mystery of the body invented to conceal defects of the mind." Lord Shaftesbury says that "gravity is the very essence of imposture." Abraham Lincoln had none of this.

Man is the most serious of animals. Man is the only animal that can both laugh and cry. Abraham Lincoln gave full vent to his emotions. He went through life with no restraints nor manacles upon his human nature. He was honest in the expression of his feelings, whether serious or otherwise; honest in their manifestation, honest with himself.

It was because Abraham Lincoln was the most human of human beings that he is loved as has never been any other man that ever lived.

LINCOLN

Here was a noble product of the soil
Grown starkly on the prairies of the West;
Insured to poverty; insured to toil;
The chivalry of Bayard in his breast.
A soul serene that ever onward pressed
Beyond the darts of calumny and hate;
Who stood in every crisis fierce, the test,
Till earth has linked his memory with her fate.
As Statesman, President, and master of his fate.

He pierced the aeons with a Prophet's eye.
Humanity was what he spelled in Creed;
He passed the letter of the Statute by
To give the spirit of it utmost heed;
His life was open both in word and deed
From prejudice and passion wholly free;
Of Liberty, he sowed a pregnant seed
For millions, and for millions yet to be;
Himself the bondman's Knight, of Nature's sole degree.

A Tribune of the people; so he sprang
And seized the reins of power and high place,
While through the world his challenge grandly rang
And shook Oppression's temple to its base.
His was the mettle of heroic race
On whom the seal of sterling merit sat:
The sunken cheeks, the shrewd and homely face
That shallow wits had launched their arrows at—
Rail-splitter, Orator and greatest Democrat.

Along the wide horizon of the years
A deep, sonorous echo of his name,
Rolls, thunderlike; and future history hears
An answering echo from the Halls of Fame;
We see the tall, the gaunt, ungainly frame,
We mark the will to dare, the mind to plan,
We find the pure resolve, the lofty aim:
And while his rugged virtues thus we scan
We stand uncovered while we cry, "This was a man."

And upward to the portals of the stars
And past the confines of the Seven Seas,
Beyond the smoky banners of our wars
Borne onward on the pinions of the breeze,
His fame is sung in divers master keys;
And shrined in bronze; or heralded in rhyme
Past mountain tops, and past the Peliades;
Far sent, far-sounding, still with tone sublime
Loud-bugled by the mighty trumpet note of Time.

ERNEST MCGAFFEY.

Portland, Ore., Feb. 1.