


# Today's Best Thought

A Series of Addresses  
by  
Foremost Speakers in North America

*This issue by*  
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# The Greatness of Abraham Lincoln

By

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**M**EN whom the world counts great have been conveniently grouped into three classes—those who are born great, those who attain to greatness, and those who have greatness thrust upon them. The first two groups may in reality be one—those who, born with inherent qualities of greatness, attain to its realization and recognition by their own innate power and its fortunate adaptation to opportunity. When a truly great man becomes the advocate of a great cause and meets a great situation adequately, worthily and triumphantly, the patient ages rise from their somnolence and rejoice.

The men who have greatness thrust upon them live not long in the rarified atmosphere to which they are suddenly elevated. They must die soon or they outlive their fame. Some of them, fortunately caught by death in the brief hour of their publicity, are suddenly enrolled among the notable men of their generation; but even so, they lengthen but little the period in which they are accounted notable. Die they soon or die they late, their fame fades, and they pass in due time to their own place in oblivion. But they who, being great, match their quality against the challenging front of opportunity, achieve a distinction which grows toward immortality. Like a snow-capped mountain, hidden at close view by its own foot-hills and emerging to seem at first only a possibly higher elevation in the range, they tower higher as the years recede, dwarfing all lesser hills of their contemporaries, until they stand as if in solitary grandeur; and while the plain is yet dark, they greet with radiant crest the dawn of succeeding generations. Of these men, greatest of all men of his generation, was Abraham Lincoln.

We measure the stature of Lincoln by the shadow which he casts over succeeding generations. It is nothing less than colossal. But while his figure bulks vast, his personality grows dim in outline as seen through the mists of the years. The memory of the men who knew him is not yet obliterated, but the halo about him refracts the light of calm judgment; and a clear vision of his qualities is lost in indiscriminate eulogy. Those who knew him constitute now a small and diminishing group, and these for the most part have added to the dim outline of their actual experiences of Lincoln the color of later reflection or tradition. Abraham Lincoln is already in good part a mythical character. To him are attributed many utterances which have no certain place in his authentic speeches or writings. Concerning him are current past any hope of eradication incidents which probably never occurred. Poetry and song and dramatic art and the myth-making tendency of the human mind are all at work, and have been active for a half century. He must have been a great man who could inspire such inventions; but can we discover the hiding of his power? Can we find at this late date the real Abraham Lincoln? And when we find him, will he still seem to us a truly great man?

#### I. THE GREATNESS OF HIS STATURE

Lincoln was a tall man. In any company his height alone made him conspicuous. This feature he accentuated by the long black coat and tall stiff hat which he habitually wore. He recognized the value of his own physical stature. He liked to measure himself, back to back, against other tall men, and was pleased if by a fraction of an inch he over-topped them. Some notable men who called upon him on matters of importance were surprised to have him open the conversation by an invitation to measure height with the President; but that method at least prepared the way for a conversation face to face.

Of Lincoln's stature, Herndon says: "In his eleventh year he began that marvelous and rapid growth for which he was so noted in the Pigeon Creek settlement." He quotes from a manuscript letter from David Turnham:

"As he shot up, he seemed to change in appearance and action. Although quick-witted and ready with an answer, he began to exhibit deep thoughtfulness, and was so often lost in studied reflection we could not help noticing the strange turn in his actions. He disclosed rare timidity and sensitiveness, especially

in the presence of men and women, and, although cheerful enough in the presence of the boys, he did not appear to seek our company as earnestly as before.”

Herndon comments on this letter:

“It was only the development of every boy. Nature was a little abrupt in the case of Abraham Lincoln. She tossed him from the nimbleness of boyhood to the gravity of manhood in a single night.” (Herndon’s Lincoln, i, p. 25.)

Before he finished his brief schooling in Indiana, Lincoln had attained his full height. Herndon says:

“He was now over six feet high, and was growing at a tremendous rate, for he added two inches more before the close of his seventeenth year, thus reaching the limit of his stature. He weighed in the region of a hundred and sixty pounds, was wiry, vigorous and strong. His feet and hands were large; arms and legs long and in striking contrast with his slender trunk and small head.”

He quotes Katy Roby, afterward Mrs. Allen Gentry, a school-mate:

“His skin was shrivelled and yellow. His shoes, when he had any, were low. He wore buckskin breeches, linsey-woolsey shirt, and a cap made of the skin of a squirrel or a coon. His breeches were baggy, and lacked by several inches meeting the tops of his shoes, thereby exposing his shin-bone, sharp, blue and narrow.” (Herndon’s Lincoln, i, 37-38.)

Lincoln’s sudden attainment of manhood stature, and its corresponding mental effect, were marked at the time and commented upon afterward. It was almost the last thing he ever did suddenly. He grew so fast that he reached the stature of manhood tired. We shall not go far wrong if we accept without attempt to qualify it the frank affirmation of his neighbors and employers that he was lazy. He inherited little energy either from Thomas Lincoln or the Hanks family—and what he inherited he used up in his rapid growth. Thereafter he moved and thought slowly.

Herndon’s description of Lincoln’s personal appearance in mature life is classic. Of few other men have we so clear and discriminating a portrayal:

“Mr. Lincoln was six feet four inches high, and when he left the city (of Springfield) for Washington was fifty-one years old, having good health and no gray hairs, or few, if any, on his head. He was thin, wiry, sinewy, raw-boned; thin through the breast to the back, and narrow across the shoulders; standing, he leaned

forward—was what may be called stoop-shouldered, inclined to the consumptive build. His usual weight was one hundred and eighty pounds. His organization—rather his structure and functions—worked slowly. His blood had to run a long distance from his heart to the extremities of his frame, and his nerve force had to travel through dry ground a long distance before the muscles were obedient to his will. His structure was loose and leathery; his body was shrunk and shrivelled; he had dark skin, dark hair, and looked woe-struck. The whole man, body and mind, worked slowly, as if it needed oiling. Physically he was a very powerful man, lifting with ease four hundred pounds, and in one case six hundred pounds. His mind was like his body, and worked slowly and strongly. Hence there was very little bodily or mental wear and tear in him. This peculiarity gave him a great advantage over other men in public life. No man in America—scarcely a man in the world—could have stood what Lincoln did in Washington and survived more than one term of the Presidency.

“When he walked, he moved cautiously but firmly; his long arms and giant hands hung down by his side. He walked with even tread, the inner sides of his feet being parallel. He put his whole foot down on the ground at once, not landing on his heel; he likewise lifted his foot all at once, not rising from the toe, and hence he had no spring to his walk. His walk was undulatory—catching and pocketing tire, weariness and pain, all up and down his person, and thus keeping them from locating. The first impression of a stranger, or a man who did not observe closely, was that his walk implied shrewdness or cunning—that he was a ‘tricky man,’ but in reality, it was the walk of caution and firmness.

“In sitting down on a common chair he was no taller than ordinary men. His legs and arms were abnormally, unnaturally long, and in undue proportion to the remainder of his body. It was only when he stood up that he loomed above other men.

“Mr. Lincoln’s head was long, and tall from the base of the brain and from the eyebrows. His head ran backwards, his forehead rising as it ran back at a low angle, like Clay’s, and unlike Webster’s, which was almost perpendicular. The size of his hat, measured at the hatter’s block, was seven and one-eighth, his head being, from ear to ear, six and one-half inches, and from the front to the back of the brain, eight inches. Thus measured it was not below the medium size. His forehead was narrow but high; his hair dark, almost black, and lay floating



when his fingers or the wind left it, piled up at random. His cheek bones were high, sharp and prominent; his jaws were long and up-curved; his nose was long, blunt, and a little awry toward the right eye; his chin was sharp and up-curved; his eyebrows cropped out like a large rock in the brow of a hill; his long, sallow face was wrinkled and dry, with a hair here and there on the surface; his cheeks were leathery; his ears were large and ran out almost at right angles from his head, caused partly by heavy hats and partly by nature; his lower lip was thick, hanging, and under-curved, while his chin reached for the lip up-curved; his neck was neat and trim, his head being well balanced on it; there was the loose mole on the right cheek, and Adam's apple on his throat.

“Thus stood, walked, acted and looked Abraham Lincoln. He was not a pretty man by any means, nor was he an ugly one; he was a homely man, careless of his looks, plain-looking and plain-acting. He had no pomp, display or dignity, so-called. He appeared simple in his carriage and bearing. He was a sad-looking man; his melancholy dripped from him as he walked.” (Herndon's *Lincoln*, iii, pp. 585-588.)

We possess a very large body of material that enables us to judge of the personal appearance of Lincoln. He emerged into prominence as the daguerreotype was coming into common use. Many photographers desired to make pictures of him, and Lincoln was not averse to having his picture taken. More than a hundred authentic and original photographs exist, showing his appearance from early in his career in Springfield to a few days before his death.

We have also oil portraits in considerable number. Soon after Lincoln's election artists flocked to Springfield. They set up their easels in the vacant legislative hall of the old Capitol and Lincoln was accustomed to sit for perhaps an hour each morning as they worked, reading his mail as he posed for them. Most, if not all, of these portraits are preserved. Some of them have merit and all of them have historic interest.

Of portraits after he became President, we have one in some respects the most notable of all, and surrounded most by remarkable associations, that of Frank B. Carpenter. The likeness is preserved in the detail portrait and in the notable painting of the Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the events which accompanied it are recorded in Carpenter's book, “Six Months in the White House.”

We are peculiarly fortunate in possessing the life-mask of Lincoln, as well as the casts of his hands—the former made in Chicago by Leonard Volk, a Chicago sculptor in the spring before his nomination for the Presidency, the latter made in Springfield, by the same artist, within a week after Lincoln's nomination. Volk was not a great sculptor, and he valued these casts for the sake of a statue which he made and which possessed no great merit. But he was a remarkably good workman in plastic material, and the casts were well made, and they preserve to all coming time not simply the bony structure of hands and head, but the living lineaments of Abraham Lincoln. To this undoubtedly accurate record of his features and his hands must every sculptor and artist refer.

Down to the time of his election to the Presidency, Mr. Lincoln wore no beard. A letter received from a little girl, Grace Bedell, suggested the wearing of a beard, and Lincoln accepted the suggestion. This decision has caused widespread regret, for the beard added little that was decorative, and did not conceal the lower lip, which was Lincoln's least attractive feature, but hid the well-modeled chin and a jaw that was at once kind and firm. To say that Lincoln was tall, gaunt and awkward does not accurately describe him. There was in his ungainliness a certain symmetry. He said of himself that for a clumsy fellow he was rather sure-footed. On election night in 1864, when the White House was almost deserted because so many Washington residents had gone home to vote, he told his secretaries and a little group who were rejoicing with him over the election returns, how on a dark night after his defeat by Douglas he had slipped on a muddy path but caught himself before he went down, and how he went on with a kind of gleeful application of the incident to his defeat—"It's a slip, but not a fall!"

To call Lincoln graceful would be untrue, but there was a certain co-ordination of his ungainlinesses which made for an approach to grace. Especially was this true when he grew animated in discourse. His features lit up; his eyes glowed; he forgot what he was doing with his great hands; he towered aloft and moved forward in his argument with a power of personality that caused men to forget that he was otherwise than graceful.

Hon. Joseph H. Choate, when a young man, heard Lincoln in his Cooper Union address. Years afterward he wrote out his impressions of the evening:

"He appeared in every sense of the word like one of the plain



people among whom he loved to be counted. At first sight there was nothing impressive or imposing about him; his clothes hung awkwardly on his giant form; his face was of a dark pallor without the slightest tinge of color; his seamed and rugged features bore the furrows of hardship and struggle; his deep-set eyes looked sad and anxious; his countenance in repose gave little evidence of the brilliant power which raised him from the lowest to the highest station among his countrymen; as he talked to me before the meeting he seemed ill at ease."

He was ill at ease, and painfully aware of his clothes, but he did not continue thus to be embarrassed. Mr. Choate continued his description:

"When he spoke, he was transformed; his eye kindled, his voice rang, his face shone and seemed to light up the whole assembly. For an hour and a half he held his audience in the hollow of his hand. \* \* \* It was marvelous to see how this untutored man, by mere self-discipline and the chastening of his own spirit, had outgrown all meretricious acts and found his way to the grandeur and strength of absolute simplicity."

Lincoln's voice was not deep and strong as seemed to befit a tall man. It was high and thin—almost grotesquely so. In his debates with Douglas, the feature which almost every surviving listener seems to have preserved is the contrast between the two men as to stature and sound. Douglas was a little man with a big voice—Lincoln a big man with a little voice. But Douglas abused his deep, rich baritone, and his voice wore out, and toward the end of the campaign could not be heard by a large portion of his audience; but Lincoln's thin, high voice carried well, and after he lost his self-consciousness was sufficiently flexible to be effective and persuasive.

People misjudged Lincoln who set him down as a clown or a simple rustic. A second and more careful look at him showed elements of dignity and nobility. Lincoln was great and capable of looking great. His portrait as we have become familiar with it is the portrait of a great man. Of him we could almost say, as the Duke of Wellington said after he had seen Webster: "Sir, no man could be as great as Daniel Webster looked!"

They also reckoned without their host who attempted on short acquaintance an undue familiarity with Lincoln. Familiar as he was, there was about him a certain dignity that protected him from too free approach.

The man who now declares that he habitually addressed Lincoln

by his first name, whether in full or with abbreviation, probably draws upon his imagination rather than his memory. Lincoln's neighbors did not address him as "Abraham" or "Abe." They called him "Mr. Lincoln."

## II. THE GREATNESS OF HIS INTELLECT

Abraham Lincoln possessed a great mind. Born in the midst of penury and destitution, not only of educational advantages but of incentive to study, he obtained by force of will and strength of mental power a mind disciplined and of commanding ability.

He had a logical mind. He wanted, as he said, to be able to bound his subject, North, South, East and West. He had a fondness for mechanics which he transferred to his mental processes; he insisted on knowing the connections of truths, their causes and effects. He would be content with nothing short of truth.

Where he inherited this power and aptitude has given rise to much discussion. He appears to have inherited from his father a certain imperturbability and good nature; a slowness of mental and physical movement, and an ability to discern a humorous quality in men and events. From his mother, as he believed, he inherited his power of analysis, his intellectual alertness, his gift of logic.

In his earlier environment there was, as he said, "absolutely nothing" to stimulate within him the love of learning; yet the love of learning was strong within him. Much did he owe to solitude and the power of reflection.

Yet his was a nature strongly social, and under that was inherent in him a great human love which could not have been evoked except in association and competition with men.

Of his mental development in youth, Herndon wrote:

"The intellectual fire burned slowly, but with a steady and intense glow. Although denied the requisite training of the school-room, he was none the less competent to cope with those who had undergone that discipline. No one had a more retentive memory. If he read or heard a good thing it never escaped him. His powers of concentration were intense, and in the ability to strip bare a proposition he was unexcelled. His thoughtful and investigating mind dug down after ideas and never stopped till bottom facts were reached. With such a mental equipment the day was destined to come when the world would need the services of his intellect and heart. That he was equal to the great task when the demand came is but another striking proof

of the grandeur of his character.” (Herndon’s Lincoln, i, p. 44—1st ed.)

Of Lincoln’s habits of study while at New Salem, Robert B. Rutledge wrote to William H. Herndon a paper which Herndon used in part and which the nephew of Robert Rutledge has furnished me in full. He says:

“While clerking in the store or serving as postmaster he would apply himself as opportunity offered to his studies, if it was but five minutes’ time—would open his book which he always kept at hand, study it, reciting to himself, then entertain the company present or wait on a customer without apparent annoyance from the interruption. I have frequently seen him reading while walking along the streets. Occasionally he would become absorbed with his book; would stop and stand for a few moments, then walk on, or pass from one house to another, or from one squad or crowd of men to another. He was apparently seeking amusement; and with his thoughtful face and ill-fitting clothes was the last man we would have singled out for a student. \* \* \* He never appeared to be a hard student, and he seemed to master his studies with little effort until he commenced the study of the law. In that he was wholly engrossed, and began for the first time to avoid the society of men, in order that he might have more time for study. He was not what is usually termed a quick-witted man, although he would usually arrive at his conclusions very readily. He seemed invariably to reflect and deliberate, and never acted from impulse so far as to force a wrong conclusion on a subject of any moment.” (Herndon’s Lincoln, i, 113.)

“The weird and melancholy association of eloquence and poetry had a strong fascination for Lincoln’s mind,” said Hon. Lawrence Weldon, at a bar-meeting held in the U. S. Court in Springfield in June, 1865. Tasteful composition, either of prose or poetry, which faithfully contrasted the realities of eternity with the unstable and fickle fortunes of time, made a strong impression on his mind. In the indulgence of this taste it is related of him that the poem “Immortality” he knew by rote and appreciated very highly. He had a strange liking for the verses, and they bear a just resemblance to his fortune.” (Herndon, iii, p. 626.)

Horace Greeley, in one of his brutally frank letters to Lincoln, told him plainly that he was not considered a really great man. The nation counted him in 1860 a political accident. Of his Cabinet, Seward, Chase and Stanton all let him know at one time or another that they considered him their inferior. But he was

great enough to compel their respect, not by the fiat of his political position above them, but by sheer force of an intellectual superiority which compelled even Seward to write to his wife:

“The President is the best of us.”

There are two opposing theories of the origin of great men. One of them, derived from Buckle and his school, attempts to account for all men, both individually and racially, by their environment and the conditions of the times in which they live. The other, of whose conviction Carlyle is the indignant spokesman, explains not the man by his times, but his times by the man. Emerson agreed with Carlyle, and went even farther. The Atlantic Ocean is there because nothing smaller would answer the purposes of Columbus; he needed a large world and a round world and a wide ocean to express what was inherent in himself. The world and all external conditions are to be explained by the man, and not the man by his world.

Something of this latter theory must be held as to genius. It has its own laws. It produces its own exponents in manner and form which cannot be predicted. It is impossible to explain Robert Burns without Scotland, but Scotland alone does not explain Burns. Scotland has been on the map for a long time, and still there is but one Robert Burns. Henry Ward Beecher stood at the foot of his class in Amherst College. Since his day many men in Amherst College have stood at the foot of the class, and it is not known that that environment has produced any more Beechers. Socrates was the product of the life and spirit of Athens, but Athens has long since given up the expectation of producing men of Socratic mind by the wholesale.

No great man can be understood entirely apart from his environment, and if he could, it would be unfair both to him and to his environment thus to interpret him; but that which enables a man to dominate and rise above his environment is in the man himself.

Lincoln would have been a great man in almost any environment. Gray is not the only man who has had occasion to moralize concerning the “mute inglorious Miltons” or the Cromwells guiltless of their country’s blood and of anything else good or bad enough to be mentioned. A few of them might have won fame and fortune in more favorable environment, but most of them in any other place would have continued mute and inglorious.

In statecraft, as in certain other of the nobler vocations, there are few absolute standards by which to measure greatness or

success. A civil engineer erects a bridge; it stands or falls, and with it stands or falls his success in his profession. A manufacturer establishes a business; it pays a profit or sustains a loss, and the balance-sheet shows it at the end of each year. A lawyer either wins his case or loses it, and he knows which as soon as the jury is polled, or the court reads its decision. The soldier either wins his battle or is defeated, and no end of official lying will permanently conceal the truth. But the teacher, the editor, the preacher and the statesman, however soon or keenly they may be made aware of failures in their respective fields, have not the same swift and sure credentials of success. The teacher must live long to see his pupils come to fame, and when they do so, he may have to divide his share of the glory with other influences which deserve it less. The editor may die before he knows that an editorial of his, pasted into a farm-house scrap-book, influenced for power or righteousness a life. The preacher must measure his success by evidences far more intangible than the size either of his congregation or his salary.

The politician also must wait long for lasting evidence of his greatness. He cannot measure it by the election returns, nor by the number of his re-elections. His success in the political arena is seldom undisputed, and he must courageously wait long before the results of the policies in which he is able to carry out his purposes bear their full and legitimate fruit and his wisdom is conceded and assured. Few men in politics live to see the result of this testing. A statesman has been defined as a dead politician; he is more than that—he is a politician whose work, viewed in the retrospect, attains a common acceptance of justification as wise, righteous, constructive and permanent.

Lincoln died while the judgment concerning his work was still in the balance, tilted indeed in his favor by the successful termination of the war, but with a final and favorable decision to be rendered not by his contemporaries alone, but also by posterity; not by America only, but by the world.

A sure test of Lincoln's intellectual processes is afforded by his literary style. The free use of words is no assurance of the ability to think. But Lincoln's clear, clean-cut, accurate and transparent use of English is the indubitable evidence of a mind working with precision, with conviction and with authority. Only a mind strong and clear and logical and well-disciplined could have expressed itself as Lincoln's did in pure, accurate and forceful language.

There is legitimate ground for honest difference of opinion



whether Abraham Lincoln at the time of his election was a sufficiently great man to have been elected President, or whether, having in him the inarticulate elements of greatness, he was educated up to his responsibilities. Henry Adams, seeing him on the night of his first inaugural ball, painfully conscious of his white gloves and showing little evidence that he was conscious of anything else, may have had some justification for his opinion that Lincoln had not as yet the requisite training for his task. But surely he was not justified in his further inference that no training that could come to him would ever be sufficient.

Lincoln declared that he did not claim to have controlled events, but that he had been controlled by them. He spoke in part truly, but that was not the whole truth. In a very large sense he did control events, and his control was that of a man who trusted his own intellectual judgments and was capable of compelling other men to accept them and in the main to approve them.

Lincoln possessed a mind capable of indefinite growth. Essentially one with the people among whom he was born and with whom he spent the years of his boyhood and youth, he early displayed a capacity for development that carried him beyond the horizon and above the level of the life of his associates. This he accomplished without at any point breaking his associations with them. His root remained in the soil of his associations, but he grew until the terminal end of his ideal was far above his associations.

He learned by his disappointments. Peter the Great is said to have accepted his early defeats in battle with a kind of glee. "They are teaching me how to fight," he is reported to have said. Lincoln fulfilled in his own career the old Latin proverb that it is lawful to learn from the enemy. He was educated by his defeats. After he suffered humiliation at the hands of Stanton in the reaper case, he returned from Cincinnati to Illinois "to study law." He was already one of the foremost men at the Illinois bar, but he had learned something from a cruel disappointment, and he did not fail to make use of what he had learned. He returned from his one term in Congress and mastered Euclid. He disciplined himself through his disappointments.

Also, he grew through his successes. They increased his self-confidence, without spoiling him with vanity.

Thus disciplined by both failure and success, Lincoln grew mentally, and he was growing to the very end of his life. His mind was a growing, a retentive, a noble, a truly great mind.

### III. THE GREATNESS IN THE BREADTH OF HIS SYMPATHIES

We cannot understand Lincoln without an appreciation of the range and power of his sympathies.

It is related of him that when he began to compose essays for use in the backwoods school of Indiana, one of the first, and perhaps the very first, of his attempts at literature was one on cruelty to animals. In it he especially protested against the practice of putting hot coals on the back of a turtle, as boys sometimes did, in order to make the turtle thrust out its head. His crossing the cold stream to carry over a dog that had been left behind and was afraid of the chilly water; his dismounting to pull out a pig that was mired deep in the mud, are kindred evidences of his sympathies. He once in his youth shot and killed a wild turkey, and never thereafter killed any larger game. He was not a hunter; his father appears never to have been a hunter. He seems not to have cared to take life needlessly. It does not appear to have troubled him as a young man to have assisted the farmers at their work of hog-killing, but this necessary work for the providing of food appears to have had a different place in his thought and feeling from that of taking life for sport.

Lincoln's sympathy sometimes caused him to be imposed upon. It was hard for him to resist an appeal on behalf of youth, old age or womanhood. A woman dressed in widow's garb made an immediate appeal to his sympathies, and there is good reason to believe that some of the sable millinery worn by those who came to him was borrowed for the occasion.

Abraham Lincoln was great as an orator. Without this element of greatness he could never have risen to fame. He was great in the high quality of his public leadership. The political leader has no such swift and sure test of success as has the military leader or the captain of industry. His success is something far less tangible, as is the success of all moral leadership. Every great leader of men must have one of two qualities. He must either have vision to enable him to see farther and clearer than other men, or he must have the ability to discern the mind of the people and adapt himself to their moods, wills and changing purposes. Few, very few, are the leaders who possess both these qualities, and almost none hold them in an equal balance. But Abraham Lincoln possessed them both, and that to a marked degree.

Generals fumed and Stanton swore because of his readiness to pardon common soldiers sentenced to die for infraction of necessary military rules.

But it would be a mistake to assume that Lincoln's sympathies were balanced by no consideration of firmness and stern resolution. Lincoln permitted the military prisons to be filled with men and women under suspicion of treason, and saw to it that those prisons were in charge of very stern men. He permitted the writ of habeas corpus to be suspended in order that where it was necessary very relentless judgment might be measured out against people who were lengthening the war or rendering its result less certain—some of them eminent and respectable people.

Many of the stories told of his gentleness are mythical. But Lincoln did issue pardons, many of them, and in the judgment of officers of the army, more than he ought, for the release of common soldiers charged with offenses which it seemed to him might be condoned. He did not see, he said, that it would do those men any good to shoot them. But he had no such mercy on "the wily agitator" or the respectable copperhead who discouraged enlistments or gave comfort to the enemy. His tenderness of heart possessed a counterbalancing quality of stern justice—a kind of relentlessness the more terrible because he was so kind.

Lincoln approached the question of slavery under the impulse of a threefold predisposition. First, he had something of the feeling of race superiority which belonged to a man of southern birth, reared in an environment essentially southern in birth and tradition. In the second place, he had a mighty and compelling sense of justice. For the same reason that he would not willingly be a slave, he would not be a master. In the third he had a compelling sympathy. This quality is expressed in his letter to Joshua F. Speed under date of August 24, 1855. Speed was an old friend, and in regard to slavery a southerner. Lincoln had re-entered politics, still believing himself a Whig and being very much mistaken about it, for he was no longer a Whig. He wrote:

"I acknowledge your rights and my obligations under the Constitution in regard to your slaves. I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down and carried back to their stripes and unrequited toil; but I bite my lips and keep quiet. In 1841 you and I had together a tedious low-water trip on a steamboat from Louisville to St. Louis. You may remember that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were aboard ten or a dozen slaves, shackled together with irons. The sight was a constant torment to me, and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio

or the slave border. It is not fair for you to assume that I have no interest in a thing that has and continually exercises the power to make me miserable.''

He was talking of his own right, as a non-slaveholder living in a free state, to an interest in slavery such as might lead him to an active opposition. The root of his personal interest, as here set forth, was in the power of slavery to make him miserable in its strong appeal to his personal sympathy.

Great in his sympathies, Lincoln was greater in his patience. He was patient with generals who lost battles which they ought to have won, and who shirked when they ought to have been fighting. He was patient with Mead, though sorely tried because he did not follow Lee after Gettysburg; patient with Burnside and Hooker and Pope. He was patient with his Cabinet officers when they did not agree with him. He was patient with the nation, even when he thought it had repudiated him and was about to throw him and his policies overboard.

Abraham Lincoln was a man of the noblest type of magnanimity.

He knew that Seward believed himself to be a much greater man than Lincoln, but he made Seward his prime minister. He refused to let Seward resign; he ignored Seward's haughty demeanor. He respected Seward, took counsel of Seward, profited by the assistance of Seward, and found in him an invaluable counsellor and a loyal friend.

Lincoln was tried almost beyond endurance by Chase. Biographers have denounced Chase as a selfish plotter. Charnwood calls him a sneak, and John Drinkwater had him in mind when he created for the Cabinet of Lincoln his character of Burnet Hook. Chase was not an intentionally dishonorable man. He believed that he ought to have been President in 1860. He had fought and suffered for the freedom of the slave long before Lincoln had defined his opinions upon that subject. Chase believed that one term of Lincoln was as much as the country could endure, and he deliberately used his own position in the Cabinet and his relation as father-in-law of Governor Sprague, and the charm and ambition of his daughter, Kate Chase Sprague, to make himself President, if he could, in 1864. Lincoln knew his schemes and disapproved them, but "hoped the country would never have a worse President than Chase would make." He held Chase in the Cabinet, not indeed to the end of his administration, but until his notable work as Secretary of the Treasury had been so far and so well done that the country could spare him by accepting one of his many resignations. But when old Chief

Justice Taney died, Lincoln appointed as his successor on the Supreme Bench of the United States the very man who had so long and so often irritated him—Salmon P. Chase.

Everyone knows the story of Lincoln's monumental patience with McClellan and the magnanimity with which he endured the timidity, the irresolution, the conceit and the hostility of that general. We need not here review it, but we must recall, though the story is familiar, his relations to Stanton. Stanton had snubbed him cruelly in the reaper case, and Lincoln was hurt to the heart. Stanton was a Democrat and had been a Cabinet officer under Buchanan. Stanton held Lincoln in contempt and Lincoln knew it. But Stanton had organizing power, and an inflexible will, and a sulphurous vocabulary, and a passionate loyalty. Lincoln made him his Secretary of War, and no man in the nation could have filled better that trying position. Stanton was rude to Lincoln, but Lincoln won not only his support but his enduring affection. In the terrible days of the war's greatest peril and uncertainty, he was always to be relied upon. When Lincoln was shot, his fortitude and control of a situation that paralyzed the nation made him for a few hours the *de facto* head of the Government. With the Vice-President helpless and the Secretary of State weltering in his own blood and apparently dying, Stanton quietly and with determination sat by the bedside of the President, dictated the best account which has ever been written of the assassination, issued orders, held a steady hand on the affairs of the nation, and stood like a mighty rock in a stricken land. And when the man whom he had grown to honor and to love' breathed his last, he uttered those undying words: "Now he belongs to the ages."

#### IV. THE GREATNESS IN HIS RELIGIOUS NATURE

Lincoln's religion was inherent in the qualities that made up his manhood. It is true that he did not find himself at home in the church with which his parents were affiliated, the Baptist Church. It is also true that he did not unite with the Presbyterian Church when his wife left the Episcopal Church and joined the Presbyterian. But it is true that his religious convictions underwent a change in 1850 when he came under the influence of Rev. James Smith and read his book on the Evidences of Christianity. Three unimpeachable witnesses testify that Lincoln declared that that book had changed his religious thinking, and Lincoln knew that Dr. Smith claimed to have brought to him evidences which resulted in his change of view. Lincoln permitted Dr. Smith to



circulate this report, and confirmed it to his own brother-in-law, Ninian W. Edwards, and when Dr. Smith gave up his pastoral work on account of age, Lincoln made him U. S. Consul to Dundee, Scotland. If Smith lied, Lincoln not only condoned the lie but participated in it. But he did not lie. Lincoln for the first time learned in logical form the evidences of Christianity and was profoundly impressed.

But Lincoln's religion was not wholly or even chiefly a matter of his opinions on doctrinal matters. It was a development, a growth.

When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation he told his Cabinet he did not ask their opinion of the main questions, for he had promised his God that he would do this thing.

Among all state papers and addresses there is none that breathes a deeper religious spirit than his Second Inaugural. It is religious from beginning to end. It is not only the noblest and greatest of his utterances—it is the high water mark of his own religious convictions.

He believed in God. He knew and honored the Bible. He believed in prayer. He believed in God's guidance in the affairs of men and nations. He believed in duty and immortality. Out of his authentic utterances could be formulated a creed, and it would not be an unworthy or unattractive creed. Abraham Lincoln was a Christian.

#### V. THE GREATNESS IN HIS POWER TO INFLUENCE HIS OWN AND SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS

Like most great men, Lincoln suffered in his own age a divided judgment. The tests of greatness in politics are not immediate and undisputable. Lincoln was denounced in his own day in terms which I should not like to repeat, so bitter, cruel and unjust were they. But he was able to hold men in working relationships and to accomplish his purposes and perform his permanent tasks. In the best sense he was an opportunist. He combined vision with practical sagacity. He was subtle and at times stubborn. He was pliable and in time of need adamant. He was a man of strong and contradictory qualities.

Lincoln was not a radical. He was a conservative. As an advocate of anti-slavery his constant appeal was to the fathers of the Republic, who, while recognizing the inevitability of slavery, believed it a moral wrong and desired its extinction. He was slow to leave the Whig Party. Even in 1855 he wrote to Speed that he believed himself to be a Whig. But the Whig

Party was already dead. Of its seven candidates, it had elected only two, Harrison and Taylor, and both of them had died early. It drew to itself the ablest men in the nation, north and south, but it did not succeed in defining its issues in terms that compelled assent.

Lincoln was unmethodical and disorderly in his office and unsystematic in his work of preparation for his cases. But he had a singular ability to discriminate in his mental processes between the essential and non-essential.

This process he carried over into his moral judgments. He believed in a government dedicated to equality of rights before the law. We are much more likely to think ourselves the equal of Lincoln than to think humbler men our equals. Lincoln faced honestly the full implications of his convictions.

Lincoln was an American. He epitomized in his life the whole of American history. He was born in a log cabin. He became President of the United States. He lived through backwoods life in Kentucky, pioneer life in Indiana, small town life in New Salem, the life of a State Capital in Springfield; and at Washington he shared and was a part of the life of the whole nation.

We never think of him as southern. We think of him as American. He belongs to Kentucky, to Indiana, to Illinois, but he belongs to the whole United States of America.

But he does more than this. It is remarkable that side by side with the growth of America's own appreciation of him has appeared a new sense of his world citizenship. England claims him and so do all free nations. His biography has been published not only in innumerable editions in the United States, but in England, France, Spain, Germany, Holland, Russia, Italy, Turkey, China, Japan, Hawaii and South America.

He belongs to the world.

The noblest statue of him, that of St. Gaudens, stands in Chicago and forever interprets to the world his features, stature and noble appearance. But in Newark stands the statue of Gutzon Gorglum, with Lincoln seated on a bench. There the working man may sit beside him and eat out of his dinner pail, and little children climb upon his knees.

But Great Britain demands a St. Gaudens, and a replica of his noble Lincoln is erected near Westminster Hall and the Abbey. And other European nations have and ever will have his monument. And they all know his name and know his character. Abraham Lincoln is not only America's greatest American—he is the first world citizen of modern times.