ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Daniel Fish —
With all good wishes
and fondest hopes for
Some reciprocation
7/1/15

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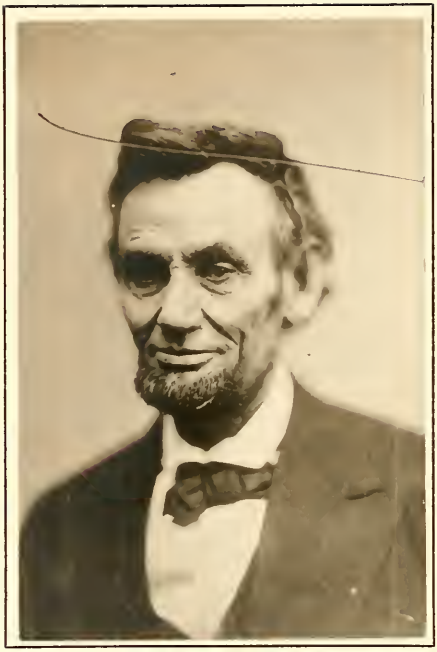

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Privately Printed
NEW YORK
1914

THE

ORATORICAL YEAR BOOK

FOR 1865:

BEING A COLLECTION OF

THE BEST COTEMPORARY SPEECHES

DELIVERED

IN PARLIAMENT, AT THE BAR, AND ON THE PLATFORM.

ARRANGED AND EDITED BY

ALSAGER HAY HILL, LL.B.,

OF THE INNER TEMPLE, BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

"Iterat voces et verba cadentia tollit."—Hor. Ep. 1. 18. 12.

LONDON:

FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.,

BEDFORD STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1866.

THE ORATION

This address was delivered by Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, orator, poet and essayist, at Concord, Massachusetts, on the occasion of funeral services in honor of Mr. Lincoln, in April, 1865.

It is an epitome of the life of the martyred President, a marvelous tribute from a contemporary singularly fitted to pronounce the verdict of time upon a great leader, spoken while the shock of the assassination absorbed the minds of all alike.

The collection of Lincolniana of Mr. Judd Stewart of Plainfield, New Jersey, contains The Oratorical Year Book for 1865, published in London 1866, in which this oration appeared. Follows a list of speeches also included in this Year Book upon the same subject: In the House of Commons On the Assassination of President Lincoln by Sir George Grey, Mr. Benjamin Disraeli, Mr. W. E. Forster and Mr. J. Stansfeld; the address of Rev. Henry Ward Beecher at Fort Sumter on April 14, 1865, on which day Lincoln was shot; the speech of Mr. William H. Seward, Secretary of State, at Auburn, N. Y., on October 20, 1865, "in return for the public congratulations offered him in his escape from the assassination intended by the cowardly accomplice of Wilkes Booth;" and this oration by Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson. Included also is the second inaugural address of President Lincoln and his speech upon the

Conclusion of the War delivered at Washington on the evening of April 11, 1865.

The title page of the book is shown in fac-simile. The remarkable photograph of Mr. Lincoln is one of several made by Gardner on April 9, 1865, the last made of the President. That of Mr. Emerson was made later in Philadelphia.

This address was printed without paragraphs and is reprinted here in the same form. It is hoped that it may be of interest to admirers of Lincoln and Emerson.

FREDERICK HILL MESERVE

New York, December, 1914.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By RALPH WALDO EMERSON

WE meet under the gloom of a calamity which darkens down over the minds of good men in all civilized society, as the fearful tidings travel over sea, over land, from country to country, like the shadow of an uncalculated eclipse over the planet. Old as history is, and manifold as are its tragedies, I doubt if any death has caused so much pain to mankind as this has caused, or will cause, on its announcement; and this not so much because nations are by modern arts brought so closely together, as because of the mysterious hopes and fears which, in the present day, are connected with the name and institutions of America. In this country, on Saturday, every one was struck dumb, and saw, at first, only deep below deep, as he meditated on the ghastly blow. And, perhaps, at this hour, when the coffin which contains the dust of the President sets forward on its long march through mourning States, on its way to his home in Illinois, we might well be silent, and suffer the

awful voices of the time to thunder to us. Yes, but that first despair was brief; the man was not so to be mourned. He was the most active and hopeful of men; and his work had not perished; but acclamations of praise for the task he had accomplished burst out into a song of triumph, which even tears for his death cannot keep down. The President stood before us a man of the people. He was thoroughly American, had never crossed the sea, had never been spoiled by English insularity or French dissipation; a quiet, native, aboriginal man, as an acorn from the oak; no aping of foreigners, no frivolous accomplishments; Kentuckian born, working on a farm, a flatboatman, a captain in the Blackhawk war, a country lawyer, a representative in the rural legislature of Illinois—on such modest foundations the broad structure of his fame was laid. How slowly, yet by happily prepared steps, he came to his place! All of us remember—it is only a history of five or six years—the surprise and disappointment of the country at his first nomination at Chicago. Mr. Seward, then in the culmination of his good fame, was the favorite of the Eastern States. And when the new and comparatively unknown name of Lincoln was announced (notwithstanding the report of the acclamations of that convention) we heard the result coldly and sadly.

It seemed too rash, on a purely local reputation, to build so grave a trust, in such anxious times; and men naturally talked of the chances in politics as incalculable. But it turned out not to be chance. The profound good opinion which the people of Illinois and of the West had conceived of him, and which they had imparted to their colleagues, that they also might justify themselves to their constituents at home, was not rash, though they did not begin to know the richness of his worth. A plain man of the people, an extraordinary fortune attended him. Lord Bacon says, "Manifest virtues procure reputation; occult ones, fortune." He offered no shining qualities at the first encounter; he did not offend by superiority. He had a face and manner which disarmed suspicion, which inspired confidence, which confirmed goodwill. He was a man without vices. He had a strong sense of duty which it was very easy for him to obey. Then he had what farmers call a long head; was excellent in working out the sum for himself, in arguing his case and convincing you fairly and firmly. Then it turned out that he was a great worker, and, prodigious faculty of performance, worked easily. A good worker is so rare; everybody has some one disabling quality. But this man was sound to the very core, cheerful, persistent, all right for labour,

and liked nothing so well. Then he had a vast good nature, which made him tolerant and accessible to all; fair-minded, leaning to the claim of the petitioner, affable, and not sensible to the affliction which the innumerable visits paid to him, when President, would have brought to any one else. And how this good nature became a noble humanity in many a tragic case which the events of the war brought to him everyone will remember, and with what increasing tenderness he dealt when a whole race was on his compassion. The poor negro said of him, on an impressive occasion, "Massa Linkum am eberywhere." Then his broad good humour, running easily into jocular talk, in which he delighted and in which he excelled, was a rich gift to this wise man. It enabled him to keep his secret, to meet every kind of man and every rank in society, to take off the edge of the severest decisions, to mask his own purpose and sound his companion, and to catch with true instinct the temper of each company he addressed. And, more than all, it is to a man of severe labour, in anxious and exhausting crises, the natural restorative, good as sleep, and is the protection of the overdriven brain against rancour and insanity. He is the author of a multitude of good sayings, so disguised as pleasantries that it is certain that they had no

reputation at first but as jests; and only later, by the acceptance and adoption they find in the mouths of millions, turn out to be the wisdom of the hour. I am sure if this man had ruled in a period of less facility of printing, he would have become mythological in a few years, like Aesop or Pilpay, or one of the Seven Wise Masters, by his fables and proverbs. But the weight and penetration of many passages in his letters, messages, and speeches, hidden now by the very closeness of their application to the moment, are destined hereafter to wide fame. What pregnant definitions; what unerring common sense; what foresight; and on great occasions, what lofty and more than natural, what humane tone! His occupying the chair of State was a triumph of the good sense of mankind and of the public confidence. This middle-class country had got a middle-class President at last. Yes, in manners, sympathies, but not in powers, for his powers were superior. His mind mastered the problem of the day; and, as the problem grew, so did his comprehension of it. Rarely was man so fitted to the event. In the midst of fears and jealousies, in the Babel of counsels and parties, this man wrought incessantly with all his might and all his honesty, labouring to find what the people wanted, and how to obtain that. It cannot be said there is any exaggera-

tion of his worth. If ever a man was fairly tested he was. There was no lack of resistance, nor of slander, nor of ridicule. The times have allowed no State secrets; the nation has been in such a ferment, such multitudes had to be trusted, that no secret could be kept. Every door was ajar, and we know all that befell. Then what an occasion was the whirlwind of the war! Here was place for no holiday magistrate, no fair-weather sailor; the new pilot was hurried to the helm in a tornado. In four years —the four years of battle-days—his endurance, his fertility of resources, his magnanimity, were sorely tried and never found wanting. There, by his courage, his justice, his even temper, his fertile counsel, his humanity, he stood, an heroic figure in the centre of an heroic epoch. He is the true history of the American people in his time. Step by step he walked before them; slow with their slowness, quickening his march by theirs; the true representative of this continent; an entirely public man; father of his country, the pulse of twenty millions throbbing in his heart, the thought of their minds articulated by his tongue. Adam Smith remarks that the axe which in Houbraken's portraits of British kings and worthies is engraved under those who have suffered at the block adds a certain lofty charm to the picture. And who does

not see, even in this tragedy so recent, how fast the terror and ruin of the massacre are already burning into glory around the victim? Far happier this fate than to have lived to be wished away; to have watched the decay of his own faculties; to have seen,—perhaps, even he,—the proverbial ingratitude of statesmen; to have seen mean men preferred. Had he not lived long enough to keep the greatest promise that ever man made to his fellow men—the practical abolition of slavery? He had seen Tennessee, Missouri and Maryland emancipate their slaves. He had seen Savannah, Charleston and Richmond surrendered; had seen the main army of the rebellion lay down its arms. He had conquered the public opinion of Canada, England and France. Only Washington can compare with him in fortune. And what if it should turn out, in the unfolding of the web, that he had reached the term; that this heroic deliverer could no longer serve us; that the rebellion had touched its natural conclusion, and what remained to be done required new and uncommitted hands—a new spirit born out of the ashes of the war; and that Heaven, wishing to show the the world a completed benefactor, shall make him serve his country even more by his death than his life. Nations, like kings, are not good by facility and complaisance. "The kindness

of kings consists in justice and strength." Easy good nature has been the dangerous foible of the Republic, and it was necessary that its enemies should outrage it, and drive us to unwonted firmness, to secure the salvation of this country in the next ages.

THIRTY COPIES OF THIS ADDRESS ARE PRINTED WITH TWO PHOTOGRAPHS AND A FAC-SIMILE OF THE TITLE PAGE OF THE ORATORICAL YEAR BOOK.

THIS IS NUMBER 14

F. H. Kellerserve