

Abraham Lincoln



BY

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE centennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln is an appropriate time to study and emulate the virtues of that character which in many of its aspects towers above other great statesmen who have by their talent, attainments and patriotism won for themselves honor in history and the devotion of their countrymen as the stately monarch of the pine everglade towers above the surrounding shrubs. While many who were not noble have by their brilliancy of intellect, or by their scholarly attainments or by their tireless labor made for themselves lasting fame and are thereby numbered with the great men, as men are judged of men, yet of a truth none are great save those of noble heart. The ignoble may pass with men for famous, yet by true value they are infamous. And, per contra, he who is in truth noble is great. And his true greatness is in direct ratio to the true nobility of his heart and character and not to the size of his hat band. Else it were little use for us to seek to follow in the steps of such as Abraham Lincoln. He was a great intellect. We may no more hope to compass his intellectual stature than we can all hope to be his physical equal. But it was not for his qualities of mind that he was great; it was for the character developed by a fervid love of right as he saw it.

Honesty the Mainstay of His Character.

He was elevated to a lofty position and won and held the love of his fellows and of the world, not because he was brilliant Abe, nor brainy Abe, nor witty Abe, but because

he was "Honest Abe." And in that particular each of us may, if he will, be his peer.

To emulate a great character is not to laud its greatness, but it is to cultivate those virtues which made it great. It is not in honor of the birth of Lincoln that people spend the night in dance. Lincoln may have danced for aught I know or care, but he is not remembered for his grace in the ball room. The dancer has no right to conjure with the name of Lincoln. Let him celebrate the birth of Beau Brummel.

BUT, if it be an offense against a great name to connect it with those deeds that did not contribute to make it great, it is a double offense to seek to dignify unworthy deeds by the name of one to whose character those deeds were repugnant. It is offense enough, in sooth, that giddy society would seek to ennoble its frivolities by the name of one who never indulged in those frivolities. But it is immeasurably more brazen to seek to justify errors by the name of one who opposed them.

Like all honest souls he departed from the beaten path of custom and prejudice in so far as those paths were divergent to the parallel of his conception of right and truth. He followed the road pointed out by his apprehension of duty. That much WE can do. And that was the basis of his greatness. As to his duty he, like us all, possibly erred. But this much is certain, up to his light he did his duty.

To Be True—The Crux of Character.

"I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed but I am bound to live up to what light I have," was his

maxim of life. This much we can all do. More than this we are not required to do. We may not see as plainly. That is a matter of vision. But that we do as well as our vision reveals is the lowest standard that can be called honest—and the highest.

History in Duplex.

Lincoln lived in a time of great struggle on a problem of political morality. So do we. Lincoln saw the great statesmen of his time trim and dodge on the issue, seeming to take sides by the pronunciation of glittering generalities and vague abstractions but leaving the vital points at issue untouched or skillfully glossed. And these conditions are current history.

He was a member of the Whig party. That was the then party of "high moral ideals." It was the "just-as-good-abolitionist-as-you-are—but" party. It was the party that had done everything that had ever been done for freedom." It was the "least of two evils." It was "as high as public sentiment was educated." It was the party that "was ready to oppose the extension of slavery when the people demanded it." It was not a party of rampant vice, but of quiescent virtue. But it was at a time when quiescent virtue was criminal complicity. On the great politico-moral question that had troubled the dreams of the nation for two generations it was characterless when to be characterless was a crime.

Choose Ye This Day and Be Honest.

Before Lincoln on the one side is the party of respectability, power, honor and influence, the party which he had loved and supported, the party of his political heroes—Clay, Harrison,

Webster—but as touching slavery it was indifferent and hence, he believed wrong. On the other side was the despised "black" republican party, weak, poor, contemptible but he believed right. What should Abraham Lincoln, an honest man, do? Listen to Lincoln: "Stand with anybody who stands right. Stand with him while he is right; part from him when he goes wrong." That meant to leave the Whig party with its power and prestige and join the hated "black" republicans. With his belief other action was impossible—he was Honest Abe.

And today the Republican party vaunts itself on its former history as the party of "high moral ideals." It is the "just-as-good-a-Prohibitionist-as-you-are—but" party. It has "done everything that has ever been done for temperance." It is the "least of two evils." But on the great politico-moral question of the hour it is characterless when to be characterless is a crime.

The "Can't" of the Coward—the Boast of the Brave.

The slave power was blatant and arrogant. Most of its opponents cringed and cowered and whimpered "Would to God we could, but we can't." At the best it seemed a long, hard fight. "Though I may live the full allotment of man's days," said Phillips, the brightest of abolition lights, "I have no hope that I shall see the slave in America free." Abraham Lincoln, choose you this day whom you will serve—place, power, fame, fortune and wrong; or a long, hard, thankless fight, an obscure grave and right. Listen to Lincoln: "If ever I feel the soul within me elevate and expand to those dimensions not wholly

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unworthy of its Almighty Architect, it is when I contemplate the cause of my country, deserted by all the world beside, and I standing up boldy and alone and hurling defiance at her victorious oppressors. Here, without contemplating consequences, before high heaven and in the face of all the world I swear eternal fidelity to the just cause as I deem it, of the land of my life, my liberty and my love."

"He That Loseth His Life Shall Find It."

Lincoln lost his political life for truth's sake and thereby found it. He chose obscurity for humanity's sake and found a pedestal of fame. "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we see it." Brave words, fit companions for the brave deeds of him who uttered them. Therefore let no fearful faltering, faithless fellow who, trembling, faces the momentous problems of this hour and whimpers "can't" profane the character which cared to look into the thick darkness of a seemingly hopeless, though righteous cause and ring out the clarion call to faith and courage.

Nor should the compromiser or the indifferent or "middle ground" muddler seek to bolster up his sophistries by pointing in admiration to him who hated compromise and indifferent half-way measures. Lincoln said, "Let us be diverted by none of those sophistical contrivances wherewith we are so industriously plied and belabored—contrivances, such as groping for some middle ground between the right and wrong; vain as the search for a man who should be neither a living man nor a dead man, such as a policy of 'don't care' on a question about which all true men do care." And no reform has ever

been more industriously belabored with sophistical contrivances seeking to find some tenable ground somewhere between right and wrong, some unoccupied state where a man is neither a living man nor a dead man than the present.

To Honor Is to Emulate.

The careless voter who neither reads nor thinks for himself can pay no honor to Lincoln. The self-seeking politician high or low, can pay no honor to Lincoln. The man who stays by his party because it is powerful or because of its past glories, or because of his prejudices when that party is silent or subservient on the questions of dominant import, can pay no honor to Lincoln. Let us who would honor the name and emulate the character of the great statesman and patriot join heart and voting hand with him in this characteristic sentiment.

"Having Done All, to Stand."

"We are here to stand firmly for a principle—to stand firmly for a right. We know that great political and moral wrongs are done, and outrages committed, and we denounce these wrongs and outrages though we cannot at present do much more. Temporizing will not do longer; now is the time for decision—for firm, persistent, resolute action. Our cause then must be entrusted to and conducted by its own undoubted friends—those whose hands are free, whose hearts are in the work and who 'DO CARE for RESULTS.'"

All honor to the natal day of Abraham Lincoln. Let every patriot say Amen.

The Old Question in New Garb.

Before me an honest voter, on the one side is the party of respectability, power, honor

and influence, the party of my political heroes—Lincoln, Sumner, Grant, Garfield—but as touching the drink it is indifferent, and divided against itself and hence wrong. On the other side is the prohibition party, weak, poor, despised but as touching this great question I believe it right. What should I, an honest man do? Listen to Lincoln: "Stand with anybody who stands right. Stand with him while he stands right; part from him when he goes wrong." That means to leave the body of men composing the party of wrong, with the power and honor and prestige, and join the despised party of right. With my belief other action is impossible—to honesty.

"We want those who think it wrong to quit voting with those who think it right."

No man who believes that license is wrong, but still votes with them who think it right, has a right to conjure with the name of Lincoln. He said, "We want men who think slavery wrong to quit voting with those who think it right." Again. "What we want and all we want is to have with us the men who think slavery wrong." That is so plain, so simple, so direct, so self-evident that he must be dense indeed who cannot see the rugged honesty of the proposition. But is license wrong? Never mind. On that we might differ. Is Prohibition right? That leads to argument. But on this all honest men can but agree that in political honor the man who thinks license wrong should quit voting with those who think it right. That is what we want and all we want. And he who thus thinks and does less can not honor Lincoln with his lips while his deeds insult his memory.

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