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ABRAHAM LINCOLN



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BY
SALVADOR CAMACHO ROLDAN

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE name with which we head these lines will be one of the most famous which this century, fruitful in great men and great events, will transmit to the admiration and love of posterity. Of the many great men whom war, diplomacy and politics have raised upon the wings of human passions, none will, perhaps, enjoy a history, a fame, so pure and imperishable as he who, controlling the turbulent waves of the most colossal civil war of modern times, preserved order with liberty, and maintained the integrity of a great republic, while the bonds of its society were being broken into atoms by the advent of a new civilization.

This will not be because history will present him brandishing a flaming sword over heaps of slain enemies, disposing in despotic councils of the fate of peoples, or erasing and shaping the lines of territories; neither boldly putting his foot on the unchained liberal spirit of his age; but because, as in all great revelations of truth to man, the divine spirit of a great idea incarnated itself in an humble being, and inspired him with the faith, the courage, and the perseverance to draw it safely from the agitated ocean through breakers, and in spite of hostile winds, to the port of safety and of triumph.

The greatness of Mr. Lincoln consisted not so much in his talents, which were more solid than brilliant; nor in his education, which was neglected, as that of every man, who, like him, is born and grows up in the bosom of poverty; neither in the sagacity of the politician nor the audacity of the tribune, or of the reformer; but in his manly good common sense, in the firmness of his character, in the instinctive sagacity with which he anticipated the genius and tendencies of his people, in his devoted patriotism, in his genial honesty, his guileless frankness, the serenity of his spirit, in his unequalled capacity to follow without ever losing sight of the thread of events, and to adapt his efforts to the magnitude and actual stage of the crisis, and to give to the cause of an abstract idea all the interest of enthusiasm and of passion; but above all, in raising himself from the narrow

field of a local advocate to the immense field of passions, conflicting interests and opinions, which was suddenly lighted up before him by the devouring conflagration of civil war.

What strife so gigantic as that in the United States? What men and what interests? What passions and what resources? The high proud magnates of slavery with their two thousand millions' worth of human flesh, the pride of command from the cradle, with all the wealth that tobacco, sugar and cotton could bring at their orders; a vast territory traversed by mountains and furrowed by great rivers, slavery and liberty, panting avarice and disinterested self-abnegation contending hand to hand; all the extraordinary discoveries of the second quarter of this century face to face with the barbarism of the past ages; the last legacy of the Old World disputing the way to the march of ideas of the New World; the soul of old Europe and the heart of virgin America, the past and the future, contending in a duel to the death on the grandest field on the face of the earth.

To raise within a few months, in a nation that had lost all their military habits from long uninterrupted peace, an army of seven hundred thousand men; to increase a navy from forty to nearly a thousand vessels within three years; to obtain from a people accustomed to economy and yearly expenses of forty millions of dollars, resources to meet an expenditure of two millions and a half daily; to feel the before hidden hate of despots now violently hissing in its face; to see ambition and treason spring up in its bosom; where before had been only submissive adoration of the people, to listen, amidst the general tumult, to the most discordant counsels; to face all these necessities, all these troubles, annoyances and dangers, and to march on, like Atlas, with the world on his shoulders, firm and full of faith to the last, was the task intrusted to and heroically performed by Abraham Lincoln and his ministers, those Titans, Seward, Chase, Stanton and Welles.

From the beginning, France and England wished to recognize the independence of the Confederates, but they had to shrink before the boldness of Mr. Lincoln, who, through Mr. Seward, announced that that recognition would be considered a declaration of war. The Confederate privateers were armed and ready

to sail from French and English ports, but at the potent voice of the American government they were seized and detained. It was necessary to effectively blockade a coast of 3,000 miles in extent; and the voice of Mr. Welles created and cast upon the waters 960 vessels, and covered the whole of that long line. It was necessary to spend \$750,000,000 per year, and the wand of Mr. Chase found those millions, and the resources to pay their interest and to extinguish the principal within a few years.

There were not 50,000 muskets when the war began, nor 4,000 men in the ranks. The voice of Mr. Cameron first, and of Mr. Stanton afterwards, called together and organized more than 700,000 brave men, and made, in American shops, more than 2,000,000 of fire-arms, thousands of cannon, mountains of ammunition, and other elements of war hardly to be calculated.

There were no generals. The penetrating sagacity of Mr. Lincoln drew from obscurity McClellan, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Thomas and many others.

General Fremont, the idol of the northern masses, attempted to press the President forward on the road of emancipation putting on the airs of a dictator, driving out in his magnificent carriage, drawn by four white horses, displaying the train of a prince in the heart of the republic. Mr. Lincoln plucked off his plumes and stars and removed him from the command of the West.

General Hunter, with extemporaneous zeal, declared the liberty of the slave early in 1862. Mr. Lincoln revoked his proclamation and took away his command.

On the victorious field of Antietam, General McClellan undertook to impose on the President a policy favorable to slavery. Mr. Lincoln broke the sword of the presumptuous chieftain, and launched forth the proclamation of emancipation.

In addition to these we might refer to innumerable other examples of elevation and firmness of character indispensable to guide a country in the midst of civil war. To his firmness is due the absence of chiefs dangerous to order and liberty; that freedom to the slave should not have produced a servile war; that hatred and vengeance did not engender bloody retaliations, dangers so common, unfortunately, in the civil wars of Spanish America. No forced loans, brutal recruiting, or disorderly

seizure of property, so demoralizing to the soldiery; none of those savage demonstrations of energy so common here. Nothing of this has been seen in the United States, neither have the Federal authorities fomented political or moral ideas, or attempted to manufacture public opinion to its own ends—evils which among us, follow in the track of revolutions as the foetid and unhealthy sediment follows the freshets in our rivers. With all this, the virtues of the people have, of course, had much to do; but not a little has depended on the high character of the leaders who have marked out the way and given the example to popular impulse.

It has been thought, mistakenly to our view, that Mr. Lincoln was gifted with an invincible stubbornness in his purposes, and a blind fanaticism in his ideas. We have noticed, on the contrary, in studying the acts of this public man, much moderation and a great inclination to conciliation. Although an abolitionist for many years before, his inaugural programme of 1861 offered all the guarantees to be desired by slavery, asking only that it should not be extended into the newly settled territories.

The emancipation of the slaves was not decreed until the measure became not only a wise means of securing their powerful assistance in the war, but also an irresistible exigence of popular opinion. When, in 1863, propositions of peace were talked of by the South, Mr. Lincoln did not hesitate to declare his willingness to submit the validity of the Emancipation Proclamation to the decision of the Supreme Court, and the approval or disapproval of Congress. It was only after so much blood had been shed that it cried to heaven for recompense, that he judged the only price of this blood was the irrevocable, complete, and absolute extermination of slavery, and that ground alone he manifested a disposition not to yield.

The last phase of his public character, and which appeals most lively to our sympathy, was his magnanimity. The formidable and groundless insurrection, which had threatened to destroy the unity and force of the country, subdued, his first and only purpose was to reorganize the conquered territories, returning them their existence and their own governments, without retaining for a moment longer than necessary and just the discretionary power with which the rebellion had armed him. He never

thought from the first of humbling and punishing, or of showing that healthy energy which is always the inevitable source of armed reaction. The stupid assassin, more stupid than his murderous bullet, without doubt, did not think that, amidst the dangerous fermentation of passions which follows a day of victory over brethren, the surest guaranty of restoration and liberty to the South was the noble life of Mr. Lincoln.

In the vulgar sense of human language, Abraham Lincoln was certainly not a great man. He had not the dazzling prestige of victorious achievements in war; he was not a conqueror of peoples and countries; he never enveloped his plans in the gloomy obscurity of mystery, dissimulation; he never took to himself the credit of results which followed the inscrutable decrees of Providence; his voice had not the enchanting harmony of Demosthenes or Mirabeau, or of Clay; he was free from that satanic pride, which, in others, supplies the want of true greatness. But he possessed something greater than all these, which all the splendors of earthly glory cannot equal. He was the instrument of God. The Divine Spirit, which in another day of regeneration took the form of an humble artisan of Galilee, had again clothed itself in the flesh and bones of a man of lowly birth and degree. That man was Abraham Lincoln, the liberator and savior of the great republic of modern times. That irresistible force, called an idea, seized upon an obscure and almost common man, burnt him with its holy fire, purified him in its crucible, and raised him to the apex of human greatness—even to being redeemer of a whole race of men. He whose boyhood was passed at the plough-handle in the then solitary prairies of Illinois; whose early manhood was dragged out in fatigue at the oar of a Mississippi flat-boat, and the only repose of whose maturer years was the noisy labors of the forum; that man was called to be the arbiter of the fate of his country—the great man of state, whose destiny it was to manage the rudder during the most frightful storm of this age. In the critical hour of trial and danger, all rested on him. Even the lines of his physiognomy, half grave, half comic, had been transformed by the agitations of his life. In the language of a distinguished journalist of his country, "his kind and powerful face was slightly marked by the circular track of his jocose thoughts, and deeply ploughed and cross-

furrowed. the visible signs of his profound anxieties." There is in his last words something of the fire of the old prophets. "Fondly de we hope," (he said in his inaugural address on the 4th of March last), "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'." And that nothing should be wanting to complete the true grandeur of his life, the hand of crime snatched it from him in the midst of the triumph of his cause, and bound his temples, already pale from the vigils and anguish of four years, with the resplendent crown of the martyr.

The tragic death of Mr. Lincoln has its only semblance of comparison in history in that of Henry Fourth, cut off in the plenitude of his genius and of his vast enterprises by the dagger of a fanatic. The wretch's pretext of tyrannicide is absurd and ridiculous applied to a man who had freed four millions of slaves, and prepared the way to freedom for the three millions more in the Spanish colonies and Brazil, and inaugurated the era of universal emancipation of the races, which, like the fellahs of Egypt and pariahs of India, are yet the object of spoliation by more powerful races. The regeneration even of Africa itself, of that great continent which is the affront of the century, will be, perhaps, one of the consequences of the abolition of slavery in North America.

If the emancipation of the negroes could give the right, not to a fanatic or inebriate but to a slaveholder, to avenge himself by murdering the liberator, what right would not being enslaved give the slave against the master?

If the assassination of Mr. Lincoln could find an excuse with the slavery party, with what show of justice could any vengeance be lamented which, in the name of a whole race invoking the recollections of two centuries of oppression, the negroes should now take on their ancient spoilers? What good was to result to a cause already fallen in the opinions and consciences of men, by the assassination of a single man, who was not the creator but

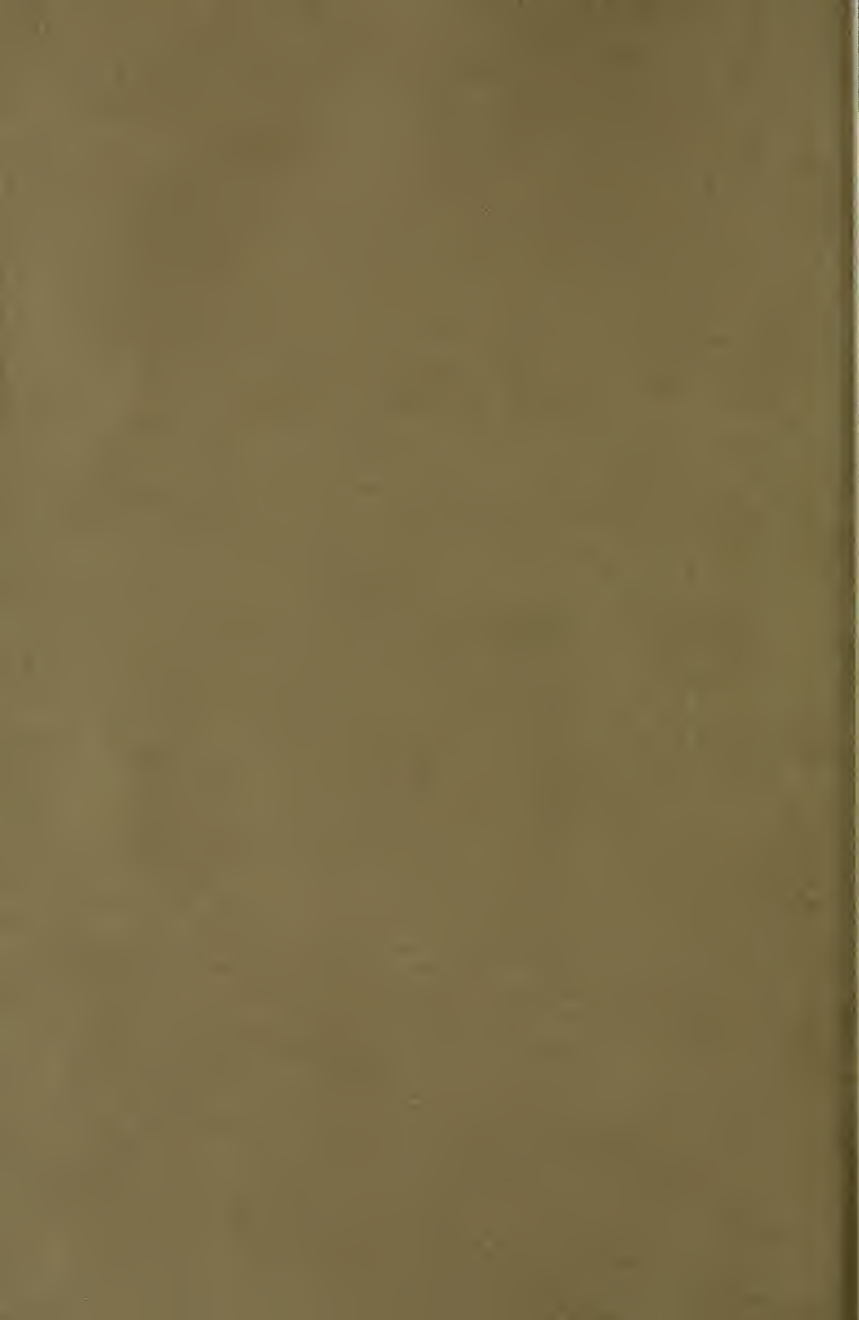
simply the instrument of an idea before fixed in the brain of all, and master of their wills? Abraham Lincoln is dead, but his work is finished and sealed forever with the veneration which God has given to the blood of martyrs. He who was yesterday a man, is today an apostle; he who was the centre at which the shots of malice and hatred were aimed, is now consecrated by the sacrament of death; he who was yesterday a power, is today a prestige, sacred, irresistible. His voice is louder and more potent from the mansion of martyrs than from the capitol, and the cry which was boldly raised among the living is mute before the majesty of the tomb.

Abraham passes to the side of Washington—the one the father, and the other the savior of a great nation. The traditions, pure and stainless, of the early times of the republic, broken at the close of the administration of the second Adams, were restored in the martyr of Ford's theatre; and the predominance of material interests which has heretofore obscured the country of Franklin, will abdicate the field to the prelacy of moral ideas, of justice, of equality, and of reparation.

The whip has dropped from the hand of the overseer; the blood-hound will hunt no more the fugitive slave in the mangrove swamps of the Mississippi; the hammer of the auctioneer of negroes has struck for the last time on his platform, and its hateful sound has died into eternal silence. The sacred ties of love which unite the hearts of slaves will not again be broken by the forced separation of husbands and wives, parents and children. The unnatural and infamous consort between the words liberty and slavery is dissolved for ever, and liberty! liberty! will be the cry which shall run from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the northern lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.

This great work has cost a great price. Humanity will have to mourn yet for many years to come the horrors of that civil war, but above the blood of the victims, above the bones of its dead, above the ashes of desolate hearths, will arise the great figure of Abraham Lincoln, as the most acceptable sacrifice offered by the nineteenth century in expiation of the great crime of the sixteenth. Above all the anguish and tears of that immense hecatomb will appear the shade of Lincoln as the symbol of hope and of pardon.

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