

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

“Lincoln is too big a theme. His greatness is different from the greatness of other men. We can not measure him. There is no standard by which to compare him with any other man. No other common man ever moved in such high position without losing his commonness. He is the only character in all history whose native simplicity no honor could transform and no office change.”

SPEECH

OF

HON. C. C. DILL

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 12, 1917



WASHINGTON
 GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
 1917

SPEECH
OF
HON. C. C. DILL.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Mr. DILL. Mr. Speaker, it is not my purpose to-day to tell the story of the life of Abraham Lincoln. With that all are familiar. Only his sad face and homely figure are better known to the American people than are the details of his tedious struggle from poverty to power. Nor shall I attempt his eulogy. Lincoln is too big a theme. His greatness is different from the greatness of other men. We can not measure him. There is no standard by which to compare him with any other man. No other common man ever moved in such high position without losing his commonness. He is the only character in all history whose native simplicity no honor could transform and no office change. All I hope to do to-day is to mention some of the characteristics of his greatness and to call attention to certain facts as evidences that a divine power so timed his life and so fashioned his faculties that he would supremely fill his country's need when his country called.

Abraham Lincoln had an unshakable religious faith. Because he was not affiliated with any church, some have said he was not a Christian. No conclusion concerning him was more grossly wrong. He himself said, "Show me the church whose only creed is to love God and to love man, and I'll walk a hundred miles to join it." All through his life and especially during the war this religious faith was the guiding force of every great deed he performed. When defeats came so thick and fast that even some members of his Cabinet openly despaired of success, he declared to them in a Cabinet meeting, "This is God's fight, and He will win it in His own good time." Thus did his religious faith become the anchor of the Union cause, the buoy of the Nation's hope. It was the overflowing reservoir furnishing strength and inspiration which gave him his superiority over every other man of his time.

As a leader and ruler of men he was ordinarily merciful and kind; but he became, when occasion called, a man of iron with the courage of a lion. The very passion of his existence as President was to save the Union. To save the Union, he called to his Cabinet every man who had been a formidable candidate against him for the nomination for President in 1860. Seward, his chief rival, he made Secretary of State; Chase, Ohio's favorite son, he made Secretary of the Treasury; and Cameron, Pennsylvania's man, Secretary of War. When Cameron failed and Lincoln felt he must have a man who would rule with an iron hand, he turned to Edwin M. Stanton, of Cincinnati, a Democrat, who up to that time had been the severest critic

which the administration had had. This was the same Stanton who 20 years before had administered the severest insult the young backwoods lawyer had ever received, and this man Stanton he made Secretary of War.

What turbulent times Lincoln had with these men! Again and again he found it necessary to ignore Seward, plead with Chase, and bear with Stanton in order to keep them working at the tremendous tasks which he knew must be performed. How perfectly he managed them is best shown by Stanton's statement immediately following Lincoln's death, as he stood just outside the little room down here on Tenth Street, in Washington, and referring to the death chamber said: "In there lies the most perfect ruler the world has ever known." After that, it is not surprising that in later years Grant said: "He was indeed a commander of commanders and incontestably the greatest man I ever knew."

Somebody has said that a truly great man is just a common man enlarged. The mountain is composed of exactly the same substances as the plain, the only difference being that the mountain mass has been piled up into the sky. Such was the greatness of Abraham Lincoln. Born and reared amidst the humblest conditions of life, he was truly a son of the soil. Although he reached the highest heights of power with more than a million men in arms to do his will, he remained to the hour of his death, the most gentle, the most just, and the most merciful ruler the world has ever known.

I have long believed and I now believe that there was something divine in the life of this plain and simple man. If I were a clergyman I would preach a sermon on this day, and I would entitle it "The hand of God in history." I would take as my chiefest proof of God's desire and purpose that this Nation should live, the life and work of Abraham Lincoln.

In that sermon I would picture God as standing at the threshold of the nineteenth century looking adown the vista of the years. Seeing the formation of the black clouds of an awful civil war and realizing the need of a new and strange kind of man for leader during that period, I would picture Him as selecting the choicest spirit of all heavenly realm and giving it birth in the form of a little boy out in the wilds of Kentucky, to be known to the world as Abraham Lincoln. I would show that for his mother He chose a woman of such strong religious sentiment that although she would be with her son but nine short years, in that brief time she would instill her religious ideals into his life so deeply they would control his entire career. I would point out that for his father, God chose a roving, reckless, almost worthless fellow who would flee on westward at the first signs of civilization. Thus did He keep this boy away from the deadening leveling processes of the schools and the crushing conventionalities of civilized communities, especially great cities, depriving him of all books save such as Shakespeare and the Bible, and reared him up in nature's school so that when his great work came he, like nature, would never compromise.

Then I would show that when the one danger to the divine plan appeared in the form of his great love for that little woman, Anne Rutledge, and God saw that this man who had

been the object of His special care might soon become so happy in the love of wife and home and child that he would neglect to take part in the struggles which were necessary to fit him for the leadership to which he was destined, God took her away. Thus was the only flower that ever budded along the hard and stony pathway of his life cut down before it bloomed, and Lincoln led to woo and win the ambitious Mary Todd who ever urged him on to position and to power.

Nor would I end my sermon here! I would point out that God caused him to choose for his life profession the law—the law, that broad but steep and dangerous pathway over which so many men have passed to ruin or to fame. I would point out that to aid his development God chose from among New England's brilliant boys the most brilliant of them all, Stephen A. Douglas, and took him out to Illinois to act as a pacemaker for this pioneer. I would show how these two men went through life together, yet opposed. During early life both lived in adjoining counties and practiced law in the same courts. Both wooed the same girl and Lincoln won her. Both served in the same State legislature together. Both were in the National Congress, Lincoln in the House and Douglas in the Senate at the same time. Both ran for the Senate in Illinois in 1858 and Douglas won, making almost certain Lincoln's election to the presidency in two years more. Then as a crowning close to all their struggles almost the last public act of Douglas's life was to hold Lincoln's hat while he took the oath of office as President. Lastly, I would show that when the awful war was done and Lincoln stood on the highest heights of fame, haloed by the homage and adoration of a world, this Divine Being took him as the Nation's last and most precious sacrifice of all that war—took him away before envy and jealousy could heap abuse and calumny upon his memory and his name.

Thus would I show how an All-Wise God had so planned this man's life, so shaped his surroundings, and so arranged his associations that by means of him he had kept us one Nation, sovereign, grand, and free. [Applause.]

For whom is the lesson of it all? The lesson is for the boys and girls of this Nation and for the boys and girls of all other nations, of which they will be the rulers when they are grown.

The story of his life is our greatest national asset. I know of no more hopeful sign of our country's future greatness and permanent security than the twenty millions of boys and girls in the public schools of this land who are being educated under the inspiration of his name and with reverence for his memory, because when the centuries of history shall have shaken the great characters of the past through the unerring sieve of time, one of the few that will remain is Abraham Lincoln. [Loud applause.]