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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By John F. Cragwell

America is an empire of beauty and wealth. Within its borders there are some of the grandest, ablest and bravest men and women of this century. But greater still it is the land of equal opportunity. That this is so is because by the stroke of a pen Abraham Lincoln gave freedom to the wronged millions of my race.

When Lincoln was 16 he assisted a neighbor to build a flat boat, which conveyed them to the city of New Orleans. This was the first time Lincoln ever saw paved streets, hundreds of houses, lights, and real civilization. In his wanderings for the first time he saw an auction sale of slaves. The victim was a young mulatto girl not over 20, and when he saw a big, strong man pat her arm, pinch her legs, and make her run like a frightened deer to ascertain whether the property was sufficiently sound in body and limb to pay a price for, the very iron entered the soul of the Lincoln boy, and turning to a companion he said: "If I ever get a chance, I am going to whack slavery on the head." Twenty-five years later he kept his word in the White House at Washington by signing the emancipation proclamation which dealt the death blow to human slavery for all time and eternity.

Lincoln, a man of Southern birth, did not hesitate to appeal to the sword when he became satisfied that in no other way could the Union be saved. The people of today in dealing with white or black, North or South, should strive to show just the qualities that Lincoln showed.

"The great Civil War in which Lincoln towered, as the loftiest figure left us, not only a re-united country, but a country which has the proud right to claim as its own the glory won alike by those who wore the blue and by those who wore the gray, by those who followed Grant and by those who followed Lee," for both fought with equal bravery and with equal sincerity of conviction.

There was born to this country in the year of 1809 a son whom the world recognized as one of the bravest men of his time. He rose from that of a rail splitter in the State of Illinois to that of Chief Executive of the greatest nation upon the globe. The man who suffered death at the hand of the assassin was the most beloved, most honored, and most in the hearts of his countrymen, was that of Abraham Lincoln; the man who died fifty years ago, who made such an impression upon the world, that nearly half a century is not sufficient to wipe out of minds the desire to know and to learn of the character of this man who sacrificed his life that those bonded people might be free.

In history there are many famous men, but it is safe to say that the fame of no one of them is more sacred in the minds of the American people than that of Lincoln. Many of the greatest historical writers have agreed that Lincoln was right when he denounced slavery, which made him one of the foremost men of all the world.

When Lincoln fell by the hand of the assassin Booth, a well-meaning, but ignorant and fanatical conspirator, he was still physically strong and his wonderful mind had hardly reached its prime. Great as Lincoln was in the roll of war, he was infinitely greater as a statesman, and it is mainly the fact of his magnificent statesmanship that the world's final estimation

of Lincoln's greatness will be based.

Great, extraordinarily great, in every way was Lincoln. Was greatest of all as an organizer; the orderly arrangement was the idea that dominated Lincoln's entire being, and dominated it unceasingly from his earliest manhood and splendid vision was ever within, that of reconstructing this country and government and making it a country cleansed of its impurities, free from its weaknesses, strong in its equity, imperial in its scope and in its influence.

That Lincoln was ambitious is granted, but there is much to show that his ambition was of the large, personal stamp, indicated above, and that if he wished to become the foremost man of all the world, it was solely to the end that he might organize society in a way to make the world better and every man regardless of color or previous condition of servitude an equal show and equal rights before the world; such was Lincoln's dream.

Lincoln's desire was to be supreme for the purpose of using his almost God-like power for the completion of his plans, which he well knew would result in much good to our race. He knew that he (Lincoln) was the one man, who could arrest the downward career of the human race for which he shed his blood to protect, but in the midst of his work, while the greatest organizer that the planet has ever known, was lovingly engaged in a task, which was to him a joy, the fatal blow was struck, and the only man who had proven himself a Saviour to this country through the dark Ages, was dead.

The day on which it was decreed that Lincoln should die, was perhaps the most calamitous, that ever overtook the human race; for when it was decreed that Lincoln should die, it was at the same time decreed that the hand on the dial of civilization should be set back at least a round hundred years.

This day is a sacred day—a day of gratitude and love. Today we commemorate more than the birth of a nation, more than independence, more than the fruits of the revolution, more than the accumulation of wealth, more than national prestige and power, we commemorate the great and blessed victory over ourselves, the triumph of civilization, the reformation of a People, the establishment consecrated to the Preservation of Liberty and the equal rights of man. Nations can win success, can be rich, and powerful, can cover the Earth with their armies, the seas with their fleets, and yet be small, selfish, and mean. There is something above land and palaces, above raiment and gold, it is the love of might, the desire to do justice, the inextinguishable love of human liberty. This was Lincoln's motto. On this day we honor the heroes who fought to make our nation just and free who broke the shackle of the slaves, who freed the masters of the south and allies of the north, who made America the hope and the beacon of the human race, the foremost nation of all the world. They did away with that ignorance and cruel prejudice that human rights depend on race or color.

The past seems like a hideous dream; the present is full of pride, gratitude and love.

When Beauregard fired upon Fort Sumpter he inaugurated the cruelest and bloodiest war in human history. When John Wilkes Booth fired upon President Lincoln he perpetrated the cruelest and bloodiest crime this side of Calvary. Between these two shots, Fort Sumpter and Ford's Theater, what awful pages of American history are recorded written in her richest and reddest blood.

Fifty years is not long in the life of a nation, but fifty years is long in the life of an individual. Fifty years, and the youth all aflame with patriotism marching miles and miles with heavy muskets and knapsacks, now find a needed support in cane and crutch. Fifty years and the drummer boy has been transformed into a gray-haired veteran.

Fifty years and the most cruel, wrong and misunderstood man of his day has become the model of American manhood.

And so it is in perfect harmony with this hour and place, we pause long enough in our devotion to lay a few flowers upon the grave of our greatest American living or dead. Sitting in his law office and preparing a speech he wrote: "If slavery is right and a just God ruling in Heaven somebody will be punished for upholding it." This he read to his law partner who said: "I would not say that." Lincoln asked: "Is it true?" "Oh, yes," was the reply, "it is true, but it is not good policy to say it just now." And honest old Abe answered: "If it is true I will say it and stand by it."

In this office scene you have the measure of the man, the secret of his life. He held with unflinching hand the helm that guided the tempest-tossed ship of state safely through the seething surf of civil war into the smooth waters of peace and union.

He was as patient as destiny. He was willing to await the verdict of future generations. He never raised a hand but to bless—never spoke a word to incite or inflame. With the Union preserved, the country united he rode on the crest of a people's love.

Nothing but a martyr's crown could add anything to the laurels he had already worn. And when he said: "Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower when I thought a flower would grow." This statement is equalled if not excelled by the peerless sentiment contained in this noted paragraph: "With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, let us finish the work we are in. To bind up the nation's wounds, that irrespressible between union and disunion, between freedom and slavery has been happily ended. The echo of the shot and shell fired at Fort Sumpter has died away."

The bell that once called the congregation of slaves to their scanty meals after their day's toil was over, has ceased to ring. The fields that once reeked with the red blood of the slain and slaughtered is now fragrant with the blossoms of the cotton plant. And now is it not further true that that magnanimous sentiment, "With malice towards none, with charity for all" uttered by him who was the most abused man of his age, one word hastily spoken frequently is productive of a feeling of bitterness between man and man, between sister and brother, between partner and partner, that finds its balm of conciliation only in the sad, silent grave.

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On the frontier men either fail or win mastery of the life they lead and know. Lincoln was on the frontier practically all his days. In the toil of getting a living out of that rude Ohio River country he became able to see and deal with realities; to see his fellow men, not only as they were and must be met daily, but also as what they might be under better inspiration; to see the conditions of human existence, not merely as cramping the present, but also, which is more important, as promising the future. Alone in his grief and weariness, Lincoln learned to value justly the worth of the individual in relation to that common fate which has been ordained for us all. Ris-

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