

# Lincoln's Purple Patches

(From the Literary Digest)  
 The conviction that the man who made the Gettysburg speech must have done other things almost equally worthy of memory and celebration has moved Mr. Montgomery Schuyler to make a search through all the published writings and speeches of Lincoln in the hope of finding other things of the same rhetorical quality. The search reveals other eloquent passages, recorded in the "Messages of the Presidents," but these passages the writer finds to be "purple patches"—not merely "more elaborately embroidered pieces of the surrounding tissue," but bits truly "sewed on." Mr. Schuyler omits, however, to mention the famous letter to Mrs. Bixby which President Roosevelt quotes in the February Review of Reviews. Reference is made to the "first inaugural" as containing a supposed specimen of Lincoln's eloquence that he declares belongs, at least in its inspiration, to Secretary Seward. It happens to have come from the secretary because the speech was submitted to his judgment before its delivery. Mr. Schuyler, writing in the Forum (February), gives this account of the peroration of that speech:

"Those who recall it at all will be apt to cite it to you as an example of Lincoln's eloquence. Seward himself was perhaps the foremost dialectician and even more clearly the foremost rhetorician of his party, a far better exemplar of the use of the English language than, for example, Charles Sumner, with his tropical and Corinthian rhetorical exuberance. Here is Seward's draft for that peroration:

"I close. We are not, we must not be, aliens or enemies, but fellow countrymen and brethren. Although

passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly, they must not, I am sure they will not, be broken. The mystic chords which, proceeding from so many battle-fields and so many patriot graves, pass through all the hearts and all the hearths in this broad continent of ours will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angel of the nation."

"And here is Seward's contribution, as retouched and adopted by Lincoln, as it stands in the text of the first inaugural:

"I am loath to close. We are not enemies but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

"Lincoln's version will be admitted to be an improvement. That 'I am loath to close,' as who might say 'let me plead with you yet awhile longer,' is a masterly rhetorical touch. At the same time his docility as to the volunteered contribution to a performance with which he had taken so much trouble, and about which he might have been expected to cherish a paternal pride and sensitiveness, shows him to have been without literary vanity. \* \* \*

"Possibly it was Lincoln's docility in this question of mere form which encouraged Seward's appointment of himself to the position of mentor to the uncouth western Telemachus, and helped to bring about in him the delusion that the pupil who had been so amenable in a matter of style would be equally amenable in things of substance. His undeception was rapid and complete."

The emancipation proclamation, we read, preserved a "pedestrian gait" and is "as dry a recital as the most technical of courts could have required or the most technical of conveyancers have produced." There is, however, one "purple patch," and this seems to have been furnished by Salmon P. Chase. Says Mr. Schuyler:

"Here is the passage. To save space, the three words added by Lincoln to Chase's draft are enclosed in the first parenthesis, and the ten words deleted from it by Lincoln in the second:

"And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice warranted by the constitution (upon military necessity), (and of duty demanded by the circumstances of the country) I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

"Without doubt the deletion is an improvement in all senses. Without doubt the interjected reservation was politically and legally demanded. But, rhetorically, how awkward it is, how careless of form, how careless of the popular impression the proclamation was meant to produce. Indeed, how destructive the awkward interjection might have been, had public opinion been more evenly balanced and not, by that time, been exerting an irresistible pressure upon the president. As to Lincoln's magnanimity, this acceptance of Chase's emendation to the emancipation proclamation speaks even more emphatically than his acceptance of Seward's emendation to the first inaugural. For from the day when Chase entered the Cabinet to the day when he left it to take the chief justiceship, he was a thorn in the side of his chief. Nor was his

chief's magnanimity repaid in his case, as it was in the case of Seward, by a corresponding magnanimity on his side. At any rate, the absence of 'literary vanity' on the part of Lincoln had here its most crucial exhibition."

The peroration of the second annual message is cited as perhaps "very nearly its author's best," notwithstanding the fact that "instead of being the culmination and summary of the reasoning of the argument, heightened into rhetorical loftiness by the reasoner's own emotion," the peroration "is extraneous, almost irrelevant, to the preceding argumentation." He quotes and comments:

"I omit the frequent italicization of the original, which really adds nothing:

"Fellow citizens, we can not escape history. We of this congress and the administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say that we are for the union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the union. The world knows that we do know how to save it. We—even we here—hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last, best hope of earth. Other means may succeed, this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which if followed, the world will forever applaud and God must forever bless."

"The fairly well-read English reader will, of course, be reminded by those first three sentences of the expression of the like thought in the conclusion of Burke's summing-up against Warren Hastings, a composition which it is highly unlikely that Lincoln had ever seen:

"A business which has so long occupied the councils and the tribunals of Great Britain can not pos-

sibly be huddled over in the course of vulgar, trite, and transitory events. \* \* \* My Lords, we are all elevated to a degree of importance by it; the meanest of us will, by means of it, more or less become the concern of posterity."

"How satisfactory to one's patriotic pride to find that the utterance of the unschooled American comes out so well in comparison with what one may plausibly call the masterpiece of the most consummate rhetorician who has ever as an orator handled the English language. While in the fourth sentence the American forges in his heat the brand-new metaphor of the illuminating torch lighted by the 'fiery trial.' It is worthy of Burke, worthy of anybody, and quite at the highest level of Lincoln."

In Greece the death sentence is never carried out until an interval of two years has expired.—Ex.

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