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Don't expect your opinions to fit if you obtain them ready made.

LINCOLN'S IMMORTALITY



Compiled By JOHN DICKINSON SHERMAN

BETTER than all printed biographies are the renewals and continuations of the lives of greater men in the lives of the less. No other American, and very few men of any nation or period have entered so intimately into the personal experience of millions as Abraham Lincoln. The words of him who never had a year in school are used in teaching college students the highest possibilities of language. His coined phrases are worn smooth and dateless in current speech. But more than that, his habit of thought has guided the thinking of errand boy and President. His faith quickens the faith of us all. Shelley wrote of Keats:

He is made one with nature; there is heard His voice in all her music, from the moan Of thunder to the song of night's sweet bird; He is a presence to be felt and known In darkness and in light, from herb and stone Spreading itself where'er that Power may move Which has withdrawn his being to its own; Which wields the world with never-wearied love, Sustains it from beneath and kindles it above.

In such wise the man whose birth we celebrate has entered into the life of his people and is in process of penetrating the wider circles of the whole world's life. This, on its earthward side, is the immortality of Abraham Lincoln.

The man had a thousand Boswells but no great one. . . . Some 1,500 books or pamphlets have been issued dealing with the various phases of the subject. . . . But if the choice must be made between the books other men have written about him and Lincoln's own words, the letters and addresses hold first place. He can be trusted as the best witness in his own case. His word was as good as his bond, and his life was as good as his word. Speech was the water from a living well, under which the stream of character never failed. Probably the majority of men desire to be counted on the side of truth. The few will make any great effort to find what is true. And, Sir Thomas Browne declares, not every man is a fit champion of truth. For when the man who is right in principle falls in the trial by combat, the cause suffers in his defeat.

Abraham Lincoln was not a speculative philosopher, an originator of systems of thought. But he was one of the greatest exponents and defenders of truth in its applications and illustrations in human experience that the world has ever seen. His life and words—which are inseparable—perfectly teach the balance between thought and act, principle and practice, general truth and particular fact. The same is true of the letters, which are full of keen and kindly applications to the life of each one of us and of the whole people. Even with Gettysburg and the second inaugural in mind, we have found a more nearly complete and satisfying expression of the man in his letters than in his addresses. In them he confounds the enemies of the Republic, admonishes, warns, and instructs his people, and comforts the broken-hearted with a tenderness that had blossomed upon the graves of Nancy Hanks and Ann Rutledge and upon those of his children. For in this man reason and emotion were joined like form and color in a flower. He rejoiced in the exercise of his mind, but he had none of that intellectual arrogance that denies all that cannot comprehend or prove. The charge of atheism is the most futile of all that have been brought against him. As an inquiring boy he read Tom Paine and wrote an essay along radical lines, but the pressure of human need constrained him to turn to Divinity.

Prayer was the very breath of his later life. Gen. Daniel Sickles was hardly the man to invent a pious tale. He has repeated to many witnesses the story of Lincoln's prayer before Gettysburg.

But it is inconceivable that so honest a man could write his reverent expressions of trust in the Almighty without a personal sense of relationship.

The two men of the Nineteenth century who have drawn and held the most intense admiration of the civilized world are Napoleon Bonaparte and Abraham Lincoln. Both were great leaders, great executives. Both had the power of binding their followers to them with a personal loyalty stronger than the ties of blood. Both appeal to the imagination of millions who never saw them.

But, as the Evening Sun pointed out on the anniversary of Waterloo, it is the downfall of Napoleon that the world remembers, the long-deferred but inevitable defeat of ambition. Lincoln died victorious, not alone in the circumstance of triumphant arms and a nation reunited but in the victory of unselfish devotion to the cause of human freedom. He identified his life with the progress of mankind, and in losing himself he found immortality.—(Editorial in New York Sun, 1919.)

The assertion "That all men are created equal" was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain; and it was placed in the Declaration not for that but for future use. Its authors meant it to be—as, thank God, it is now proving itself—a stumblingblock to all those who in aftertimes might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism. They knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant, when such should reappear in this fair land and commence their vocation, they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack. (Speech at Springfield, Ill., June 26, 1857.)

Think nothing of me; take no thought for the political fate of any man whomsoever, but come back to the truths that are in the Declaration of Independence. While pretending no indifference to earthly honors, I do claim to be actuated in this contest by something higher than an anxiety for office. I charge you to drop every paltry and insignificant thought for any man's success. It is nothing; Judge Douglas is nothing. But do not destroy that immortal emblem of humanity—the Declaration of Independence. (Speech at Bardonia, Ill., Aug. 12, 1853.)

I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the motherland but that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence which gave liberty, not alone to the people of this country but, I hope, to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weight would be lifted from the shoulders of all men. (Speech at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, Feb. 22, 1861.)

But soberly, it is now no child's play to save the principles of Jefferson from total overthrow in this nation. . . . This is a world of compensation, and he who would be no slave must consent to have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it. All honor to Jefferson—to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times, and so to enshrine it there that today, and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and a stumblingblock to the very barbarians of reappearing tyranny and oppression. (Letter to Republicans of Boston, April 6, 1859, in reply to an invitation to attend a celebration in honor of Jefferson's birthday.)

This declared indifference, but as I must think, covert zeal, for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world, enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausible, to taunt us as hypocrites, causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so

many good men among ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty, criticizing the Declaration of Independence and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest. (Speech at Ottawa, Ill., Aug. 21, 1858.)

What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling sea-coasts, the guns of our war steamers, or the strength of our gallant and disciplined army. There are not our reliance against a resumption of tyranny in our fair land. . . . Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in our bosoms. Our defense is in the preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men in all lands everywhere. Destroy this spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism around our own doors. (Speech at Chicago, Ill., Sept. 11, 1858.)

All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years. At what point, then, is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reaches us it must spring up among us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time or die by suicide. (Speech at Springfield, Ill., Jan. 27, 1837.)

No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent. . . . Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God cannot long retain it. (Speech at Springfield, Ill., Oct. 1, 1854.)

Allow all the governed an equal voice in the government; that and that only is self-government. . . . Finally, I insist that if there is anything that it is the duty of the whole people to never intrust to hands other than their own that thing is the preservation and perpetuity of their own liberties and institutions. (Speech at Peoria, Ill., Oct. 16, 1854.)

The strongest bond of human sympathy outside the family relation should be one uniting all working people of all nations, tongues and kindreds. (Reply to committee of Workingmen's association of New York, Mar. 21, 1864.)

We will hereafter speak for freedom and against slavery as long as the Constitution guarantees free speech; until everywhere on this wide land the sun shall shine, and the rain shall fall, and the wind shall blow upon no man who goes forth to unrequited toil. (1856, History of Abraham Lincoln.—Arnold, p. 97.)

I go for all sharing the privilege of the government who assist in bearing its burdens. . . . by no means excluding females. (Announcement of political views, June 13, 1836.)

I am opposed to the limitation or lessening of the right of suffrage. If anything I am in favor of its extension or enlargement; I want to lift men up—to broaden rather than contract their privileges. (Interview, Springfield, Ill.—Herdson, p. 625.)

But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. (Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863.)

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