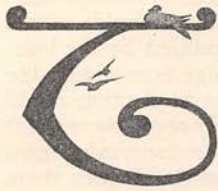


GREELEY'S ESTIMATE OF LINCOLN.

AN UNPUBLISHED ADDRESS BY HORACE GREELEY.¹



HERE have been ten thousand attempts at the life of Abraham Lincoln, whereof that of Wilkes Booth was perhaps the most atrocious; yet it stands by no means alone. Ora-

tors have harangued, preachers have sermonized, editors have canted and descanted; forty or fifty full-fledged biographies have been inflicted on a much-enduring public; yet the man, Abraham Lincoln, as I saw and thought I knew him, is not clearly depicted in any of these, so far as I have seen. I do not say that most or all of these are not better than *my* Lincoln—I only say they are not mine. Bear with me an hour and I will show you the man as he appeared to me—as he seems not to have appeared to any of them; and if he shall be shown to you as by no means the angel that some, or the devil that others, have portrayed him, I think he will be brought nearer to your apprehension and your sympathies than the idealized Lincoln of his panegyrists or his defamers. Nay, I do sincerely hope to make the real Lincoln, with his thoroughly human good and ill, his virtues and his imperfections, more instructive and more helpful to ordinary humanity, than his unnatural, celestial apotheosized shadow ever was or could be.

I shall pass rapidly over what I may distinguish as the *rail-splitting* era of his life. Born in a rude portion of Kentucky in 1809; removed into the still more savage, unpeopled wilderness, then the Territory of Indiana, in 1811; losing his mother and only brother while yet a child, and his only sister in later youth, he grew up in poverty and obscurity on the rugged outskirts of civilization, or a little beyond it, where there were no schools, post-offices few and far between, newspapers in those days seldom seen in the new and narrow clearings, and scarce worth the eyesight they marred when they were seen; the occasional stump speech of a candidate for office, and the more frequent sermon of some Methodist or Baptist

itinerant—earnest and fervid, but grammatically imperfect, supplying most of the intellectual and spiritual element attainable. He did not attend school for the excellent reason that there *was* no school within reach—the poor whites from the Slave-States, who mainly settled Southern Indiana, being in no hurry to establish schools, and his widowed father being one of them. So he chopped timber, and split rails, and hoed corn, and pulled fodder, as did other boys around him (when they did anything); learning to read as he best might, and, thenceforth, reading from time to time such few books, good, bad, and indifferent, as fell in his way, and so growing up to be six feet four inches high by the time he was twenty years old. As no one ever publicly denied that he was an obedient, docile son, a kind, indulgent brother, and a pleasant, companionable neighbor, I will take these points as conceded.

About the time he became of age his father made a fresh plunge into the wilderness—this time into the heart of Illinois, halting for a year near the present city of Springfield, and then striking eastward seventy miles to Coles County, whither his son did not see fit to follow him; but having once already when nineteen years of age made a voyage down the Mississippi to New Orleans on a flat boat, laden with produce, he now helped build such a boat, and made his second journey thereon to the Crescent City; returning to serve a year as clerk in a store; then heading a company of volunteers for the Black Hawk War of 1832; and next becoming at once a law student and a candidate for the legislature; receiving an almost unanimous vote in the only precinct where he was known, but failing of an election in the county. He had already, since he became his own man, obtained some schooling, and the craft of a land surveyor; he was twenty-three years old when he in the same season became a captain of volunteers, a candidate for representative, and a student at law.

Let me pause here to consider the surprise often expressed when a citizen of limited schooling is chosen to be, or is presented for one of

¹ This interesting address by Horace Greeley was written either in 1868 or not far from that date; but for some reason it did not receive publication—and it is believed was never delivered. Mr. Greeley's manuscript, now in the possession of a former editor

of the "Tribune," has been lent to me to decipher. Its frequent and closely and minutely written interlineations, and its general illegibility have made its reproduction a somewhat appalling task.

Joel Benton.

the highest civil trusts. Has that argument any foundation in reason, any justification in history?

Of our country's great men, beginning with Ben Franklin, I estimate that a majority had little if anything more than a common school education, while many had less. Washington, Jefferson, and Madison had rather more; Clay and Jackson somewhat less; Van Buren perhaps a little more; Lincoln decidedly less. How great was his consequent loss? I raise the question; let others decide it. Having seen much of Henry Clay, I confidently assert that not one in ten of those who knew him late in life would have suspected from aught in his conversation or bearing, that his education had been inferior to that of the college graduates by whom he was surrounded. His knowledge was different from theirs; and the same is true of Lincoln's as well. Had the latter lived to be seventy years old, I judge that whatever of hesitation or *rawness* was observable in his manner would have vanished, and he would have met and mingled with educated gentlemen and statesmen on the same easy footing of equality with Henry Clay in his later prime of life. How far his two flatboat voyages to New Orleans are to be classed as educational exercises above or below a freshman's year in college, I will not say; doubtless some freshmen know more, others less, than those journeys taught him. Reared under the shadow of the primitive woods, which on every side hemmed in the petty clearings of the generally poor, and rarely energetic or diligent, pioneers of the Southern Indiana wilderness, his first introduction to the outside world from the deck of a "broad-horn" must have been wonderfully interesting and suggestive. To one whose utmost experience of civilization had been a county town, consisting of a dozen or twenty houses, mainly log, with a shabby little court-house, including jail, and a shabbier, ruder, little church, that must have been a marvelous spectacle which glowed in his face from the banks of the Ohio and the lower Mississippi. Though Cairo was then but a desolate swamp, Memphis a wood-landing and Vicksburgh a timbered ridge with a few stores at its base, even these were in striking contrast to the somber monotony of the great woods. The rivers were enlivened by countless swift-speeding steamboats, dispensing smoke by day and flame by night; while New Orleans, though scarcely one-fourth the city she now is, was the focus of a vast commerce, and of a civilization which (for America) might be deemed antique. I doubt not that our tall and green young backwoodsman needed only a piece of well-tanned sheepskin suitably (that is, learnedly) inscribed to have rendered those two boat trips memorable as his degrees in ca-

capacity to act well his part on that stage which was mankind for its audience.

He learned and practised land-surveying because he must somehow live—not ultimately but presently—and he had no idolatrous affection for the wholesome exercise of rail-splitting. He studied law, giving thereto all the time that he could spare from earning his daily bread, for he aspired to political life; and seven-eighths of all the desirable offices in this country are monopolized by the legal profession—I will not judge how wisely. He stood for the legislature, as an election would have enabled him to study regularly without running in debt; whereas, land surveying must take him away from his books. Beaten then, though he received the votes of nearly all his neighbors, he was again a candidate in 1834, and now, when twenty-five years old, and not yet admitted to the bar, he was elected and took his seat—the youngest but one, and probably the tallest member on the floor. He was reelected in 1836, in 1838, and in 1840, receiving after his fourth election the vote of his fellow Whigs for Speaker. He had thus practically, when but thirty-one years old, attained the leadership of his party in Illinois; and that position was never henceforth contested while he lived. When the party had an electoral ticket to frame, he was placed at its head; when it had a chance to elect a United States Senator, it had no other candidate but Lincoln, though under his advice it waived its preference, and united with the anti-Nebraska Democrats in choosing their leader, Lyman Trumbull; it presented him to the first Republican National Convention as its choice for vice-president, and the next, as its choice for president, which prevailed. Meantime, when his second seat in the Senate became vacant in 1858, there was not one Republican in the State who suggested any other name than his for the post. What was it, in a State so large as Illinois, and a party that was justly proud of its Browning, its Yates, its Davis, its Washburne, and others, gave him this unquestioned ascendancy?

I would say, first, his unhesitating, uncalculating, self-sacrificing devotion to the principles and aims of his party. When a poor, unknown youth he first proclaimed himself a Whig, Jacksonism was dominant and rampant throughout the land, and especially in Illinois, where it seemed to have the strength of Gibraltar. In 1836, Ohio and Indiana went for Harrison, but Illinois was not moved to follow them. In 1840, the Whigs carried every other free State, New Hampshire excepted; yet Illinois despite her many veterans who had served under Harrison, or been under his rule, as Governor of the Northwest Territory, went

for Van Buren. Again, in 1844, Mr. Lincoln traveled far and wide, speaking long and well as a Clay elector, yet the State rolled up a largely increased majority for Polk, and she went heavily for Pierce in 1852, likewise for Buchanan in '56. She never cast an electoral vote for any other than the Democratic nominee, till she cast all she had for her own Lincoln. I apprehend that throughout his political career Mr. Lincoln was the most earnest partizan, the most industrious, effective canvasser of his party in the State. Having espoused the Whig cause when it was hopeless, and struggled unavailingly for it, through twenty years of adversity, his compatriots had learned to repose implicit faith in him beyond that which they accorded to any other man, Henry Clay alone excepted.

Our presidential and State canvasses are often improvidently conducted. People wander to distant counties to listen to favorite orators, and swell processions at mass-meetings. They compel speakers to strain and crack their voices in addressing acres of would-be auditors; when, in fact, more effect is usually produced, so far as conviction is concerned, by a quiet, protracted talk in a log school-house than by half-a-dozen tempestuous harangues to a gathering of excited thousands. I perceive and admit the faults, the vices of our system of electioneering; and yet I hold that an American presidential canvass, with all its imperfections on its head, is of immense value, of inestimable utility, as a popular political university, whence even the unlettered, the ragged, the penniless may graduate with profit if they will. In the absence of the stump, I doubt the feasibility of maintaining institutions more than nominally republican; but the stump brings the people face to face with their rulers and aspirants to rule; compels an exhibition and scrutiny of accounts and projects, and makes almost every citizen, however heedless and selfish, an arbiter in our political controversies, enlisting his interest and arousing his patriotism. The allowance of a monarch, exorbitant as it is, falls far below the cost of choosing a president; but the acquaintance with public affairs diffused through a canvass is worth far more than its cost. That falsehoods and distorted conceptions are also disseminated is unhappily true; but there was never yet a stirring presidential canvass which did not leave the people far better, and more generally, informed on public affairs than it found them. The American stump fills the place of the *coup d' état*, and the Spanish-American *pronunciamento*. It is, in an eminently practical sense, the conservator of American liberty, and the antidote to official tyranny and corruption.

The canvasser, if fit to be a canvasser, is

teaching his hearers; fit or unfit, he can hardly fail to be instructed himself. He is day by day presenting facts and arguments and reading in the faces of his hearers their relative pertinence and effectiveness. If his statement of his case does not seem to produce conviction, he varies, fortifies, reënforces it; giving it from day to day new shapes until he has hit upon that which seems to command the hearty, enthusiastic assent of the great body of his hearers; and this becomes henceforth his model. Such was the school in which Abraham Lincoln trained himself to be the foremost *convincer* of his day—the one who could do his cause more good and less harm by a speech than any other living man.

Every citizen has certain conceptions, recollections, convictions, notions, prejudices, which together make up what he terms his politics. The canvasser's art consists in making him believe and feel that an over-ruling majority of these preconceptions ally him to that side whereof said canvasser is the champion. In other words, he seeks to belittle those points whereon his auditor is at odds with him and emphasizes those wherein they two are in accord; thus persuading the hearer to sympathize, act and vote with the speaker. And with this conception in view, I do not hesitate to pronounce Mr. Lincoln's speech at Cooper Institute, New York, in the spring of 1860, the very best political address to which I ever listened—and I have heard some of Webster's grandest. As a literary effort, it would not of course, bear comparison with many of Webster's speeches; but regarded simply as an effort to convince the largest possible number that they ought to be on the speaker's side, not on the other, I do not hesitate to pronounce it unsurpassed.

I first met Mr. Lincoln late in 1848 at Washington, as a representative in the Thirtieth Congress—the only one to which he was ever elected. His was, as apportioned under the census of 1840, a Whig district; and he was elected from it in 1846 by the largest majority it ever gave any one. He was then not quite forty years old; a genial, cheerful, rather comely man, noticeably tall, and the only Whig from Illinois—not remarkable otherwise, to the best of my recollection. He was generally liked on our side of the House; he made two or three moderate and sensible speeches which attracted little attention; he voted generally to forbid the introduction of slavery into the still untainted Territories; but he did not vote for Mr. Galt's resolve looking to the immediate abolition of slavery in the Federal district, being deterred by the somewhat fiery preamble thereto. He introduced a counter-proposition of his own, looking to

abolition by a vote of the people—that is by the whites of the district—which seemed to me much like submitting to the votes of the inmates of a penitentiary a proposition to double the length of their respective terms of imprisonment. In short, he was one of the very mildest type of Wilmot Proviso Whigs from the free States—not nearly so pronounced as many who long since found a congenial rest in the ranks of the pro-slavery democracy. But as I had made most of the members my enemies at an early stage of that short session, by printing an elucidated exposé of the iniquities of Congressional mileage; and as he did not join the active cabal against me, though *his* mileage figured conspicuously and by no means flatteringly in that exposé, I parted from him at the close of the Congress with none but grateful recollections. There were men accounted abler on our side of the House—such as Collamer, of Vermont; Palfrey, and Mann, of Massachusetts, and perhaps Schenck and Root, of Ohio—yet I judge that no other was more generally liked and esteemed than he. And yet had each of us been required to name the man among us who would first attain the presidency, I doubt whether five of us would have designated Abraham Lincoln.

He went home to his law office after trying, I think, to be commissioner of the General Land Office under the incoming Taylor régime and finding the place bespoken; and thenceforth, little was heard of him out of Illinois until the Northern uprising consequent on the introduction and passage of what is known as the "Nebraska Bill." He had hitherto been known as rather conservative than otherwise; this act had the same effect on him as on many others. He was henceforth an open, determined opponent of any extension of slavery to territory previously free. Thus he bore his part in the Illinois contests of 1854 and 1856; and thus when unanimously proclaimed the standard bearer of the Republican party of the State in the senatorial struggle of 1858, he opened the canvass in a speech to the convention which nominated him, which embodied these memorable words:

If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not ex-

pect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Here is the famous doctrine of the "irrepressible conflict," which Governor Seward set forth four months later in his speech at Rochester, New York, which attracted even wider attention and fiercer denunciation than Mr. Lincoln's earlier avowal. "Shall I tell you what this collision means?" queried Governor S., with reference to the existing controversy respecting slavery in the Territory: "They who think that it is accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators, and, therefore, ephemeral, mistake the case altogether. It is an *irrepressible conflict* between opposing and enduring forces; and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slave holding nation, or entirely a free labor nation. . . . It is the failure to apprehend this great truth that induces so many unsuccessful attempts at final compromise between the slave and the free States; and it is the existence of this great fact that renders all such pretended compromises when made, vain and ephemeral."

Finer reading of a national horoscope no statesman ever made—clearer glance into the dim-lit future has rarely been vouchsafed to holy prophet after long vigils of fasting and prayer at Sinai or Nebo. And yet what a stunning concert—or rather dissonance of shriek, and yell, and hostile brays these twin utterances evoked, from ten thousand groaning stumps, from a thousand truculent, shrewish journals! An open adhesion to atheism or anarchy could hardly have called forth fiercer or more scathing execrations. Yet looking back through an eventful interval of less than a decade we see that no truth is more manifest, and hardly one was at that moment more pertinent than that so clearly yet so inoffensively stated, first by the Western lawyer and candidate, then by the New York senator.

I invoke that truth to-day as a bar to harsh judgments and bitter denunciations—as a balm to the wounds of the nation. There *was* "an irrepressible conflict," the Union *could not* "endure half slave and half free." The interests of slave-holders and free labor *were* antagonistic, and it was by no contrivance of politicians, but in spite of their determined efforts that the slavery question was perpetually, with brief intervals, distracting Congress, and involving the North and the South in

fierce collision. Shallow talkers say "If it had not been for this or for that — if there had been no Calhoun or no Garrison, no Wendell Phillips or no Wise — if John Brown had died ten years sooner, or Jeff Davis had never been born there would have been no Nebraska question; no secession; no civil war." Idle, empty babble, dallying with surfaces and taking no account of the essential and inevitable! If none of the hundred best-known and most widely hated of our notables of the last twenty years had ever been born, the late struggle might have been postponed a few years or might have been hastened, but it could not have been averted. It broke out in God's good time because it had to be — because the elements of discord imbedded in our institutions could no longer be held passive, so far as its divine end had been fully accomplished. Such are the convictions which have impelled me to plead for amnesty, charity, and mercy, and oblivion, as I should have pleaded though with even less effect had the other party triumphed. Though there had never been a Missouri to admit, a Texas to annex, nor a Kansas to organize and colonize with free labor or with slaves, the "conflict between opposing and enduring forces" would, nevertheless, have wrought out its natural results.

I cannot help regarding that senatorial contest of 1858, between Lincoln and Douglas, as one of the most characteristic and at the same time most creditable incidents in our national history. There was an honest and earnest difference with regard to a most important and imminent public question; and Illinois was very equally divided thereon, with a United States senator for six years to be chosen by the legislature then to be elected. Henceforth each party selects its ablest and most trusted champion, nominates him for the coveted post, and sends him out as the authorized, indorsed, accredited champion of its principles and policy to canvass the State and secure a verdict for its cause. So the two champions traversed the prairies, speaking alternately to the same vast audiences at several central, accessible points, and speaking separately at others, until the day of election; when Douglas secured a small majority in either branch of the legislature, and was reelected, though Lincoln had the larger popular vote. But while Lincoln had spent less than a thousand dollars in all, Douglas in the canvass had borrowed and dispensed no less than eighty thousand dollars; incurring a debt which weighed him down to the grave. I presume no dime of this was used to buy up his competitor's voters, but all to organize and draw out his own; still the debt so improvidently, if not culpably, incurred remained to harass him out of this mortal life.

Lincoln it was said was beaten; it was a hasty, erring judgment. This canvass made him stronger at home, stronger with the Republicans of the whole country, and when the next national convention of his party assembled, eighteen months thereafter, he became its nominee for President, and thus achieved the highest station in the gift of his country; which but for that misjudged feat of 1858 he would never have attained.

A great deal of knowing smartness has been lavished on that Chicago nomination. If A had not wanted this, or had B been satisfied with that, or C not been offended because he had missed or been refused something else, the result would have been different, says Shallowpate. But know, O Shallowpate! that Lincoln was nominated for the one sufficient reason that he could obtain more electoral votes than any of his competitors! And that reason rarely fails in a national convention. It nominated Harrison in '39; Polk in '44; Taylor in '48; Pierce in '56; and Lincoln in '60. Those who compose national conventions are generally at least shrewd politicians. They want to secure a triumph if for no better reason than that they hope thereby to gratify their own personal aspirations. So they consult and compare and balance popularities, and weigh probabilities; and at last the majority center upon that candidate who can poll most votes. This may not be our noblest test of statesmanship, but it is at least intelligible. And thus Abraham Lincoln became President, having every electoral vote from the free States, but three of the seven cast from New Jersey.

Then followed secession, and confederation, and civil war, whereof the first scenes had been enacted before Mr. Lincoln commenced his journey to Washington, taking leave of his fellow-citizens of Springfield with prophetic tenderness and solemnity, and thenceforward addressing at almost every stopping place vast crowds who would have kept silence; and so meandering to the national capital, everywhere cheered and welcomed, though nearly half his auditors had voted against him, until he neared the slave line; and now he was over-persuaded by the urgent representations of Senator Seward and General Scott, based upon the espials and discoveries of Police-Superintendent Kennedy, to break his engagement to traverse Baltimore, as he had traversed New York and other cities which had given heavy majorities against him, and take instead a sleeping-car which, passing through Baltimore in the dead of night, landed him in Washington hours before that wherein he was expected publicly to enter Baltimore.

I have no doubt that there was a plot to

assassinate him on his way through Baltimore — that the outbreak which cost the lives of six Massachusetts volunteers would have been anticipated by two weeks had he afforded the opportunity; but this peril of assassination is one of the inevitable attendants of conspicuous activity in public affairs in times of popular passion. I cannot say how many distinct, written notices that *my* life was forfeited, and the forfeit would soon be exacted, I have been honored with — certainly a dozen, possibly a hundred — and, arguing from the little to the great, I have no doubt that Mr. Lincoln's allotment of these seductive billets must have considerably exceeded ten thousand.

But what then? Must we sit up all night because so many people die in their beds? We cannot evade the assassin; we cannot fence him out, or Henry IV., of France, and ever so many more powerful and beloved monarchs would not have succumbed to the dagger, the pistol, or the bowl. The most powerful of living rulers is Alexander II., of Russia, and his life has twice within a few years past been saved by the inaccuracy of a regicide's aim.¹ The words of the mighty Julius, as rendered by Shakspeare, embody the truest and highest wisdom:

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should
fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

I am quite certain that this was also Mr. Lincoln's profound conviction, and that he acted on it whenever he was not overruled by a clamor too sudden and too weighty to allow his judgment fair play. "Hence his untimely death," you say. I do not believe it; you may renounce the sunlight and sit trembling in an inner dungeon surrounded by triple walls and triple guards and yet the assassin will steal in upon you unawares. There is no absolute safeguard against him; your only refuge is the assurance that

Man is immortal 'til his work is done.

Despite ten thousand menaces and warnings and offers to pay for his taking off, and to take him off for pay, Mr. Lincoln was inaugurated President. No crack of rifle or bark of revolver interrupted the reading of his inaugural, though I confidently expected and awaited it. Under a bright March sun, surrounded by a brilliant coterie of foreign ministers and home

dignitaries, the new President read the inaugural, which he had evidently prepared with care and anxious deliberation before leaving his distant home. That document will be lingered over and admired long after we shall all have passed away. It was a masterly effort at persuasion and conciliation by one whose command of logic was as perfect as his reliance on it was unqualified. The man evidently believed with all his soul that if he could but convince the South that he would arrest and return her fugitive slaves and offered to slavery every support required by comity, or by the letter of the Constitution, he would avert her hostility, dissolve the Confederacy, and restore throughout the Union the sway of the Federal authority and laws! There was never a wilder delusion. I doubt whether one single individual was recalled from meditated rebellion to loyalty by that overture, yet mark how solemnly, how touchingly he pleads that war may be averted:

[Here Mr. Greeley quotes the close of the inaugural.² — EDITOR.]

I apprehend that Mr. Lincoln was very nearly the last man in the country whether North or South to relinquish his rooted conviction, that the growing chasm might be closed and the Union fully restored without the shedding of blood. Inured to the ways of the Bar and the Stump, so long accustomed to hear of rebellions that never came to light, he long and obstinately refused to believe that reason and argument, fairly employed, could fail of their proper effect. Though Montgomery Blair, that member of his cabinet who best understood the Southern character, strenuously insisted from the outset that war was inevitable, that hard knocks must be given and taken before the authority of the Union could be restored, or would be recognized in the Cotton States, the President gave far greater heed to the counsel and anticipations of his Secretary of State, whose hopeful nature and optimistic views were in accordance with his own stubborn prepossessions.

I saw him for a short hour about a fortnight after his inauguration; and though the tidings of General Twiggs's treacherous surrender of the larger portion of our little army, hitherto employed in guarding our Mexican frontier, had been some days at hand, I saw and heard nothing that indicated or threatened belligerency on our part. On the contrary, the President sat listening to the endless whine of office-seekers, and doling out village post-offices to importunate or lucky partizans just as though we were sailing before land breezes on a smiling, summer sea; and to my inquiry, "Mr. President! do you know that you will have to *fight* for the place in which you sit?"

¹ Assassinated finally March 13, 1881. — EDITOR.

² See "Abraham Lincoln: A History," Vol. III, p. 319. — EDITOR.

he answered pleasantly, I will not say lightly—but in words which intimated his disbelief that any fighting would transpire or be needed; and I firmly believe that this dogged resolution not to believe that our country was about to be drenched in fraternal blood, is the solution of his obstinate calmness throughout the earlier stages of the war; and especially, his patient listening to the demand of a deputation from the Young Christians of Baltimore as well as of the mayor and of other city dignitaries, that he should stipulate while blockaded in Washington, and in imminent danger of expulsion, that no more Northern volunteers should cross the sacred soil of Maryland in hastening to his relief. We could not comprehend this at the North—many of us have not yet seen through it; most certainly if he had required a committee of ten thousand to kick the bearers of this preposterous, impudent demand back to Baltimore, the ranks of that committee would have been filled in an hour from any Northern city or county containing fifty thousand inhabitants.

And thus the precious early days of the conflict were surrendered because the President did not even yet believe that any serious conflict would be had. He still clung to the delusion that forbearance, and patience, and moderation, and soft words would yet obviate all necessity for deadly strife. Thus new volunteers were left for weeks to rot in idleness and dissipation in the outskirts and purlieus of Washington, because their commander-in-chief believed that it would never be necessary or advisable to load their muskets with ball cartridges. But when at length that heartless, halting, desolating, stumbling, staggering, fatally delayed advance to Bull Run was made by half the regiments that should have been sent forward, and had recoiled in ignominious disaster, as an advance so made against a compact, determined, decently handled force must, there came a decided change. The wanton rout of that black day cost the President but one night's sleep. It cost me a dozen, while good men died of it who had never been within two hundred miles of the so quickly deserted field. Henceforth Mr. Lincoln accepted war as a stern necessity, and stood ready to fight it out to the bitter end.

And yet while I judge that many were more eager than he to bring the struggle to an early if worthy close, no one would have welcomed an honorable and lasting pacification with a sincerer joy. No man was ever more grossly misrepresented or more widely misapprehended than he was on this point; and I deem the fault partly his own or that of his immediate counselors. Let me state distinctly how and why.

The rebellion, once fairly inaugurated, was

kept alive and aggravated by systematic and monstrous misrepresentation at the South of the spirit and purpose of the North. That our soldiers were sent down to kill, ravage, and destroy, with "Beauty and booty" on their standards, and rage and lust in their hearts; and that the North would be satisfied with nothing less than its utter spoliation, if not the absolute extirpation of the Southern people—such were the tales currently reported and widely believed in that vast region wherein no journal not avowedly Confederate existed or could exist for years, until the strength of the Rebellion lay in a widespread belief within its domain that nothing worse could possibly happen to its adherents or their families than subjugation to the Union. Hence I hold that our Government, whatever its hopes of a favorable issue, should not only have welcomed every overture looking to pacification from the other side but should have studied and planned to multiply opportunities for conference and negotiation. When Henry May, an anti-war representative of Baltimore, in Congress, sought permission to go to Richmond in quest of peace, Mr. Lincoln allowed him to slip clandestinely through our lines; but kept his mission quiet and disclaimed all responsibility for it. I would have publicly said: "Go in welcome, Mr. May; I only stipulate that you publish, and authenticate by your signature, the very best terms that are offered you at Richmond; and I agree if they be responsibly indorsed to give them a prompt unprejudiced consideration." And I would have repeated this to every Democrat who might at any time have solicited like permission. So, when in July, 1863, Mr. A. H. Stephens sought permission to visit Washington in a Confederate gunboat with some sort of overture, I would have responded: "Spare us your gunboat, Mr. S.; that would be superfluous here; but you will find a swift vessel and a safe-conduct awaiting you at Fort Monroe; so come to us at once, properly accredited, and you will find us not merely willing but anxious to stay this revolting effusion of human blood." And so to the last. I do firmly believe that the President's Niagara card, "To whom it may Concern," did much to disabuse the Southern mind with regard to Northern purposes, and might have been so framed and proffered as to have done very much more had it said directly, affirmatively, what it said inferentially, negatively. I believe it would have paralyzed thousands of arms then striking frenziedly at the best of their and our country. And I hold Mr. Lincoln's ultimate visit to Fort Monroe, there to confer with Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell, with a view to peace, one of the wisest and noblest acts of an eventful, illustrious

life, and one which contributed more than many a Union victory to the speedy disintegration and collapse of the Rebellion. Honored be the wisdom that comes late, if it be not indeed *too* late!

As to the slavery question I think Mr. Lincoln resolutely looked away from it so long as he could, because he feared that his recognizing slavery as the mainspring and driving wheel of the Rebellion was calculated to weaken the Union cause by detaching Maryland, Kentucky, and possibly Missouri also, from its support. "One war at a time" was his wise veto on every avoidable foreign complication; and in the same spirit he vetoed Fremont's and Phelps's, and Hunter's, and other early efforts to liberate the slaves of rebels, or to enlist negro troops. I am not arguing that he was right or wrong in any particular instance; I am only setting forth his way of looking at these grave questions, and the point of view from which he regarded them. To deal with each question as it arose and not be embarrassed in so dealing with it by preconceptions and premature committals, and never to widen needlessly the circle of our enemies, was his inflexible rule. Hence when Congress, in the summer of 1864, named and enacted an elaborate plan of reconstruction for the States then in revolt—which bill was presented to him during the last hour of the session—he withheld his signature and thereby caused its failure—not, as he explained, that he was adverse to the conditions proposed therein, but that he "refused to be inflexibly committed to *any* single plan of restoration"—while the Rebellion was still unsubdued, and while exigencies might arise in the progress of the conflict, which could not be foreseen. The document wherein Messrs. Wade and Winter Davis criticized and controverted this decision is far clearer and more caustic than any Mr. Lincoln ever wrote; and yet I believe, the judgment of posterity will be that he had the right side of the question.

I am not so clear that he had the better position in his discussion with Messrs. Corning and other Democrats of Albany and in his like correspondence with Democratic leaders in Ohio touching the arrest and punishment of Mr. Vallandigham. The essential question at issue was this: "How far may a citizen lawfully and with impunity oppose a war which his country is waging?" It is a question as old as human freedom, and its settlement has not yet been approximated. That there must be liberty to nominate and support candidates hostile to the further prosecution of the contest, and in favor of decisive efforts looking to and in favor of its speedy close by negotiation, is not contested: but where is the limit of this

liberty? May the Opposition proceed to arraign the President as a usurper, despot, anarchist, murderer, and eulogize the cause of the public enemy as righteous, patriotic, and entitled to every good man's sympathy and support? If not, where is the freedom of discussion in election? If yea, how is the national authority to be upheld and its right in extremity to the best services of the whole people enforced and maintained? Mr. Vallandigham was and had been an open, unqualifiedly consistent opponent of the War for the Union. He held that war to be unjust, unconstitutional, and wantonly aggressive. He held that the Union could only be restored through the discomfiture of the national forces and the consequent abandonment of all attempts to "coerce" the South. There was nothing equivocal in his attitude, nor in his utterances, whether in Congress or on the stump. And it cannot be fairly denied that his speeches were as clearly giving "aid and comfort" to the enemy as were the cavalry raids of John Morgan, J. E. B. Stuart, or Mosby. So General Burnside, commanding the military department, including Ohio, had him arrested, tried by a court-martial, convicted, and sentenced to imprisonment in a fortress; which sentence was commuted by the President into banishment to the Southern Confederacy—which sentence was duly executed. And thereupon Mr. V—— was nominated for Governor by the Democracy of Ohio, and a strong appeal made to the President by the Democrats of Albany and elsewhere, for an unconditional reversal of the sentence of banishment, assuming that Mr. V—— had been condemned and banished in violation of law and right—"for no other reason than words addressed to a public meeting in criticism of the course of the administration; and in condemnation of the military orders of" Burnside. I think Mr. V——'s friends have ground to stand upon so strong—or at least so plausible—that they might well have offered to set forth more broadly and forcibly the position and the action they controverted.

Mr. Lincoln answered them in what I consider the most masterly document that ever came from his pen. I doubt that Webster could have done better—I am sure he could not have so clearly and so forcibly appealed to the average apprehension of his countrymen; it is clear enough from his letter that the whole business was distasteful to him—that he thought Burnside had blundered in meddling at all with Vallandigham, or even recognizing his existence. Indeed, he intimates this part plainly in the course of his letter; yet he braces himself for his task and fully justifies therein the claim I set up for him, that he was the cleav-

erest logician for the masses that America has yet produced. Six years before he had crushed by a sentence the sophism that sought to cover the extension of slavery into the Territories with the mantle of "Popular Sovereignty": "It means," said he, "that if A chooses to make B his slave, C shall not interfere to prevent it," so, in answering Messrs. Corning and company, he treated their letter as covering a demand that the rebel cause might be served and promoted in the loyal States with impunity by any action that would not be unlawful in times of profound peace—a position that he stoutly contested. . . .

[Mr. Greeley here quotes from Mr. Lincoln's letter of June 12, 1863.—EDITOR.]

. . . I do not suppose this logic convinced Mr. Lincoln that the arrest, and trial, and conviction of Mr. V—were wise and useful measures of repression—if it did it has had no kindred effect on *my* mind. Yet I hold that the bitterest opponent of the President and his policy must in fairness admit that the case is not entirely one-sided—that if government is to exist it must have power to suppress rebellion against its authority; and that it is neither reasonable nor possible to accord the same immunities and uniformly respect the same safeguards of free speech and personal liberty in the presence of a gigantic rebellion, as in times of public tranquillity and unbroken allegiance to order and law.

I have said that Mr. Lincoln when I first knew him was classed with the more conservative of Northern Whigs on the subject of slavery. On the 3d of March, 1837—the last day of General Jackson's rule—he submitted to the Legislature of Illinois a protest against certain pro-slavery resolves passed by the Democratic majority of that body, wherein on behalf of himself and his brethren he says:

They believe that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy, but that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than abate its evils.

They believe that the Congress of the United States has no power under the Constitution to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different States.

They believe that the Congress of the United States has the power, under the Constitution, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, but that the power ought not to be exercised, unless at the request of the people of the District.

In 1848 he voted in Congress (as we have seen) to lay on the table Mr. Galt's resolve, proposing instructions to the Federal District Committee to report a bill abolishing slavery in said district; but submitted a substitute looking to compensated, gradual emancipation,

upon the express assent of a majority of the legal voters thereof. Ten years later, instructed by the Nebraska developments he had advanced, as we have seen, to the conception that "the Union could not permanently endure half slave and half free"—and that slavery, not the Union, would eventually have to succumb and disappear. This was a great stride; and he had hardly moved again when he wrote me on the 22d of August, 1862, in reply to an appeal from the pro-slavery policy which had thus far governed the practical conduct of the war, this exposition of his war policy:

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was." If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time *destroy* slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors, and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views. I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish, that all men everywhere could be free.

Yours,

A. LINCOLN.

This manifesto was exultingly hailed by the less radical portion of his supporters—I never could imagine why. It recognized the right to destroy slavery whenever that step should be deemed necessary to the national salvation—nay, it affirmed the *duty* of destroying in such contingency. And it proved that the President was meditating that grave step and clearly perceiving that it might—nay, probably *would*—become necessary, and that he wished to prepare the public mind for acquiescence therein whenever he should realize and announce that the time had come. I do not see how these points can have escaped the attention of any acute and careful observer.

It may well be noted here that this letter, though in form a response to my "Prayer of Twenty Millions," was not so in fact; I had not besought him to proclaim general eman-

icipation, I had only urged him to give full effect to the laws of the land, which prescribed that slaves employed with their master's acquiescence in support of the rebellion should thenceforth be treated as free by such employment, and by the general hostility of their owners to the national authority. I have no doubt that Mr. Lincoln's letter had been prepared before he ever saw my "Prayer," and that this was merely used by him as an opportunity, an occasion, an excuse, for setting his own altered position — changed not by his volition, but by circumstances — fairly before the country.

At the same time, I have no doubt that his letter expresses the exact literal truth, precisely as it lay in his mind. Assailed on the one hand as intent on upholding and preserving, on the other as subtly scheming and contriving to subvert and abolish slavery, he was really and truly obnoxious to neither of these charges, but solely, engrossingly intent in putting down the Rebellion, and preserving the Union by any and every means, and ready either to guarantee the perpetuity or proclaim the overthrow of human bondage, according as the one step or the other should seem likely to subserve and secure that end. Hence the first proclamation of freedom, which was issued but a few weeks after the appearance of this letter, seemed to me but the fulfilment of a promise implied in its forerunner.

I did not see the President between the issue of his first and that of his second Proclamation of Freedom — in fact, not from January, 1862, till about February 1, 1863. He then spoke of the Emancipation policy as not having yet effected so much good here at home as had been promised or predicted, but added that it had helped us decidedly in our foreign relations. He intimated no regret that it had been adopted, and, I presume, never felt any. In fact, as he was habitually and constitutionally cautious as to making advances, he seldom or never felt impelled or required to take a step backward. Never putting down his foot till he felt sure there was firm ground beneath it, he never feared to lay his whole weight on it when once fairly down. And, having committed himself to the policy of Emancipation, he proclaimed and justified it in letters to sympathizing British workmen, and to friends and foes on every side. His proposal of gradual and compensated Emancipation in the loyal slave States and districts, his postponed but hearty sanction of the enlistment of Black soldiers, and his persistent and thorough recognition and assertion of the Inalienable Rights of Man, were links in one chain which he wove skilfully, if not nimbly, around the writhing form of the over-mastered, fainting Rebellion. I am no admirer of the style of his more elaborate and pretentious

state papers, especially his messages to Congress. They lack the fire and force that an Andrew, a Chase, or even a Stanton would have given them; they are not electric — not calculated to touch the chords of the national heart, and thrill them with patriotic ardor; yet I doubt that our national literature contains a finer gem than that little speech at the Gettysburg celebration, November 19, 1863, . . . after the close of Mr. Everett's classic but frigid oration. . . .

One more citation, and what seems to me the essential characteristics of a man as truly, unconsciously portrayed in his own acts and words, will have been set fairly before you:

Kentucky had been a chief obstacle to the early adoption of an Emancipation policy. As the President's native State, as the most central and weighty of the so-called border States, and as preponderantly favorable to the Union, though very largely represented in the rebel armies, the President had long hesitated and yielded to his natural reluctance to offend his loyal Whites, as it was clear that any act looking to general Emancipation would surely do.

When the die had at length been cast, and the attitude of the government had become unequivocal, her governor, Bramlett, with ex-Senator Dickson and Editor A. G. Hodges, appeared in Washington as bearers of her solemn protest against that policy. The President met them cordially, and they discussed their difference freely and amicably, but neither party seems to have made much headway in convincing and converting the other. After the Kentuckians had left, Mr. Hodges asked the President to give in writing the substance of the views he had set forth during their interview, and he did it in a letter of remarkable terseness and cogency even for him. I will cite but two passages which illustrate phases of Mr. Lincoln's character and of his mode of viewing the great questions at issue, which I have not clearly presented. In the former he says:

I am naturally antislavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel. And yet, I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling. It was in the oath I took, that I would to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath. Nor was it my view, that I might take an oath to get power, and break the oath in using the power. I understood, too, that in ordinary civil administration this oath even forbade me to practically indulge my primary, abstract judgment, on the moral question of slavery. I had publicly declared this many times, and in many ways. And I aver that, to this day, I have

done no official act in mere deference to my abstract judgment and feeling on slavery.

I did understand, however, that my oath to preserve the Constitution to the best of my ability imposed upon me the duty of preserving, by every indispensable means, that government—that nation of which that Constitution was the organic law. Was it possible to lose the nation, and yet preserve the Constitution?

By general law, life and limb must be protected; yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life; but a life is never wisely given to save a limb. I felt that measures otherwise unconstitutional might become lawful by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the Constitution through the preservation of the nation. Right or wrong, I assume this ground, and now avow it. I could not feel that, to the best of my ability, I had even tried to preserve the Constitution, if, to save slavery or any minor matter, I should permit the wreck of the government, country, and Constitution, all together.

Having briefly set forth how and why he was driven by the difficulty of subduing the Rebellion first to proclaim Emancipation, and then to summon Blacks as well as Whites to the defense of the country, and barely glancing at the advantages thus secured, he closes with these words:

And now let any Union man who complains of the measure, test himself by writing down in one line that he is for subduing the Rebellion by force of arms and in the next; that he is for taking these hundred and thirty thousand men from the Union side, and placing them where they would be but for the measure he condemns. If he cannot face his case so stated, it is only because he cannot face the truth.

I add a word which was not in the verbal conversation. In telling this tale I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years' struggle, the nation's condition is not what either party or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it. Whither it is tending seems plain. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills also that we of the North as well as you of the South, shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God.

Yours truly,

A. LINCOLN.

Those few words: "I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity; I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me," furnish a key to the whole character and career of the man. He was no inspired Elijah or John Baptist, emerging from the awful desert sanctified by lonely fastings and wrestlings with Satan in prayer, to thrill a loving, suppliant multitude

with unwonted fires of penitence and devotion. He was no loyal singer of Israel touching at will his heart and sweeping all the chords of emotion and inspiration in the general heart—he was simply a plain, true, earnest, patriotic man, gifted with eminent common sense, which, in its wide range, gave a hand to shrewdness on the one hand, humor on the other, and which allied him intimately, warmly with the masses of mankind. I doubt whether any woman or child, White or Black, bond or free, virtuous or vicious, accosted or reached forth a hand to Abraham Lincoln, and detected in his countenance or manner any repugnance or shrinking from the proffered contact, any assumption of superiority or betrayal of disdain. No one was ever more steeped in the spirit of that glorious lyric of the inspired Scotch plowman—

A man 's a man, for a' that;

and no one was ever acquainted and on terms of friendly intimacy with a greater number of human beings of all ranks and conditions than was he whom the bullet of Wilkes Booth claimed for its victim.

I pass over his reflection, his second inaugural, his final visit to the army of the Potomac, and his entry into Richmond, hard on the heels of a prolonged, postponed capture; I say nothing of his manifest determination to treat the prostrate insurgents with unexampled magnanimity, and the terrible crime which with singular madness quenched, under the impulse of intense sympathy with the Rebellion, the life which was at that moment of greater importance and value to the rebels than that of any other living man. All these have added nothing to the symmetry of a character which was already rounded and complete. Never before did one so constantly and visibly grow under the discipline of incessant cares, anxieties, and trials. The Lincoln of '62 was plainly a larger, broader, better man than he had been in '61; while '63 and '64 worked his continued and unabated growth in mental and moral stature. Few have been more receptive, more sympathetic, and (within reasonable limits) more plastic than he. Had he lived twenty years longer, I believe he would have steadily increased in ability to counsel his countrymen, and in the estimation of the wise and good.

But he could in no case have lived so long. "Perfect through suffering" is the divine law; and the tension of mind and body through his four years of eventful rule had told powerfully upon his physical frame. When I last saw him, some five or six weeks before his death, his face was haggard with care, and

seamed with thought and trouble. It looked care-plowed, tempest-tossed, and weather-beaten, as if he were some tough old mariner, who had for years been beating up against wind and tide, unable to make his port or find safe anchorage. Judging from that scathed, rugged countenance, I do not believe he could have lived out his second term had no felon hand been lifted against his priceless life.

The chief moral I deduce from his eventful career asserts

The might that slumbers in a peasant's arm!

the majestic heritage, the measureless opportunity of the humblest American youth. Here was an heir of poverty and insignificance, obscure, untaught, buried throughout his childhood in the primitive forests, with no transcendent, dazzling abilities, such as make their way in any country, under any institution, but emphatically in intellect, as in station, one of the millions of strivers for a rude livelihood who, though attaching himself stubbornly to the less popular party, and especially so in the State which he had chosen as his home, did nevertheless become a central figure of the Western Hemisphere, and an object of honor, love, and reverence throughout the civilized world. Had he been a genius, an intellectual prodigy, like Julius Cæsar, or Shakspeare, or Mirabeau, or Webster, we might say: "This lesson is not for us — with such faculties any one could achieve and succeed"; but he was not a born king of men, ruling by the resistless might of his natural superiority, but a child of the people, who made himself a great persuader, therefore a leader, by dint of firm resolve, and patient effort, and dogged perseverance. He slowly won his way to eminence and renown by ever doing the work that lay next to him — doing it with all his growing might — doing it as well as he could, and learning by his failure, when failure was encountered, how to do it better. Wendell Phillips once coarsely said: "He grew because we watered him," which was only true in so far as this — he was open to all impressions and influences, and gladly profited by all the teachings of events and circumstances, no matter how adverse or unwelcome. There was probably no year of his life in which he was not a wiser, cooler, better man than he had been the year preced-

ing. It was of such a nature — patient, plodding, sometimes groping, but ever towards the light — that Tennyson sings:

Perplex in faith, but pure in deeds,

At last he beat his music out.

There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

There are those who profess to have been always satisfied with his conduct of the war, deeming it prompt, energetic, vigorous, masterly. I did not, and could not, so regard it. I believed then — I believe this hour — that a Napoleon I., a Jackson, would have crushed secession out in a single short campaign — almost in a single victory. I believed that an advance to Richmond 100,000 strong might have been made by the end of June, 1861; that would have insured a counter-revolution throughout the South, and the voluntary return of every State, through a dispersion and disavowal of its rebel chiefs, to the counsels and the flag of the Union. But such a return would have not merely left slavery intact — it would have established it on firmer foundations than ever before. The momentarily alienated North and South would have fallen on each other's necks, and, amid tears and kisses, have sealed their Union by ignominiously making the Blacks the scapegoat of their by-gone quarrel; and wreaking on them the spite which they had purposed to expend on each other. But God had higher ends to which a Bull Run, a Ball's Bluff, a Gaines's Mill, a Groveton, were indispensable; and so they came to pass, and were endured and profited by. The Republic needed to be passed through chastening, purifying fires of adversity and suffering; so these came and did their work, and the verdure of a new national life springs greenly from their ashes. Other men were helpful to the great renovation, and nobly did their part in it; yet, looking back through the lifting mists of seven eventful, tragic, trying, glorious years, I clearly discern that the one providential leader, the indispensable hero of the great drama — faithfully reflecting even in his hesitations and seeming vacillations the sentiment of the masses — fitted by his very defects and shortcomings for the burden laid upon him, the good to be wrought out through him, was Abraham Lincoln.

Horace Greeley.





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Horace Greeley