


1946

UA3/2/4 [Abraham Lincoln]

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INTRODUCTION--I

Richard Dana: "My heart sinks at the unspeakable calamity.
Stanton: "I will not associate with such a damned, gawky, long-armed ape as that. If I can't have a man who is a gentleman in appearance associated with me in the case I will abandon it."

In 1862 Henry Ward Beecher said of him: "Not a spark of genius has he, not an element of leadership."

Salem Advocate: "European powers despise us because we have no better material out of which to make a president."

F. B. Morse in a letter to his brother-in-law described him as weak, vacillating, illiterate--a President without brains

At the time of his election the distinguished James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald said: "There is a chance for Lincoln to avert impending ruin and invest his name with immortality by surrendering his claims to national man acceptable to both sections. If he persists he will totter into a dishonored grave driven there perhaps by an assassin leaving behind a memory more execrable than that of Benedict Arnold."

The Charleston Mercury, which of course may be assumed to have had some prejudice described a speech of Lincoln's matter of factly stating, "The Baboon resumed and concluded his remarks."

In like tone the Richmond semi-weekly Examiner casually referred to him as "the abolition orangoutang."

And a letter said to have been written by a member of Congress, published in the Louisville Courier described him as a cross between a sandhill crane and an Andeluvian jackass."

INTRODUCTION--II

Let me give you a few more favorable estimates from rather widely different sources:

After Lincoln's death Stanton, who as I have previously stated thought it an insult to associate with Mr. Lincoln, said, "Now he belongs to the Ages."

Henry Ward Beecher, who according to my previously quoted statement thought so little of the President, in 1862 in a funeral sermon after his death said: "Four years ago, Oh! Illinois, we took from your midst an untried man. We return him to you a mighty conqueror, not thine any more but the nations--not ours but the worlds."

The British humor magazine Punch which had disparaged him in every way possible during his administration apologized after his death by the following:

"Yes he had lived to shame me for my sneer
To lame my pencil and confute my pen
To make me own this hind of princes peer
Tis rail splitter a true born king of men."

Stoddard: "No Caesar he whom we lament
A man without a precedent
Sent it would seem, to do
His work and perish too."

It may be that Pual Dunbar in expressing his race's devotion to its benefactor came near the truth when he said:

"Earth learned of thee what Heaven already knew
And wrote thee down among her treasured few."

Markham: "And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when some lordly cedar, green with years,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."

Ingersoll: "Lincoln was the greatest figure of the fiercest civil war.
He is the gentlest memory of our world."

Wilson: "Lincoln rather than Jackson is the supreme American of our history."

Lowell called him "the first American."

Watterson: "One thinks that the world in which Abraham Lincoln lived might have dealt more kindly with such a man. He was himself so gentle, so upright in nature, and so broad of mind, so sunny and tolerant in temper, so simple and unaffected

(Introduction--II)

2.

in bearing. He was the only friend we had at court when friends were most in need; he was the one man in power who wanted to preserve us intact--to save us from the wolves of passion and plunder who stood at our door.

As to the quotations which I have given regarding Mr. Lincoln's personal appearance and manners, the polished gentleman, Edward Everett stated that on the only social occasion when he was in Mr. Lincoln's company, which was of course at Gettysburg, he stated that he ate with Mr. Lincoln in distinguished company and that in gentlemanly appearance, manners, and conversation Lincoln was the peer of any man at the table.

Certain it is that each year finds increased the already great number of books and articles honoring him. His statue stands in countless cities in America, and in many places throughout the world. The greatest sculptors and painters have made permanent their conception of him. Statesmen have eulogized him, poets have devoted their genius to his glory, and the humble log cabin near Hodgenville has become a shrine for humble and proud, voter and President. Increasing knowledge of the man seems to breed increasing respect and devotion. Since my residence in Bowling Green, I have passed many times the lowly cabin now incased in marble and the locality of the Knob Creek home. One cannot pass these places without thought and a good bit of wonder. I have of course stood before the magnificent statue in Lincoln Park in Chicago, a reproduction of which stands in London, and climbed the steps of the impressive memorial in Washington. Since coming to Bowling Green in September, 1937, I have read I expect ten books and many articles on Lincoln seeking to find if I might the qualities which gave this son, as Dodd calls him, of poor Nancy Hanks and trifling Tom Lincoln, who said himself that his formal schooling did not total in excess of one year, and whose life he once told an inquirer had been described by the poet Gray when he mentioned, "the short and simple annals of the poor," his claim to greatness and more especially his place in the hearts of the American people.

Granted that the preservation of the nation entitled him to the national gratitude that would yet not explain the devotion of a people. To be sure the poverty and struggle through which he emerged plus a martyr's death would be powerful influenced, but I want to call your attention to some of the characteristics which were his which I am disposed to think are essential to secure the love of a people and to entitle one to a lasting place in the hearts of men when accompanied by accomplishment and service.

HONESTY

Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser in fees expenses and waste of time. As a peace maker the lawyer has a super opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.

There is a vague popular belief that lawyers are dishonest. Let no young man choosing the law for a calling for a moment yield to the popular belief--resolve to be honest at all events and if in your own mind you cannot be an honest lawyer resolve to be honest without being a lawyer.

While a clerk for Offutt cash over run, and he found he had short changed an old woman. Although only a few cents were involved he walked a considerable distance to her home to correct the error. Again it was told that on one occasion he found that through use of the wrong weight he had given a customer short weight in tea. He sent balance due. Numerous tales evidently authentic of such happenings are to be found.

At the close of his career as postmaster a small balance due the government. During the period which followed while practicing law he was in a constant struggle for existence with poverty. Frequent borrowing necessary for existence. When the government agent came to check up the post office a friend said he did not believe Lincoln could pay the money and was about to take him aside to offer a loan when Lincoln asked the agent to wait till he went to his boarding place. He brought from his trunk an old blue sock and poured out on the table the exact amount as he had placed it there and left it inviolate as a trust fund.

A similar story is told of his law partnership that he divided fees received and marked his partner's share with his name refusing to mix another's money with his.

When the firm of Lincoln and Berry failed leaving a debt of eleven hundred dollars he assumed this though it required some fifteen years to discharge it. "This debt was the greatest obstacle I ever met in my life. I had no way of speculating, and I could not earn money except by labor and to earn by labor eleven hundred dollars besides my living seemed the work of a lifetime. There was however but one way. I went to the creditors and told them that if they would leave me alone I would give them all I could earn over my living as fast as I could earn it."

MODESTY

In 1859 he wrote two letters in which he said, "I must say I do not think myself fit for the Presidency."

When notified of his nomination the suggestion was made that his biography should be written. His reply was, "My friend, I do not see much in my life yet to write about."

Speaking of an early acquaintance who was an applicant for an office which he hardly thought him qualified to fill he remarked, "Now I never thought he had any more than average ability when we were young men together--really I never did--but then I suppose he thought the same about me; he had reason to and--here I am."

Mr. Hay who was certainly qualified to speak said, "All agree that his most marked characteristic was simplicity and artlessness, a freedom from pomposity and affectation--he shrank from assuming the titles of his position--had a total lack of consideration of what was due his exalted station."

John Bigelow said he was so modest by nature that he was perfectly willing to walk behind any man who wished to walk in front of him.

TOLERANT AND KIND

Chase said of him, "The President hates to be harsh even when harshness is deserved."

During the election returns of 1864 he said to a friend, "You have more of that feeling of personal resentment than I. Perhaps I may have too little of it, but I never thought it paid. A man has not time to spend half his life in quarrels. If any man cease to attack me, I never remember the past against him."

I call your attention to the fact that there was no place for retaliation or the evening of scores in his philosophy. This is most quickly illustrated by his attitude toward the South at the close of the war as contrasted with those evil spirits of vindictiveness who brought on the horrors of reconstruction. It was he who said, "I hope there will be no persecution after the war is over, no bloody work." He proved that he meant the statement in his second inaugural, "with malice toward none, with charity for all," by his policy of reconstruction and the friendliness to which Mr. Watterson refers in my earlier quotation.

General Joseph E. Johnston to Sherman, "Mr. Lincoln was the best friend they had. His assassination was the greatest possible calamity to the South."

I am obliged to pass over briefly his well-known love for children, but you will remember the many stories told of his delight in gathering a group of them to take to the circus; the account of his finding the girl in tears because the drayman had failed to come for her trunk. Whereupon he took it upon his shoulders and carried it to the station. Of the occasion while president when he indulged briefly in a game of leap-frog with Willie and Tad and their friends. The story of how in the midst of the cares of war when Tad and Willie and their playmates had sentenced their soldier doll to die at sunrise for having slept on duty had the happy thought that it might be better to have the doll pardoned that the President found time, in his understanding and love of children, to solemnly write, "The doll Jack is pardoned by order of the President."

OBJECTIVE JUDGMENT OF MEN

He always put the country's welfare above personal feelings, and judged men not by their attitude toward him.

I remind you on the authority of Clarence McCartney of the delicious story that some weeks after election of 1860 John Bunn going to Lincoln's room at the state house in Springfield met Chase coming away. "You don't mean to put that man in your cabinet?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he things he is a great deal bigger than you are."

"Well, do you know any other men who think they are bigger than I am?"

"I cannot say that I do but why do you ask that?"

"Because I want to put them all in my cabinet."

When Chase in 1864 allowed a movement to get underway to secure for him the nomination, Lincoln in commenting on it told the story of the gadfly. It seems he was plowing corn with his half brother, he driving the horse and his brother holding the plow. "If Mr. Chase has a presidential gadfly biting him, I'm not going to knock it off if it will only make his department go."

After admitting to John Hay that Chase was doing everything he could to embarrass him he said, "I am entirely indifferent to his failure or success in these schemes so long as he does his duty at the head of the treasury department."

You will remember the overbearing manners of Seward, the refusal of Stanton to take orders, and the haughty treatment accorded him on occasion by the military. One of his visitors, "If I were as big and ugly as you are I would take Stanton on my knee and spank him." Mr Stanton is an able and valuable man for this nation and I am glad to bear his anger for the service he can give."

Note to Stanton--"What did he say?" He tore it up and said you were a fool." "Well, Stanton is generally right."

"Mr. Chase is a very able man, he is a very ambitious man, and I think on the subject of the presidency a little insane. He has not behaved very well lately and people say now is the time to crush him out. Well, I am not in favor of crushing anybody out if there is anything that a man can do and do it well, I say let him do it."

HUMOR

Bates,

In company with Attorney General/Chase, and Jay Cooke, Cooke commented on Bates' black hair and white whiskers and mustache stating that his father had had the same combination and wondering as to the explanation. Lincoln said, "Why that's easily accounted for-- the cause is he uses his jaws more than he does his brain."

An interviewer stepped out on the balcony with him and was requested by an aide to drop back a few steps. Lincoln softened the request by interposing, "You see they might not know who was President."

A woman caller demanded a colonel's commission for her son saying, "My grandfather fought at Lexington, my father at New Orleans, my husband was killed at Monterrey." Lincoln's response was, "I guess, madam, your family has done enough for the country, and it is time to give someone else a chance."

When the cares of war were heaviest upon him, a farmer came seeking pay for a horse and some hay taken by the Union soldiers. Lincoln sent him to the Claim Department and was reminded of the story of a steamboat at full speed on a Western river when a boy tugged at the captain's sleeve and said, "Stop the boat! I've lost my apple overboard."

An old friend asked him how it felt to be President. "You have heard of the man who tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail remarked, 'If it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I'd rather walk!'"

At a reception, shaking hands with his white gloves on, greeting an old friend: "Well, old friend, this is a general beautification. You and I were never intended to wear these things." The old friend exclaimed with delight, "The same old Abe."

Looking at a pair of socks presented to him--"The old lady got my latitude and longitude about right, didn't she?"

Humor (cont.)

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3 +
On one occasion when a delegation came requesting a pardon from him they said they knew he was more humane than Stanton. Lincoln admitted it. He was reminded of the man that had a bull terrier that whipped all the other dogs. When the owner was asked to explain it, he said, "Most dogs get half through a fight before they are ready. My dog is always mad."

4 +
Not having heard from Burnside for a good while, on receipt of a telegram he said, with relief, he felt like the girl in Illinois who had 14 children who when one of them was heard to cry said, "Thank heaven our children ain't dead yet."

Office seekers presenting claims of their candidate: "He is preeminently qualified for the position, has administrative ability, invincible loyalty, and attachment to Republican principles, no honor, Sir, could be showered on him that could elevate him higher in the estimation of his fellow men." "It gratifies me to hear such praise. Such a man needs no office, to give so good and excellent a person a place like this would be an act of injustice to him. I shall reserve the office for some poor politician who needs it."

Job hunter, "I am the man who made you President."
"Yes, and its a pretty mess you got me into."

5 +
Stanton was full of energy, and folks were afraid he'd run away with the show. Lincoln said they might have to treat him as they were obliged to treat a Methodist preacher in the West who got so wrought up in prayer and exhortation that they had to put bricks in his pockets to keep him down. Said--"We may be obliged to do Stanton the same way, but I guess we'll let him jump a while first."

Of McClellan: "He's got the slows."

6 +
After accepting the resignation of Secretary Cameron was being urged by dissatisfied Republican Senators to appoint a whole new cabinet. Story of farmer in Illinois who was much troubled by skunks. Wife insisted that he get rid of them. Loaded gun, got behind woodpile. Came in. She inquired as to his luck. "Hid myself behind woodpile. There was not one but seven. Took aim and killed one, and he raised such a fearful smell that I concluded it was best to let the rest go."

Letter to Mrs. Lincoln: "Tell Tad the goats and his father are both well, especially the goats."

Advice to a young man anxious to enter the military academy against family objection. Hand letter from him in to his good uncle through the window after he had good dinner and watch its effect from the top of the pigeon house.

Speech in Congress on internal improvements. Patrick's new boots, "I shall never get en on till I wear em a day or two and stretch em a little."

7 +
"Well for those that like that sort of thing I think it just about the sort of thing they would like."

RELIGIOUS FAITH

Faith in God approaching fatalism. Regular attendant
New York Avenue Presbyterian Church.

On platform of train leaving Springfield--"Today I leave you. I go to assume a task more difficult than that which devolved upon Washington. Unless the great God who assisted him shall be with me and aid me I must fail; but if the same omniscient mind and almighty arm that directed and protected him shall guide and support me I shall not fail, I shall succeed. Let us all pray that the God of our fathers may not forsake us now. To Him I commend you all. Permit me to ask that with equal security and faith you will invoke his wisdom and guidance for me.

1863-"No one is more deeply aware than myself that without His favor our highest wisdom is but as foolishness and that our most strenuous efforts would avail nothing in the shadow of his displeasure."

I happen to be placed a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father as I am and as we all are to work out his great purposes. I have desired that all my acts might be according to his will and that it might be so I have sought his aid; but if after endeavoring to do my best in the light which he affords me I find my efforts fail, I must believe that for some purpose unknown to me He wills it otherwise."

I should be the veriest shallow and self conceited blockhead upon the footstool if in my discharge of the duties which are put upon me in this place I should hope to get along without the wisdom which comes from God and not from men.