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**The Simplicity of Greatness and the Greatness of Simplicity :a  
Discourse Delivered at San Diego, California, on Lincoln's birthday,  
1915**

Elizabeth Harlow-Goetz

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THE SIMPLICITY  
OF GREATNESS  
AND THE  
GREATNESS OF  
SIMPLICITY



DISCOURSE DELIVERED BY  
**MRS ELIZABETH HARLOW-GOETZ**

at San Diego, California,  
on Lincoln's Birthday 1915.



This discourse, while embodying the the principle events of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, told in a vivid truthful and entrancing manner by this entertaining and clever lecturer, is full of the philosophy of the simplicity of greatness and the greatness of simplicity.

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Elizabeth Harlow Cook

## THE SIMPLICITY OF GREATNESS AND THE GREATNESS OF SIMPLICITY.

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The thought, as you all know, in its simple statement, is one which has touched the mind and the heart of every individual; not simply because of the person to whom we shall refer, but because men love to be great. Or, in other words, the thought which is expressed by the term "great" has always been the dream, or ideal, in human life. If it had not been for this dream, or ideal, many men would have failed. While some have paid no attention to it, others have attempted and failed. But, I repeat, to become great is the dream and ideal of human nature. Men, and when I say men I mean women as well, have had the idea that to become great they must do something unusual. Men set themselves apart from other men and thereby become distinguished because of that which they do; and I am about to say as Thomas Paine said: "The work of distinction from this basis, is the work of little minds and narrow concepts and small souls." For, in turning to the history of man, we find that those who have become immortalized, are the men and the women who have never thought about the prize that was to be won, but they have simply lived the everyday life as it came to them and, much as General Grant said when hewing his way into Richmond: "I shall proceed upon this line if it takes all summer."

Why do we immortalize Abraham Lincoln? Why do we call him "great"? Why do we love him? As we turn the pages of history we find that no man and no woman who stands beneath the stars and stripes ever had a simpler, more common-place or more ordinary birth than Abraham Lincoln. Born upon the frontier in a life of simplicity and poverty and neglect, triumph was his birthright. We find that out of a log cabin came this child—most angular in look and peculiar in habit and taste as measured with other boys; but

yet, we find within the peculiarity and the angularity of this wonderful temperament and body was waiting the warm flame of life. Wherever this child proceeded from his infancy, his touch was tender, his consideration was loving, his outlook was for the other creature instead of for himself. His playmates and his superiors were always considered before himself. We find that the first great touching event in his life, an event which seemed to open up the depth of his spiritual consciousness, was the death of his mother. While but a lad of 10 years of age, his Angel Mother slipped across the Borderland and, in those days of frontier life when nothing but the extreme necessities could be possessed, it was then he heard the rap of the hammer that builded the case that held the shell of her who was a part of his life, and the sight of that form being laid beneath the sod without one word from the scriptures, or from the lips of any speaker, was the first great sorrow experienced by Abraham Lincoln. How simple! How natural! And yet, how touching! This lad, feeling the pang not only of the loss of his Angel Mother, but that she should be thus laid away without one word, made a promise that the first preacher that came within carrying distance should be called to the mound where his Mother's body slept, and something should be said. True to his resolve he, a mere child, travelled seven miles, it is said by some, to procure the Circuit Preacher and have him come to the spot where his Mother lay to say just a word. How many children, how many of you who are men and women, would not perhaps first consider the seven miles before you would have put into execution the resolve that you had made? It was not so with this child.

We find that following this child was a hunger that the step mother touched so deeply and so wonderfully—for his father and his associates considered him a shiftless child. He longed for books. He longed for contact of intellect. He longed for converse; and, it is said of him that he preferred to stand in converse or to hear his step mother

read from the Bible, or some other book if it could be obtained, rather than work. And yet he never shirked duty, showing that there was a hunger of mind, a searching after the larger things. And thus it is we find him reaching out in every direction for that which should train his mind, which should enlarge his outlook and prepare him for the great things in life. We find one incident that I always love to refer to, for it shows what was in the man. One Sunday morning, while on the road to his Sunday School, which was several miles away, adorned in his best homespun garments, he passed a mire, and in that mire was a poor pig that had wandered in and become fast and could not extricate itself. The first impulse of Lincoln was to help the poor creature from its dilemma, and then, like all humans, he thought of his "Sunday clothes", and he drew back—because in those days "Sunday clothes" were not common things, or easily procured. He drew back and proceeded on his journey when one more squeal came from that four footed beast and his heart melted and he said "c'lothes or no clothes, I must help him." And so into the mire with his Sunday best Abraham Lincoln went and drew out the four footed creature and he returned home to clean his clothes. Some would consider this a mean and trivial thing, not to be considered or to be thought of in the events of a great man's life. But, my friends, this shows the foundation of his character, and these small events and their consideration is of more service than lessons learned from the authority of books or teachers.

We find, following the course of his life, that at the age of 17 he made a vow that he would learn all that he could, and we find him, according to historians, lying upon his stomach night after night while the family were sleeping, studying by the dying embers of the fireplace and picking out his mathematics upon the back of an old wooden shovel with a piece of coal that had fallen from the hearth, and in this manner he learned that which boys, nowadays, learn

more easily. He became acquainted with the foundation of that education that really equipped him for the mighty future that lay before him, and, when in this position, one evening he said, looking up, "I wonder if I ever shall have an opportunity to do anything"? And then, answering himself, he replied, "I will get ready so that if I do, I can do it." Do you young men and young women understand? I want you to remember that. Get ready to do something whether you know what the future holds for you or not. Be ready, so that when the time comes you will have something to work with. And so, our Lincoln, climbing the stairway of pioneer simplicity, doing the most common things and yet doing them with strength and a will, doing them with an understanding and a consciousness that lightened his work so that some would, at times, laugh at him, others admired him, but all enjoyed him because of the vitality of the nature that was getting ready for life. And so we find that in the events of his life Lincoln always stood, as it were, a torch light among his associates, not only in the six feet and a few inches above them in stature, but in physical strength, in mental power, in spiritual precept and in moral strength. For, it is said that at one time at a neighboring grocery they tried to jeer him into the tasting of liquor; and at last, after running from one thing to another, they were betting whether one could lift this, that or the other, and Lincoln at last laughingly said, "I can lift that cask of gin and drink from the bung-hole." He did it; and at the bung-hole he placed his lips and took the mouthful, and when he sat the cask down, spat out the gin. My friends, when our children are born as morally and physically clean as the pioneer child, Abraham Lincoln, you will not need Temperance Societies. Men must be born temperate, born with a normality between the body and the mind so that their tastes shall not overpower their reason and thought.

We find, following up his life, that at the age of 21, the rail splitter had engaged to



split 4000 rails that a woman should make him a pair of pants. Then, having reached his majority, he was free to go as he saw fit and do for himself. But his father alluding to the situation at home, Lincoln remained at home and served yet a time. Young men, remember this. We feel, some of us, when we have reached the age of our majority that we are great men and should have privileges and rights that hitherto we have not enjoyed and that our fathers and sisters have no claim upon us. "He that followeth the path of the larger right; he that remembers his father and mother in honor and in servitude, will bless the day and the generation in which he lives." And so did Abraham Lincoln.

Thus, remaining for some time at home, he later went away on that first trip—that first trip down the Mississippi. Who would have dreamed that that bare footed youth, with bared arms and shirt rolled back, that angular looking creature, was destined to be the President of the greatest nation in the world? Going down the river with the cargo of the flat bottom boat, he went, my friends, upon that trip to the altar of this nation. For at New Orleans it was that he met in positive contact the first touches of chattel slavery. There, all its horrors, all its cruelties and all the arguments of its institution were laid bare before him; and that morning when he stood upon the market place and saw the dusky browed maiden placed upon the auction block and saw those men approach her as fiends would any dumb beast they were measuring by commercial values, it was then that the life, the spirit, yea, the moral strength of Abraham Lincoln arose like a mighty lamp and burst from his lips when he said: "By God, if I ever have a chance to strike at slavery, I will strike hard." He never forgot his meeting God face to face that hour. That resolve, my friends, was the upworking, if you will allow me, of the nature that could see that in serving a four footed beast, he was serving God better than by going to Sunday School.

Coming back to the frontier life and there running through the town, the county and



the state political life, it was here that Abraham Lincoln kept his resolve that he had made when he said, "I will get ready to do something whether I ever do it or not." For it is said by historians of authority that there was no other individual in the State of Illinois that was so well versed in the laws of the State. He acquainted himself with all the questions of the day. Abraham Lincoln in these days was not a financial success, but a failure; but Abraham Lincoln was a leader of thought, of moral courage and truthfulness; and he was a spiritual breath for he lived for his state and for men who were his brothers, whether they believed as he believed, or no. Following the common and ordinary incidents of that life you find that Abraham Lincoln forever was upon the side of moral right and not legal precedent; and so, we find that when, at last in the Legislature he sat, it was his voice that led in the thoughts and in the arguments that later proved to be the foundation stone of his state. While financial prosperity was not in the ascendancy, while some moves that then were taken proved to settle a marvellous debt upon his state, yet the underlying principle worked out for the truth and the right of the home and the State of Illinois. We find, following him into the Capitol at Springfield, Illinois, that there he is associated with men who not only were aided, but were taught by him. We find that in these days, my friends, an incident occurred which, as was said of Thomas Paine, was the fire that made ready the soul for his greatest work. And it was when Abraham Lincoln fell in love with Annie Rutledge, the sweetheart of his youth, the dream of his young manhood, but Annie Rutledge was called by the Angel World and she became the Angel unseen of his life, and when the prejudices of human beings overcame him in those days, it was then that he drifted to the grave of Annie Rutledge and there he communed with the spirit, seen and unseen and he gathered unto himself the force that car-

ried him forward and made of him the later adored husband and the loving father of a family of his race. We find, my friends, that as we follow Abraham Lincoln's life that the lesson all the while to be learned is that he did common things—he did those things which men call small and inconsequential as well as doing the larger things. Abraham Lincoln was not a successful lawyer as lawyers count success, but as a lawyer he would never take a case that he did not consider that he was on the right side of it. And we find one incident which probably you will know where he took the case of a poor lad accused of the crime of murder, and his life was to pay the penalty. His mother was without a penny to give him as a reward, but Abraham Lincoln took his case and won it, not upon legal technicalities, or legal procedure, but upon the simple common facts; and the simple common fact was this; that when all of the witnesses upon the opposing side had testified that they saw the lad commit the crime charged, and it was done upon such a night, at such an hour, Abraham Lincoln simply swung his case upon this and proved that the moon was not shining on the night in question, but it was a dark night and cloudy and it was impossible for the witnesses, from the distances stated, to have seen him. The simple things! But the simple facts of life my friends, save life every time. And so we find this was the training, this was the school and these were the opportunities that this man had to prepare him for the Presidential chair of the United States.

Now, I wish to ask has not every boy and every girl as great an opportunity to prepare for life as he had? You cannot all be Presidents; but there are situations in life that are equally as important and are equally as necessary. therefore I ask you to learn the lesson which he so wonderfully and unconsciously taught: Get ready to do something by doing the simple things of life as nobly and truthfully and as conscientiously as he did, the larger things of life. This is what equips you for the larger things and gives

you the power to meet the emergencies of life.

At this point we find him, under the stress and strain of things, nominated to the Presidential contest. We find clustering around his life at this time the debates between himself and Stephen Douglas—called “the little giant”. Stephen Douglas was a man of a different character. Born in luxury, and surrounded by the culture of those days—in stature small, but in intellect, large; and it was this intellectual giant that had already made his mark in the world, not simply in Illinois, but he had made his mark in the world, that our rail splitter was called to meet, and, as it were, cross swords with. And you who are acquainted with these facts realize how in debate after debate Lincoln always met him, not only upon his own ground, but upon the ground of the great moral rights of the state and of the nation, and, my friends, the one incident that I wish to draw to your attention in this series of events is this. You will remember that the noted debate at Peoria, Illinois, was to take place and Abraham Lincoln, not flush with capital, started to go to Peoria, but because of his insufficiency of money, boarded a freight train. While sitting in the caboose of the freight train which was side-tracked waiting for other trains that had the right-of-way, he got into conversation with some of the help, they, not knowing who he was. Finally one of the fast passenger trains of those days flew by and Mr. Lincoln said: “What train is that?” and his companion replied: “Oh, that is passenger number so and so and she has attached to her the special car that is taken Stephen Douglas to meet that farmer whom he is going to whip.” There sat the farmer in the caboose, giving the right-of-way to Stephen Douglas. But in that debate Abraham Lincoln met Stephen Douglas face to face upon every fact, and when at last he asked that all important and famous question as to state rights, Stephen Douglas was whipped and the caboose had the right-of-way.

We find that out of these things grew really the election of Abraham Lincoln to the

Presidential chair, and all of you know the stormy nights and days and hours of Mr. Lincoln's reaching Washington, how through the streets of Baltimore it was only by strategy that his life was saved and he was placed in the White House. But let us look. We find that at that inaugural address the man of culture, the man of renown, held the hat of the man of the people. The man that only loved right and loved humanity, black or white, loved the state better than politics; loved his nation better than favor or fame. Those days I need not now rehearse to you for I see here several of the little brown buttons that know the story of those days. Oh! ye boys in blue; that great heart, that loved man did not prove unfaithful or untrue. In those hours when a nation's life was in danger God indeed had brought a Savior of Nations. For Abraham Lincoln was as kind to the boy in grey as to the boy in blue. He could hand to the boy in grey a cup of water in tenderness and love as he handed the same to the boy in blue. Can you realize the breadth of the soul of a man that can see both sides of the question and in those days when men in whom he had placed confidence dallied and played, with his confidence no word of blame came from him. When the church came to him through its representatives and tried to advise him, telling him it was God's will, he simply asked them: "If that be so why has not God spoken to me as I am the only man that can do the work." Not allowing himself to be encumbered or obligated with the social touches of life, he was criticized, maligned and abused by those who had professed to love him, and he stood alone. One night in his room it is said he prayed: "Oh Father, why hast thou placed such a burden upon my shoulders, but, as thou hast, I only ask thee to make me strong enough to carry it." Not complaining but asking to be made strong enough to carry it. In these days how many of you realize that it was the spirit world that opened its doors and spoke to him, and he heeded. For the facts are these. A stranger in the city of New York

who possessed the power of slate writing was there attending to his work, when another stranger from the city of Philadelphia going to a neighboring city on business thought he would interview this mediator and so he presented himself and in this sitting came a message for Abraham Lincoln from an old schoolmate. He had gone up the steps of life with him into young manhood and then slipped away. The spirit begged of Colonel Case to deliver the message to Abraham Lincoln. Col. Case had never seen Mr. Lincoln, but he promised to do as requested and in a few weeks presented himself to Mr. Lincoln and simply handed him the slate. Mr. Lincoln read it and then with bowed head said, "Amen". But, on looking up he said: "Sir, where did you get this?" Col. Case explained the situation and Mr. Lincoln's only answer was: "Where may I see a mediator?" and through the influence of Col. Case, Mr. Lincoln visited his first medium. From that time on that sainted worker, Nettie Coburn Maynard, was a visitor at the White House for over two years and the seances that were held for Abraham Lincoln from 1861 to 1863, were the hours when the spirit world came close and gave him courage, gave him advice, and upheld him through the trying hours of those days; and it is said, by those who attended that at these seances, when the spirit possessed Nettie Maynard Mr. Lincoln always rose to his feet and stood with bowed head when they addressed him, knowing and feeling the significance. We find that this great soul was tempered with the spirit in a naturalness that brought the world of the unseen in such close and wondrous touch with him. We find that those hours of trial, when all along the line the boys in blue were suffering and fighting, were singing and cursing, were marching and praying, it was their chief that held the great psychic center because he had made ready to do great things and was susceptible to the great demands of the hour and under these touches it was that the spirit lead him to the telegraph office of the secret service and there under the influence of a



spirit that was known to some, his hand was guided to write the proclamation of emancipation. And this was kept for several months before the world knew it had been written except they who were in the service at the office. We find, my friends, that this proclamation of emancipation came from the same source as did the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Paine, beneath the stars of heaven touched by the fires of the revolution became the source out of which came your Declaration of Independence. Abraham Lincoln, alone, with the great commands of a nation and people being led by the spirits seen and unseen, if you please, became the instrument for the emancipation of God's people who happened to be black. In this proclamation he kept the oath taken in New Orleans. He struck out, not in anger, not in party power, but he struck out as a man that knew the spirit, the right and the future.

And so, my friends, we find that greatness grows from the simplicity of doing things that need to be done. We find that the simplicity of being great is simply being equipped to do the thing that is demanded of you. Ah, my friends, what simpler language, but what greater thought ever fell from the lip or pen of a human being than Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg! Upon that sanctified soil where forty thousand men had given up their liberty, he spoke in the simplicity of the common language of everyday expression, but it conveyed a great truth of a democratic nation—a government of the people for the people and by the people. This man of nature, tempered with spirit divine was the Savior indeed of democracy, but I wish to say right here that Abraham Lincoln without a Sherman or a Grant, and many another, could never have saved a nation; and these generals without the common soldier like you, and you, could never have saved the nation.

This proclamation of emancipation did not only free the African, but it freed each one of you. The white man was freed quite as much as was the African. The African was freed from chattel slavery, or slavery of the



body, and you were freed from the moral slavery of an institution that was supposed to be a spiritual right. You were freed from a spiritual fetter, so-called, that broke and numbed the preception of true democratic conscience. And so I say that North and South were freed—the black man and the white man stood freer before their God and before their country.

Oh Abraham Lincoln, the father of the great freedom! Abraham Lincoln, the instrument of God on earth! Abraham Lincoln, the teacher of all time, we come at this hour to lay our tribute of love upon the altar of thy memory. Though the assassin's bullet cut short thy days, it was but the fury of a wrong concept of a great question, and we forgive. Thou of the spirit that could see both ways and tenderly say, "I defeated them to take care of them", indeed was a great man. He that saw no class, or caste and could enter into the statesmanship of a nation was indeed the Savior of the hour. He that loved life, from the child to the sire, was indeed the nation's friend. And so, in closing let us remember that the man of greatness lives the life of simplicity and truthfulness and honor. The man of the simple life and conscious power grows to be great because he serves when men need him. And thus it is that from the log cabin up over the difficulties of pioneer life, out into the ways of the social world, our boy grew from child to manhood, from manhood to savior and left behind true liberty, and her face more radiant shines because Abraham Lincoln passed this way.

