

Ingersoll on Lincoln.

Col. Robert G. Ingersoll lately delivered a lecture on Abraham Lincoln, at the N. Y. Broadway theatre. After briefly summarizing the events leading up to Civil War, Col. Ingersoll went on to say:

The sympathies of Lincoln, his ties of kindred were with the South. His convictions, his sense of justice and his ideals were with the North. Lincoln was a statesman. And there is a great difference between a politician and a statesman: a politician schemes in every way to make the people do something for him, a statesman wishes to do something for the people. With him place and power are a means to attain an end, and the end is the good of his country.

It is not a common thing to elect really great men to fill the highest official position. I do not say that the great Presidents have been chosen by accident. Perhaps it would be better to say they were the favorites of a happy chance.

The average man is afraid of genius. He feels as an awkward man feels in the presence of a sleight-of-hand performer. He admires and suspects. Genius appears to carry too much sail—lacks prudence; has too much courage. The ballast of dullness inspires confidence. By a happy chance Lincoln was nominated and elected in spite of his fitness, and the patient, gentle, just, and loving man was called upon to bear as great a burden as man has ever borne.

After the proclamation of emancipation was signed Lincoln held it, waiting for some great victory before giving it to the world, so that it might appear to be the child of strength. This was on the 22nd day of July, 1862. Lincoln wrote his celebrated letter to Horace Greeley in which he stated that his object was to save the Union; that he would save it with slavery if he could; that if it was necessary to destroy slavery in order to save the Union he would—in other words, he would do what was necessary to save the Union.

This letter disheartened, to a degree, thousands and millions of the friends of freedom. They felt that Mr. Lincoln had not attained the moral height upon which they supposed he had stood. And yet when this letter was written, the emancipatory proclamation was in his hand, and had been for thirty days, waiting only an opportunity to give it to the world.

On the 22nd day of September, 1862, the most glorious date in history of the Republic, the proclamation of emancipation was issued. Lincoln had reached the generalization upon the question of slavery and freedom—a generalization that never has been, and probably never will be excelled. "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free."

Colonel Ingersoll's lecture was long, and abounded in bright and eloquent sayings. Speaking of Lincoln's character, he said:

Lincoln was not a type. He stands alone—no ancestors, no fellows, and no successors. He was a many-sided man, acquainted with smiles and tears, complex in brain, single in heart, direct as light, and his words, candid as mirrors, gave the perfect image of his thought. He was not afraid to ask—nay, never too dignified to admit that he did not know. No man had a keener wit or kinder humor. He was not solem. Solemnity is a mask worn by ignorance and hypocrisy. It is the preface, prologue and index to the cunning or stupid. He was natural in his life and thought, master of the story teller's art, in illustration apt, in application perfect, liberal in speech, shocking prudes, using any word that wit could dis infect. He was an orator—clear, sincere, natural. He did not pretend. He did not say what he thought others thought, but what he thought.

If you wish to be sublime you must be natural—you must keep close to the grass. You must sit by the fireside of the heart; above the clouds it is too cold. You must be simple in your speech; too much polish suggests insincerity.

Referring to Lincoln's gentleness, Col. Ingersoll said: Men submitted to him as they submit to nature—unconsciously. He was severe with himself, and for that reason lenient with others. He appeared to apologize for being kinder than his followers. He did most things as stealthily as other's committed crimes. Almost ashamed of tenderness, he said and did the noblest words and deeds with that charming confusion, that awkwardness that is the perfect grace of modesty—a great man stooping, not wishing to make his fellows feel that were small or mean.

By his candor, by his kindness, by his perfect freedom from restraint, by saying what he thought, and saying it absolutely in his own way, he made it not only possible, but popular to be natural. He was the enemy of meek solemnity, of the stupidly respectable, of the cold and formal.

At other points in his lecture the orator said:

Lincoln had the unconscious naturalness of nature's self. Through manners, clothes, titles, rags and race he saw the real—that which is. Beyond accident, policy, compromise and war he saw the end.

• • • He was patient as destiny, whose undecipherable hieroglyphics were so deeply graven on his sad and tragic face. • • • Nothing discloses real character like the use of power. It is easy for the weak to be gentle. Most people can bear adversity; but if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power. This is the supreme test. It is the glory of Lincoln that, having almost absolute power, he never abused it, except on the side of mercy.

Colonel Ingersoll concluded his oration as follows:

Wealth could not purchase, power could not awe this divine, this loving man. He knew no fear except the fear of doing wrong. Hating slavery, pitying the master—seeking to conquer, not persons, but prejudices—he was the embodiment of self denial, the courage, the hope and the nobility of a nation.

He spoke not to inflame, not to upbraid, but to convince. He raised his hand, not to strike but in benediction. He loved to see the pearls of joy on the cheeks of a wife whose husband he had rescued from death. Lincoln was the grandest figure of the fiercest civil war. He is the gentlest memory of our world.

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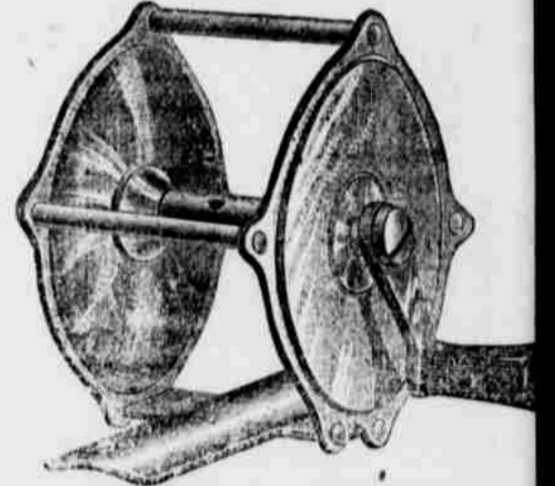
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