

LINCOLN LORE

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PATRIOTISM—THE MOVING PASSION OF LINCOLN'S LIFE

The Compromise of 1850 evidently dampened the patriotic enthusiasm of all champions of liberty—Abraham Lincoln included. He said to Herndon about that time, "How hard, oh! how hard it is to die and leave one's country no better than if one had never lived for it."

His love for his country reached back to the days in which he first began to read. Weems's Washington made him familiar with the hardships endured by those men who established the Union, and in later years he said, "I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that these men struggled for." Lincoln's boyhood hero was not a profile Washington but a gallant leader of troops and later the honored President.

The portrait oratory in vogue during Lincoln's early days was admirably adapted to the dramatic story of the Revolutionary War and visualized for the masses the colorful episodes of that contest. In an address before the Young Men's Lyceum at Springfield in 1837, Lincoln using the oratorical style of the times, portrayed the Revolutionary fathers as "A forest of giant oaks," and pictured their passing with these words: "but the all-restless hurricane has swept over them, and shorn of its foliage, unshading and unshaded, to murmur in a few more gentle breezes, and to combat with its mutilated limbs a few more ruder storms, then to sink and be no more. They were pillars of the temple of liberty."

Lincoln's patriotic appeal on the occasion of this address has often been quoted although seldom heeded:

"Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well-wisher to his posterity swear by the blood of the Revolution never to violate in the least particular the laws of the country, and never to tolerate their violation by others . . . Let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the charter of his own and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap; let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling-books, and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice."

A year or two after this speech Lincoln concluded an address with these words, "Many free countries have lost their liberty, and ours may lose hers; but if she shall, be it my proudest plume, not that I was the last to desert but that I never deserted her . . . Here, without contemplating consequences, before high heaven and in the face of the world, I swear eternal fidelity to the just cause, as I deem it of the land of my life, my liberty, and my love."

On one occasion Lincoln spoke at Chicago in the month of July, and the birthday of the nation was called to mind which inspired the following comments:

"Now, it happens that we meet together once every year, somewhere about the 4th of July, for some reason or other. These 4th of July gatherings I suppose have their uses. If you will indulge me, I will state what I suppose to be some of them.

"We are now a mighty nation: we are thirty, or about thirty, millions of people, and we own and inhabit about one-fifteenth part of the dry land of the whole earth. We run our memory back over the pages of history for about eighty-two years, and we discover that we were then a very small people, in point of numbers, vastly less extent of country, with vastly less of everything we deem desirable among men. We look upon the change as exceedingly advantageous to us and to our posterity, and we fix upon

something that happened away back as in some way or other being connected with this rise of prosperity. We find a race of men living in that day whom we claim as our fathers and grandfathers; they were iron men; they fought for the principle that they were contending for; and we understood that by what they then did it has followed that the degree of prosperity which we now enjoy has come to us. We hold this annual celebration to remind ourselves of all the good done in this process of time, of how it was done and who did it, and how we are historically connected with it . . ."

We might expect many expressions of loyalty to the Union coming from Lincoln during the period between his nomination and inauguration. However, the fact that he made no addresses until he started for Washington just before the inauguration reduces to a great extent the material which would reveal his patriotic devotion at that time.

Upon leaving Springfield for the capitol, he advised the people that he had a task before him "greater than that which rested on Washington." At Indianapolis he put this question to the people, "Shall the Union and shall the liberties of this country be preserved to the latest generation?"

At the conclusion of his address at Cleveland he said, "If we do not make common cause to save the good old ship of the Union on this voyage, nobody will have a chance to pilot her on another voyage." In reply to the Mayor of New York City he said, "In my devotion to the Union I hope I am behind no man in the nation . . . I am sure I bring a heart devoted to the work. There is nothing that could ever bring me to consent—willingly to consent—to the destruction of the Union, unless it would be that thing for which the Union was made."

Scenes of the Revolutionary War which were recalled by his visit to Trenton formed a historical background for his visit to Philadelphia on Washington's Birthday where he was moved by the atmosphere emanating from Independence Hall to make several patriotic remarks.

He said, "I am filled with deep emotion at finding myself standing in this place . . . All the political sentiments I entertain have been drawn, so far as I have been able to draw them from the sentiments which originated in and were given to the world from this hall." After discussing the principle of liberty for all men, he said, "If this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say that I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it."

Even after reaching Harrisburg, the state capitol, it is evident the spell of Independence Hall was still upon him. He said to the Legislature of Pennsylvania:

"I was for the first time allowed the privilege of standing in old Independence Hall . . . opening up to me an opportunity of manifesting my deep regret that I had not more time to express something of my own feelings excited by the occasion that had been really the feelings of my whole life."

The patriotism of Lincoln after his inauguration as President takes on more of a legal aspect, although there is no evidence that he was motivated in his patriotic efforts entirely by the authority vested in him as president.

While it is true that he proclaimed in the First Inaugural Address that he had a solemn oath registered in heaven to "preserve, protect and defend" the Union, in the very next paragraph he spoke about the "Mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave." No oath could have made Abraham Lincoln more loyal to the land he loved.