

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE CONCILIATORY LINCOLN

The seventy-fifth anniversary of the Gettysburg battle with its commemorative program has caused a new emphasis to be placed on the conciliatory attitude of Abraham Lincoln. The blue and the grey, as they fraternized on the battlefield, offer an appropriate climax to the last realistic scene enacted by the actual participants in the dramatic but tragic civil struggle. No one would have rejoiced more over this display of comradeship than the martyred president.

The address which Lincoln delivered there when the graves of the soldiers were dedicated has been called "one of the noblest extant specimens of human eloquence." If it were possible to conceive of a sequel to such a masterpiece which would not be too serious a violation of sequence or eponymy, it might be the concluding paragraph of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. It seems to be an appropriate expression embodying the anniversary spirit at the Gettysburg reunion and if read immediately following the famous Gettysburg speech it serves as a proper benediction.

*With malice towards none;  
with charity for all;  
with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the  
right,  
let us strive on to finish the work we are in;  
to bind up the nation's wounds;  
to care for him who has borne the battle,  
and for his widow and his orphan—  
to do all which may achieve and cherish  
a just and lasting peace  
among ourselves and with all nations.*

"With malice toward none, with charity for all," was no catch phrase Lincoln used for political prestige but a sincere expression of some ideals embodied in his character which had been continually dominating his method of procedure during the entire season of hostilities, and most likely throughout his whole life.

It is apparent that Secretary of War Stanton was not always so generous in his treatment of doomed men as the President would wish. An excerpt from a letter he wrote to Stanton on March 18, 1864, gives us one of the finest expressions of Lincoln's conciliatory attitude:

"In using the strong hand, as now compelled to do, the government has a difficult duty to perform. At the very best it will by turns do both too little and too much. It can properly have no motive of revenge, no purpose to punish merely for punishment's sake. While we must by all available means prevent the overthrow of the government, we should avoid planting and cultivating too many thorns in the bosom of society. These general remarks apply to several classes of cases, on each of which I wish to say a word."

Lincoln did not like the idea of dismissing officers "when neither incompetency nor intentional wrong, nor real injury to the service is imputed." He said that, "in such cases it is both cruel and impolite to crush the man and make him and his friends permanent enemies to the administration if not to the government itself."

He was especially solicitous for the welfare of women who found it necessary to pass through the lines and made specific regulations as to how they were to proceed. He was anxious that the families of condemned men should not suffer for the misdeeds of husband and father and tried to arrange that there should be as little suffering as possible in both North and South. On

August 8, 1863, Lincoln wrote this letter of introduction and advice to General Foster:

"This will be handed you by Governor Peirpont of Virginia.

"He goes, among other things, seeking to adjust a difficulty at Norfolk and Portsmouth. It seems there is a large number of families in Portsmouth who are destitute and whose natural supporters are in the rebel army or have been killed in it. These destitute families must live somehow, and it seems the city authorities on one side, and our military on the other, are in ruinous conflict about the mode of providing.

"Governor Peirpont is a good man, and if you will place him in conference and amicable relations with the military authority in the vicinity, I do not doubt that much good will come of it. Please do it.

"Yours truly,  
"A. Lincoln."

The greatest difficulty Lincoln had to overcome was division within his own ranks where his conciliatory measures were again brought into play. One of the most troublesome factions sprang up within the Union sympathizers in Missouri. An excerpt from a letter written by Lincoln to General Schofield with reference to the situation reveals the wisdom of his advice.

"Let your military measures be strong enough to repel the invader and keep the peace, and not so strong as to unnecessarily harass and persecute the people. It is a difficult role, and so much greater will be the honor if you perform it well. If both factions, or neither, shall abuse you, you will probably be about right. Beware of being assailed by one and praised by the other.

"Yours truly,  
"A. Lincoln."

One of the most serious charges brought against Lincoln by his critics would imply that he was trying to prolong the war. Horace Greeley, an influential editor and one of these complainers, attempted to arrange a conference between Lincoln and four representatives of southern forces to which Lincoln readily agreed and then sent a note to Greeley from which this excerpt is made:

"I not only intend a sincere effort for peace but I intend that you shall be a personal witness that it be made."

More than a year before the Greeley conference Lincoln had written to a friend: "Peace does not appear so distant as it did. I hope it will soon come, and come to stay; and so come as to be worth the keeping in all future time."

About this same time he wrote to Dr. Tobey, "Engaged as I am in a great war, I feel it will be difficult for the world to understand how fully I appreciate the principles of peace" and in a public address remarked, "The man does not live who is more devoted to peace than I am."

There is a well known episode in Lincoln's boyhood that inspired an artist to make a study of Lincoln settling a quarrel between two boys, which he called "The Peace Maker." Possibly the spirit of reconciliation was born this early.

If one would appreciate those characteristics of Lincoln which stand out so preeminently during the great civil strife he must know Lincoln as a youth. Here he may discover not only the well spring of the Gettysburg Address but also the early concepts that gave utterance to "With malice towards none, with charity for all."