

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S MIND AT WORK

Obscured by reason of a caption indicating a book review, there may be found in a copy of *The Spectator* for 1865, a most remarkable interpretation of how Lincoln's mind worked. Modern psychologists could well take a lesson from the unknown English author's method of attack and the accuracy with which he draws his conclusions. A few excerpts from the treatise follow:

"Mr. Lincoln's mind was a political transparency, in which the nation could see an individual character of great power working out the problems set before them all, working them out slowly indeed, but upon a method in which they all felt the most perfect confidence, working them, too, with a sincerity that was unmixed with the faintest pretension, and showing evidences of a long and patient rather than passionate grappling of his powerful intellect with the difficulties of each question presented to him, evidences which must have touched as well as convinced the great people who followed so anxiously the slow tentative progress of his thought. To compare Mr. Webster, or Mr. Clay, or Mr. Seward as politicians with Mr. Lincoln, is like comparing the themes of clever boys who have borrowed nine-tenths of their thoughts from their school-books with the essay of one who has slowly and awkwardly, but pertinaciously built up every conviction for himself by the sheer force of his own intellectual strength and moral veracity. . . .

"His training in the backwoods seems to have drawn every feverish element away from his mind, and to have substituted a sort of patient sympathy with the slow process of nature, which reminds us of the parables of Christ about letting tares and wheat grow together till the harvest, and awaiting the gradual growth of truth, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear," rather than of prophetic denunciations. In this, as in other characteristics, Mr. Lincoln simply supplied a deeper foundation for what was in fact a national quality. *Patience* is one of the main characteristics—not of the visible talkers, but—of the invisible voters of the United States, yet it is almost a discreditable patience at times, showing a tendency to acquiesce in real evil to save the trouble of fighting it. But there was in Mr. Lincoln's case, what can scarcely be said of any other eminent American statesman, a profoundly ethical root to this spirit of patience. 'If slavery is not wrong', he said, 'nothing is wrong', and he said, so long before he even suspected that it would be his duty,—that it would be otherwise than a crime in him,—to deal it its death-blow. No great statesman ever harbored purposes in his heart longer, or had a deeper feeling that 'the hour was not yet come', than Mr. Lincoln, yet none kept a more tenacious hold of the duty to be aimed at so soon as anything should occur to release him from his obligation to tolerate the wrong . . .

"But besides a political patience deeper because resting on deeper grounds than that of the nation he represented, Mr. Lincoln had a political understanding that was of the same kind as, but more lucid than, the national understanding, also for an ethical reason,—that he never could

tolerate the tyranny of mere words, and always pressed through the words to the reality behind them. There are no State papers in history more remarkable for their refutation of mere *cries* than Mr. Lincoln's. His method is almost always the same,—to assume his adversary's position and use his weapon for him more thoroughly than he dared himself, till he showed that its use led to absurd and inadmissible results. . . .

"Of course lucid logic of this kind would have been no title to his countrymen's respect without the moral force to act upon it,—but this is just what gives the special flavour to Mr. Lincoln's style, that it reads like the style of a man who was pressing his way to right *action*, not merely to right thought. The lucidity is the lucidity of a man scanning narrowly his own duty, facing an *emergency*, not merely expounding a theorem. . . .

"Even the simplicity and tenderness of his nature, combined as they were with so much strength, did much to endear him to the people, who put more confidence in him for feeling like one of themselves. . . .

"Nor was this tenderness of feeling of course at all confined to Mr. Lincoln's own domestic life. The stories of his personal tenderness to persons thrown into affliction by the war are quite numberless; and of the pressure of the war on his own feelings some judgment may be formed by his saying, after the defeat of Fredericksburg, 'If there is a man out of perdition that suffers more than I do, I pity him.' . . . This power of realizing to the full the suffering and grief involved in the great struggle was indeed essential to give to Mr. Lincoln's general bearing and State papers the weight of that solemnity which, in spite of their absolute simplicity, many of them have. To our minds no funeral oration ever exceeded in pathos the few words spoken by the President in dedicating as a national cemetery part of the battle-field of Gettysburg. Nor can the message in which before the issue of the Emancipation proclamation he entreated the Border States to sacrifice slavery not at their own expense, but at the expense of the nation, be easily surpassed in the depth and earnestness of its entreaty.

"And when the news of Lee's surrender came to Washington, it was received not with the triumph of a successful politician, but with the profound gratitude of a child . . .

"Perhaps Mr. Lincoln's religious faith and simplicity are the only traits which still remain unappreciated by the American people at large. For ourselves we cannot read his last inaugural address, delivered only five weeks before his assassination, without a renewed conviction that it is the noblest political document known to history, and should have, for the nation and the statesmen he left behind him, something of a sacred and almost prophetic authority. Surely none was ever written under a stronger sense of the reality of God's government, and certainly none written in a period of passionate conflict ever so completely excluded the partiality of victorious faction, and breathed so pure a strain of mingled mercy and justice."