

LINCOLN LORE

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SOURCES OF TRADITIONAL QUOTATIONS

The question of authenticity is constantly being raised with reference to certain quotations credited to Abraham Lincoln but which cannot be found over his signature. Sources of six of the statements most often mentioned follow:

Study and Get Ready

Miss Anna O'Flynn of Vincennes, Indiana, interviewed in 1895 Mrs. Elizabeth Crawford who is said to have recalled the following conversation with Abraham Lincoln when he was but a youth:

Mrs. Crawford—"What do you want to be?"

Lincoln—"I'll be President!"

Mrs. Crawford—"You'd make a purty President with all your tricks and jokes, now wouldn't you?"

Lincoln—"Oh, I'll study and get ready, and then the chance will come."

Miss O'Flynn's manuscript containing the interview was made available to Miss Ida M. Tarbell who used the story on page 62 of her *Early Life of Abraham Lincoln* which was published in 1896. Of course sixty-five years is a long time to remember a conversation, and, while the gist of it may have been recalled by Miss Crawford, one would hesitate to identify the quotation in question as a verbatim statement of Abraham Lincoln.

Religion

A eulogy on Abraham Lincoln delivered before the General Assembly of Connecticut on Thursday, June 8, 1865, contains a brief statement about Lincoln's religious faith which is often quoted though its origin is seldom cited. The speaker on this occasion was Henry C. Deming, a lawyer, a member of Congress from Connecticut, and a close friend of Lincoln.

In the course of his address Mr. Deming said: "I am here reminded of an impressive remark, which he (Lincoln) made to me upon another occasion and which I shall never forget. He said, he had never united himself to any church, because he found difficulty in giving his assent, without mental reservation, to the long complicated statements of Christian doctrine, which characterize their Articles of belief and Confessions of Faith. 'When any church,' he continued, 'will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership the Saviour's condensed statement of the substance of both law and Gospel, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself!" that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul!'"

Fooling the People

No quotation credited to Abraham Lincoln has been more generally accepted as genuine, yet without documentary support, than the following lines:

"You can fool all the people some of the time
And some of the people all the time
But you cannot fool all the people all of the time."

The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1905 interviewed many people who claimed to have heard Lincoln repeat the memorable triplet, and, with hardly any exception, the consensus of opinion was that it was used in an address which Lincoln made at Clinton, Illinois, in 1858, yet it is not found in any of Lincoln's printed speeches. One affiant testified that the statement referred to fooling the people on the slavery issue and recalled the very place it occurred in Lincoln's address.

Sabbath Day

A New York Sabbath Committee called on President Lincoln during the Civil War, and one of the members some time later reported that Lincoln used the following language:

"As we keep or break the Sabbath Day we nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope by which man rises."

Lincoln delivered his second Annual Message to Congress on December 1, 1862, and in the course of his remarks he spoke of freedom for both the slave and the free and then concluded, "We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth."

It would appear that the alleged statement Lincoln is said to have made about the Sabbath Day has been confused with this more famous authentic quotation.

The Crisis

By far the widest circulated spurious Lincoln quotation appears to have been printed first in a book entitled *A Gold Conspiracy*, which was distributed by the Progressive American Publishing Company of New York in 1896 and written by Captain Stephen Nicolette. On page 33 are found these words alleged to have been spoken by Lincoln when the war was nearing its end:

"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As a result of the war corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed. I feel at this moment more anxiety for the safety of my country than ever before, even in the midst of war. God grant that my suspicion may prove groundless."

This quotation has found its way into numerous publications and it appears in *The Congressional Record* for Tuesday, December 15, 1931, in a speech delivered by Representative Louis T. M'Fadden of Pennsylvania. Mr. M'fadden, however, was under the impression that the excerpt was from a letter Lincoln wrote to a man by the name of Elkins, yet there is no evidence that Lincoln ever wrote or spoke the words, referring to the crisis.

Prohibition

Whenever the prohibition question is brought to the front the following statement said to have been made by Lincoln is often quoted:

"Prohibition will work great injury to the cause of temperance. It is a species of intemperance itself for it goes beyond the bounds of reason in that it attempts to control man's appetite by legislation in making crimes out of things that are not crimes. A prohibitory law strikes a blow at the very principles on which our government was founded. I have always been found laboring to protect the weaker classes from the stronger and I can never give my consent to such a law as you propose to enact. Until my tongue be silenced in death I will continue to fight for the rights of man."

Atlanta, Georgia, was in the midst of a local option campaign in 1887, and the alleged Lincoln statement above was widely circulated in the campaign.

Some time after the excitement of the campaign had disappeared, Colonel Samuel W. Small was told by Colonel John B. Goodwin, who had been the director of the Anti-Prohibition forces, that he himself composed the alleged words of Lincoln to influence the colored voters to vote the wet ticket.