

# LINCOLN LORE

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## BISHOP SIMPSON'S FUNERAL ORATION

It will be seventy-five years ago on May 2 that the final funeral rites for Abraham Lincoln were held at Springfield, Illinois. There can be no finer memorial of this occasion published in *Lincoln Lore* than excerpts from the eulogy pronounced at that time by Bishop Simpson.

### THE FUNERAL ORATION

"Fellow-citizens of Illinois, and of many parts of our entire Union: Near the capital of this large and growing State of Illinois, in the midst of this beautiful grove, and at the open mouth of the vault which has just received the remains of our fallen chieftain, we gather to pay a tribute of respect and drop the tears of sorrow around the ashes of the mighty dead. A little more than four years ago, he left his plain and quiet home in yonder city, receiving the parting words of the concourse of friends who, in the midst of the dropping of the gentle shower, gathered around him.

"Such a scene as his return to you was never witnessed. Among the events of history there have been great processions of mourners. There was one for the patriarch Jacob, which went up from Egypt, and the Egyptians wondered at the evidences of reverence and filial affection which came from the hearts of the Israelites. There was mourning when Moses fell upon the heights of Pisgah and was hid from human view. There have been mournings in the kingdoms of the earth when kings and warriors have fallen. But never was there in the history of man such mourning as that which has accompanied this funeral procession, and has gathered around the mortal remains of him who was our loved one, and who now sleeps among us. If we glance at the procession which followed him, we see how the nation stood aghast.

"Men left their ploughs in the fields, and asked what the end should be. The hum of manufactories ceased, and the sound of the hammer was not heard. Busy merchants closed their doors; and in the exchange gold passed no more from hand to hand. Though three weeks have elapsed, the nation has scarcely breathed easily yet. A mournful silence is abroad upon the land; nor is this mourning confined to any class or to any district of country. Men of all political parties, and of all religious creeds, have united in paying this mournful tribute. The archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church in New York and a Protestant minister walked side by side in the sad procession, and a Jewish rabbi performed a part of the solemn services.

"More persons have gazed on the face of the departed than ever looked upon the face of any other departed man. More have looked on the procession for 1600 miles or more—by night and by day—by sunlight, dawn, twilight, and by torchlight, than ever before watched the progress of a procession.

"We ask why this wonderful mourning—this great procession?

"The great cause of this mourning is to be found in the man himself. Mr. Lincoln was no ordinary man. I believe the conviction has been growing on the nation's mind, as it certainly has been on my own, especially in the last years of his administration, that, by the hand of God, he was especially singled out to guide our government in these troublesome times, and it seems to me that the hand of God may be traced in many of the events connected with his history.

"If you ask me on what mental characteristic his greatness rested, I answer, on a quick and ready perception of facts; on a memory usually tenacious and retentive; and on a logical turn of mind, which followed sternly and unwaveringly every link in the chain of thought on every subject which he was called to investigate. I think there have been minds more broad in their character, more comprehensive in their scope, but I doubt if there ever has been a man who could follow step by step, with more logical power, the points which he desired to illustrate. He gained this power by the close study of geometry, and by a determination to perceive the truth in all its relations and simplicity, and, when found, to utter it.

"It was not, however, chiefly by his mental faculties that he gained such control over mankind. His moral power gave him preeminence. The convictions of men, that Abraham Lincoln was an honest man, led them to yield to his guidance. As has been said of Cobden, whom he greatly resembled, he made all men feel a sense of himself—a recognition of individuality—a self-relying power. They saw in him a man who they believed would do what is right, regardless of all consequences. It was this moral feeling which gave him the greatest hold on the people, and made his utterances almost oracular.

"But the great act of the mighty chieftain, on which his fame shall rest long after his frame shall moulder away, is that of giving freedom to a race. . . . Such a power, or such an opportunity, God has seldom given to man. When other events shall have been forgotten; when this world shall have become a network of republics; when every throne shall be swept from the face of the earth; when literature shall enlighten all minds; when the claims of humanity shall be recognized everywhere—this act shall still be conspicuous on the pages of history. We are thankful that God gave to Abraham Lincoln the decision and wisdom and grace to issue that proclamation, which stands high above all other papers which have been penned by uninspired men.

"His career teaches young men that every position of eminence is open before the diligent and the worthy. To the active men of the country, his example is an incentive to trust in God and do right.

"The time will come when, in the beautiful words of him whose lips are now forever sealed, 'The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.'

"Chieftain! farewell. The nation mourns thee. Mothers shall teach thy name to their lisping children. The youth of our land shall emulate thy virtues. Statesmen shall study thy record, and learn lessons of wisdom. Mute though thy lips be, yet they still speak. Hushed is thy voice, but its echoes of liberty are ringing through the world, and the sons of bondage listen with joy. Prisoned thou art in death, and yet thou art marching abroad, and chains and manacles are bursting at thy touch. Thou didst fall not for thyself. The assassin had no hate for thee. Our hearts were aimed at, our national life was sought. We crown thee as our martyr—and humanity enthrones thee as her triumphant son. Hero, Martyr, Friend, Farewell."