

LINCOLN LORE

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A PILOT FOR UNCHARTED SEAS

Abraham Lincoln replied with these words to a delegation which visited him in May, 1863: "As a pilot I have used my best exertions to keep afloat our Ship of State and shall be glad to resign my trust at the opportune time to another pilot more skillful and successful than I may prove." Under the original pilot, however, the Ship of State weathered the storm and Lincoln's chief task, apparently, was to prevent the country from disintegrating—to keep the ship from being shattered on the rocks of disunion.

In the present national emergency there is not much danger of the Ship of State being dashed in pieces but there is considerable concern about its course, whether or not it will be able to make a satisfactory voyage and return to its old moorings or swing at anchor at another berth. One critic has pointed out that the Ship of State seems to be afloat on an uncharted sea, with its course largely to be determined by the contrary winds of shifting sentiment. Some words from the pilot who saved the ship in the former emergency ought to be timely in attempting to steer the vessel over the troubled waters of discontent and economic strife, as one commentator has put it: "The greatness of Lincoln's character and the mastery of his words in framing the philosophy of life are needed greatly in these days of uncertainty and transition into the uncharted seas of a new era."

Lincoln said at one time "If we could first know where we are and whether we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it." It would seem quite necessary to first determine—if that is possible—for just what port we are bound.

There are certain Lincoln axioms which put in concise form, present some observations of Pilot Lincoln as he too drove a ship into uncharted seas; but, nevertheless, had definitely in mind the destination which he hoped to reach.

There were certain groups which Lincoln tried to influence who might have been able to steady the boat and make the journey less dangerous. Even before he left port and observed the impending storm in the future he wondered if proper preliminary steps were being taken to avoid the predicted tempest. Some of his observations and the groups to whom his remarks were directed follow:

LEARNED MEN

Lincoln visited New England after his fine speech at Cooper Institute in New York and one of the cities where he addressed the people was New Haven, Conn., seat of Yale University. He discussed the subject that was then uppermost in the minds of the people and made this observation before his learned hearers. "Our best and greatest men have underestimated the size of the question. They have constantly brought forward small cures for great sores—plasters too small to cover the wound."

CONGRESSIONAL GROUP

Lincoln prepared a little known appeal to certain members of Congress in 1862 whose influence he felt either could bring to a close or prolong hostilities, as they

might choose. His concluding admonition might be directed today towards those Congressmen who may be contemplating driving the ship into the fog of political uncertainty. Lincoln wrote:

"Our common country is in great peril, demanding the loftiest views and boldest action to bring it speedy relief. Once relieved, its form of government is saved to the world, its beloved history and cherished memories are vindicated, and its happy future fully assured and rendered inconceivably grand. To you, more than any others, the privilege, is given to assure that happiness and swell that grandeur, and to link your own names therewith forever."

THE PEOPLE

On January 19, 1862, Lincoln found it necessary to issue a proclamation revoking an order of General Hunter respecting emancipation. His appeal to the people to rise above ordinary behavior is so well stated in these words: "You cannot, if you would, be blind to the signs of the times. I beg of you a calm and enlarged consideration of them, ranging if it may be, far above personal and partizan politics."

RETURNING SOLDIERS

Within a period of two weeks, in the month of August, 1864, groups of soldiers on their way home from short terms of enlistment visited Washington. Three different Ohio delegations were addressed by the President. To the first body he said in part: "When you return to your homes, rise up to the height of a generation of men worthy of a free government and we will carry out the great work we have commenced."

The 166th Ohio Regiment was addressed by the President as follows: "I suppose you are going home to see your families and friends. I happen temporarily to occupy this White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each one of you may have, through this free government which we have enjoyed an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life with all its desirable human aspirations."

Ten days later Lincoln addressed the 148th Regiment of Ohio, using among other comments these words: "I congratulate you and those who are waiting to bid you welcome home from the war. You are soldiers of the Republic everywhere honored and respected. . . . This government must be preserved in spite of any man or set of men. It is worthy of your effort. Nowhere in the world is presented a government of so much liberty and equality. To the humblest and poorest among us are held out the highest privileges and positions."