

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S POSTHUMOUS ADDRESS

Immediately after the cabinet meeting adjourned at 2:00 P. M. on the afternoon of April 14, 1865, General Grant and other members of the executive body having left the President's office, the question of receiving the new British Minister, Sir Frederick Bruce, was brought up. Assistant Secretary of State, Frederick W. Seward, son of Secretary William H. Seward who was then ill at his home and unable to care for the duties of his office, inquired of the President when it would be convenient for him to receive Sir Frederick. Seward relates that after some moments of contemplation Lincoln replied, "Tomorrow at two o'clock."

Following some further conversation about the proposed reception, Mr. Lincoln is said to have closed the interview with the request, "Don't forget to send up the speeches beforehand. I would like to look them over." In view of the tragedy which occurred that night it would be interesting to know whether or not the papers were sent up that afternoon for Lincoln's approval and possible revision. It would also be of interest to learn just how much if any of the speech Lincoln was supposed to have used on that fateful Saturday, came from his pen. Was the address finally delivered to Sir Frederick Bruce by President Johnson, the Posthumous Address of Abraham Lincoln?

On April 20, 1864, the people of Washington looked for the last time on the remains of Abraham Lincoln whose body lay in state in the capitol under the great dome. That very same day the news correspondent for the New York Daily Tribune sent this dispatch to his paper:

"Sir Frederick W. A. Bruce was today introduced to the President by the acting Secretary of State, and presented his credentials as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of her Britannic Majesty to this government. Sir Frederick made the following remarks upon the occasion:

"Mr. President: It is with deep and sincere concern that I have to accompany my first official act with expressions of condolence. On Saturday last the ceremony that takes place today was to have been performed, but the gracious intentions of the late lamented President were frustrated by events which have plunged this country into consternation and affliction.

The more formal part of the address followed these preliminary remarks and then there appeared what is supposed to have been the remarks of President Johnson, in full, as here copied from the Tribune:

"Sir Frederick A. W. Bruce—Sir:—The cordial and friendly sentiments which you have expressed on the part of Her Britannic Majesty give me great pleasure. Great Britain and the United States, by the extended and varied forms of commerce between them, the contiguity of portions of their possessions, and the similarity of their language and laws, are drawn into contrast and intimate intercourse at the same time. They are from the same causes exposed to frequent occasions of misunderstanding, only to be averted by mutual forbearance. So eagerly are the people of the two countries engaged throughout almost the whole world in the pursuit of similar commercial enterprises, accompanied by natural rivalries and jealousies, that at first sight it would almost seem that the two Governments must be enemies, or, at best, cold and calculating friends. So devoted are the two nations throughout all their dominion, and even in their most remote territorial and colonial possessions, to the principles of civil rights and constitutional liberty, that, on the other hand, the superficial observer might erroneously count upon a continued concert of action and sympathy, amounting to an alliance between them. Each is charged with the development of the progress and liberty of a considerable portion of the human race. Each, in its sphere, is subject to difficulties and trials, not participated in by the other. The interest of civilization and of humanity require that the two should be friends. *I have always known and accepted it as a fact honorable to both countries, that the Queen of England is a sincere and honest well-wisher to the United States. I have been equally frank and explicit in the opinion that the friendship of the United States toward Great Britain is enjoined by all the considerations of interest and of sentiment, affecting the character of both.* You will therefore be accepted as a minister friendly, and well-disposed to the maintenance of peace and the honor of both countries. You will find myself and all my associates acting in accordance with the same enlightened policy and consistent sentiments; and so I am sure that it will not occur in your case that either yourself or this Government

will ever have cause to regret that such an important relationship existed at such a crisis."

The English magazine *Good Words* for the issues of August and December, 1865, carried an article by J. M. Ludlow under the title "President Lincoln Judged by His Own Words." This series of articles was later published in book form with slight corrections and additions. The December installment concludes with the above address to Sir Frederick Bruce which Ludlow prefaces with this comment "No notice of his (Lincoln's) state papers and speeches can be sufficient which does not include that voice from the grave, President Johnson's reply (20th April) to Sir F. Bruce on his first presentation as British Minister, known to have been drawn up by his predecessor—the last solemn token of Abraham Lincoln's friendly feeling towards our sovereign and our country."

In his book which appeared a year later, Mr. Ludlow states in introducing the speech, "He (Lincoln) still found time that afternoon (April 14) to pen one public document of special interest to us Englishmen the draft of a reply to Sir F. Bruce on his forthcoming first presentation as British Minister, outlined indeed by Mr. Seward but which was only read by his successor."

The fact that President Johnson in his speech made no comment on the assassination whereas Sir Frederick did mention the tragedy, would suggest that the President was following a manuscript already prepared. Certain statements in the address would imply that the more formal introduction and the conclusion may have been blocked out by the State Department while it is almost certain that the more personal element—lines placed in italics by editor of *Lincoln Lore*—was inserted by Lincoln.

The expression "honorable to both" is so typically Lincolnesque that it is immediately recognized as is also the phrase "is enjoined by all the considerations of interest and of sentiment, affecting the character of both." One will recognize in the term "well-wisher" the closing salutation of the letter to Grace Bedell: "Your very sincere well-wisher." It is to be hoped that further evidence may reveal just what part of the manuscript was penned by Lincoln, but we may feel sure that it was the address he was supposed to have delivered on April 14, 1865.