

LINCOLN LORE

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A MEASURING ROD FOR STATESMEN

Jones, Edgar DeWitt. *The Greatening of Abraham Lincoln*. The Bethany Press, St. Louis. Limited Ed., \$5.00.

H. G. Wells, famous English historian, has just passed away. His death recalls that upon the completion of his *Outline of History* he submitted a list of the world's six greatest figures, which included the name of Abraham Lincoln. A review of some of the characteristics which were basically responsible for Lincoln's elevation to such an illustrious group would seem timely.

Coincident with the death of Wells is the publication of a brochure entitled *The Greatening of Abraham Lincoln*. The author, Edgar DeWitt Jones, is a well known Lincoln student and a former president of the Federal Council of Churches of America. The monograph is a "Prize-winning Sermon" awarded first place in a nationwide Lincoln sermon contest. Even among the five hundred and more sermons on Abraham Lincoln already in print, prepared by many of the most noted clergymen in America, Dr. Jones's effort would be awarded a significant place.

The Greatening of Abraham Lincoln presents Lincoln's development in his professional and private relations. Three specific fields of advancement are noted: political philosophy, literary style, and moral grandeur. It is evident that H. G. Wells did not overlook these accomplishments of the Emancipator when he selected him to stand among the giants of all time.

If Lincoln students have failed to note the significance of a certain statement made by Lincoln at the beginning of the Civil War they are not likely to forget it after reading Dr. Jones's sermon. He calls this avowal made on July 4, 1861, "The quintessence of Lincoln's political principles."

"This is essentially a people's contest. . . . It is a struggle for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men—to lift artificial weights from all shoulders, to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all; to afford all an unfettered start, and a fair chance in the race of life. Yielding to partial and temporary departures, from necessity, this is the leading object of the government for whose existence we contend."

From this patriotic presentment Dr. Jones excerpts what he terms "four mighty affirmations of a political creed truly Lincolnian":

1. To elevate the condition of men.
2. To life artificial weights from all shoulders.
3. To clear the paths of laudable pursuits for all.
4. To afford all an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

- He was tolerant.
He was temperate.
He was generous.
He was merciful.
- He was magnanimous.
He was forgiving.
He was just.
He was gentle.
- He was kind.
He was faithful.
He was honest.
He was humble.
- He was patient.
He was diligent.
He was truthful.
He was prayerful.
- He was long-suffering.
He was compassionate.

The greatening of Lincoln's literary style must have been observed with interest by Wells, so it was by his English literary contemporary, Lord Curzon, who regarded the Gettysburg Address as the most eloquent oration in the Anglo-Saxon tongue. In the development of his argument about Lincoln's remarkable power of speech, Dr. Jones takes occasion to mention what he considers to be the most famous of the literary and oratorical compositions. The list is confined to these five contributions arranged in the order in which they were delivered.

1. Farewell Address upon leaving Springfield.
2. The First Inaugural delivered on March 4, 1861.
3. Remarks at the dedication of the Gettysburg Cemetery.
4. The Letter of condolence to the widow Bixby.
5. The Second Inaugural Address delivered on March 4, 1865.

While the political philosophy and literary achievements of any fame seeking statesman will always be given serious attention in his bid for immortality a third consideration, moral grandeur, is bound to have tremendous weight in the final verdict of the people—the ultimate judges who make up the list of immortals. Dr. Jones approaches this third phase in the life of Lincoln, recognizing that the President's accomplishments in this field may be considered the results of both "an endowment and an achievement." Possibly the emphasis here is placed on his downright honesty, with further attention given to the "purgatorial years" of the war when Dr. Jones feels Lincoln's soul greatened most noticeably under the burdens he bore.

The spiritual growth of Lincoln is further amplified by the text Dr. Jones prints on the page preliminary to the introduction, "Thy gentleness hath made me great.—2 Samuel 22:36."

In the conclusion of his sermon the author has enumerated certain elements discovered in Lincoln (displayed in center column box) which are seldomly inherent in one personality. They contribute tremendously to the stature of Abraham Lincoln whose greatening Dr. Jones has so expressively revealed in his political philosophy, literary style and moral grandeur.

We have constant need in America of a measuring rod for statesmen whose admirers would elevate them above the common run of men. This measuring rod must not be of European or Asiatic metre with dictatorial and anarchial standards but it must conform to those qualifications which have been accepted as paramount in a nation where "all men are created equal." Lincoln is the embodiment of America and those who aspire to greatness must approach his stature.