

LINCOLN LORE

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WINTHROP REPUDIATES LINCOLN

Robert Charles Winthrop was three months younger than Abraham Lincoln and they were both Whig members of the Thirtieth Congress. Winthrop backed Bell and Everett in the campaign of 1860 and he was a staunch supporter of McClellan for the Presidency in 1864. His last and "not the least memorable" of his political speeches was delivered at New London, Connecticut on October 18, 1864. It was primarily a repudiation of Abraham Lincoln and his administration, and contained very little data of a constructive nature about McClellan.

Inasmuch as Lincoln bibliographers seem to have overlooked this speech, although it is predominantly about the President and his administration, it seems worthwhile to briefly cite some of Winthrop's comments on Lincoln's conduct of public affairs. *A Memoir of Robert C. Winthrop* by Robert C. Winthrop, Jr. published in 1897 by Little, Brown & Co. reproduces the contents of a letter written by the senior Winthrop on October 23, 1864 in which the New London address is mentioned as follows: "The McClellan managers, by the bye, think so well of my New London speech that they have had it stereotyped, and, besides my own edition, 200,000 copies have been circulated as campaign documents." Both of these pamphlets are in the Foundation library. The stereotype edition is 6" x 9" and contains 16 pages, while the personally published pamphlet is of 8 pages and 11½" x 8".

Winthrop recalled that Lincoln's "only term of congressional service was during the period when I had the honor to preside over the House of which he was a member." Winthrop further acknowledges that Lincoln "helped me to the speaker's chair by his own vote," but concluded, "I really wish I could find it in my conscience to return the compliment at this moment."

Winthrop's first criticism of the President takes the form of the serious charge of bribery, claiming that the President "so obviously connived a few weeks ago, at offering him (McClellan) a high command if he would decline to be a candidate for the Presidency." Winthrop further concluded that "The Republican Party will hardly accuse the President of being willing to buy a dangerous competitor at the risk of putting a doubtful general in the field." Apparently a visit of Francis Preston Blair to McClellan was the basis of this false accusation. Blair on his own initiative urged McClellan to withdraw from politics and urged him to ask the President for reappointment in the army, also assuring the President that "he did not seek a restoration to command, with any further eye on a presidential nomination." It is of interest to note that Winthrop's biographer omitted this accusation from a condensation of the speech.

The next criticism brought against the President was his inability to establish a "wise, conciliatory, healing policy." Winthrop held that the great advantage of military success is in opening the way for conciliation, and he stated that in his judgment "the present administration is wholly incapacitated." The current military successes, Winthrop argued, opened the way for "a new President to restore union and peace in our land." The speaker further commented, "I have not been able to resist the conclusion, . . . that almost any other President would be more likely than Abraham Lincoln to accomplish . . . the earliest practical restoration of union, peace and constitutional liberty to our afflicted land." Lin-

coln is represented as having said on one occasion, "It is generally the case that a man who begins a work is not the best man to carry it on to successful conclusion" which caused Winthrop to propose, "Mr. Lincoln is adverse to seeing the application of whatever truth there is in his theory, to the one to whom it particularly applies—himself."

Winthrop proposed that "a Patriot in Lincoln's place six months ago would have refused to run for a second term" and what Lincoln should have said at the time is ingeniously set forth by the speaker. "But," he continued, "President Lincoln has followed the very reverse of this magnanimous and self-denying policy . . . we see him clinging eagerly and desperately to patronage and place." Winthrop deplored the attitude that "demands the reelection of an existing President in time of war, even though a majority of the people may have no confidence in the capacity of the incumbent, either for conducting the war or for negotiating peace."

The speech Lincoln made while a congressman on the subject of "military coattails" was reviewed by Mr. Winthrop. He introduced the episode with this statement: "You know already, I am sure, all that you care to know about President Lincoln. Yet perhaps I can recall a little passage in his public life which may at least amuse you." One point Lincoln stressed in his ridicule of General Cass, then an aspirant to the Presidency, is found in this statement with reference to any attempt Lincoln's own friends might make to nominate him for the Presidency, "I protest they shall not make fun of me, as they have of General Cass, by attempting to write me into a military hero." In referring to this bit of humor Winthrop commented, "Ah, my friends, what a blessed thing for the country it would have been if President Lincoln had only 'recked his own rede;' if after he became President, he had not made fun of himself by attempting to play the part of a military hero." As a final thrust at the President, Winthrop concluded: "Why, it is hardly too much to say that, if he had never undertaken to direct and control the course of our armies, if he had not so rashly interfered with the movement of at least one of our generals, Richmond might have been taken, and the war triumphantly terminated long before this time."

After Lincoln's assassination there was some resentment in Boston to Winthrop for his attitude towards the President during the campaign. However, he introduced a series of resolutions prepared for one of the organizations with which he was affiliated and from which we have excerpted this paragraph.

"Beyond all doubt, the life of President Lincoln was a thousandfold the most precious life in our whole land; and there are few of us, I think, who would not willingly have rescued it at the risk, or even at the sacrifice, of our own. The cheerful courage, the shrewd sagacity, the earnest zeal, the imperturbable good-nature, the untiring fidelity to duty, the ardent devotion to the Union, the firm reliance upon God which he has displayed during his whole administration; and the eminent moderation and magnanimity both towards political opponents and public enemies, which he has manifested since his recent and triumphant re-election, . . . have won for him a measure of regard, of respect, and of affection, such as no other man of our age has ever enjoyed."