

LINCOLN LORE

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LINCOLN'S RENOWN

1. Emotional Trends*

The exalted position which Abraham Lincoln occupies in the annals of civilization has invited many persons to ponder over the factors which may have contributed most to his renown. In the closing paragraphs of his book *Lincoln the Liberal Statesman* the late J. G. Randall concluded: "Lincoln's greatness arose from a combination of qualities in a balanced personality. . . . Perhaps the inner source of his strength has not been plumbed."

In attempting to fathom Lincoln's personality it is doubtful if any unknown isolated element could be discovered which would account for his genius. A more satisfactory approach might be made by making an exhaustive compilation of his widely diversified characteristics and with proper evaluations and balances the man in the making might be observed. The limited space available in *Lincoln Lore* would not permit so vast an exhibit, so we must be content with just a glimpse of him by noting a few of his generally recognized traits.

The elements of Lincoln's personality seem to fall into three rather loosely defined areas which may be termed; Emotional Trends, Intellectual Processes and Behavior Tendencies. The present approach will consider a half a dozen of his better known Emotional Trends. These qualities might be classified by some psychologists as feminine peculiarities. Coleridge observed that no man "ever succeeded in simultaneously gaining distinction and affection unless he possesses . . . a mixture of masculine and feminine qualities." Thus we have the parental term "Father Abraham" commonly used when referring to Abraham Lincoln.

HUMILITY

*"Humility, that low, sweet root
From which all heavenly virtues shoot."*

—Thomas Moore

Lincoln is said to have opened his remarks at Pappsville, Illinois in what is called his first political speech with the statement, "Fellow Citizens, I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln." Lincoln stated in a eulogy pronounced on Zachary Taylor that he (Taylor) verified "the great truth that 'he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.'" Lincoln could not have even surmised at this early date that his humble spirit would contribute to his own exaltation as the President of the nation. After receiving the Republican nomination for the presidency at Chicago in 1860, Lincoln wrote to a friend with reference to his unexpected success and referred to himself as "the humblest of all whose names were before the convention."

MAGNANIMITY

"Lincoln's magnanimity was sorely tried and never found wanting."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Criticized for promising a political office to a young man Lincoln replied: "I have certainly not been selfish in it, because, in my greatest need of friends, he was against me and for Baker." Justin Butterfield had beaten Lincoln for an office he very much desired but when a favor was asked of him for Butterfield's son, Lincoln wrote, "I am glad of an opportunity of doing a service for his son." Alexander H. Stephens, vice-president of the Confederacy paid this tribute to Lincoln in an address at Washington on Lincoln's birthday in 1878: "He was warm hearted, he was generous, he was magnanimous. Every fountain of his heart was overflowing with the milk of human kindness."

MERCY

"Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge."

—Shakespeare

Hon. H. L. Dawes in the *Atlantic Monthly* tells of an incident where he requested a pardon for a man that Lincoln was reluctant to grant but when Dawes insisted on the truth of the prisoner's appeal Lincoln stated: "I think if you believe it, I will; at any rate, I will take the risk on the side of mercy." Lincoln wrote to a friend once about an incident in his law practice. He said: "I could have got judgment against Farly if I had pressed to the utmost; but I am really sorry for him—poor and a cripple as he is." Charles W. Fairbanks in commenting on Lincoln concluded, "Although possessing unlimited power he never abused it, except on the side of mercy."

MODESTY

*"If we have sense, modesty best sets it off:
If not, best hides the want."*

—Scott

Abraham Lincoln's first printed political announcement concluded with these words: "Considering the great degree of modesty which should always attend youth, it is probable I have already been more presuming than becomes me." While a member of Congress, Lincoln wrote a letter to his wife who was then visiting with her relatives. In one paragraph, with respect to the form of address she had been using on her correspondence, he said, "Suppose you do not prefix the 'Hon.' to the address on your letters any more. I like the letters very much but I would rather they should not have that upon them." Dec. 20, 1859 Lincoln enclosed in a letter to J. W. Fell a brief writing to which he referred to the attached memorandum in these words: "Herewith is a little sketch, as you requested. There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me. If anything be made of it. . . . I wish it to be modest and not to go beyond the material."

PATIENCE

"Patience is a necessary ingredient of genius."

—Disraeli

Lincoln wrote a note to Reverdy Johnson in which he said: "I am a patient man,—always willing to forgive on the Christian term of repentance and also to give ample time for repentance." These words in the closing sentence of the First Inaugural offer a good illustration of Lincoln's patience: "My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well, upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time."

SYMPATHY

*"His tears, pure messengers sent from his heart;
His heart as far from fraud as heaven from earth."*

—Shakespeare

A deputation of colored people visited the White House and in the course of his remarks Lincoln said, "It is a cheering thought throughout life that something can be done to ameliorate the conditions of those who have been subject to the hard usages of the world." Lincoln's sympathy for the war widows and weeping mothers have become proverbial and it would be superfluous to recall such letters as he wrote to the widow Bixby and Col. Ellsworth's parents. One of Lincoln's Illinois friends was worried about his son's military status and the President wrote Stanton with respect to the father: "This matter touches him very deeply—the feelings of a father for a child—as he thinks, all the future of the child. I cannot be the instrument to crush his heart." One of our novelists has given to Abraham Lincoln the name of "Great Heart."

*Subsequent issues will present discussions on Intellectual Processes and Behavior Tendencies.