

LINCOLN LORE

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WHY IS LINCOLN GREAT?

The acceptance of Abraham Lincoln as one of the world's outstanding personalities is everywhere acknowledged. Naturally the question arises: What makes Lincoln great? One group asks the question sympathetically seeking to know the factors which contributed to his renown. Another group, holding that Lincoln has been too highly esteemed, puts the query as a challenge. It may be presumptuous to attempt to answer this question satisfactorily in the limited space available in this bulletin, but it will be possible to provide a synopsis which each reader may supplement to his own satisfaction.

Most men have been awarded recognition by sheer ability to excel in one objective, such as: Arts, Athletics, Education, Entertainment, Industry, Law, Literature, Politics, Science, Theology, etc. Lincoln, however, excelled in many fields of endeavor and that fact may largely account for the unique place he occupies in civilization. Fortunately we may turn to Lincoln himself for a formula which will guide us to a better understanding of his enviable position among men. Upon the death of Henry Clay, Lincoln pronounced a eulogy in which he said: "It is probably true that he (Clay) owed his preeminence to no one quality but to a fortunate combination of several . . . no one of them very uncommon: but all together are rarely combined in one individual."

Martyrdom might be suggested as the most important contribution to Lincoln's greatness, but we are in agreement with *The London Spectator's* opinion, "the fact that he was martyred would be only one of the reasons for his position." We propose however, in this monograph to confine ourselves to five fields of attainment in which he excelled through his own directive efforts, although there were many other accomplishments which were noteworthy.

PROFOUND STATESMANSHIP

"The memory of Lincoln will live and endure among you, gathering reverence from age to age, the memory of one who saved the republic by his wisdom."—James Bryce

As truly as Washington might be called the father of his country, Lincoln could be termed its savior. With the southern confederacy fighting for its own independence, with the abolitionists of the north shouting "good riddance to the south," with many northern generals advocating compromise and with some of his own cabinet members in favor of allowing the southern states to go their own way, Lincoln stood almost alone among the nation's leaders in sponsor-

ing the objective that "The Union must be preserved." The outstanding lifetime achievement of Abraham Lincoln was the preservation of the Union. This contribution alone would make him our preeminent statesman.

HUMANITARIAN MEASURES

"I doubt whether any statesman who ever lived sank so deeply into the hearts of the peoples of many lands as Abraham Lincoln did."—Lloyd George

One of the most far reaching documents ever written, the Proclamation of Emancipation, was Abraham Lincoln's own personal composition. Gideon Welles in his diary and Frank C. Carpenter in his reminiscences agree that the President himself prepared the document, "Without consultation or knowledge of his cabinet." He concluded the proclamation with this paragraph: "And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God." This proclamation set in motion a series of enactments that struck the shackles from 4,000,000 slaves and caused Lincoln to become known as the "Emancipator of a Race." This is another accomplishment which sets Lincoln apart as the great humanitarian of the age and extended his fame universally.

MILITARY STRATEGY

"The responsibility lay entirely with Lincoln: he struck the keynote; and this establishes him as the strategist of the north. He must take the credit or bear the blame."—Colin R. Ballard

Only in recent years has the role of Lincoln as the commander-in-chief of the armies of the Republic been properly set forth. A book entitled *The Military Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by General Colin R. Ballard, lecturer at British Staff College, presents Lincoln as "the forerunner of that which we now call the Higher Command." He was the first great military leader to conduct armies from a central office, far withdrawn from the scene of hostilities. Yet he had no "ready made General Staff to set carefully prepared plans before him, and he had to pick up expert advice as best he could," according to Ballard. This English military authority closes his book with the statement that during the Civil War there were "many men who earned immortal fame . . . but the man was Abraham Lincoln," the commander-in-chief of the victorious Union army.

LITERARY GENIUS

"The three supreme masterpieces of English eloquence—the toast of William Pitt after the victory of Trafalgar, and two of Lincoln's speeches: The Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural."—Lord Curzon

Ralph Waldo Emerson said he thought the Second Inaugural address of Abraham Lincoln "was likely to outlive anything now in print in the English language." Monsieur M. E. Dusergier de Hauranne, French editor, wrote: "I do not believe that modern speech has ever produced anything that will excel his eloquent discourse over the grave of dead soldiers at Gettysburg." There were also letters of condolence to the widow Bixby, the parents of Col. Ellsworth and Fanny McCulloch; political correspondence with Horace Greeley, Erastus Corning and James C. Conkling; eulogies on George Washington, Henry Clay and Zachary Taylor; and personal military notes to generals McClellan, Hooker, Halleck, Blunt and others, which were significant writings. *The London Spectator* claimed: "It is not too much to say of him that he is one of the greatest masters of prose ever produced by the English race." Although he was but 56 years old at the time of his death, few literary critics seem to have lamented the fact that his early passing cut short a life which presaged one of the most promising literary careers in American letters.

EXEMPLIARY CHARACTERISTICS

"I may feel free to speak of him as I might speak of Plato or St. Paul or any other of that little group of men but for whose lives and thoughts we should all be different from what we are."—Lord Halifax

The great masses of people have come to admire Lincoln most for his sterling character. Tolstoi went so far as to call him "A Christ in miniature, a saint of humanity." Sometime ago *Lincoln Lore* (Nos. 1333, 1340) compiled a few of Lincoln's characteristics which through the years have become associated with him. Among them were: courage, honesty, humility, justice, mercy, patience, simplicity and sympathy.

Before Lincoln was inaugurated President, before he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, before he spoke at Gettysburg, before the war was won, before the Union was saved, and more than four years before his martyrdom, Robert Black on January 9, 1861, published in London this tribute to the character of the newly elected President of the United States: "By untiring energy, by unswerving integrity, by uncompromising courage, by kindness of heart, by general humor, by strong common sense, by respectable talent and by moderate eloquence has Abraham Lincoln commended himself to his countrymen and won himself a place among the princes of the world."