

# LINCOLN LORE

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## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LINCOLN'S RENOWN

### 3. Behavior Tendencies\*

The series of three bulletins, concluding with this number, seems to have been very inadequate in providing space enough to touch upon all the factors which contributed to the world renown of Abraham Lincoln. There has been no opportunity to present testimonials, or statements of Lincoln himself, which illustrate these following characteristics which he is known to have inherited or acquired; ambition, awareness, common sense, composure, concentration, courage, determination, discrimination, fidelity, forbearance, humor, pity, resoluteness, retrospect, reverence, self-reliance, etc. There are, however, five behavior tendencies which stand out in Lincoln's character that contributed greatly to his fame.

#### SIMPLICITY

Someone said of Lincoln: "When he speaks it seems as if the people were listening to their own thinking aloud." Albert J. Beveridge, a resident of Lincoln's own Hoosier state, commented: "In a sense Lincoln may be said to have been the child of a people. All that was best in this great middle stream of that mighty American folk movement was combined in his person, character and intellect." From President Wilson came this analysis of the brotherhood of man: "Mr. Lincoln we describe as 'a man of the people,' and he was a man of the people, essentially . . . who has his rootage deep in the experiences and the consciousness of the ordinary mass of his fellowmen. . . . A man of the people is a man who has felt that unspoken, that intense, that almost terrifying struggle of humanity, that struggle whose object is . . . simply to live and be free." Another President of the United States said: "No other man in all history so understood the people, was so loved by them, or could so enable them to identify their government by themselves."

#### FAITH

James Russell Lowell described Abraham Lincoln as "A man whom America made as God made Adam, out of the very earth, unancestral, unprivileged, unknown, to show us how much truth, how much magnanimity and how much statecraft await the call of opportunity in simple manhood when it believes in the justice of God and the worth of man." Looking at Lincoln from a land far off, Tolstoi referred to Lincoln as "a Christ in miniature," and suggested that "his supremacy expresses itself altogether in his peculiar moral power and in the greatness of his character." But Bishop Wm. J. McDowell has given us one of the finest expositions on Lincoln's faith: "He had the faith that saves, without the bigotry that blights. He had insight like a prophet's, a source of the Almighty Person like a mystic's; no theology, but the life of the spirit; an unwavering belief in the Providence that was often silent and perplexing; moral courage born of moral conviction. His sense of destiny was no fatalistic, but faith."

#### FORESIGHT

Theodore Roosevelt was a great admirer of Lincoln and many of the qualities of Lincoln he emulated. He believed that "Lincoln saw into the future with the prophetic imagination usually vouchsafed only to the poet and the seer. He had in him all the lift toward greatness of the visionary, without any of the visionary's fanaticism or egotism." Another President, Calvin Coolidge, paid his tribute in these words: "To me the greatness of Lincoln consisted very largely of a vision by which he saw more clearly than the men of his

time, the moral relationship of things." While some may not agree with Judge W. G. Ewing's conclusion, this was his reaction to Lincoln's foresight: "Genius never needs an introduction to itself. Lincoln could not have been unconscious of his wonderful talent and power as a leader of men. . . . His prophetic soul foresaw the end from the beginning, and possibly his own great part in the gigantic struggle that was to enthrone Freedom." It is left for an Englishman, John Drinkwater, to climax Lincoln's ability as a "far-seeing" statesman in these words: "Abraham Lincoln stands out not only as the greatest American, but as the greatest man in modern history, in that he did the work that he saw as his to a greater degree of perfection than any man in late centuries has been able to do. . . . Lincoln, unlike some men who rise to high public office, was great before he was called, in that he saw the needs of his country with a far-seeing eye."

#### HONESTY

Woodrow Wilson drew this interesting conclusion about Lincoln's integrity: "Men used to call him 'Honest Abe', but honesty is not a quality. Honesty is a manifestation of character . . . it is a general description of him." A eulogy pronounced on a man in Springfield who had been known for his integrity drew from Lincoln this quotation: "In very truth he was the noblest work of God—an honest man." An engraving was published by H. B. Hall in 1865 showing Diogenes resting beside a portrait of Lincoln and under the picture this inscription.

"Diogenes his lantern needs no more

An honest man is found; the search is o'er."

Plutarch is responsible for this observation: "Alexander was wont to say, 'were I not Alexander, I would be Diogenes.'" James B. Blaine affirmed that Lincoln "would not argue from a false premise, or be deceived himself or deceive others by a false conclusion." John D. Long brings these comments on honesty to an appropriate conclusion with this tribute: "There is an element of popular greatness without which the title is never at last conferred, it is the moral element of sincerity and truth."

#### JUSTICE

George Eliot once said, "Justice is like the Kingdom of God: It is not without us as a fact; it is within us as a great yearning." John Carlisle in referring to Lincoln wrote, "He had the sense of justice within himself." Lincoln's attitude towards the slavery question was fundamentally one of social propriety. "He supposed there was a question of God's eternal justice wrapped up in the enslaving any race of men." In his famous speech at Peoria, Lincoln said with reference to slavery, "I hate it because of the monstrous injustice." Extolling Lincoln, Frank S. Black concluded: "The love of justice and fair play, and that respect for order and the law which must underlie every nation that would long endure, were deeply embedded in his nature."

Two observations, one by a poet and the other by a statesman, bring this monograph to an appropriate close. Edwin Markham once said, "Lincoln is a greater possession to us than all battleships and a greater safety to us than all our arms." Thomas R. Marshall concluded: "His is the one life in our history we cannot too often review nor too sedulously emulate."

\*Note: See Lincoln Lore 1333, 1337.