

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N.

A man who leads a people safely through a period of war and danger runs always the risk of becoming blurred by tradition until he is little better than a myth. His proportions become those of the half-god, huge, dim and uncertain. His mind is endowed with supernatural qualities. His acts are mysterious. He ceases to be one of us and becomes a fabulous personage that you cannot sit down comfortably with and study on something like an equal footing. It is never man to man

with a hero. He is not a man. He is a myth.

There is an interesting psychology involved in this curious fact. It is easier to let the imagination play on a career than to force its facts. We understand facts so poorly - we dread so their inexorable logic. We are so inclined to underestimate what is and overestimate what might be. Fancy is so much dearer to us - and easier for us than reason - that we gradually elevate our hero out of our own ranks until we have him seated in Olympus or Valhalla, according to our learnings are Greek or Teutonic.

*We save our face
We excuse ourselves* (3)

Then, too, when any one who achieves more than the rest of us we save our ^{face} ~~face~~ - excuse ourselves for our non-achievement by endowing him with special qualities - special opportunities - special guardianship. He is a genius - a favorite of the gods - he has a star. He is lucky. Kipling hits off this tract when he makes Sir Anthony Gloster say in explaining his career:

"I didn't begin with askings, I took my job and I stuck! And I took the chances they wouldn't; an' now they are calling it luck."

This is the tendency always in regard to a

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career of great moment to the world - to attribute it to something beyond ordinary human efforts and processes - to ascribe it to Destiny - Fate - Luck.

Ever since Abraham Lincoln's tragic death there has been a growing tendency to make a hero and a myth of him. Men early said that there was a mystery about his birth - that he was the son of an unknown but highly endowed father. A nonsensical claim with no foundation but *legend* gossip. Indeed the parentage of Lincoln is far more fully bulwarked by documents than is customary in pioneer districts. *Many who do not think of districts.* Others overlooking his years of labor

putting his birth are ready to

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said he was "raised up" to save the country, others said he was lucky, and when he suddenly was killed at the very moment of peace - a whole people dropped on its knees. He became in a moment a prophet, a priest, a Guide.

Now without denying the value to a people of a gallery of demi-gods, I do contend that as far as Abraham Lincoln is concerned he is eminently more valuable to this people if ^{we} understand, and studied as a man like the rest of us. A man of high qualities, no doubt, but of qualities common in some degree to us all.

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His endowment was a typically American endowment - good sense, shrewdness, directness, a love of fair play, kindness, and a touch of mysticism. The difference between him and most men were less in the quality of endowment than the *patience* methods he used in developing his endowments. I hardly know a character in history myself whom it is more satisfactory to study, for there never was a more logical career - one whose *achievement* actions was more directly and inevitably the result of the conscious and deliberate operations of the mind and heart.

It is not necessary to go far afield to

search for the clue to Abraham Lincoln's life.

It stares us in the face in every human document of him from his boyhood up -- an enormous interest in everything which came within his range, men, facts, ideas, coupled with a passion to understand.

In any community the mind that does more than dully to accept the facts of its ~~immediate~~ *immediate environment* existence is

rare. All the majority of us do is to take what is put into our minds and hands by others. To ask at each step, why, why, why, and not cease until we have an answer, is not the way of the mass. Sadly enough many of those who start with

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authentic

the insistent "why" are met with the authentic
"don't ask questions", until curiosity is blinded
and they join the unthinking crowd. In the
humble community into which Lincoln was born his
was the questioning, serious, prying, unresisting
mind. A more unpromising field for a mind to
bite on it would be hard to conceive. There in
what we call a god-forsaken land, so dreary and
unfruitful it seems - in a log cabin - with not
over a half dozen books in it, with no teachers,
except itinerant school masters, under the strain
of severe physical toil to support daily life,

without contact with educated persons, and with no stimulating opportunities, Abraham Lincoln familiarized himself with the laws of nature, learned the essential rudiments of mathematics and of civil government, became saturated with ^{some} ~~much~~ of the greatest English poetry, learned the secrets of meeting men of all classes on equal grounds and of interesting and swaying them, ~~kept alive in himself~~ ^{his} ~~his native spiritual qualities~~ and acquired a mastery of English prose/expression at once individual and elegant, one that by general concession of opinion places him among the masters of English

and kept alive his native spirit ⁽¹⁰⁾
grasping

prose. He did all this by grasping everything about him, turning it over, pulling it to pieces, putting it together, making it his in its facts, its spirit, its tendencies. His early schoolmates who have left their impressions of him invariably speak of his persistency in getting to the bottom of problems, his energy in committing to memory the contents of the books which came in his way, his zeal in hunting books, borrowing and reading them. One of his father's standing complaints was the boy's habit of dropping his work to talk with a chance traveller, his instance in taking

part in the neighborhood discussions and his remorseless pinning down of everybody to explain what they meant. That was what he was always and eternally after - what things meant - what people meant. He grappled problems as if they were enemies on whose overthrow his life depended. He walked the floor with them at nights, the furrows with them by day - unresisting until he saw light. *dog at a root* He must not only understand it, "see it" as we say, but must have it classified and arranged in his mind - placed where it belonged in his mind - in relation to other ideas and facts. I believe that

Lincoln had the same necessity ^{for} intellectual order that many people have for physical order - mental slovenliness was a discomfort and humiliation to him as real as having the buttons off the coat, the room undusted, the table badly set is a physical discomfort to most of us. As each new idea or fact acquired was adjusted to what was already in his storehouse, he realized more and more the effect of new knowledge - the necessity for it. The result was he was always a student to the day of his death, always looking for the new knowledge, which would correct the old.

When Lincoln had arrived at a satisfactory understanding he must put his conclusions into words. He seems, somehow, to have felt that the intellectual process which was ~~not expressed~~^{permeated} ~~was in-~~
~~complete.~~^{until expressed} No dead scholarship for him, what he believed he must say and he must say it so any man, any boy, could understand it. Unless he could make it clear to others he felt that, after all, the idea was not conquered, not yet really his. Hence he was always trying what he had worked out on others - explaining things to them - forcing their indolent intellects, ^{to action} ~~throughout his~~

~~life. Their results prove their soundness. In~~
~~the first place they gave him the invaluable power~~
~~of quickly mastering difficult subjects. Take the~~
~~familiar story of his mastery of English Grammar.~~ *science & surveying*
~~Lincoln was twenty-three years old.~~

To a friend who asked him once how he had
 achieved his pure style he said: "When a mere
 child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked
 to me in a way I could not understand. I do not
 think that I ever got angry at anything else in my
 life; but that always disturbed my temper, and has
 ever since. I can remember going to my little

bedroom, after hearing the neighbors talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings.

"I could not sleep, when I got on such a hunt for an idea until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over; until I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me; for I am never

easy now, when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north and bounded it south, and bounded it east and bounded it west."

This passion for clear expression grew on him. The simplest words, the fewest, was his aim. Verbosity, undigested material, technicalities, always irritated him. A bulky report weighed down with these faults was once handed him. Why can't an investigating committee use a little common sense, he said. If I send a man to find out about a horse for me, I expect him to tell me that horse's points, not how many hairs he has on his tail!

tail.

One invaluable result to Lincoln of this *line*
continued effort to understand and to put his
convictions into plain language was the courage and
confidence it gave him to attack any new subject
which he needed to know. When he first decided
to enter public life he was only twenty-three years
old. Up to that time he had been little more than
a jack-of-all trades, as far as employments was
concerned, but he was ambitious. He had studied
carefully the so-called great men of his communities
- the lawyers, preachers, State Assemblymen - trying

to discover their secret, to make up his mind what there was about them, if anything, which was not within his reach. He concluded there was nothing at all. He could, if he worked, do all that they *had done* could do. He would enter politics, announce himself as a candidate for the state legislature - those were the good old days before the congention system, you will remember. A friend to whom he confided his ambitions told him his English was too poor, that he did not understand Grammar.

But I can learn it, Lincoln said. The story of how he did learn it is familiar enough.

How thoroughly the work was done one has only to study his letters and speeches to realize. Outside of an occasional blunder with shall and will there is but one error in construction to which

Lincoln was addicted throughout his life - he ~~se-~~

ways joined to
ways split his infinitives.

Muse joined company in this!

Dr. Bateman of Illinois, the State Superin-

tendent of Education in 1860, once told me that when Lincoln had finished his letter accepting the nomination to the presidency he brought it to him to correct. Lincoln had written in regard to the platform adopted - It shall be my care "to not

violate or disregard it in any part."

Dr. Bateman suggested that to not violate was incorrect. Lincoln looked at the sentence a moment and said in a puzzled way, "So you think I better turn those two little fellows end for end, do you?" The correction was made for in the letter of acceptance as printed the "two little fellows" are "end for end." But the correction made no impression apparently for constantly in his writings as President we find the blunder.

L. learned Surveying as he said
~~A little later he repeated his feat on~~
 grammar, learning surveying, practically unaided,

*Opportunity
good surgery*

*new subject
German
(21)*

*Taking a look
at the*

in six weeks. He attacked law in the same way.

Point is that great
When Lincoln came to the first test of his powers,

the study of the slavery question, his mind was

a mind accustomed to grappling & mastering
really ready for it. The series of speeches which

he delivered between 1854 and his election in 1860,

in which he developed his argument against the ex-

tension of slavery, must be counted, I think, as

of the greatest
one, if not the greatest, intellectual feat any

performed
American has achieved. The process by which he

worked out his argument is worth *most* the carefullest

study of every one who aims to develop his intellect

to its full capacity, to train himself to exact

thinking and to sound conclusions.

To begin with, the man saturated himself with his subject: The very essential of any great intellectual performance. He studied it, handled it, lived with it until he gradually constructed an argument which was practically flawless. He was like a master builder putting up the framework of a great building. Every timber fits, every nail goes into the exact spot where it is needed and no useless nail is driven, no piecing out, no defective material. It is a strong, well-proportioned, sound framework. ~~Such was~~ Lincoln's argument in

his anti-slavery addresses and letters. *Wm* So sound was he that no trick of oratory, no subtilty of argument, no brutality of attack on Douglas' part could surprise him. *Is the grand of his day in argument & experience*

L He not only saturated himself with his subject, but he was never satisfied that he knew it all - never satisfied that he had presented it in the best way. He used to say that he could never make the same speech twice, that the subject constantly was taking on new meaning - new significance. It was that which gave increasing freshness to his handling of the question. His mind

was never allowed to get stale by incessantly repeating that with which it was thoroughly familiar.

On the contrary, it was kept alive and stimulated by the addition of the new to the ^{old} ~~world~~ - that is,

he had the growing mind. ^{He} ~~The one that~~ recognises

that no matter how much we know on a subject we

never know it all, that we never get more than

half the truth do the best we can. One of the

most conspicuous differences between Lincoln and

Douglas in their debates was right there. Douglas'

~~that~~ ^{though he knew it all and he let} argument, his matter, became stale.

This is made particularly clear by comparing

the way the two men treated fresh objections, facts or arguments. Lincoln tackled them promptly with zest and sincerity - welcomed them. Douglas evaded or ridiculed, ^{with} ~~flew with~~ a violent passion when forced to notice an unexpected point. The one man was working his mind, the other was relying on the work he had done in the past.

This eagerness for new ideas, new light, new material, was a source of enormous strength to Lincoln during the Civil War. ~~He never settled down on a conclusion and said, I have made up my mind and you cannot convince me. He always talked~~ ^{was strong in} ~~He never~~ ^{He never} settled down on a conclusion and said, I have made up my mind and you cannot convince me. He always talked

~~of adopting new views, as soon as they should be~~
~~proved to be true views.~~ He listened to every
man, argued with every man, examined every man's
papers, tested his opinions by every man's. There
was much fretting in Washington because he saw so
many people, but he persisted. In his open office
he got what he called his "public opinion baths",
the refreshment and correction of points of view
which he believed essential to keeping his mind
informed and alive.

But if so ready to listen to the advice and
judgments of others he was the hardest of men to

move, when he had reached a conclusion. His conclusions ~~was~~ the result of so much close and patient study that they were naturally held tenaciously.

Why this fact & him could not
 Indeed Lincoln would always give up any temporary advantage in politics rather than yield an opinion, which he was convinced was correct. The most important thing to his mind was that the country should think right. It was his business before all to help her think right. If he believed a judgment was the true one he must be true to that even if it cost him and his party the particular thing they were working for at the moment. There

Contending seat in Senate
It's argument was (then) is
means one thing in North
men in South - (28)

are two familiar illustrations of this, the first belongs to 1858, when in his debates with Douglas he insisted on asking a certain question which if answered as everybody believed Douglas would answer it, would lose him the election to the Senate of the United States, which he was contesting with Douglas. Lincoln asked the question, and lost the election, but he succeeded in getting the truth he wanted before the people, and it was the recognition of this truth and the fact that he stood for it that won him the nomination to the presidency.

In 1864 he did the same thing in regard to the draft. It was the summer before Presidential election. The war was at a stand still. The country was growing daily more discouraged and consequently more dissatisfied with Lincoln. He saw there must be a new outpouring of men. His friends besought him to wait until after the election, a draft would certainly defeat him. That does not matter, said Lincoln, we must lose nothing even if I am defeated. I am quite willing the people should understand the issue. My re-election will mean that the rebellion is to be