

(Final pages missing.)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AS A MAN OF LETTERS.

We are a people

People generally are so accustomed to thinking of Abraham Lincoln as a statesman that at first thought many of ^{us} ~~them~~ are inclined to challenge his classification among American Men of Letters. *It seems to us* ~~They look~~ *naturally upon* ~~upon the suggestion~~ as an attempt to claim for him a distinction he did not possess and which he does not need to make sure his fame. Yet any study of his power will show that one of its elements was his possession of high literary ability, that much of what he accomplished was due directly to his power of expression. Indeed with every year men are agreeing more and more that Lincoln was one of the few great prose writers whom this country has produced.

It is useless to look to the ancestry and early education of Lincoln for an explanation of his taste for letters. Even if he had sprung from a line of literary folk, the barrenness, even squalor of his early life was such that it would seem to have forbidden the development of any quality he had inherited.

His father was illiterate, unable to sign his name save with difficulty, and never known to read any book but the Bible. The boy never had all told over a year of schooling and even this was under the itinerant system common to pioneer districts where the only qualification required of a teacher was that he be able to teach readin', writin' and 'rithmetic to the rule of three, and where a master who understood a little Latin was looked upon as a wizard. There was but one redeeming feature in his boyhood education, - his mother - a gentle woman,

able to read and write and with a genuine ambition to instruct and inspire her children. She gathered them about her relating to them Bible stories, curious country legends, wild tales of Indians and of pioneer hardships and often when it grew dark in the evenings heaping the chimney place of the log cabin full of spice-wood brush that her boy and his sister might see to read their few books and to con their lessons. In spite of the intellectual barrenness of his early surroundings the boy showed from the first two unfailing characteristics of your born man of letters -- an unquenchable thirst for books and a necessity for expressing himself by the written word. As soon as he had learned to read, books became his constant companions. There were few in either the house of his father or of those of the neighbors. The Bible, Aesop's Fables, Robinson Crusoe, Pilgrim's Progress, a History of the United States, and Weems' Life of Washington comprised the store of reading matter in the community in which he lived, and when young Lincoln had exhausted this he began to borrow from a distance. He once told a friend that there was not a book he had not read within a radius of 50 miles of his boyhood home. The character of the books seemed to make little difference to him. The legends say that he walked as far to get a treatise on law as to get a volume of poetry or biography. Everything excited his eager curiosity, his hungry desire for new thought and expression. He did not simply read the books, he absorbed them - committing long passages to heart - copying long extracts, making them literally his own - something which attended him as he followed the plough, furnished him material in the long discussions he sought with every passing neighbor, and fed a faculty which was stronger than the

poverty enveloping not only his family but the whole ugly hard-pressed country into which he had been born.

When his boyhood was past and he had entered upon that career of Jack-of-all-trades which he was forced to pursue until he was nearly 25 years old, in the intervals of rail-splitting, flat-boating, store keeping, acting as village postmaster and deputy surveyor, he continued to read. It was in this period of life that he made his thorough and critical acquaintance with Shakespeare and Burns. It is rare indeed that a person is found so well versed in Shakespeare as Lincoln was. He could quote pages from many of the plays and had very clear and intelligent opinion of the meaning of difficult passages. He was fond of seeing the plays acted, and while in Washington never missed a Shakespearean play if he could help it. Often he sent for the leading actors after it was over and discussed their arrangement of the play with them, amazing them by his knowledge.

It was while Lincoln was studying Shakespeare that there fell into his hands a set of books which finally led him to read law. The incident illustrates very well the eagerness with which he always seized any book which came in his way and the avidity with which he read it. ~~The story is told by Mr. A. J. Conant, of New York, a gentleman who, forty years ago, was one of the best known portrait painters in this country.~~ Soon after Lincoln's nomination to the Presidency, in 1860, an ardent republican of New Jersey sent Mr. Conant to Springfield to paint the portrait of the party's nominee. Mr. Conant confesses that he had not expected to find much of a subject, for Lincoln was practically unknown in the East, and he was the more surprised to discover that this new man possessed ^{an} ~~an~~ amazing if unconventional intellectual

a well-known portrait painter
quite
day
Sumner

cultivation. According, during the sittings, he took pains to ask Mr. Lincoln many questions about his early life in order to find out, if possible, what his education had been. One day he asked Mr. Lincoln how he became interested in the law. "It was Blackstone's Commentaries that did it," said Mr. Lincoln, and then he related how he first happened on the books. "I was keeping store in New Salem, when one day a man who was migrating ^{to} the West drove up with a wagon which contained his family and household plunder. He asked me if I would buy an old barrel for which he had no room in his wagon, and which he said contained nothing of special value. I did not want it, but to oblige him I bought it, and paid him, I think, half a dollar. Without further examination I put it away in the store and forgot all about it. Sometime after, in overhauling things, I came upon the barrel, and emptied its contents upon the floor. I found at the bottom of the rubbish a complete edition of Blackstone's Commentaries. I began to read those famous works, and I had plenty of time; for during the long summer days, when the farmers were busy with their crops, my customers were few and far between. The more I read" - this he said with unusual emphasis - "the more intensely interested I became. Never in my whole life was my mind so thoroughly absorbed. I read until I devoured them."

Blackstone whetted his appetite for more law. Later become a lawyer, a politician, a man of family, the love of books remained and he often read late into the night after a hard day at the bar trying to make up, he said, for that chance at an education which he did not have as a boy.

The necessity for expressing himself through the written word

was as early with Lincoln as the necessity of knowledge. He began to write almost as soon as to read. Many doggerels have been preserved that he scrawled in his early exercise books,

"Good boys who to their books apply,
Will all be great men by and bye."

and there are many well-authenticated stories of attempts at essays and poetry. Some of these boyish performances even found their way into local papers, and not a few were preserved by his family and have been published by his earliest biographers. Of course they are crude, but they all show a sense of the value of words and an evident ^{pleasure} ~~measure~~ in rhythm. They are never meaningless. They are never flat. They show always that the writer had an idea of his own and that though he might work it out blunderingly, he nevertheless had a real feeling of the possibilities in his medium.

Though all the hard years of his early manhood he stuck to his effort to express himself as he did to books. He must have been nearly twenty years old when he began to feel the need of a knowledge of grammar, to realize that these blocks out of which he had been building sentences intuitively ^{and} imitatively governed only by his pleasure in them and by the unconscious influence of his reading ~~were~~ ^{were} really subject to certain laws. He decided he must know these laws, learn how to put words together scientifically. The familiar story of Lincoln's hunt for a grammar, of his impassioned study of it by night ^{before} after his long days' work, is at once one of the most pathetic and most inspiring in the history of his intellectual life. How well he mastered

the grammar one has only to study his works to see. Outside of an occasional blunder with shall and will, there is but one error in English construction to which Lincoln was addicted throughout his life. He always split his infinitive. Some of the examples of this mistake to be found in his writings are very curious. This in writing his well-known autobiography he speaks of the illiteracy of his father saying that he was never able to do more than "to bunglingly write his own name."

When Lincoln was talked of in Illinois in 1859 as a candidate for the Presidency he wrote one of his friends "it would hurt some for me to not get the Ill. delegation."

In 1860 after writing his note of acceptance to the nomination to the Presidency tendered him by the Chicago Convention he took the manuscript to a Springfield friend, Dr. Bateman then State Superintendent of Education, saying that he was not strong in grammar and that he wished the doctor would look after the construction of the sentences. Now Lincoln had written in regard to the platform adopted by the Convention this sentence: "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.

It was ~~then~~ ^{thus} from a soil barren of all intellectual life, in an

atmosphere devoid of all literary stimulus that Lincoln developed, practically unaided, his rare ability to think and to express himself. By the time he was twenty-three years of age, he felt himself sufficiently master of his medium to put out his first public document, an address to the people of Sangamon County, Ill., offering himself as a candidate for the office of representative to the General Assembly of the State. This document is remarkable for its directness. He plunges at once into the subjects which he supposes most interesting to his constituents and states his views in English which bears all the characteristics of his style twenty-five years later.

From 1832 on throughout the rest of his life we have a steady series of addresses called out by the events in which he was most deeply interested. In addition to elaborate arguments such as these are, Lincoln's writings contain several remarkable short addresses for occasions; pre-eminent among these is the Gettysburg speech.

He also wrote in the course of his life several lectures on subjects quite out of politics. A very good temperance lecture is in this list, as well as an address on Inventions. But while the bulk of Lincoln's works is in the form of addresses, he by no means confined himself to this species of composition. At various times in his life he tried his hand at essays which have been lost, he even wrote occasional verse, a little of which has been preserved and from the testimony of his associates we know that ideas for stories sometimes flitted through his head.

In Lincoln's literary output nothing is better than his letters. For instance, his letters to his constituents through which for many years he did most of his electioneering form a series of

political documents as distinguished for their quaint phraseology and humor as for their frankness and shrewdness, and these letters in which he gave counsel to friends, must eventually become classics.

Putting all his writings together - addresses, lectures, public and private letters and fugitive expression, the bulk of work which resulted in the course of his life is considerable. His "complete works" edited by Nicolay and Hay, containing fully 750,000 words of matter packed into two fat volumes, - enough matter to make nine volumes in the series of American Statesmen, familiar, no doubt, to you all. I submit that this is in quantity alone a very creditable output.

Unquestionably the most important of Lincoln's literary works is the series of speeches made between 1854-1865, in which he developed his argument ^{first} against the extension of slavery, ^{and second for its abolition}. The most familiar of these are the powerful replies to Douglas in 1858, but they are by no means all which are worth attention. The speech made in 1856 when he publicly severed his connection with the old Whig party and joined the newly formed Republican organization is one of the most vigorous and eloquent he ever delivered. It is doubtful if any speech of his whole career produced such an extraordinary effect. So moved were his audience that the very reporters forgot to take notes and it was supposed until recently that no notes of it had been preserved. It thus became known all over Illinois as Lincoln's "Lost Speech". It is only within a few years that a report of this speech has been found.

It is doubtful if anyone who did not live through the exciting decade before the war, or who has not made some special study of Lincoln's life, realizes the effect of these speeches. They really introduced him to the nation. Before that he had been an unknown man.

Even when he began the debates with Douglas 1858 he was so little known and appreciated that his friends in Illinois were afraid of a fiasco. They could not believe that this great, gaunt, friendly man, with his simple ways and his modest air, could match the most brilliant and popular orator of the day. But as the debate went on, it became clear to them that Lincoln was the stronger. They began to ask each other if it was possible that Lincoln, whom they had known all their lives, with whom they rode the circuit, told stories and played practical jokes, could be a great man. Then they began to receive letters from the East, "who is this Lincoln?" "Do you realize," wrote one great man of the day to the chairman of the republican committee, "that no greater speeches on public questions have been made in the history of our country, that his knowledge of the question is profound, his logic unanswerable, his style inimitable?" Before the campaign was over, his friends all made up their minds that Lincoln was in fact a great man.

There was so strong an interest in him in the East, awakened by the debates with Douglas, that he was invited to speak at Cooper Union, the greatest compliment that could be paid to a public speaker in that day.

Mr. Lincoln's audience was a notable one even for New York. It included William Cullen Bryant, who introduced him, Horace Greeley, David Dudley Field and many more well known men of the day. It is doubtful if even Lincoln's best friends did not fear that his queer manner and quaint diction would amuse ^{entertain} people so much that they would fail to catch the weight of his logic. But to their surprise there

was universal enthusiasm over the intellectual and literary quality of the address. Where has this man learned his logic and his English, his cultivated audience asked.

The question was a proper one for these anti-slavery speeches of Lincoln were one of the greatest intellectual feats as well as one of the most distinguished literary performances any American has achieved. To begin with, the man was saturated with his subject: The very essential of any great literary performance. He had studied it, handled it, lived with it until when he came to present it he constructed an argument which was practically flawless. He was like a master builder putting up the frame work 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 frame work. Now the flawless argument is the very life of a piece of literature for it is that which makes the appeal to the intellect. Let the argument be incomplete, shifty, interlaid with shams or tricks, and the intellect will not give its complete assent. The thing is not "convincing" we say to-day. Now Lincoln was always convincing in his anti-slavery addresses and letters. So sound was he that no trick of oratory, no subtlety of argument, no brutality of attack on Douglas' part could surprise him, in the debates and the later work grew constantly in logic.

Had not Lincoln worked as steadily and as hard on his expression as he did on his argument, the effect of his anti-slavery speeches and letters would have been less immediate and less general. But he had constant thought of his form. He wanted to be "clear", he said. Unless he could be easily understood he knew he could not easily persuade and it

was for this he struggled throughout his public life with the result that a style more lucid than that which he had achieved before his death is scarcely conceivable. I doubt if it was not the supreme elegance of clear and simple forms of expression which caused Lincoln to cultivate this style though unquestionably he had an instinctive feeling for the simple expression. He was rather driven to it by what was in him an intellectual necessity. He had a mind which was never quiet until it had solved ^{and formulated in words} to its own satisfaction the questions with which it struggled. Even in his boyhood days his companions noticed that he constantly was searching for the reason of things and that he "explained so clearly". 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, although I tried to, 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 anyboy 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 is exactly what he did in his public speeches and letters. When he had found what seemed to him the truth of a subject, he tried to put it in a form so simple that nobody could mistake his meaning. He stated his case with mathematical exactness, in the fewest words possible and always with the simplest words. The result was that his style was crystalline in its purity and that his putting of what he considered the vital points in any great question are really axioms. In the debates with Douglas, for example, his vital arguments were condensed into a few phrases which appear again and again. The most notable example is probably the famous paragraph of his first speech in the campaign where he stated the position on which he intended to stand in the contest.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved -- I do not expect the house to fall -- but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other."

Another great and memorable example of this axiomatic clearness of statement is in the letter which he wrote in August 1862 to Horace Greeley, in which he states his policy in regard to slavery:-

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be "the Union as it was." If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could have it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.

What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause.

These sentences are like a series of short, determined, ringing strokes of a hammer. They have distinction, the kind of distinction which comes from precision and simplicity. They show a complete mastery of the balanced sentence, - an accurate feeling for the kind of phase needed to carry home the truth he had in mind. Still more they have that superior literary quality - they reveal the personality of the writer. You know this man has thought out his problem, is unafraid, will neither shift nor temporize, is ready to abide by his own conviction.

But while the appeal to the intellect is so strong in Lincoln's literary work, the appeal to the emotions is ^{even greater} ~~hardly less~~. He could move the ^{human} heart to its depths. His own was so stirred and again and again in his public career he poured forth his emotions in words so elevated, in imagery so lofty, that the effect can only be compared to that of some noble sacred poem. Take for instance the closing paragraphs of the second inaugural, I doubt if a more moving bit of English prose exists. "Fondly do we hope - fervently do we pray - that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yes, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firm-

ness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan - to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

The poetic feeling and the elevated imagery of these paragraphs characterize also Lincoln's Gettysburg speech. In this speech which is universally acknowledged to be one of the most perfect bits of English prose ever written, we have Lincoln's clearness of expression, also admirably illustrated while the sympathetic charm which pervades it thrills the heart to-day as deeply as it did forty years ago when, in the presence of a throng of mourning men and women and facing the numberless graves of those sombre hills and vales, he first pronounced it.

It illustrates, indeed, so well his best style that I venture to read it entire:-

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation,

under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

In this Gettysburg speech we can study to advantage Lincoln's methods of composition, as well as the characteristics of his style. One of his friends who was much with him in the days before he delivered the speech, once told me how it was prepared. This friend had an office in the War Department and here Lincoln would go often, hiding himself from visitors, as it seemed impossible for him to do in the White House. Lying on the lounge in the office, oblivious of his friend he would mutter over the speech to himself, transposing phrases, changing words, dropping out sentences. If he hit on a phrase which pleased him particularly, he would call to his friend to listen while he repeated it. During all this time he never put a word to paper. The work was confined entirely to his brain and lips. There has long been a story current that Lincoln made no preparation for the Memorial at Gettysburg, writing out his speech in the train as he journeyed to the place. It is possible that he did first put it on paper at that time, but the speech itself had been pounded out in his brain days before. This peculiar method of composition Lincoln used in his earlier years. Different friends who were with him on the circuit in the 50's, when in the intervals of practicing law he composed his great political speeches say, that they were often familiar with much of the argument as well as many of the strong and eloquent passages, for they had heard him go over these again and again aloud, trying to get them into a satisfactory form.

There is one clause in the Gettysburg speech the origin of

which has been much debated and which is worth considering because it illustrates a habit of phrase-making which is frequent in Lincoln. The clause in question is the famous closing reference to "a government of the people by the people, for the people." In the writings of both Theodore Parker and Daniel Webster as well as in earlier sources almost an identical expression is to be found. Where did Lincoln get the words? Were they original with him? or had he read them in Parker or Webster or some old school reader, and remembering them used them? From his law partner Herndon we know that Lincoln marked some years before his election to the Presidency in a volume of Theodore Parker, a sentence reading "Democracy is direct self-government over all the people, for all the people, by all the people." It is probable that he was familiar with Webster's speech in which the similar phrase occurs. He may have seen the idea elsewhere, and the words clung unconsciously to him. However that may be, in the years since he had read the phrase, the truth had become a vital one to him. He had learned what the people were, had become profoundly convinced by the close contact he had kept with them that they were fit for self-government. To get beneath the bursts of enthusiasm and of passion, the professional outcries and the artificial alarms of factions and of the press to the slowly formed but pre-eminently wise and true sentiments of the people of the country had been Abraham Lincoln's profoundest study for years before he uttered this phrase at Gettysburg. It was certainly his at this time, if a phrase ever really belonged to any man. That the arrangement of it he caught from Webster or Parker, is possible, though I have no doubt he used it unconsciously.

A close examination of his letters and speeches show that fre-

quently his sentences were turned after something he had read. The Bible and Shakespeare seem to be the two sources which influenced him oftenest. Sentence after sentence can be found in his speeches which without being quotations are unmistakably modeled after Biblical or Shakesperian expressions. It was simply a quick power of adaptation - an indifference to source, perhaps an unconsciousness of it, providing he found the words which would do the work he had in mind.

The points on which I have so briefly and so inadequately touched that is Lincoln's skill in constructing his argument - his lucidity of phrase, and his power to convey his own emotions, are, of course, the fundamental qualities of all literary performance. But Lincoln's English has something in it beside these serious fundamentals. It has a delightful original flavor, distinctive and natural, untainted by conventional culture which having once caught you always recognize. An element of this charm is unquestionably the captivating awkwardness, the homely dignity, which characterizes almost always the product of the self-trained man of genius.

In no particular is this originality more conspicuous than in the quaint figures of speech with which he illustrates his meaning. It

was the fashion of his time to seek metaphors and other embellishments in the classics. "He never went among the ancients for figures" he used to say. Instead he drew them from his own experience. That experience had been humble enough but it yielded in his hands a fruitful crop of powerful illustrations. Some of the most typical of these occur in his dispatches to officers during the war. Such was his dispatch to Hooker in June of 1863; fearing that Hooker might cross to the South of the Rappahannock and give Lee a chance to get behind the Federals, he wrote: "I would not take any risk of being entangled upon the river, like an ox jumped half over a fence and liable to be torn by dogs front and rear without a fair chance to gore one way or kick the other." Equally pertinent was his message sent a few days later to the same general: - "If the head of Lee's army is at Martinsburg and the tail of it on the plank road between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, the animal must be very slim somewhere. Could you not break him?" - and nothing could have been better than his advice to Grant in '64, - "Hold on with a bulldog grip and chew and choke as much as possible."

Lincoln's private letters, particularly, are all marked by his distinctive personal ^{touch} style. There have been published a series of letters to a step-brother who must have been a shiftless fellow, which are as good examples of well-put commonsense as anything Poor Richard himself ever gave us. His letter to General Hooker in January '63, when the command of the Army of the Potomac was given into his charge is a perfect example of the point on which I am insisting.

Burnside had proved a failure at the head of the army, Hooker among others had criticised Burnside severely and he had also criticised Mr. Lincoln. Nevertheless, he seemed to Lincoln the best man available and he appointed him, sending with this appointment the following letter:

Dear General:

I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have done this upon what appear to me to be sufficient reasons, and yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which I am not quite satisfied with you. I believe you to be a brave and skillful soldier, which, of course, I like. I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession, in which you are right. You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable if not an indispensable quality. You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm; but I think that during General Burnside's command of the army, you have taken counsel of your ambition and thwarted him as much as you could, in which you did a great wrong to the country and to a most meritorious and honorable brother officer. I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the army and the government needed a dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship. The government will support you to the utmost of its ability, which is neither more nor less than it has done and will do for all commanders. I much fear that the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the army, of criticising their commander and withholding confidence from him, will now turn upon you. I shall assist you as far as I can to put it down. Neither you nor Napoleon, if he were alive again, could get any good out of an army while such a spirit prevails in it; and now beware of rashness. Beware of rashness, but with energy and ceaseless vigilance go forward and give us victories.

Yours very truly,

A. LINCOLN.

Hooker was greatly moved by this letter. Noah Brookes tells of his reading it to him once with choking voice and of his saying as he folded it up carefully, "That is such a letter as a father might have written to a son." And it is just that, - Lincoln not only felt, but

Consider the wisdom, the good-humored irony, fatherly kindness, patience and seriousness which in turn show in that brief letter. A man must know his medium well indeed to be able so to interpret to others his own feeling and point of view. Not only that but to be able at the same time to convey such a sense of his own personality. Indeed the great interest in Lincoln's distinctive style is that it gives you so much of the Man Lincoln. It sounds like him we say, and it does. And herein of course lies a high and rare literary quality -- the ability to make words express the personality of the writer, to catch that peculiar thing which makes you, and which stamps you as forever different from all the men of the earth. Whatever the medium in which one works -- be it with words, with pencils, with brushes, with men, his highest success comes in stamping what he does as his own -- an original thing -- possible only to him -- colored with his blood, warmed by his passion, inspired by his impulse.

It is not difficult to see now as we study Lincoln's life that his mastery of expression was of incalculable value in dealing with the terrible problems of a civil war President. For instance his aptness in illustrating his meaning by stories and figures solved many a problem for the country. At first men complained at what they called this triviality, this buffoonery. What right had the President of the United States to tell stories and laugh when the country was at war? Yet gradually the discerning began to see that every one of his stories settled a question. Frequently, when the Cabinet was perplexed and fearful, it was one of Lincoln's stories which broke its tense irritable mood, clearing up doubt and torment as a shower clears the hot overburdened air. Again and again, commissions of good but narrow men came to him to present a theory which if adopted they were sure would alone end the war, free the slave, satisfy the South and restore happiness. The president simply told them a story and they filed out without a word, the theory shattered in their hands. These stories were not classic. They were not drawn from literature or history, frequently they were coarse in grain. They came straight from raw human life as Lincoln had observed it, were full of a humor not unlike that of Rabelais and of homely pioneer picturesqueness, but they were profound in their philosophy and truthfulness, and no argument he or any other could have advanced would have had their convincing force.

The source of his inexhaustible supply of stories was always a mystery to his associates. Did he invent them? If not, where did he get them? The greater majority no doubt dated back to his early life in Illinois when as a postmaster and a surveyor and later as an itinerant

lawyer and a member of the Illinois State Assembly he met constantly large numbers of quaint and original people and when he was thrown much with a class of men who for lack of other amusements entertained one another with stories. A new story in a community like that in which Lincoln spent his earlier manhood has an importance not unlike that of a new play or a new book in a town of to-day. Everybody wants to hear it, and hearing it everybody discusses it, and passes judgment on it. In Springfield where Lincoln lived at this period nobody was more eager than he to hear each man's new stories. Let one of his friends go away for a trip and his first greeting on the man's return would be "any new stories?" and if the answer was affirmative everything must wait, until he heard them. If they pleased him forthwith they were added to his repertoire. He rarely told a story, however, simply for the sake of telling it. To him it was an argument or explanation, sometimes even an exhortation. And because he told it simply to illustrate, he rarely told it twice alike. In order to make it serve his purpose he was obliged to work it over, dressing it in new colors and giving the characters new surroundings, so as to make them more suitable to his immediate object. It thus happens that there can hardly be said to be an original version of a "Lincoln story". For example, the story of Sykes' dog is well-known to most of us. Sykes, you remember, owned an ill-favored cur to which he was devoted but which because of its ugly looks and its propensity for worrying inoffensive pedestrains was heartily despised by his friends. One day a few desperate individuals induced Sykes' dog to swallow a piece of meat in which a charge of gunpowder with fuse at-

tached was concealed. The meat was no sooner down than the fuse was lighted and the dog was scattered over the road. When Sykes came up and saw the situation he made a feeble effort to collect the pieces, but soon gave it up remarking sorrowfully that he guessed that dog's days of usefulness were ended. After the capture of Vicksburg a delegation waited on Mr. Lincoln complaining because Grant had paroled Pemberton's army. Pemberton, they said, would soon have the men together again. Mr. Lincoln did not attempt to argue with them. He simply told them the story of Sykes' dog remarking as he ended that he guessed Pemberton's army was about in the same condition as the dog. He told the same story on other occasions when delegations came to him to criticise the paroling of Confederate troops. Each time, if we believe his auditors the story had its peculiar color. Thus there were really several authentic versions of the one story.

A striking literary quality in his stories was the realistic setting. He seemed to see all the details of each character in his story, and the group as a whole stood before him like a picture. In telling the story I have alluded to the dog was always described graphically - its yellow bristling hair, its impertinent tail, its vicious little eyes, its aggravating bark. Sykes came in for his share of coloring, so did the group which administered the destructive meat. Of the final scene he made much leaving his auditors with the whole ludicrous situation as vividly in mind as if he had charcoaled it before their eyes.

This ability to appreciate literary values that is the humor, pathos, poetry, and strength in persons and situations was of great use

to Lincoln in handling people. It awakened an interest in them very like that with which a novelist has in his surroundings. Nothing was commonplace to him -- not touch of folly, of sentiment, of tenderness, of grotesqueness escaped him. In the days when he traveled the circuit, the country road which to his fellow lawyers was a dreary lifeless length, was to him a shifting panorama of amusement and suggestions. "He saw the ludicrous in a flock of hens" writes one who made many excursions with him, "in a man spading his garden, in a clothes line full of clothes, in a group of boys, in a lot of pigs rooting at a mill door, in a mother duck teaching her brood to swim, in everything and everywhere." We know from many sources that it was not the ludicrous alone which he saw. The pain and trial of the men and women he passed he read like an open book. All over the old 8th Circuit of Illinois where he practiced are scattered today touching reminiscences of his unobtrusive deeds of kindness -- deeds of which he alone could have been the author, because he alone saw the need of them.

After he became President of the United States, he still watched men with the same objective human interest. He liked to note their peculiarities, to study their emotions, to follow the workings of their minds. They absorbed him as the characters of a great novel do you and me. This peculiar attitude made him meet everybody half way with a sympathetic understanding. Not irrelevancy or weakness, not even cowardliness alienated him, for it was all human and so dear to him. He grasped all the elements in the situation of the man who had deserted his post, saw the man's story as clearly as if it had been written by a skilled pen and understanding he could not but forgive. It is only when we remember the endless procession of men and women who

passed in and out the White House daily during the four years that he occupied it that we can understand what it was to have there a man who was limited to sympathizing with only those persons who were like himself in their opinions, in their habits and in their morals.

No quality of Lincoln's style, however, compared in its value to the public cause, during the civil war to his lucidity of expression. Clearness is always tonic in its effect. A man who in a crisis has a definite policy, stated in clean English never fails of a following. Such a letter as that which Lincoln wrote to Greeley in 1862 and from which I have already quoted won the public by the very vigor of its sentences. The reader felt that here was nothing uncertain, evasive, or declamatory. That the man who wrote believed what he expressed and was ready to execute it. When this letter was published the people of the United States had been sorely afflicted for nearly two years, not only afflicted but puzzled. In the fury of war it seemed as if no man had a clear policy. Here, however, was something unmistakable. Both its courage and its commonsense appealed to them. When a few weeks later Lincoln followed the letter by the Emancipation Proclamation, they showed their faith by supporting him.

This power Lincoln had of putting things so that everybody understood him endeared him peculiarly to the people. The masses, particularly the American masses, want to think right, but it takes them a long time to make up their minds what is the truth. Let some one state the idea which is dimly working in their heads and they recognize it at once. Here is the origin of the maxims which a people have always on their tongues. Somebody has put into words which are unmistakable a conviction which has been working in a people's heart. Lincoln

did this for the people in the civil war. How often did he help them to a just estimate of a man! Nothing outside of his own deeds did so much to fix Grant's worth in the public mind as two quiet remarks of Lincoln. The first was after Shiloh, complaints of the general had been brought to the President. He listened to them silently and then turning, said "I can't spare this man, he fights."

After Vicksburg, other malcontents came. Grant drinks, they said. A man who uses liquor has no right to command armies. "I wish" said Lincoln musingly, "that I could send some of our other generals a barrel of the kind of whiskey which Grant drinks."

In the same way that he characterized men, he summed up situations. Indeed, it was his lucid putting of the anti-slavery question in 1858 that first made him a National figure. "A house divided against itself cannot stand," he told the people. "The government cannot exist permanently half slave and half free." Seward meant the same thing when he talked of an "irrepressible conflict" but the words were too big for the people. They understood Lincoln better. They saw a great question faced them and the plain farmers of the Northwest began to say to one another "We've either got to keep slavery back or its going to spread all over the country. That's the real question that's behind all this. Lincoln's right" and in 1860 they voted accordingly. And thus it was in all that tumultuous period from 1858 to 1865, whenever the people groped for a characterization of a man, for a statement of a situation, he who had their commonsense and honesty, combined with powers which were not theirs, expressed what they felt. They loved him for it. He understands things, they said. He