

February 13, 1933

My dear Mr. Dickson

I hope you will pardon my delay in replying to your letter of January 4th, asking me to send a letter to be read at the Annual dinner of the Lincoln Club of Los Angeles.

I appreciated the invitation and should have replied long before this, but have had demands on my time and strength that have made it impossible for me to take proper care of my correspondence.

I take it you want a word as to what about Lincoln is uppermost in my mind at the present moment. It is how best to answer a question put to me occasionally in the past frequently in the last year. Here is the question:-

What would Lincoln have done about prohibition - or the foreign debts - or Japan - or inflation - deflation - about any one of the multitude of problems now perplexing us?

Have I a right to attempt to say? My general answer has always been "I do not know". Moreover, I think it futile for us to go seeking men of the past specific answers to problems the outcome of events of our day, but not of theirs.

But does it follow then that Lincoln can give us no help in our perplexities? I think not. Is not what we can properly and should be asking ourselves today - What approach would Lincoln have made to our questions - what would have been his attitude of mind and of spirit. That seems to me important. The value of a man's contribution to a solution of a problem depends generally speaking from the way he handles his mind and his temper in his attack. Lincoln's power lay there. He had little or none of that common form of vanity which makes a man offer an opinion, give a decision without full knowledge of facts and without giving himself a chance even to digest the facts he has.

Lincoln took his time when faced with a problem. While others talked he listened - weighed. He came slowly to his solutions and arrived he defended them sturdily, though never so obstinately he was not ready to consider new facts. He laid down his rule as early as 1862 when Horace Greeley was accusing him of not knowing his own mind. "I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors and I shall adopt new views as fast as they shall appear to be true views," he wrote laconically.

The temper in which he worked accounts for much of his power over men. He was steady in storms, not easily upset by opposition, criticism, disaster. When his mind was clear as to the crux of a matter he was unwavering. There was something curiously impersonal in his handling of public matters. He thought not of himself, but of the aim. No man was ever freer of malice towards opponents. "The things I handle are too big for malice," he said.

These are good things to think about, or to reflect upon. Most of us need it. Certainly they are much more important than attempts to read from his written words what he would have done about this or that. Indeed the only way that we can come anywhere near to what he would have done in this or that of our problems is to approach those problems in the mind and spirit which we can be sure would have been his.

Of course you know, my dear Mr. Dixon, that if the above does not seem to you suitable for your purpose or if the letter reaches you too late to be conveniently fitted into a program you have only to throw it in the waste paper basket.

Very sincerely

Mr. Edward A. Dickson
Lincoln Club
402 Subway Terminal Bldg.
Los Angeles, Calif.