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

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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

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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 face 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 as our learnings are Greek or Teutonic.

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Then, too, when any one who achieves more than the rest of us we save our force - 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 gossip. Indeed the parentage of Lincoln is far more fully bulwarked by documents than is customary in pioneer districts. Others overlooking his years of labor

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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 (I) 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, kindliness, and a touch of mysticism. The difference between him and most men were less in the quality of endowment than the 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 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

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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 duly dully? to accept the facts of its immediate environment ~~environment~~ 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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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,

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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 ~~much~~ Some 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 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

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Thos à Kempis – "Imit of Christ" – more poetic & truly read than any book
next to the Bible, full of wisdom & deep knowledge of the
heart of man, simple as his life in spring – this writer
which learned he found all the elements to

kept alive his spiritual nature –

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

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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. 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

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Lincoln had the same necessity to 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.

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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~~ pressed was incomplete. 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, ~~throughout his~~ to action.

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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. 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

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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

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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.

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One invaluable result to Lincoln of this 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

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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 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.

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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 always split his infinitives. This is in which he does much + noble company

Dr. Bateman of Illinois, the State Superintendent 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

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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 these 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.

A little later he repeated his feat in grammar by learning surveying, practically unaided,

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at 40 learned Lincoln

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

Point fact in Ref

When Lincoln came to the first test of his powers, the study of the slavery question, his mind was 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 extension of slavery, must be counted, I think, as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, intellectual feat any American has achieved. The process by which he worked out his argument is worth the most careful study of every one who aims to develop his intellect to its full capacity, to train himself to exact

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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

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his anti-slavery addresses and letters. So sound was he that no trick of oratory, no subtility of argument, no brutality of attack on Doublas' part could surprise him.

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

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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 world - that is, he had the growing mind. 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' argument, his matter, became stale.

This is made particularly clear by comparing

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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, flew into 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

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~~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

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

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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 loose 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.

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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

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crushed by force of arms, and he called for volunteers at the moment of greatest despair.

Now this is nothing else than the highest sort of intellectual integrity. It is what Kipling means when he talks of "doing the thing as we see it for the God of things as they are." It is what Lincoln meant when he talked of "firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right." It is the most essential point in the development of the mind - this recognition of the necessity of being faithful to your conclusions. The mind is a proud and sensitive organ. Treat the results of

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its operations lightly - evade them, temporise with them, juggle with them - and it takes its revenge. It leads you where your will backs you up in false views - tricks and deceives you. It is just as essential that one play fair with his mind as that he feed and exercise if he wants honest work from it.

~~One of the greatest services Abraham Lincoln has done this country was to demonstrate not only what could be made out of a mind by passionate, persistent effort, but what moral height the mind would rise to if dealt with in perfect candor.~~

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He was as careful always to guage a man's limitations as he was his capacity. He saw that it was his duty both to a man and to the country to know what could not be expected of them as well as what could. It was one of his greatest elements of strength in the war. He generally saw nearly what he was going to get, and realized what he would get, but must supply from other sources. If he knew a man was capable of rendering a needed service he would never throw him over because of something he knew he could not expect of him, or because of habits or actions which might be offen-

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sive to him in themselves. It was the secret of his patience with general after general, official after official.

Many are the stories which illustrate this. There is one of a certain important and very able and useful person who made a great deal of fuss and noise about whatever he had to do. His associates complained to the president. It was intolerable to be troubled by the man's lamentations. "He reminds me of something I saw the other day at the launching of a ship. Everything was ready. The master of the yard had sent a young lad under

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the hull to knock out the trigger which was to release her, when I heard the most heart-breaking cries coming up from him. The officer did not notice them, and finally I said something must have hurt that boy? Why don't you send someone to his assistance? The master smiled. No, he said, he's all right. That's just his way. The moment he gets under the hull he begins squealing, but he always hits the trigger square and true, and in a moment he did it, and the boat glided into the water and the boy came out smiling. Now, that's the way with General A. When he undertakes a piece of

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work he begins to howl. It's just his way. He only wants you to understand how hard his task is and that he is on hand performing. And that's the really important thing. Don't mind him."

There are many examples of this same humorous upholding of a valuable officer or official, who had disturbed somebody's nerves or prejudices. Probably the most valuable to the country was Lincoln's famous reply to the scandalized citizen who came to ask that Grant be relieved because he drank. "What kind of whiskey does he drink?" asked Lincoln. "I should like to send some of our generals a bar-

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rel of the kind Grant drinks."

Not even personal insult would swerve him from appointing or supporting a man whom he believed useful to the administration. In the case of Edward Stanton Lincoln had suffered a kind of insult very hard for a man of superior mind and character to overlook. An intentional rebuff, one founded solely on the fact that the outward appearance is not what the person is accustomed to or believes essential. Lincoln was always a badly dressed man. His clothes loose and ill-fitting, and not often renewed. His first meeting with

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Stanton was in Cincinnati, where both men had been engaged as counsel in a famous suit. One of the lawyers in this case once told me, with bitter self-reproach, of his and Mr. Stanton's attitude toward Mr. Lincoln.

"We knew nothing of him except that our client believed in him and wished him employed, and when he joined us in the hotel corridor, with his queer clothes and his big cotton umbrella grasped in the middle, we deliberately turned our backs on him. We snubbed him throughout the trial, because of his appearance. I feel that I deserve

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the humiliation I feel in telling this."

Mr. Stanton was bitter in his contempt for Lincoln later, but Lincoln learned at Cincinnati when he heard Stanton arguing the case that here was a great lawyer. He came to believe later that he was a great patriot and he brought him into his Cabinet for the sake of the Country. And Stanton had not been long in the position before he learned as did Seward and Chase and many another, that this man of awkward manners and queer clothes was their master - absolutely and finally that he extracted from them their best, prevented their mistakes and

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directed their policy. One by one they all came, Seward and Stanton among the first to say openly and honestly - He is the best man of us. It is not to be supposed that Lincoln was insensible to insults like that of Stanton at Cincinnati, to supercilium such as Seward showed at the opening of the administration. There is endurance enough that he was entirely conscious of, the limitations of his education, entirely conscious of the differences in general culture and address, between him and many of his Washington associates. But nobody had a juster sense of the relative importance of

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sorry to say that - the querulous is present - so readily all would - to the unjust suffrage were pay taxes or bear arms (as no women exclu-

leaders, preachers, teachers, everybody who has any cause tries to strengthen it through him. It is a conscious tribute to the faith that the people have in him. But many of those who quote him fail to get from him the real help he has to give. It is not his particular opinion, not his wit and wisdom, not his wonderful and moving letters and speeches which are his great contribution. The temper with which he approached his problems, the methods by which he handled them, there lies the deep and real lesson Abraham Lincoln has for every man or woman who would fit himself for service. His life is a

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