Ida M. Tarbell
120 East 19th St.
New York City

THE DURABLE QUESTION

With the passing of the years the observance of Lincoln's Birthday becomes more and more general and what is worth notice less, rather than more, set - formal.

We get more out of it now - not more of eloquent eulogy or more exhaustive interpretation, but a deeper realization of how much the man has to teach us about handling ourselves in difficult times and particularly about the handling of questions involving human rights, human injustice, such as the slavery question with which he had to deal. Such questions are the foundation of what we call politics and we are apt to complicate and muddle them because we forget that being a question of human relations they must be dealt with according to the laws of human nature. Lincoln never did. He constantly brings us back to the man in the case.

There is no better way to celebrate Lincoln's Birthday than to read his Letters and Speeches. You are sure

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to be rewarded by coming upon phrases as pertinent today as when they were written. There is his characterization of slavery as a durable question - something having its roots in the past, tied up with century-old traditions and practices, only to be loosened by generations of effort.

Problems like slavery yield, he taught, only to patience, to education, to the constant pressure of good will, tolerance, to appeals to that better nature of man in which he so profoundly believed. Those in Lincoln's judgment, were the only sure weapons for those who would correct human wrongs.

When the amendment making slavery forever unconstitutional in the United States had been passed, he made no hasty generalizations as to the question being forever and finally settled. He knew better - knew that questions of human relations are never solved as long as intolerance, revenge and the ugly exultation over being stronger than somebody, or victorious over somebody persists. And persist they would, he saw clearly enough after the war was ended and the slave free.

That is, he was not in the last fooled about the human beings he worked with, particularly those that made up the Congress of the United States, and who in his day,

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as in ours, went out of their way to keep alive hateful human emotions if they thought they might help swing the vote to their liking. He was not fooled by them nor was he afraid nor did he hesitate. He realized that more and more "durable" struggle awaited him. "We must begin with and mould from disorganized and discordant elements," he told the Washington crowd as it swayed about him for the last time, seeking his mind on the terrific problems of reconstruction staring the country in the face.

That is, here was no man deluding himself that he could by some sure working formula settle things for good, but one wise enough to know that there are no quick cures in human affairs, that all problems of human relations are durable. His phrase is as good today for the problems centering in the New Deal as it was when he coined it in 1858.

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