Ida M. Tarbell
East 19 Street

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Abraham Lincoln - Gentleman

How do you know a gentleman? Where do you look for the evidences? There are those that look to pedigree and are willing to put the stamp on a snob or a blackguard if they find his ancestry sufficiencyly distinguished. Others look to linen, boots, the cut of the coat. And there are those who are satisfied with a bank account as a measuring yard. But those who fall back on these exterior marks are comparatively few, and they run to cover if confronted by proof that their man lacks both courage and courtesy, those qualities that long ago the wise set down as the infallible marks of a gentleman. This means that the world is quite universally agreed that you must look to the inside, not the outside for gentlemanhood, to a man's character and not to his genealogy, his clothes, his wealth.

Abraham Lincoln, we all know could not pass muster as a gentleman before a board of judges that looked to the outside of a man. His pedigree at best was that of a yoeman, his clothes, whatever their quality, hung on him. He appeared in the White House in yarn socks, and in early days more than one "great man" turned his back on him because his umbrella was of green cotton and when he stalked down the street he carried it unrolled, by the middle.

But look at the inner man. And what should we look for there? A gentleman, I take it, must have courage to respect himself - respect himself too much to cringe or to fawn. He must respect himself too much to use his power to make others cringe and fawn. Measure Abraham Lincoln by his self-respect, and few men outstrip him. He was humble before the great - but it was with the humility of the learner. When he was not much more than a jack-of-all trades in Illinois, the well born Kentuckians and Virginians who led in the new country admitted him to their inner circle, said to one another, Here is an unusual mind, a rare soul.

When he came to the White House the great men that he had called around him - Chase, Seward, Stanton, looked superciliously upon him - he was of pioneer blood and experience, he had not been to college, he did not know how to wear his clothes, he had none of the conventional graces, manners, small talk. They thought to dominate him. But they did not know that this man was, according to somebody's fine phrase, "lord of himself." They had no power to budge him. Before they realized what was happening they found him dominating them, getting the best out of them, preventing their mistakes, or patching them up, once made. One by one they came - Seward and Stanton among the first - to say openly, "he is the best of us."

Do not imagine that he was unconscious of the covert sense of superiority in his associates. He was too observing, too understanding, too given to studying himself and comparing

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himself with others not to see the difference between his clothes and theirs, his awkward hands and body and their suave exterior, his ignorance of the world and their easy familiarity. He knew the power of these superficial differences, but he held so high the interior man tha t he would not allow himself to be set aside, rebuffed, weakened by his exterior inferiority. He planted himself firmly on the proposition that character, intellect, integrity, ability are first considerations. When you have them, why, manner, clothes, all the rest can be sacrificed. The polish of diplomats, scholars, officers of army or navy never weakened his grip when he came into contact or controversy with them. He took men for what they really were - quietly compelled them to take him in the same way.

But there are other tests for your gentleman. What does he do when men revile him, unjustly accuse, intrigue? Fly in a passion - return epithet for epithet - meet intrigue with intrigue? Not your gentleman. His courtesy, which is in essence a sense of justice, truth, decency, carries him over and above the injustice, falsity, indecency that may be heaped upon him. Possibly no man was ever blackguarded as Lincoln in the White House - blackguarded at home and abroad. And how did he return it? One of the best observers of that day, a distinguished English journalist, E. L. Godkin, who watched him in the troubled times of the Civil War, credits him with what he calls the

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"most necessary and aristocratic virtues, those of patience and self-control." His continued patience and self-control through attacks of Congress, of cabinet, of political enemies, of domestic and foreign enemies, aroused Mr. Godkin's wonder and admiration. "I never heard of his uttering or writing one word", he said once, "to show that these shameless attacks ever roused in him a single angry impulse. How many men of high breeding and culture", he goes on, "could pass through a similar ordeal with as much credit?" Look over the great men of your acquaintance and ask how many of them, whatever their pedigree or clothes, can stand up to this test of a gentleman.

It was amazing how little malice he had. He was so big hearted and big minded that he realized that malice had nothing to do with the affairs he handled. That is being a real gentleman. He could be considerate of his worst enemy - the enemy that was at his hand, pretending to work with him and yet intriguing against him. Lincoln was so shrewd that intriguers never long deceived him and yet so much of a gentleman that he treated them with invariable courtesy, respected them for the merits that they had, would not allow others who resented their intrigues, their discourtesies to him, to belittle what he felt were their real powers.

In his judgment, a gentleman must respect whatever is good even though he finds it mixed with what he knows to be evil. This is the highestexercise of that quality of courtesy which, along with courage, make up the highest type of a gentleman. Courtesy and

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consideration to those around him, his friends, the weak, the poor, children - that goes without saying, thatwas his joy. that was easy; but to be courteous to a man who, like McClellan, insulted him - to be just to a man who like his Secretary of the Treasury, Chase, intrigued incessantly against him, well, there you have a higher form of courtesy than men often reach.

A great gentleman - Abraham Lincoln - so great that externals fade out of sight when you look to the man within, and trace how through a long and active life of struggle, disappointment and agony of soul, he remained "lord of himself."

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