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1906

Abraham Lincoln and the Needs of the Time

Earl Clement Davis

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tribute to him, and to the notion which her served, and to the truth and frinciples ufon which that nation is founded is to see toil that future generations shell not be confelled to second that the first american war also the the hurched less three, years to me forsed since the first american was born in the little by Cohinsof denticky The wind bloweth where it listeth." Twon Rounth vot where it-cowell vor white it goeth" who are explain the worder fores mystery of life, which is revealed in the stry which of the life of Abrolom Liveolus Lace it for yourselver as it leads your though the herelship and frivations of his by book in Incliana, what gone him the importee to study by the light of a condle or the ofen fire, searching yealously after truth and wis done? What former is it in som that evobles him to size when the very limitating, and surrouchings

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Inhat Kircl of a won wor he. fled to these presisters, resto the volubility of the problem before in to day. what kind of a new now ha? HE wow forest hot love t because it was the heat Johny, we became it was con: newient, but become he have theil. wonsight. We look with indifference now when that extreme lifts of loverity which he exercised he my this with the he wor stretching a point when after a long don't works he pade bound to transle these wises to revised or windows works in giving change. Themosal seem. It would further wany forthering officerole to day to ped that when they are collect you to cattle accounts, they swell go to their trunks, and fire out the execut amount hick up in on ded blue stocking, and feel that it had been mailing their for years. The stain of refusact would be ninged

from the legal frogerin if every lowger for shortel feel as director click, and act as Lincoln click, when were time he was forsecuting a civil case, in the course of which to enidence wor introduced showing that his client was attempting a pand. Lincoln rose and ment to his total in duf chiquest. The judge sent for him,; he refused to come. Leel the judge," he said "my hovels are duly! I come over to work them" do deef noted wor his sense of boosty so friendly chiel he believe in the obsolute vecanity of keeping his havels unsoiled by any act of dirfmerty that when he wor in the legislature, at a critical woment ofter a long dircursim, ober a bit of jothery, he wor asked his ofinion. The whole offerin wor closed by his refly. you way bown my body to asher and settle any them to the winds of heaven; you way chang my soul down to the regions of claubres and desfair

to be townwetel forever; but you miel & mene get me to suffert a measure which I believe to be wrong, although by doing so I way accomplish that which I believe to be 13 A." Ime where in that his raw broad won there luked a former which we weed to sky was then we need echreatin, was then we need reform, Hot forms is flair, hard, clear cut truty which will suffer any defeat water thru a nictory benght by a stain of distancety. Chas 2. Hugher, where forme as the insurance investigation for work a fublic worn, sompthing ine this very forinteel suging. What we week is a revivol of the seuse of hover, her wont to hear les of the won who begon for and direl aworrech iches, and worr about the won who lived musult iel, though he chies foor:" To the following his life Lincoln earried a word evel breel you

absolute and unconferring tonesty, the integrity of his own life, and the integrity of the life of others. Are me foring life with the serve Nohen he woole his Gethystung speels in 1863, amid the wort in fersive surrowd: righ, and contenthe ivort from trying times of his life, he give expension to the greatest thoughts that have ever here uttered in the history of the world. They were the thought of Dewocracy. We go forget with what toil, and sace: fice, and low of life, the dewver the seech of deworacy were sewed from the week of the old world, flavtel and untired in this curity, but he did not Jorget, because the ideas of Dewocracy were nital to him. HE believed in them, and he lived them vot alove in the little fronten loven of the her Solem, but when he become

the head of nation. Muchen afering the great achieve with there worth. Fourene and seven your ago our fothers brought frath on this nation continent, a new nation, conceined in liberty, and declicated to the ferfusition that all wen are free created egral." he was not giving experim to a mere intellective speculation, but was speaking a truth which found its incamation in his own life. He regarded himself ar a won and he regarded others as men, meeting them as won to won, not bulding lines self above the town churkard whom he could fick uf in the steet, and carry for to the im for treatment like the good Sommer tom fold, or regarding himself hereath the wort ferminent won when he wet in his life. Theost of us betry the sivolbour of ou natures, by tolding ourselves about thre who are les forturate those ouselves, and whiring and forming

like a Mich Heef when we come 10 into the feseure of thre who haffen to be for wor futurate. It toher a won to believe in and to live the ideas of Dewocracy. Any whinstering swiffling rad con stand you the shoulder of some less fortunate being below him, and grasf front evely after the coat tails of someone of me heliere mi the fineigles of Deward which we frozen to believe in, why vot he were about it, to be men for what they are, and face ourselinde for what they are. To Lineolu the flyforition that all men are created equal was a fractical wital frinciple of his life, and his the according to that principle he lived. It was because of his implicit-faith in the suruchen and integrity

of the flair feofle that gave in such empidence in forthe finion and worther him to lead the nation through three dark years, His former and his strugth as a header rested in this that he was subservient to voore, but was the sevout of all, in a government of the feefle. by the feefle for the feefle. His confidence in humm nature, and his recognition of man as a wow, was vot the trusting creclulorismens of igunavel, but the cliect fruit of Rumledge. HE Knew humm notine, He undustivel all the mindings, in and out, of the hower mind, I and could meet a wor of any track or colling and in a very start rund time discover the une workings of the ferm. This keen and synfothetic restoure to other minds resulted in two very monted Characteristics of Bis Lincohn.

The first wor his keen some of hower, 13 a trait which belonged to and developed with his devocary. It rested ufon his Affreciation of human voture, and away all the stronge for that he tol wet he hoch gleaned a great store of accedates; and toles albertatus of the ideocyascricis of humanotus When he wor flerident he weed to seek relixation in telling there stories to the ready literais who chustired about him. His said that at one time when he wer adtending court that the judge on the heuch had to interruft a georif over in the corner to whom his who won telling stries. Then he collect are of the wen to the hereb in mediately, and said. What was that sting shin cook wor beling ! HE was an hobited reader of humerous literature, and in the long sleften wight of the clark drys of the wor he weel to while away

the Sows by reading hashy. Billhye " and others? But the other side of his how But the some weight who him water, t evokled him to see the fottor of the. and vowen in forthe bye for shown work tevelerven and forgue: ver, then aholow Lincolm, all the stries told of his factors, and his deeds of five kincher foy a tribute to a sich in his voture which is often locking in great men. It worke vo difference who come to him, metter it wor the for me the was wrown on the um of influence, he wor forever geauting faccious, so that the generals had to request him wot to because it interfered with the chicifline of the any. de sple of this he still continued to fardon, and le once said. If I have one great sin, it is the in obelity to say vo,

Became it contains so much of the duf office other of howen votice vfor which his whole life resteel, and ortof which it evolved, because it shows so work of his tendeaners and sympthy, and ofme all his spirit of Jorgiveners, I must refeat the closing forogroft of his I'm inangevel, Mith while Towards were; with chaily for all: with fairmen in the right, or God gives us to see the rightalit us stime on to finish the work me are in; to brund if the notion's wormels, to care for him who shall have borne the bottle, and for his widow, and his orthon .to do all which way achieve, and cheish a just and losting four away ouselves, and with all notions" for our civic and social age do me

to day bring this defeated with Us Devocacy restrong your faith in I true spoken of his faith in his our integrity, and I'm that expensel itself in his boverty, his un welling wers to soil himself in what wer wrong or distonent. I have af ohen of his faith is the integrity of human worture, and the suital Dewreroey which control of Alot faith. I come own to shok of his duf religions notine, His faith in god, lefor which both is lovesty, and this Democrocy resterts I am well awar of the fret that he has vot always been regarded as a religious word, that he was even spoken of as an atheirt, and in bidely but the cours of jirelyewent have vot olings peen just, Let in afford this by the way of deed. One convot reach the well known stry

churchord liping in the the thet one wight, and carried him on his book to the im, and cared for him as he world for a brother. Be within that if Server hogerath von of the tating he woodlevent, mithout thinking of the heart fol farothe of the good servortor which ferentalls. But such thing one vot always regarded as evidences of Religious tife, and in as much as he had read form Paines age of reason, diel vot believe the toll of the · Bitle wor inspired, and chil vot behine in the wirocles, he has been spoken of as an alkeist, So Juish to spork of one or two things in which is revealed any a defe uligeins voture ascare. He ouce said. Whenever any Church will inscribe mu itsalter as a grabfication for member. ship the foreionis state went of the soletime of the low and the toyle. Flow stolk live the lord they bod with the loll thy heart, and witholl they soul, and

with all thy mind, and thy weight as 17th thyself, that church will dinn with all my heart and som! In the down dryp when the orthorh for the Moin war black, he used to go alone with god and give him self up to flager. I have been chiven worry times to his they Reeve. Rueer," he over reworked, by the men whelling consiction that I had vow here shee to godgo, Tuyoru luischon, and that of all obut we seemed in sufficient for that chy!" That west home hear a mondeful sight to see that great Jol fearing won alme, at night, when all the city wor sleeping, forming out the befor and climbts and fears ophis sort to fool in frager." One thing work as to his religious life and the chiect hearing it had you the way in which tincoh sewed his country. The Diary of secretary choice worlows the following entiry for the chy to ha the Owelowotin of linerai folim

wor usual. He gootes the President stroying there wills, when the Nebel anny wor at Frederick I determined as seen or at should be cliven out of Eucryland to issue a ferclowater of Ewoneifetion, such as Ithought wort likely to be useful. I said vothing to anyone, met worke the fermise to ungself and to my Wohen the Robel any is vom chiven out, and I am going to Julpil ony the formise." Lluis deef religions bife of discolu wor the foundation of all his great work, and who shell not my that in this rests that great former and genius which carried enobled him to do the work that he click, For the fertlewer of his day he correct a deef religious faith resting you the experience of his our sul!

are me giving to our times a service with good?

you way think it afostiange that I have said wothing about Fireshi's Echeotin which he seewed for him self, and the wohne which Echication, and such things vory bring to the feotlews four own day, but Education, skill, execution ohi liky. and training, are wat the qualities of which we are in reed. Me are still working out the feotleme of a motion correction liberty, and dedirated to the ferfasition thrall wen are created egood; Twony of the froblem faer for solution, would Volatiol corruption, ducherhiol encertainty folder delos of life, beturgets unsured workets; the care of new corners, and the

training of them into citizens, are the footbleur which we went foce, La there froblems me ment bring that some obsolute tomerty. that some nitredewowey, that some faith in God, and his truth that the great Linealus showed when he faced the forther of flinery, a broken Mirn and a dinided Forth. elso the sew own y were who have died fu freedom must have obied in vairs. That we way conflicte the work which they devoted themselves to me must declicate ouselnes to the unfinished work which the who fought in the simil wor have so vokly actuared, 27 is from To declicate ou selves to the great took remaining before us, that from there broned devil we toke in creoied devotion to that came

for which they goneth lost free 27 wearine of devotion! that we here highly resolve that the devel shell vot me diel in vair; that this noties, under God, still home a new bith of freedom; and that the Government of the feofle by the feofle and for the feofle thele vot faith from the Earth

Abraham Lincoln and the Needs of the Times Earl Clement Davis Pittsfield, MA 1906

It seemed to me very much like a tribute of mere words and false to attempt to present to you some suggestions of the greatness and the significance of Lincoln, without correlating the spirit and power of his life with the needs of our own times, and the duty which we owe in forwarding the work to which Lincoln gave his life. We regard him as one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, of the builders of the nation. Yet his work is hardly complete unless we take up the trowel where he laid it down, and continue in the nurture and care for that principle of Democracy, which shall not perish from the Earth forever. With great insight Lowell spoke of him as the "New birth of our new soil, the first American." But our greatest tribute to him, and to the nation which he served, and to the truth and principles upon which that nation is founded is to see to it that future generations shall not be compelled to record that the first American was also the last.

One hundred less three years have passed since the first American was born in the little log cabin of Kentucky frontiersmen. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," but knoweth "not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Who can explain the wonderful mystery of life, which is revealed in the story of the life of Abraham Lincoln. Trace it for yourselves as it leads you through the hardship and privations of his boyhood in Indiana. What gave him the impulse to study by the light of a candle or the open fire, searching zealously after truth and wisdom? What power is it in man that enables him to rise upon the very limitations and surroundings, all making them stepping

 $^{^{1}}$ A line from a poem by James Russell Lowell delivered at Harvard the summer after Lincoln's assassination (1865).

² This is a partial quote from John 3:8 "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Sprit."

stones to the lofty pinacle of the greatest man of the greatest nation of the Earth?

What was there in his nature that made him look with horror and righteous indignation upon the system of slavery when for the first time he saw it as he gained his first knowledge of the world in the trip to New Orleans in 1830? What was it that gave him the courage at the age of 22 to announce himself as candidate for the state legislature, and publish the platform upon which he stood? He had no friends of wealth or influence, but little education, and no experience. But here his political career began.

What was the power in him that enabled him [to] feel the pulse of the nation and amid the turmoil, strife and agitations of those bitter years of conflict to read aright the hand writing on the wall? Never once did he flinch. Never once did he waver, even when temporary defeat seemed to belie the very principles upon which he stood.

What power was that in him that enabled him when he came to the White House in 1861 to meet the situation, and perform the work where unto he was called? He had no training as a statesman, and yet he handled with a skill which has never been surpassed the delicate and complicated problems which arose in the affairs at home and in the relations with foreign nations.

What power carried him through all the trials of abuse, criticism and intrigue which he had to face from the day he set his foot upon the capitol steps until the night when he fell a victim to the hand of a man of mistaken judgement? I ask these questions because they are forever coming before when I read the story of his life, and more than that because I feel that upon the answer which we give to these questions rests the solution of the problems before us today.

What kind of a man was he?

He was honest. Not honest because it was the best policy, nor because it was convenient, but because he knew that it was right. We may look with indifference now upon that extreme type of honesty which he exercised. We may think

that he was stretching a point when after a long day's work he feels bound to travel three miles to correct a mistake of six pence made in giving change. It would puzzle many public officials today to feel that when they are called upon to settle accounts, they could go to their trunk, and pull out the exact amount tied up in an old blue stocking, and feel that it had been waiting there for years.

The stain of reproach would be {???} from the legal profession if every lawyer should feel as Lincoln did, and act as Lincoln did, when at one time "he was prosecuting a civil suit, in the course of which evidence was introduced showing that his client was attempting a fraud. Lincoln rose and went to his hotel in deep disgust. The Judge sent for him. He refused to come. 'Tell the judge,' he said 'my hands are dirty. I came over to wash them.'"³ So deep rooted was his sense of honesty so firmly did he believe in the absolute necessity of keeping his hands unsoiled by any act of dishonesty that when he was in the legislature at a critical moment after a long discussion over a bit of jobbery, he was asked his opinion. The whole affair was closed by his reply:

You may burn my body to ashes and scatter them to the winds of heaven; you may drag my soul down to the regions of darkness and despair to be tormented forever; but you will never get me to support a measure which I believe to be wrong, although by do so I may accomplish that which I believe to be right.

Somewhere in that big {???} {???} man there lurked a power which we need today more than we need education, more than we need reform. That power is plain, hard, clear-cut honesty which will suffer any defeat rather than a victory bought by a stain of dishonesty. Chas. E. Hughes, whose fame as the insurance investigator has made a public {???} gives us this very point saying "What we need is a revival of the sense of honor. We want to hear less of the man who

³ Davis is quoting Frederick Trevor Hill. *Lincoln, the Lawyer*. New York: The Century Co. 1906, pp 498-9.

began poor and amassed riches, and more about the man who lived unsullied, though he dies poor." 4

To the problems of his life Lincoln carried a moral code based upon absolute and uncompromising honesty, the integrity of his own life, and the integrity of the life of others.

Are we facing life with the same honesty?

When he made his Gettysburg speech in 1863, amid the most impressive surroundings and in the most trying times of his life, he gave expression to the greatest thoughts that have ever been uttered in the history of the world. They were the thoughts of Democracy.

We forget with what toil and sacrifice and loss of life the seeds of democracy were saved from the wreck of the old world, planted and nurtured in this country, but he did not forget, because the ideas of Democracy were vital to him. He believed in them, and he lived them not alone in the little frontier town of New Salem, but when he became the head of the nation. When opening the great address with these words, "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." He was not giving expression to a mere intellectual speculation, but was speaking a truth which found its incarnation in his own life. He regarded himself as a man and he regarded others as men, meeting them as man-to-man, not holding himself above the town drunkard whom he could pick up in the street, and carry to the inn for treatment like the good Samaritan of old, or regarding

⁴ Charles E. Hughes, at the time this sermon was written in 1906, had just completed an investigation of the insurance industry revealing significant corruption. He went on to serve as the Governor of New York (1906-1910), Associate Justice of the Supreme Court (1910-1912) and was the unsuccessful Republican nominee for President, when Woodrow Wilson was elected in 1912. He served as Warren G. Harding's Secretary of State (1920-1925). He rejoined the Supreme Court as Chief Justice in 1930 until he retired in 1941.

himself beneath the most prominent man whom he met in his life.

Most of us betray the smallness of our natures by holding ourselves above those who are less fortunate than ourselves, and whining and {???} like a {???} {???} when we come into the presence of those who happen to be more fortunate. It takes a man to believe in and to live the ideas of Democracy. Any whimpering, squibbing cad can stand upon the shoulders of some less fortunate being below him, and grasp frantically after the coattails someone above. So [for] Lincoln the proposition that all men are created equal was a practical vital principle of his life, and according to that principle he lived. It was because of his implicit faith in the soundness and integrity of the plain people that gave him such confidence in public opinion and enabled him to lead the nation through those dark years. His power and his strength as a leader rested in this that he was subservient to no one, but was the servant of all, in a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

His confidence in human nature, and his recognition of man as a man, was not the trusting credulousness of ignorance, but the direct fruit of knowledge. He knew human nature. He understood all the windings, in and out, of the human mind, and could meet a man of any trade or calling and in a very short time discover the inner workings of the person. This keen and sympathetic response to other minds resulted in two very marked characteristics of Lincoln.

The first was his keen sense of humor a trait which belonged to and developed with his democracy. It rested upon his appreciation of human nature, and from all the strange people that he had met he had gleaned a great store of anecdotes and tales illustrative of the idiosyncrasies of human nature. When he was president he used to seek relaxation in telling these stories to the ready listeners who clustered about him. It is said that at one time when he was attending court that the judge on the bench had to interrupt a group over in the corner to whom Lincoln was telling stories. Then he called one of the men to the bench immediately and said, "What was that story Lincoln was telling?"

He was a habitual reader of humorous literature and in the long sleepless nights of the dark days of the war he used to while away the hours by reading {???}, Bill Nye and others.

But the same insight into human nature enabled him to see the pathos of life, and no man in public life has shown more tenderness and forgiveness than Abraham Lincoln. All the stories told of his pardons, and his deeds of fine kindness pay a tribute to a side in his nature which is often lacking in great men. It made no difference who came to him, whether it was the poor woman or the man of influence, he was forever granting pardons, so that the generals had to request him not to, because it interfered with the discipline of the army. In spite of this he still continued to pardon, and he once said, "If I have one great sin, it is the inability to say no." Because it contains so much of that deep appreciation of human nature upon which his whole life rested, and out of which it evolved, because it shows so much of his tendencies and sympathy, and above all his spirit of forgiveness, I must repeat the closing paragraph of his 2nd inaugural.

With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness 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.

To our civic and social life do we today bring this deeprooted vital Democracy resting upon faith in Human Nature?

I have spoken of his faith in his own integrity, and how that expressed itself in his honesty, his unwillingness to soil himself in what was wrong and dishonest. I have spoken of his faith in the integrity of human nature, and the vital Democracy which rested upon that faith. I come now to speak of his deep religious nature, his faith in God, upon which both his honesty and his Democracy rested.

I am well aware of the fact that he has not always been regarded as a religious man, that he was even spoken of as

an Atheist, and infidel, but the {???} of judgement have not always been just.

Let us approach this by the way of deed. One cannot read the well-known story of how he found the town drunkard lying in the street one night, and carried him on his back to the inn, and cared for him as he would for a brother, without thinking of the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan which Jesus tells.

But such things are not always regarded as evidences of Religious life, and in as much as he had read from Paine's Age of Reason, did not believe that all of the Bible was inspired, and did not believe in the miracles, he has been spoken of as an Atheist. So I wish to speak of one or two things in which is revealed a deep religious nature. He once said,

Whenever any church will inscribe over its alters as a qualification for membership the Savior's condensed statement for the substance of both law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and will all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church will I join will all my heart and soul.

In the dark days when the outlook for the Union was black, he used to go alone with God and give himself up to prayer. "I have been driven many times to my knees," he once remarked, "by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day." That must have been a wonderful sight to see that great God fearing man alone, at night, when all the city was sleeping, pouring out the hopes and doubts and fears of his soul to God in prayer.

One thing more as to his religious life and the direct bearing it had upon the way in which Lincoln served his country. The Diary of Secretary Chase contains the following entry for the day the Proclamation of Emancipation was issued. He quotes the President saying these words,

When the Rebel army was at Fredericksburg, I determined as soon as it should be driven out of

Maryland to issue a proclamation of emancipation such as I thought was likely to be useful. I said nothing to anyone, but made the promise to myself and to my Maker. The Rebel army is now driven out, and I am going to fulfill that promise.

This deep religious life of Lincoln was the foundation of all his great work, and who shall not say that in this rests that great power and genius which enabled him to do the work that he did. To the problems of his day he carried a deep religious faith resting upon the experience of his own soul. Are we giving to our times a service resting upon a covenant of service with God?

You may think it strange that I have said nothing about Lincoln's education which he secured for himself, and the value which education, and such things may bring to the problems of our own day. But education, skill, executive ability, and training are not the qualities of which we are in need. We are still working out the problems of a "nation conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Many of the problems press for solution. Political corruption, industrial uncertainty, false ideals of life, unsound {???}, the care of newcomers, and the training of them into citizens, are the problems which we must face. To these problems we must bring that same absolute honesty, that same vital Democracy, that same faith in God, and his truth, that the great Lincoln showed when he faced the problem of slavery, a broken Union and a divided North, else the men who have died for freedom must have died in vain. That we may complete the work which they devoted themselves to, we must dedicate ourselves to the unfinished work which those who fought in the Civil War have so nobly advanced. It is for us to dedicate ourselves to the great task remaining before us, that from their 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 those dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the Government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the Earth.