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The Gospel According to Abraham Lincoln

by

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The anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birthday inspires a solemnity, an honesty and a sincerity not ordinarily found in such celebrations. Pompous officials and politicians, clothed in gravity, that mysterious carriage of the body which so often covers defects of the mind and conscience, welcome any opportunity to eulogize with an oratorical effort calculated to keep themselves conspicuous, but the memory of Lincoln and reverence for his disposition is better kept alive by our every-day expression.

I say "disposition" because disposition has far more to do with ones usefulness to humanity than educational attainment, which, coupled to perverted disposition has so deceived, deluded and imposed itself that we have classes and masses in America, where there should be social equality.

Lincoln, as a meditative boy, had slight opportunity for educational attainment but was very prompt in showing his appreciation of knowledge and its practical utility in the dealings with his fellows and the men and women about him in whose problems he was sympathetically interested and I know of no eulogy more appropriate than that of one who knew him intimately and referred to him as "the humblest of the humble and the greatest of the great".

Humility is a quality sadly lacking in politicians and, commenting on the politicians of his time, Lincoln said; "Politicians are a set of men who have interests aside from the interests of the people and who, that is to say, the most of them, are at least one long step removed from honest men. I may say this with greater freedom, being myself a politician" End of quotation. Without humility no one acquires substantial knowledge of men and affairs, or the discernment to separate truth from the rubbish.

Knowledge is studiously and patiently acquired in humility, and the urge to do so was more conspicuous in the Lincoln disposition, his humanitarian disposition to be right, than with any of the other illustrious men we eulogize. Education is thrust upon us. We absorb it, and commit it to memory, and Lincoln's education has been much over-stressed, but his social and economic knowledge, perhaps, under-estimated. It was this knowledge of the plain people and their equities, together with the sympathetic honesty of his disposition, that gave him ^{that} a voice so sincere, pathetic and persuasive.

Other men have given us spurts of oratory that will be injected into patriotic effusion for generations to come but only Lincoln could have said, in 1860,

"Let us be diverted by none of those sophistical contrivances wherewith we are so industriously plied and belabored,-- contrivances such as groping for some middle ground between right and wrong; such as a policy of "don't care" on a question about which all true men do care. Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menace of destruction to the government, nor of dungeons to ourselves. Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

~~And what politician, thoughtless of himself, amid the blasts of passion, the aberrations of greed, the delusions of short-sighted expediency and tormented by political intrigues -- Who but Lincoln would have said; "With malice toward none; with char-~~

And who but Lincoln, amid the blasts of passion, the aberrations of greed, the delusions of short-sighted expediency, and tormented by political intrigue could have found in the depths of his heart the expression of the second inaugural address.

"Fondly do we hope -- fervently do we pray -- that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequiting toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid for by another drawn with the sword -- as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'." With malice toward 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 bourn 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."

There is a lesson in the sayings and in the disposition of Lincoln of which America may well take heed today. America is in a sorry plight. Its people apprehensive, discouraged, rebellious, -- and unfortunately, still tight-minded altho and as Lincoln said it; "the partisan who will not hear both sides is dishonest."

That which is "the other side" to most of us is but barely visible thru the smoke screen of propaganda financed by the rich and honorable, and that, makes the obligation a serious obligation for those who do get a glimpse of economic truth, to talk about it, and discuss it, because it is what the neighbor and the neighborhood agree upon that makes public opinion, and Public opinion, under our form of government, can take bad men out of legislative halls and keep able, industrious men out of *the bread line*.

The terms with which we generalize seem harsh as applied to the exceptional individual, but you are reminded that the individual is not better than the regime he supports. Moreover, there is no compromise with honesty and sincerity. One is or he is not. Neither can we deny the fact, that the rich and honorable, as the governing class, directing our affairs,

the world, that some have labored and others, without labor, have enjoyed a large portion of the fruits. This is wrong and should not continue. To secure for each laborer the whole product of his labor, or as nearly as may be, is a worthy subject for any good government." End of quotation.

The contributions to our national wealth and its distributions, just balance. The man is too rich who can, and does, acquire more than he contributes, thereby thrusting poverty on others who must, and of necessity, contribute more than they *absorb*. There are parasites galore who adapt themselves to every conceivable opportunity and thrive society from top to bottom but their activities are, for the most part, unlawful, excepting those who enjoy a privilege. Privilege is a lawful right to perpetrate a moral wrong and those privileged to collect and retain land rent, a value created by all the people and therefore belongs ^{ing} to all the people, absorb something like ten thousand million dollars every year for which they make no social contribution and the rest of us must therefore ^{ten thousand million more dollars worth} *earn or* contribute *to* *than we get*. This particular privilege would be destroyed by collecting for the use of the community that value which is created by the community -- the rental value of land.

Among our other ills we have those super-patriotic jingoes on our pay-roll who urge vast expenditure and the confiscation of labor's product by taxation to meet the cost of war and preparedness. Suitable reply to them is also to be found in the words of Lincoln.

"At what point is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reaches us it must spring ~~from~~ up from amongst us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction is to be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we must live through all time, or die by suicide."

There is something ominous in this conclusion and the sadness which seemed so intermingled with ^{Lincoln's} / whole life might have been but a part of ^a temperament in which ~~some~~ tragedy was foreshadowed.

The most impressive monument in America is the Lincoln Memorial, with its tablets and heroic statue of the greatest Americans and the best of men.

This bronze doth keep the very form and mould
Of our great martyr's face. Yes, this is he;
That brow all wisdom, all benignity;
That human, humorous mouth; those cheeks that hold
Like some harsh landscape all the summer's gold;
That spirit fit for sorrow, as the sea
For storms to beat on; the lone agony
Those silent patient lips too well foretold.
Yes, this is he who ruled a world of men
As might some prophet of the elder day --
Brooding above the tempest and the fray
With deep-eyed thought and more than mortal ken.