HUMILITY

DRAWER 3A PERSONALITY

Abraham Lincoln's Personality

Humility

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Lincoln Was Not So Mild and Meek

Great Liberator Could Bare Teeth and Fight When Necessary

Highland Democrat 2/9/24
Freehold N.J.

By PROF. B. J. CIGRAND, in Chicago Evening American.

There is a tendency in recent writings to picture Lincoln so mild and meek that his red-bloodedness and his emphatic methods of rebuke are lost and the real value of the giant among men is destroyed.

Several recent biographies and many orations and magazine articles of late years have given the impression that Lincoln was not master of his cabinet. It is said he often laughed and told stories when his serious opinion was needed.

If any president endured intrigue at the cabinet board, Lincoln did. Not a single other man who ever sat in the presidential chair would have permitted the bold, personal campaigning of his personal associates.

But Lincoln seemed to let these men go on, gradually disclosing not only to himself but the public their selfish personal ambitions and then at the right time and in an inimitable way he would grab the official by the coat collar and bring him back to the straight and narrow path of Lincoln ideas.

Lincoln's manner of dealing with men was entirely different from that of any other president.

He even "ran after" General McClellan and permitted offensive correspondence, and no end of "slights" to come to light. But Lincoln, like an indulgent father, could, when the proper moment came, call a halt and take some of the officials "in the woodshed and dust their trousers."

Ultimatum to Plotters.

To show he was not intimidated, I give a copy of a letter which he read at a cabinet meeting during the time when Stanton, Chase and Seward were secretly condemning one another and suggesting removals so that they might all the better conduct their campaign to prevent Lincoln's re-election and seat themselves.

The letter reads:

"I must be the judge how long to retain in, and when to remove any of you from his position. It would greatly pain me to discover any of you endeavoring to procure another's removal, or, in any way, to prejudice him before the public. Such endeavor would be a wrong to me; and much worse a wrong to the country. My wish is that on this subject no remark be made, nor question asked by any of you, here or elsewhere, now or hereafter."

One day early in Lincoln's administration, Mrs. Lincoln said to him:

"It is common rumor about the capitol that Seward and not you will be the president—that he will rule you."

He replied:

"I may not rule myself, but certainly Seward shall not. The only ruler I have is my conscience, following God in it, and these men will have to learn that yet."

At another time Lincoln was visited by a congressional committee headed by Thad Stevens, who burst in on Lincoln with the accusation:

"The way you are running this country is causing it to be approaching hell, and very fast."

Lincoln asked: "About how far from that place are we now?"

Stevens sharply replied: "I would say about a mile."

Lincoln smiled and replied: "About a mile—why that's about from here to the capitol." And everyone save Stevens roared.

Stepped Out of Beaten Path.

Seward, who had for years toiled to subordinate Lincoln, finally wrote to his wife: "Executive skill and vigor are rare qualities. The President is the best of us."

On July 30, 1863, Lincoln issued a public letter, designed especially for the soldiers and sympathizers of the Confederacy:

"It is the duty of every government to give protection to its citizens and especially those who are organized as soldiers in the public service. It is, therefore, ordered that for every soldier of the United States killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works."

Promised Glory for All Officials.

I look upon this order as the least representative sentence in Lincoln's entire life story and doubtless it was inspired by the usages of war and came as a cabinet measure.

Another message to his cabinet shows how he guided them and constantly reminded them of broad patriotism. It reads:

"It will require the utmost skill, influence and sagacity of all of us to save the republic. Let us forget ourselves and join hands like brothers to save the republic. If we succeed there will be glory enough for all."

And Stanton, who, in the early days of the Civil war, said, "Lincoln is a fool, a low, cunning clown. The original gorilla Du Chaillu, the naturalist, wandered all the way to Africa in search of when he might have found it in Springfield, Ill.," later said when Lincoln was assassinated: "Lincoln is the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen."

Ill. St. Journal 5/30/36

, ILL., TUESDAY, JUNE

LINCOLN CORDED HIS OWN TRUNKS ON GOING AWAY

Family Lived At Chenery House Before Leaving For Capital.

Many weeks before his departure for Washington to be inaugurated president of the United States, Mr. Lincoln sold his furniture and rented his house and removed his family to the Chenery house, northeast corner of Fourth and Washington streets, where he remained until the morning of his departure. The Illinois hotel now occupies this site.

Mr. Lincoln's sturdy self-reliance was shown that morning when he refused to allow the hotel porters to "cord" his trunks, but with his own hands tied them with stout ropes in the hotel lobby, took hotel business cards and on the reverse side wrote "A. Lincoln, White House, Washington, D. C."

First headquarters of U. S. Grant were in this hotel. Richard Yates and his wife stopped here. Troops en route to the depot were reviewed from the porch. Stephen A. Douglas and John Palmer were guests here. The proprietors were William Dodd Chenery and John William Chenery, who equipped a large room on the first floor as a hospital.

True Humility

THE SUPREME COURT IS NOT A PARTISAN ISSUE

By ALFRED M. LANDON

Lincoln Day Dinner, National Republican Club, New York, February 12, 1937

IT IS fitting that we, as Americans, should gather on each anniversary of Lincoln's birth to pay tribute to him. For, as his contemporary, Edward Everett, once said: "National recollections are the foundations of national character." And there can be no recollections better fitted to preserve the foundations of our character as a nation than the enduring memory of Abraham Lincoln. He was, and remains, one of the great moral forces of our national life, and in the final accounting it is the moral force of a nation which shapes its destiny.

It is always well to remember those simple and fundamental qualities which made Lincoln a moral force—which enabled him to lead the nation through some of its darkest days. He possessed humility. He believed in the combined wisdom of the people. He had abiding spiritual faith.

Lincoln knew toil with scant return. He knew cold and hardship. He knew want and hunger. He knew the utter weariness of body which came from these. And he knew the dark hopelessness that men feel when brought face to face with the overwhelming odds of nature.

These experiences gave him a true humility—for no man can strive with, and know, the great forces of nature without being humble. Nature chastened him. She taught him that she cannot be deceived, or cheated, or cajoled. These experiences gave him an honesty that was a part of his very bone and muscle. He well and fully earned that name of highest tribute—Honest Abe.

Lincoln was great in character, in the integrity of his civic virtue, in righteous conviction, in his strength to live his beliefs. But underlying all these traits was a deep spiritual faith. Men today need such faith. Without it there can be no enduring security for this or any nation. Men need such faith for the preservation of the freedom for which our government was founded—and for which Abraham Lincoln made every sacrifice.

When I accepted the invitation to come to this meeting I planned to make a few informal remarks to you as a Republican talking to fellow Republicans. Since then events have occurred in our national life which make it out of place for me to talk on a party basis. The issues raised are greater than any party.

They concern the whole of us. They are worthy of unhurried deliberation by the Congress. They will not wisely yield to partisan discussion either within or without the Congress. The whole future of our country is involved. Upon these issues I have strong convictions, but I shall not avail myself of this occasion to discuss them further.

In the past it has been a boast in this country that politics ends at the water's edge. While this grave matter, which goes to the very foundation of our government, is pending, let us resolve, each and every one of us, to prove ourselves Americans by doing our best to end politics within the water's edge.

And, with humbleness of heart, let us pray to the God of our fathers that now, as in the days of old, He will be "for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate."

Triumph of Lincoln Had Humbling Effect

Buffalo Evening News 2/8/41

LINCOLN ON THE EVE OF '61. A journalist's story by Henry Villard. Edited by Harold G. and Oswald Garrison Villard. Alfred Knopf, New York. $1.25.

"HAD the election fallen to any other of the distinguished candidates instead of myself it would have been proper for all citizens to have greeted him as you now greet me. It is evidence of the devotion of the whole people to the Constitution, the Union and the perpetuity of the liberties of the country. I am unwilling on any occasion that I should be so meanly thought of as to have it supposed for a moment that these demonstrations are tendered to me personally."

Thus spoke the very humble Abraham Lincoln at the American Hotel in Buffalo on Feb. 16, 1861.

It was a breathless speech for more reasons than one, according to the dispatch from Buffalo that day of Mr. Villard, who was reporting the progress of the presidential train for the New York Herald.

With difficulty, the president-elect and his party, including former President Millard Fillmore, had made their way through the throng which had got out of hand at the railway station and again at the hotel.

A Triumphal Journal Told in Simple Terms

The story has been told a number of times, as have been the accounts of Mr. Lincoln's appearances in other cities on what in these days might be regarded as a triumphal march. But it is well, many readers will believe, that Lincoln's journey again be recounted from the simple and objective news reports of the day.

That is the good purpose served by the Villards' editing of their father's reports to what was then a paper hostile to Lincoln and his cause.

"Verily," Mr. Villard had written from Columbus, O., a day or two before. "the journey of the President-elect is a march of triumph."

But it was only in the great crowds that turned out to greet the Rail Splitter, that the triumphal phase of the journey was manifest.

"Mr. Lincoln was so profoundly moved," the account continues, "as to be hardly able to do himself justice . . . but the earnestness and conscientiousness that plainly shone on his face effected more with the audience than words could."

As the train neared Washington, any doubts Mr. Villard may have had about Mr. Lincoln's competence to meet the great crisis which confronted the nation had vanished.

"Putting prejudices a-one-side, no one can see Mr. Lincoln without recognizing in him a man of immense power and force of character and natural talent . . . one cannot help liking him and esteeming any disparagement of his abilities as a personal insult," was the way Mr. Villard summed the man up as he left the presidential entourage in New York to report to his office.

It is to the credit of the New York Herald and to honest newspapers of then and now, that no effort was made to edit the correspondent's report of events as they passed before him.

Writer Finds Humility On Abe Lincoln Trail

Sends Imaginary Letter to Martyr; Tells of Inspiration on Pilgrimage

February—the birth month of the martyred Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. So Eddie Doherty, Chicago Sun writer, has visited Lincoln's birthplace in Kentucky, his boyhood home in Indiana, and the scenes of his young manhood in Illinois. In a series of articles commencing in today's Chicago Sun, Mr. Doherty retraces the Lincoln pilgrimage in terms of today and recounts the Lincoln legend.

Dear Abe Lincoln:

Perhaps it is a crazy idea to write to a man dead three score and many years ago, to discuss with him the things of his life, and to tell him of the present generation of Americans. But, Abe, your birthday comes this week, and all America is thinking of you. And perhaps I put into words only what America is thinking.

Forgive me for saying "Dear Abe" so informally. But you are above all earthly titles now. And it would be affected for me to say "Dear Mr. President." Even the school children in your country think of you as Abe. And, really, that is quite a compliment. It implies not only the greatness and magnificence we see in you, but your humbleness, your friendship for the common people, the human touch that was ever in you which made you immortal.

"The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones."

Jack Kelso once read that line to you. Remember? While he was fishing in the Sangamon River near New Salem, Ill. Or maybe while he was setting a log trap in the silt and mud and backwater of the river to catch a racoon.

Your Good Lives After You.

It was not thus with you. The good you did, the words of wisdom and of charity and of consolation you uttered, the funny little stories you told, the tremendous things you accomplished, and the little setbacks and the tragedies you encountered, live after you. They will always live.

Your life has been written into thousands of books. It has been chiseled into stone and marble. It has been cast in everlasting bronze. And it is re-lived in the hearts of millions of your fellow men.

If there was any evil in your life it has not yet been discovered.

It was with these thoughts in mind that I made a pilgrimage over the Lincoln trail—the path you trod through Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. I was seeking, in a way, to recapture the feeling of the times that formed you; to get a little closer to you and your day, in the scenes and the things you knew and loved.

And, I can't help feeling now, that you will be interested in my wanderings, in my pilgrimage to the shrines these states have built, in love and reverence to your memory.

Kentucky Is First.

I decided, naturally, to visit Hodgenville, Ky., first, to see the home in which you were born 134 years ago.

Ordinarily this would have taken but a few hours. I could catch a plane out of Chicago to Louisville, then take a taxi to your old home.

Do you know about planes, Abe—great silver machines that fly through the air with incredible speed and fearful thunder? Do you know about taxis, and busses, and autos?

An auto is a machine, too. A transportation machine. It runs on rubber tires. It is propelled by the explosions of gasoline. It can travel hundreds of miles. It can, and sometimes does, travel at the rate of 100 miles an hour. Some planes, Abe, travel four or five times that fast.

The auto has revolutionized life in your America. It has killed and maimed more people than did the Civil War. It has cluttered the statute books with a multiplicity of new—and strange—laws. But it has brought great prosperity to this land; it has knit closely together the states in the Union you preserved; and it has built millions of miles of fine hard roads all over the world.

It's War Again.

And the plane has revolutionized warfare; for these winged carriers fly over land and water, thousands of miles, to drop bombs on enemy concentrations, on munitions factories, railroad yards, piers, ships, and armored trains.

What couldn't the Grand Army of the Republic have done with a fleet of warplanes!

Abe, we are engaged once more in a great war. A world war. Millions of men are arrayed against us, equipped with all the modern implements of war. But, as you have anticipated, we are more than holding our own. We too have millions of men, volunteers and conscripts, in our Army and Navy. Before we are through we shall have 10 million more.

Remember, Abe, the song that rang through all the North in 1861—"We are coming, Father Abraham, a hundred thousand strong"?

Times have changed. We have over 130,000,000 people in the United States today. And 100,000 is a small figure. Even if you say $100,000, it is a small figure.

Well, because of the war, and restrictions on travel, I couldn't take a plane to Louisville. And I couldn't get a train.

All Trains Filled.

I suppose the trains were full of soldiers in your day, and that ordinary people like myself were hampered in their wish to go places. It is certainly so today. All trains to Louisville were filled.

I had to go to Cincinnati. I arrived there early in the morning, and asked how to get to Hodgenville. An information clerk in the depot gave me a puzzled look.

"Hodgenville, Ky? I never heard of it. There isn't such a place, is there?"

"There was," I said. "Abe Lincoln was born there."

"It isn't on any railroad."

"All right," I said, "how can I get to Elizabethtown. That's only about a dozen miles from Hodgenville. There, maybe I can find a taxi or a bus."

A taxi, Abe, is an auto that charges you so much per mile. It has a meter that shoots up a nickel or a dime every so many feet and makes you believe it is accurate. A bus is a bigger taxi—a tremendous thing that charges down the roads like a ferocious elephant and

Indp. News, 2-7-52

Lincoln's Humility Shown to Barber

By the United Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., Feb. 7— A letter written to President Abraham Lincoln by his friend, Billy the Barber, a Haitian Negro who migrated to Springfield, was published by historians for the first time today.

It dwelt on Lincoln's humility and liking for the "poor and downtrodden."

Billy the Barber was William de Fleurville, born in Haiti in 1806 and spirited to this country by his godmother when revolution broke out on the island in 1821.

He and Lincoln were fast friends before Lincoln became President and moved to Washington.

In his letter, written to Lincoln at the White House on December 27, 1863, Billy expressed a prayer for peace, concern for Lincoln's health, a hope that he would run and be elected for a second term, condolences on the death of Lincoln's son, and news of a dog left behind in Springfield by the Lincoln children.

"The truly great man regards with corresponding favor the poor, the downtrodden of the nation, to those more favored in color, position and franchise rights," Billy wrote. "And this you have shown.

"I and my people feel greatful to you for it. The shackels have fallen and bondsmen have become freemen . . . I hope ere long, it may be universal in all the slave states."

Billy said if the people again elected Lincoln, he should "accept it and put things and matters through to their termination and when these troubles shall end the nation will rejoice."

"The oppressed will shout the name of their deliverer and generations to come will rise up and call you blessed (so mote it be)."

After expressing sorrow over the death of Lincoln's son Willy, the barber said, "Tell Taddy that his (and Willy's) dog is alive and kicking and doing well."

Dr. Harry E. Pratt, Illinois state historian, said the letter was never published before today. It covers four typewritten pages.

Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, willed the De Fleurville letter along with other papers belonging to his father, to the Library of Congress.

When Lincoln was killed and his body was brought back for burial, Billy the Barber was invited to march with the honorary pallbearers. He declined, and walked instead with the Negro contingent.

When Lincoln moved here, Billy was a well-established barber and owned considerable real estate including several blocks here and four lots in Bloomington, Ill., where he had a shop for a time as well as in Peoria. Lincoln became his lawyer.

Pratt said he believes Lincoln picked up many of his anecdotes in Billy's shop where customers were shaved for an annual rate of $15 and got haircuts for 15 cents.

HUMILITY DRAWER 3A PERSONALITY