

We Need a Lincoln

AS THE YEARS roll in the saga of America, Abraham Lincoln grows in stature not because he was assassinated, nor even because he was President during our Civil War, but because he was a philosopher, a moralist, a rare figure among those who rise in our political system.



The American President has usually been a politician, not a statesman; an operator of techniques of manipulating the people's choice, not a thinker who leads his followers into the lofty realms of moral philosophy. Too often his speech has been of the earth rather than inspired by revelation. How many of them could have thought, much less put into rhetoric, the grandeur of the second inaugural:

"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 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."

ABRAHAM Lincoln thought lyrically and his poetry was sunshine in a dark moment of national history. He required no ghost-writer. He was not briefed by researchers. He called no conferences to decide what he was to think and say. His artistry came from his consciousness, and to it, no man add or detract. A man who could compose the "Gettysburg Address" on the back of an envelope while traveling on a railroad train is unusual among our politicians who generally submit their major thoughts to associates for crit-

icism, the associates taking out of it everything that is of sufficient potency to produce controversy.

Lincoln was never afraid of controversy. In fact, he started his national career as a controversialist, debating the little giant, Stephen Douglas, no mean man. The Lincoln-Douglas debates stirred a generation by the deftness of logic, by the fullness of the knowledge of both debaters and by the courageous stance of each man on a public question. There was no pussy-footing in anything that Lincoln did and said, as the more popular Seward discovered to his discomfiture.

What a wonderful thing it would be in this age of television if two candidates for the Presidency—say Eisenhower and Stevenson in 1952—could have debated the issues before the Nation, face to face, with questions and answers and interpolations. Perhaps the Nation might have discovered that the eggheads are really behind the scenes.

LINCOLN lives for us not so much in deeds as in ideas. One can pick and choose nuggets of thought, wisely and literally spoken, courageously phrased with no idea of advantage. Such men do not often appear in any country; they have rarely appeared in ours since that magnificent group of philosophers sat in Independence Hall to adopt the Declaration of Independence and later to write the Constitution. Lincoln might have been of that galaxy had he been born earlier; he was of their succession.

Our people in these days pray for the inspiration of a national ideal. We live in a period of excitement, of action, of motion, but we are a sad people because we are not at peace with ourselves or with the world. We need the wisdom of a great mind and the leadership of one who walks with God. We again need the gentle hand of Abraham Lincoln, who could be firm in the right without permitting himself the wickedness of hate.

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