Lincoln

TRACY

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OF

HON. BENJAMIN F. TRACY,

BEFORE THE

Middlesex Club of Boston,

MASSACHUSETTS.

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Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Middlesex Club: This day is consecrated by the Nation to the memory of our martyred President, Abraham Lincoln.

On each recurring anniversary of his birth, the strife and bustle of business ceases, while seventy millions of people, with reverent hearts, pay their tribute of love and respect to that matchless leader and patriot who guided the nation successfully through four years of civil war, preserved the Union and restored it to prosperity and peace.

He was the offspring of the Republic, the product of free institutions. In no other country could such a career as his have been possible.

I shall not attempt here to trace at length the marvellous life of one who, born and reared in extreme poverty, without any advantages of early education, by sheer force of character and intellect, in twenty-five years raised himself from the humble position of a laborer working for monthly wages to the chief magistracy of a Nation of thirty millions of free and independent people.

Born in Kentucky, his boyhood was passed in a severe struggle for existence against the adverse conditions of frontier life. Beyond learning to read and write and the simple rules of arithmatic he had no early education. His occupations during early manhood were of the humblest kind—now a flatboatman on the river, now keeping a country store, then occasionally working as a surveyor. In his speech at New Haven in 1860, he said: "I am not ashamed to confess that twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer mauling rails and at work on a flatboat."

When twenty-five years old, Lincoln entered the Legislature and took up the study of the law, still supporting himself by manual labor. Two years later he entered upon the practice of his profession at Springfield. Thus began, all things considered, the most marvellous career of modern times.

In 1846 he was elected to Congress, for one term, but we hear little of him politically until the repeal of the Missouri Compromise act in 1854. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act aroused the people of the North and filled them with apprehension and alarm. Lincoln recognized the gravity of the crisis and at once assumed the leadership of his party in Illinois He was its candidate in 1855 for the United States Senate but, lacking a few votes of a majority, he directed his friends to vote for Trumbull, an anti-Nebraska Democrat.

Three years afterwards, in 1858, he was again the candidate of his party for the Senate, this time against Senator Douglas himself. Then came the battle royal. The two candidates spoke from the same platform at a series of meetings held in different parts of the State. It was the most important political debate that ever occurred in this country. Douglas had achieved a reputation as one of the most powerful debaters in the Senate, and was the admitted leader of his party in what was then known as the Northwest. He was believed to be its coming candidate for the Presidency.

The repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the contest between freedom and slavery for the possession of Kansas, amounting at times almost to a condition of civil war, and the open threat of the South to dissolve the Union in case it should be denied the privilege of extending slavery made the discussion of the slave question sharp and bitter. The presidential campaign of 1856 had given the Republicans high hopes of success in 1860. Under these circum-

stances, the open contest for the Senate between Douglas and Lincoln before the people of the State of Illinois was invested with national importance, and aroused the deepest interest throughout the country. It was not believed that Lincoln was the equal of Douglas in such a series of debates, and the Eastern Republicans feared that Douglas would achieve a great personal triumph. Their first meeting upon a public platform served to change this impression. Lincoln's friends were everywhere surprised and delighted, and even the Democrats were compelled to admit that Douglas had at last found in his own State a foeman worthy of his steel. Every succeeding speech increased Lincoln's reputation. He drove his opponent to assume positions which alienated from him the support of the South as a presidential candidate in 1860, and made the union of the Democratic party upon a single candidate for the presidency impossible. At the close of the contest, although defeated for the Senate, Lincoln had won the Presidency, and had opened for himself a career which was to place his name forever beside that of Washington. Washington and Lincoln—two names to be henceforth inseparable in American history.

Lincoln at once became the recognized candidate of his State for the Republican nomination. Popular in the West, he had never been heard in the East. In February, 1860, three months before the meeting of the Chicago convention, it was determined by his friends that he should visit the East and make a political address in New York. This was his famous Cooper Institute speech. It was a revelation to the people of the East of Lincoln's powers of reasoning and oratory. The *New York Tribune* declared that "No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New York audience." There is no doubt that this speech and his later addresses in New England cities contributed largely to Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency.

In connection with this speech there is a story of Mr. Lincoln touching its preparation, which I am now permitted to tell. Mr. Joseph Medill, then the young associate editor of the *Chicago Tribune* was a friend of Lincoln and had been his companion during the Douglas debates. Shortly before his visit to New York, Lincoln brought his proposed speech to the *Tribune* office and asked Dr. Ray, the editor, and Medill to read it. "Boys," he said, "I have prepared the speech that I intend to deliver in New York and have brought the manuscript along with me from Springfield. I would like to have you examine it and note down such changes of words as you think will improve it, without materially altering the ideas or arguments." Lincoln left the manuscript with them, promising to call for it the next day, and Ray and Medill laid aside their work and devoted themselves to the delicate task. One read slowly while the other listened attentively and the reading was frequently interrupted to consider and discuss suggested improvements of diction. It was well past midnight before their work was completed, and they returned to the office early the next morning to re-examine the revised and improved manuscript. When Mr. Lincoln came in they handed him their numerous notes, with references carefully marked on the margin, with the satisfied feeling that by their efforts the speech had been brought to a high degree of perfection. He thanked them cordially for their trouble and took his leave, carrying with him both the manuscript and their notes. A few days later the news reached Chicago that Mr. Lincoln had made his speech and that it had been a triumphant success. In due course the New York papers arrived in Chicago with the text of the address and comments praising its loftiness of tone, the cogency of its reasoning and the vigor of its expression. Ray and Medill seized copies

of the papers and plunged eagerly into the report, congratulating themselves on the successful effect of the polish they had applied to the address. They had not read far before Ray said:."Medill, he does not seem to have made much use of our notes." Reading on further, he said again: "Medill, I believe old Abe must have mislaid our manuscript." Medill replied: "More likely he threw it out of the car window." Ray tried to laugh and said: "This must have been meant for one of his waggish jokes." "Perhaps so," replied Medill, "but we must keep this joke to ourselves, for if the boys find it out they will never get through telling it at our expense." The speech had been delivered as originally written. No allusion was ever made to this incident by Mr. Lincoln, and it is now told publicly for the first time, nearly forty years after the occurrence.

As had been anticipated, at the next national convention the Democratic party divided between Douglas and Breckinridge, thus making Lincoln's election certain from the beginning.

During the four years which followed his inauguration this country was the scene of the greatest civil war of history. More than two millions of men gave their services to the Government to maintain the Union and at the close of the war in April, 1865, the army consisted of more than a million men. Two hundred thousand lives were sacrificed in the struggle. How magnificently Lincoln bore himself throughout that memorable contest is now a matter of history, universally recognized by friend and foe alike.

Coming to the discharge of his Presidential duties, with but slight knowledge of the public men of the country upon whom he must rely for counsel, without experienced officers to place in important commands, he was compelled for two years to grope his way largely in the dark. Em-

barrassed by dissentions and rivalries in his Cabinet and by opposing factions struggling for supremacy in the party, driven to face disaster after disaster in the field, the burden he was forced to bear would have broken the hearts of most men. Still, he fought on, hoped on. Call succeeded call for more troops. As one general failed, a new trial was made with another, but with no certain prospect that the trial would prove a success. Meanwhile, Lincoln was devoting all his energies to mastering the details of administration, both civil and military, which were essential to make one man the master spirit who should control every important movement in the struggle. Often disappointed and deceived, but "with malice towards none and with charity to all," he fought on with unfaltering courage until, in July, 1863, the daylight broke at last. On the fourth of that month, Gettysburg, the decisive battle of the war, had been won; and Vicksburg, the last stronghold of the Confederates on the Mississippi, surrendered. The clouds had rolled away. Two years of discouragement and defeat had at length discovered the great captains who could be safely entrusted with the charge of military movements in the field. New assignments of generals were made. Grant was brought East and made Lieutenant-General; Meade the hero of Gettysburg, retained under Grant the command of the Army of the Potomac; Sheridan was placed at the head of the cavalry; while Sherman and Thomas directed the armies in the West. From that moment victory was assured. A concerted movement of the armies of the nation upon Richmond in the East and Atlanta in the South began in April, 1864, and less than a year sufficed to bring the war to a triumphant close. Lee was driven from the banks of the Rappahannock and shut up in Richmond, while Sherman moved on Atlanta and his triumphant army swept through

Georgia from Atlanta to Savannah, and thence along the coast through the Carolinas, cutting off Lee's communications in the rear. Finally Richmond was captured, the armies of the Confederacy were crushed, and the Union saved.

Looking back over the four years of this terrible conflict we now see how largely the triumph was due to the mental and moral characteristics of Lincoln. His clear and strong intelligence, his sound judgment of men and of affairs, his uncommon commonsense, and his judicial quality of mind which was never swayed by sophistries or calumnies from a direct and logical course of reasoning, gave him a grasp of the situation such as no one about him possessed to an equal degree. His innate uprightness and truthfulness led him to meet all men and all situations with a manly frankness and straightforwardness. He combined in a rare degree the qualities essential to true greatness. He had a powerful intellect, undaunted courage, a keen sense of justice, and with it all a native kindness and gentleness of heart, and a deep sympathy with human suffering. His patriotism was boundless. With him love of country was as strong as the instinct of life itself. His marvellous buoyancy of spirit, aided by a keen sense of humor, infused hope into those around him in the darkest moments; while his broad sympathies, combined with a rare faculty of expression, enabled him to place great truths before the masses of the people in a form that appealed alike to the heart and to the understanding of of all. Thus by turns appealing and encouraging, but always wisely leading, guiding, directing, he was able to bring this great country successfully through its appalling crisis. Lincoln was the man for that crisis. He was a man raised up by the Almighty to lead the Nation through the bitter conflict for the abolition of slavery, a conflict long foreseen to be inevitable—a noble work, nobly

done—and the fame of him who achieved it is immortal.

The great benefit which flows from the public observance of each recurring anniversary of Lincoln's birth is the love of country which his life and services inspire in the young. Let us turn from that life of marvellous achievement to consider briefly the past and to contemplate the future of the country which he so ably and so faithfully served.

Nearly a century and a quarter has passed into history since the Declaration of Independence, and we may truly say that this history is a history of national progress, not only towards material prosperity, but towards a higher standard of public virtue, truth and justice. The century now drawing to a close has been eventful in putting at rest great questions of foreign and domestic policy upon which the security and the very existence of the Nation depended. The slavery of three million men and women is no longer tolerated, and liberty and equality are by the fundamental law of the land guaranteed alike to all. The germ of secession and disintegration, hatched in the fertile brain of Jefferson, which, under the slavery agitation, developed into a malignant and cancerous growth, has been extirpated by the sword. Never again will the right of the nation to defend its own existence by force of arms be questioned or denied. In material prosperity our growth has been the marvel of the century; our population has increased from three millions to seventy-five millions and, excluding Alaska, our area has been more than doubled.

In this brief period in the life of a nation, we have grown from one of the smallest and weakest to be one of the largest, most populous, and, in all that constitutes real strength and wealth, among the richest and most powerful of the nations of the earth. While more than doubling our own area,

we have for three-quarters of a century successfully prevented any European nation from extending its territory or dominion upon the Western Hemisphere.

In the beginning of the present century the Mississippi was our western boundary, while Louisiana and Florida, owned respectively by France and Spain, closed the mouth of the river to the free navigation of our people, cutting us off from the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. In 1803 Jefferson purchased Louisiana from France, and by this single act we acquired a continuous territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It is difficult now to conceive that there ever was a time when both banks of the Mississippi were not ours, but it is still more difficult to realize that there were those among us by whom the purchase of Louisiana was strenuously opposed, even to a threatened dissolution of the Union. The act was denounced as unconstitutional and as a rank usurpation of power. Jefferson, while insisting upon the measure, admitted that he found no warrant for it in the Constitution. His doubts were born of his peculiar theory of the nature of that instrument. He regarded the United States, not as a nation, but as a mere league of independent States, associated only for certain purposes specifically enumerated in the fundamental law. But the opening of the Mississippi to the free navigation of the people of the Union was a national necessity, and with Jefferson this necessity was its justification. The statesman triumphed over the theorist. Then followed in succession the purchase of Florida, the annexation of Texas, and the acquisition of California, Arizona and New Mexico, crowned by the purchase of Alaska. Every one of these extensions met with vehement opposition, but who now doubts the profound wisdom and statemanship that made them? The Louisiana purchase is the most important

event in the early history of the Republic—more important almost than the preservation of the Union, for without it Lincoln would have found no Union to preserve. With the Mississippi as our western boundary and closed to our free navigation the Union would have distegrated and broken up long bfore 1861.

But there is a class of people who now say that this policy of acquisition, by which we have grown great and powerful, should cease, that the nation is large enough, and that even the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, with their own consent and with the consent of the whole world, would mark a new departure in national policy, fraught with infinite trouble and disaster. They admit, for it is admitted by all, that in no event can the United States permit any other great power to control these islands. That has been our settled policy in support of which all political parties have been united for more than fifty years. Even now the opponents of annexation in the Senate have introduced a resolution declaring that the exercise of control over the Hawaiian Islands by any other government would be deemed an act unfriendly to the United States. This is extending the Monroe doctrine to the Hawaiian Republic. It is a declaration that those islands belong to this continent, and that their possession by a foreign power would be dangerous to our peace and safety. If this be true, and if the island republic is not powerful enough to maintain itself against foreign aggression, as it clearly is not, we must either annex it or guarantee its independence. If we are not prepared to do this, we must abandon the Monroe doctrine as applied to the islands of the sea.

That the Hawaiian Islands are essential to the defense of our western coast is obvious to all who have given the subject the most casual consideration. They are the key to the commerce of

the Pacific. With these islands in the possession of a great naval power, the commerce of any other nation could be driven from that ocean. In time of war the islands would, in the possession of an enemy, furnish a base for a successful attack upon our Western coast. With the islands in our possession, such an attack would be impossible. Coal is the vital power of a modern navy. No fleet of ships can wage a successful war upon a foreign coast where it has to steam five thousand miles from its base of supplies. The Hawaiian Islands can alone afford this necessary base for an enemy. Their possession by us is vital to the protection of our coast in time of war, and to the growth of our commercial interests in time of peace.

It is said that their annexation would make it necessary for us to fortify and defend them. But by fortifying in time of peace and holding this single point in time of war, we fortify and defend two thousand miles of our western coast.

Again, it is said that the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands will be the beginning of a general scheme of colonization. This is the old cry that the nation cannot trust itself. It is the same cry that is raised by un-Americans domiciled here that we must not have a navy, because if the nation had a navy as a means of defense, it would use it as a means of conquest. This cry of distrust is a false and traitorous cry. It is a slander upon the most peaceful and conservative nation known to history. We have no ambition for war, either for glory or for conquest. During the one hundred and fifteen years since the treaty of peace acknowledging our independence, we have had but two foreign wars. Had we desired a war of conquest, we would have had it in 1865. Never did a nation have greater cause for war than we had against England then, and never would the results of victory have been greater. Our navy at the close

of our civil war was the strongest and most efficient navy in the world. We could then have met England upon the sea on equal terms and could have destroyed her commerce, as she had already destroyed ours. Whatever else might have been the issue of such a war, Canada would be ours, and never again could the Great Lakes on our northern frontier become the scene of a naval conflict. The commerce of these lakes, greater than that borne upon any other inland sea, and the great cities which maintain it, from Chicago to Oswego, could never be menaced with destruction by a hostile fleet. The sight of the united armies of Grant and Lee marching upon Canada would have electrified the world, and would have done more in a day towards reconciliation and the restoration of the Union than has been accomplished in thirty years of peace. But did we resort to war? No. The nation loved peace more than it loved glory or revenge, and we appealed not to war but to arbitration.

Again, consider the present situation in Cuba. Here is one of the richest and most fertile islands in the world, lying at our very door, the key to the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico and the Isthmus of Panama. We long since proclaimed to the world that no nation other than Spain should be permitted to obtain control of Cuba. For three years its people have been engaged in an heroic struggle to achieve their independence. For three years one of the most cruel and barbarous wars of modern times has been waged against a people devotedly struggling for liberty. The island is wellnigh devastated, its people reduced to abject poverty, and thousands and thousands of them to absolute starvation. The story of their suffering has shocked humanity. But in spite of our deep interest in the prosperity of Cuba and our sympathy for its struggling patriots, we have adhered faithfully to our international obligations and have rigorously abstained from intervention.

May God speed the day when peace with liberty shall gladden the hearts of that brave and long suffering people.

Against the charge of belligerent tendencies and of a disposition to enter upon a career of bloodshed and conquest, I put the fact, as stated by President Eliot, of Harvard University, that during the brief period of our national life the United States have been a party to forty-seven arbitrations—being more than half of all that have taken place in modern times and embracing subjects which would have been deemed by other nations ample cause for war.

The fear, therefore, that the annexation of Hawaii will lead to the adoption of a new and dangerous policy on our part is unfounded and absurd. To annex the islands is to avoid becoming entangled with other nations on their account. I am for annexation to preserve peace and to avoid war.

There is one other measure of vital moment to the future prosperity and safety of this nation which should be undertaken before the close of the present century, and that is, the construction of the Nicaraguan Canal. The vast consequences to this nation that hang upon its successful accomplishment cannot be overestimated. The canal should be built and controlled by the United States alone. In addition to the commercial advantages of the canal, its construction is demanded as a measure of national defense. To-day we are compelled to maintain two virtually separate and independent navies. More than eight years ago, I took occasion as Secretary of the Navy, to say, in speaking of the necessities of our naval force, that our position demanded the immediate completion of two fleets of battleships, a fleet of eight to be assigned to the Pacific and one of twelve to the Atlantic and the Gulf. This was long before

Japan had become the great naval power that she is now recognized to be. To-day we need the same naval force in the Pacific as upon the Atlantic. Instead of having twelve battleships upon the Pacific we have only one. The Nicaraguan Canal would unite the navies of the Atlantic and Pacific and make them available on either coast as the emergency might arise. We would then have one strong and efficient navy, instead of being compelled to maintain two weak and comparatively inefficient ones. If the canal is built for one hundred and fifty million dollars, the reduced expense of the navy would pay the annual interest on its total cost.

The annexation of the Hawaiian Islands and the beginning of the Nicaraguan Canal should crown our achievements in the present century. What destiny awaits the nation in the century that is to come, it is not given to man to know. But, having faith in the future of my country, I firmly believe that the prophecy of that great Englishman, John Bright, uttered during the most discouraging crisis of our civil war will then be fulfilled. Replying at Birmingham, in 1862, to the declaration of Gladstone that the restoration of the Union was impossible and that the cause of the North was hopeless, he said: "I cannot believe, for my part, that such a fate will befall that fair land, stricken though it now is with the ravages of war. I cannot believe that civilization, in its journey with the sun, will sink into endless night in order to gratify the ambition of the leaders of this revolt. . . . I have another and a far brighter vision before my gaze. It may be but a vision, but I will cherish it. I see one vast confederation stretching from the frozen North in unbroken line to the glowing South, and from the wild billows of the Atlantic westward to the calmer waters of the Pacific main,—and I see one people, and one language, and one law, and one faith, and, over all that wide continent, the

home of freedom, and a refuge for the oppressed of every race and of every clime."

To the memory of John Bright, orator, statesman and philanthropist, the friend of the United States in its darkest hour, there should be erected in the Capital of the nation a monument having inscribed thereon the words which I have quoted. In the history of the war for the preservation of the Union the name of John Bright will ever be connected by every patriotic American with that other name immortal—Abraham Lincoln.