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Lincoln's Personal Characteristics

William Hnery Herndon

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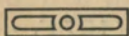
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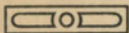
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LINCOLN'S
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

By WILLIAM H. HERNDON



A Letter written Jan. 15, 1874, to
an unknown correspondent in
New York City.



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FOREWORD

The name of Herndon's New York correspondent to whom this letter was addressed, is not known, nor is it certain the original letter now exists.

Its recipient valued it to the extent that it was published in a newspaper, doubtless of the same year (1874) and a clipping has been preserved in an old scrap-book, making it possible to pass on to admirers of Abraham Lincoln this truly beautiful estimate of his character.

Its value as source material justifies its publication.

H. E. Barker

Issue limited to 100 copies of which this is
No. 32.

Chinkapin, Sangamon County

January 15, 1874

Dear Sir:

You say you desire to know all possible things of the great and good dead. I have just now a few moments to spare, and I do not know how better to spare them than to tell you what Mr. Lincoln really was and what he was not. Mr. Lincoln was a kind, tender and sympathetic man, feeling deeply in the presence of suffering, pain, wrong or oppression in any shape; he was the very essence and substance of truth; was of unbounded veracity, had unlimited intergity, always telling the exact truth, and always doing the honest thing at all times and under all circumstances. He was just to men, he loved the right, the good and true, with all his soul.

I was with Mr. Lincoln for about twenty-five years, and I can truthfully say I never knew him to do a wrong thing, never knew him to do a mean thing, never knew him to do any little dirty trick. He was always

noble. In his nature he felt noble and acted nobly. I never knew so true a man, so good a one, so just a one, so incorrupted and incorruptible a one. He was a patriot and loved his country well, and died for it. Mr. Lincoln expressed his great feelings in his thoughts, and his great thoughts in his feelings; he lived in his thoughts, and thought in his feelings. By these his soul was elevated and purified for his work. His work was the highest and grandest religion, noble duty nobly done. Mr. Lincoln was cool and calm under the most trying circumstances; he had unbounded charity for all men.

In religion he was a Theist, somewhat after the order of Theodore Parker. Mr. Lincoln was not a speculative minded man; was, like Washington, severely practical; he never ran in advance of his age, and yet was always directing the ideas and feelings of men to purely practical ends, to something that would end in good. Mr. Lincoln never shaped his veracity, integrity or virtue to circumstances; he fashioned and formed circumstances, so far as he could, to virtue,

veracity, and to integrity. He scorned meanness everywhere and at all times, and was bold and manly in his denunciation of wrong however and by whoever done; he was not a foxy, tricky man; he was a statesman high above all tricks. How such a man as Lincoln could walk up to the highest point of human grandeur, from such a low origin, God only knows. But he was so ordained from the beginning, and so it is.

Mr. Lincoln was a man of great fidelity to whatever he believed was right—was true to friends, never deserting them till they deserted virtue, veracity, and integrity. Mr. Lincoln could be, and was, trusted by the people with almost omnipotent power, and he never abused it nor shook the public's faith in him. He was true to his trust, true to his country, and true to the rights of man. What a noble man, and what a noble life he lived! Washington was America's creator; Lincoln was its savior. Mr. Lincoln now stands up against the deep blue sky the grandest figure of the age.

I have now stated to you Mr. Lincoln's leading characteristics, and if you like him better for them I am well satisfied with what I have told you. I have weighed every word and sentence, and can truly say they are true to Lincoln and Lincoln true to them. Lincoln was not a very social man. He was not spontaneous in his feelings; was, as some said, rather cold; he was rather reflective—not cold. However, take him all in all, he was as near a perfect man as God generally makes.

Yours truly,

W. H. HERNDON