

Abraham Lincoln and His Friends

Address by President J. Raymond Chadwick of Iowa Wesleyan College before Joint Session of 58th General Assembly—February 12, 1959.

I certainly would be remiss if I did not express to you my sincere thanks for the honor which you have accorded me to speak on this very outstanding occasion to this joint session of the House and the Senate of the State of Iowa when we commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. There are many phases of the life of Abraham Lincoln upon which one might speak. I have been an admirer of Lincoln for many years, and a student of his writings over a considerable period of time.

I know of no manner in which to study the life of Abraham Lincoln, however, which is more fascinating than to think of "Lincoln and His Friends." We are in a very large measure what our friends of the past and the present make us; and our influence is perpetuated through friends who feel the strength and power of our personality and teachings and carry forward our philosophy of life. History, therefore, is not a series of events, or a multitude of facts to be learned, but a line of men to be understood and appreciated. A very helpful approach, therefore, to the strength and

the power of Abraham Lincoln is to note how his life and thought was influenced by the philosophy of government which was held by Alexander Hamilton, on the one hand, and Thomas Jefferson, on the other.

There is sufficient evidence in the writings of Lincoln to indicate beyond the shadow of a doubt that he, like Hamilton, believed in a strong central government; and that these United States together make up one Nation. It is common knowledge that Lincoln had a very high regard for the Union. The basis for his national point of view is found in his conviction of the priority of and supremacy of the Union to the States. He held that the Union was older than the States and that they gained the standing they have as States through the Union. Furthermore, Lincoln held that the authority and the power of the Union was supreme to that which the States had. Even more he insisted that the Union was perpetual and no State had a right to withdraw from the Union. Consequently the preservation of the Union became the political cornerstone of Lincoln's theory of government. In his famous "House Divided Against Itself" speech he said, "I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the House to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other."

Although it is not always recognized, the preservation of the Union was to Lincoln a more important issue than the momentous slavery question. This he made evident in his familiar words: "If freeing all the slaves would save the Union I would do that. If freeing none of the slaves would preserve the Union I would do that. What I do, I do for the preservation of the Union and what I do not do, I do not do for the preservation of the Union." And at last he accepted the "Mighty Scourge of War," as much as he hated it, rather than give up the Union. To Lincoln a strong central government was imperative.

When we turn to a consideration of Lincoln's conception of the objectives of government, however, we follow the way of Jefferson rather than Hamilton. In the mind of Lincoln the object of government was: (1) To protect its members from all forms of external harm. (2) To advance the personal rights of man. (3) To do for its members what they cannot well do for themselves. These emphases were undoubtedly due to the diligent study of the writings of Jefferson which Abraham Lincoln pursued. Nicolay and Hay record a letter of Lincoln on Jefferson as follows:

The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and actions of free society. . . . All honor to Jefferson — to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for a National independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document an abstract truth, applicable to

all men at all times, and so to embalm it there that today and in all coming days it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling block to every harbinger of reappearing tyranny and oppression.

Thus it becomes evident even from this brief glimpse at the thought and practice of Abraham Lincoln that his philosophy of government was an unique synthesis of the political philosophy of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Therefore, it is possible for people of both major parties, Republicans and Democrats as well, to join heart and head and hand with all other people in paying tribute to Abraham Lincoln, that "Man of the people" who possessed the qualities of human sympathy, keen insight and great determination, the combination of which made him the Sage, the Savior and the Saint of Democracy. With one accord we all join with Edwin Markham in saying:

Here was a man to hold against the world,
A man to watch the mountains and the sea.

Lincoln's life and decisions were likewise influenced by the close friends of his day, his contemporaries if you please, one of the most outstanding of whom came from Iowa. This friendship, therefore, should be of special interest to us as citizens of Iowa on this Sesquicentennial of Lincoln's birth. I refer to none other than the friendship which existed between Abraham Lincoln and James Harlan, the first Republican Sena-

tor [originally an Anti-Nebraska Whig] from the State of Iowa.

President of Iowa Wesleyan, 1853-55, during which he built "Old Main" Hall, and being elected in 1855 to the United States Senate, James Harlan was well acquainted with Washington circles when Abraham Lincoln arrived as President-elect. While the country was awaiting the inauguration of Lincoln, a new and warm friendship began between him and Harlan. In selecting his first cabinet Lincoln sought the advice of Senator James Harlan, whom he had met only once before. During the years of the war the friendship between them deepened so that at the second inaugural Senator Harlan was chosen as an escort for Mrs. Lincoln, and Miss Mary Harlan was among the distinguished group surrounding the President.

Senator Harlan was also intimately connected with the President on the occasion of his last public appearance. It was only three days before the assassination. The President had announced that he would speak from the White House and a large audience gathered in front of the executive mansion. When the President ceased speaking, there were calls for Senator Sumner but he was not present, and then Harlan was loudly called for.

Another indication of the close relationship between Senator Harlan and President Lincoln is revealed in the fact that Lincoln appointed Harlan as Secretary of the Interior in the Spring of 1865,

and even though Lincoln was assassinated before Senator Harlan assumed the duties of this office, he filled it with distinction from May 15, 1865, to July 27, 1866, when he resigned because of opposition to policies of Johnson's administration.

The close personal quality of this friendship between Senator Harlan and President Lincoln is revealed in the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln and Mr. and Mrs. Harlan often took drives together out into the country surrounding Washington, D. C. The last drive which they took together was shortly after the fall of Richmond when they crossed the Potomac River into Virginia through a country devastated by war. This drive, says Senator Harlan in his autobiographical papers, has become to me historical not only because it was the last drive of this nature which President Lincoln took but also "because he had suddenly become, on the fall of Richmond and the surrender of the Confederate Army at Appomattox, a different man from what I had ever seen in him. His whole appearance, poise and bearing had marvelously changed. He was in fact transfigured. That indescribable sadness which had previously seemed to be an adamantean element in his very being, had been suddenly exchanged for an equally indescribable expression of serene joy as if conscious that the great purpose of his life had been achieved. . . . Yet there was no manifestation of exultation or ecstasy. He seemed," Senator

Harlan concluded, "the very personification of supreme satisfaction."

This close friendship between Senator Harlan and President Lincoln was recognized by the Senator's associates, when he was chosen a member of the Congressional Committee to escort the body of Lincoln, after his assassination, to Springfield, Illinois.

A few weeks later Harlan presided over a meeting of citizens who were interested in erecting a monument to Lincoln. An organization was formed and James Harlan was chosen President.

But why were these two men such close friends? Why did Lincoln seek the counsel and advice of James Harlan on many occasions? They were kindred spirits. They had much in common. To use the words of Edwin Markham:

Born of the ground,

The great west nursed them on her rugged knees.

The education of each was very meager. Lincoln, as we know, had three books in his library, as a boy, *Aesop's Fables*, *Weems' Life of Washington* and the Holy Bible. Harlan, likewise, at the age of 14, saw for the first time a large collection of books in the Public Library of Park County, Indiana. After examining the wonderful volumes, he secured a few volumes to take home with him, and thus began his search for knowledge.

Both of these men were lawyers; also pioneers in the field of human rights. Each of them be-

lieved in education for all and placed human rights uppermost in their scale of values. Harlan, like Lincoln, continually raised his voice against the further extension of slavery, and when the war came he firmly supported the government in its measures to preserve the Union. With Lincoln he shares the credit for securing the freedom and enfranchisement of an oppressed race.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the state of Iowa paid high tribute to the memory of James Harlan in 1907, when Congress passed a law authorizing each state to select the names of two of its illustrious sons, statues of whom would be placed in the National Statuary Hall in the Capitol Building in Washington, D. C., Iowa designated James Harlan as "Worthy of being selected as one of the citizens of Iowa whose statue shall be placed in the said National Statuary Hall."

The friendship of these two outstanding American families bearing the name of James Harlan and Abraham Lincoln continued on in a very real sense of the word, long after Lincoln's death, through the union of the two families in marriage. On September 24, 1868, Mary Harlan, the only one of James Harlan's four children living to maturity, married Robert Todd Lincoln, the only one of Abraham Lincoln's four children living to maturity. After Senator Harlan retired from his position as Senator in 1873 he returned to his home in Mount Pleasant. Mr. and Mrs. Robert Todd

Lincoln often visited him there. His three grandchildren, Mary Lincoln, Abraham (Jack) Lincoln and Jessie Lincoln, were his pride and joy. On one occasion, in September, 1883, he had the three grandchildren stand against a closet door while he recorded the name and the height of the same on the central panel. This door is a precious treasure of Iowa Wesleyan College.

The continuing strength of the Harlan-Lincoln friendship is further revealed in a very interesting and unique manner which I am sure is of special interest to everyone in Iowa. Robert Todd Lincoln inherited slightly more than \$100,000.00 from his father, Abraham Lincoln. With this he made an estate of \$3,300,000.00 through the medium of free enterprise, which I feel is one of the greatest blessings of America.

Upon the death of Robert Todd Lincoln in 1926 his entire estate came into the possession of his wife, Mary Harlan Lincoln. In the early thirties she sought the counsel of Frederick Towers, attorney of Washington, D. C., in making her will. After making certain bequests to individuals there remained \$2,100,000 which she desired to set up as a trust fund, the interest from which would go to her descendants so long as there was any issue of blood. Furthermore, Mrs. Lincoln said she wanted the trust fund to be divided, when there was no more issue of blood, one third going to the American Red Cross, one third to the Chris-

tian Science Church of Boston and the remaining third to be used to create a memorial to her father. Mr. Towers made the suggestion that her father, James Harlan, had but one thought, day or night, and that was Iowa Wesleyan College. The comment was true, for Mr. Harlan had been twice President of Iowa Wesleyan and had remained a trustee of the College to the day of his death in 1899. After due consideration Mrs. Robert Todd Lincoln concurred that a gift to Iowa Wesleyan would be a fitting memorial to her father, James Harlan, and instructed Mr. Towers to designate the last third of the trust fund for this purpose.

At the present time the trust fund has appreciated so that it is valued at more than \$3,000,000. The youngest heir is Robert Todd Beckwith, a grandson of Robert Todd Lincoln and Mary Harlan, whose age is 55 and no children. The next heir is his sister, Mary Beckwith, 61 and no children; and the third heir is Lincoln Isham, another grandchild, cousin of the first two named, who is 67 years of age and no children.

Thus in the course of human events, since there is no further issue of blood besides the three living great grandchildren of Abraham Lincoln and James W. Harlan, the trust fund will be divided and Iowa Wesleyan College will receive at least \$1,000,000.00. This will be a significant gift, but even more significant is the fact that we will be the only college in the world ever to receive any

of Abraham Lincoln's money, at least in any substantial amount, through his son Robert Todd Lincoln. Yea more, how appropriate that it should be a memorial to Lincoln's close friend, James Harlan. Therefore, just as Iowa is next to Illinois geographically, so it also seems to me that she is next to Illinois in importance as far as association with the spirit of Abraham Lincoln is concerned through the union of the two families of Abraham Lincoln from Illinois and James Harlan of Iowa.

Our desire to perpetuate the spirit of that union as well as the memory of the families of James Harlan and Abraham Lincoln, is revealed by the fact that Iowa Wesleyan College has recently launched a program for the restoration and refurbishing of the Harlan House in Mount Pleasant, adjacent to the campus of Iowa Wesleyan where Senator Harlan lived following his retirement from his important position of national leadership. This we feel will be a fitting memorial to the memory of James Harlan, first Superintendent of Public Instruction for Iowa, first Republican Senator from Iowa, first Cabinet Member from Iowa, and fast friend of Abraham Lincoln; as well as an appropriate recognition for Robert Todd Lincoln, outstanding business man and public servant, and a worthy shrine symbolizing the spirit of Abraham Lincoln and James Harlan, great pioneers of the Middle West who went "From prairie cabin up to Capitol."

In this I am sure you all rejoice. More and more we need to recognize and give honor to great Americans who served their Nation with unusual vision and courage in a most critical period of our history. It is only as we all join our hearts and minds and hands to perpetuate the spirit of Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator, as well as the spirit of his contemporaries who shared his outlook upon life, outstanding among whom was James Harlan, will we demonstrate our full measure of devotion so that "Government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

J. RAYMOND CHADWICK