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“Lincoln,” 1915 February 12.

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Rabbi Moses J. Gries,

THE TEMPLE, Cleveland, O.

"Lincoln"

More than forty years have passed since the death of Abraham Lincoln. Tonight we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of his birth. He was the greatest man whom the Republic has produced - one of the few truly great of all history.

In my boy's room at home hangs a picture of the rude log cabin, which was the birth-place of Lincoln. What one of us was born in a home so poor and under conditions of life so lowly?

Wonderful is the story of his wonderful life. Born of humblest parentage - a poor farmer's son - a flat-boatman, a rail splitter, a country clerk, a country lawyer, then, President of the United States. His life story teaches the most impressive lesson in the history of America. It reveals the possibility of the poor in a democracy. Understand what he was as a man - understand Lincoln as President. Behold him on the day of his death, know what he accomplished, know him as the saviour of the Union, the emancipator of millions.

Abraham Lincoln, the son of poverty, ranks above kings and emperors. Therefore, the day of his birth is eloquent with the prophetic promise of his life. It speaks the message of hope to all of America and to all of the oppressed of the world.

Lincoln's name will forever be associated with the idea of human liberty. Minds there are which have not yet grasped the fundamental truth that human liberty must be liberty, not alone for us, but liberty for all. Liberty does not mean liberty for the white, and, not slavery, but lesser liberty to the black and the brown and the yellow peoples. It does not mean freedom and authority for the supreme and the masterful races and subjection and slavery for the inferior races of the earth.

In America slavery persisted in contradiction of the Declaration of Independence. In 1860, just before the Civil War, there were 3,954,000 slaves in the United States. Liberty meant freedom for the whites and slavery for the

blacks, until the hour of emancipation. Never again will the philosopher plead that slavery is natural and just, as in the ancient republic of Plato. Never again will a minister of God declare that slavery is divinely appointed, as in the modern republic of America. Liberty is necessary to human happiness. None doubts today all men must be free. It is injustice when man is not free. History has vindicated the wisdom of Abraham Lincoln. On his way to Washington in 1861, standing in old Independence Hall and interpreting the Declaration of Independence, he declared it "gave liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time".

Therefore, America feels such profound sympathy with the oppressed millions of Russia. The sympathy of America is always with the people oppressed and not with the tyrant rulers. There can be no true friendship between democracy and despotism. America believes in freedom - in the inborn right of man. It does not believe in oppression nor in the divine right of kings. Who of us believes that the Czar of Russia is God's representative to rule millions of men? America offers welcome to the unfortunate victims of injustice and oppression. America will not close her portals against the hunted and the persecuted. Let Russia shut her gates and let the nations of the earth compel her to do justice and to establish peace within them.

The Russian peasantry are struggling now, fighting the age-old battle for human freedom. Millions are dreaming of liberties and pleading for human rights we hold to be natural and inborn. Russia cannot be half free and half serf - half nobility and half peasantry. Lincoln's historic declaration "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided" - has proven true for America. It will prove itself for Russia. Russia must grant freedom to live and to toil - free speech and free press and free education to her people. It will prove itself true for the world. The time will come when the world will not be half free and half slave - when no human being will be in bondage anywhere.

We are all freemen. This nation, thank God, is free. Our land is a land consecrated to liberty. Let us hold America to her historic ideals, that she shall ever be the land of freedom and the home of justice.

A generation ago great questions gripped the conscience and the heart of the people. What is the great question of our generation? It is whether we shall be half slave and half free - half slave and half free politically, half slave and half free industrially, half slave and half free commercially, half slave and half free morally. Politically, whether the bosses or the people shall rule in the city and the state and the nation; industrially, whether the trusts and the corporations or the government shall be supreme; commercially, whether the privileged few or the people shall control the necessities of life; morally, whether there shall be a double standard of morals, one for the private and another for the public life, one for the rich and powerful and another for the poor and weak, one standard for the man and another standard for the woman.

I conceive the problems of this nation, as I believe does the courageous President of these United States, as problems of moral right and moral wrong. As individuals let us not hesitate, let us declare honestly where we stand. In the spirit of Lincoln, in his famous Cooper-Institute address, "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it."

Lincoln's life is a mighty protest against a false aristocracy. We need here in America an American Thackeray to write a new "Book of Snobs," fitly to portray, with Thackeray's pen and Thackeray's power, the aristocracy of wealth - of the newly rich, glorifying itself in what should be a democracy of the poor. How many there are who believe that riches is the greatest prize to be won in the battle of life.

Abraham Lincoln was never rich. Always he belonged to the common people. He was worth but a few thousand dollars when he became president. Who were the rich men of Lincoln's day? Who were the men who ruled the exchanges? Who were

the kings of the market places? All are forgotten - buried in the oblivion of the past. False are the old distinctions of my lords and my ladies. False the idea of the noble born. I am reminded of Lincoln's answer to the Austrian count, who recited his long lineage and noble ancestry and desired a commission in the army. Said Lincoln, "I will see to it that your bearing a title shan't hurt you". It

is not how a man is born, of what ancestry and of what parentage, whether he be born patrician or plebian, in a ~~pink~~ palace of the capital, or in a log cabin in the woods. Heart and soul and mind make men what they really are. Character distinguishes the true aristocrat. Castellane is one of the noblest names in France. Count or no count, we take his true measure and know him to be not noble, but ignoble. To the true aristocracy of character, the poorest and the humblest may belong.

Lincoln was born the child of poverty. Kings and emperors and czars die and leave no memorial behind, but the whole world treasures the life and reveres the memory of Abraham Lincoln. The world loves the name of Lincoln. As a man he measured more than kings.

For me there is power in the story of Abraham Lincoln. The rude log cabin in old Kentucky of almost a century ago proclaims a message to mankind more powerful than do the palaces of Europe. The historic palaces and historic castles of Europe and of all the Old World are symbolic of glory and splendor that are no more. They are eloquent of royal pomp and royal power. Their message is of despair and decline and death and decay. The little log cabin is symbolic, not of glory nor yet of splendor, eloquent not of pomp nor of power, but it proclaims the message of life and growth and not of death and decay. It speaks the message of hope to all the millions of the world.

It is a familiar tale, often told. Often quoted are the thoughts of Lincoln. We may speak of them again with new interpretation and proclaim with new emphasis the words of the Gettysburg address, one of the classics of the English tongue. It contains a message to all America, in every generation:

"But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate - we cannot consecrate - we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. . . . It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us - that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

The life story of Lincoln renews our faith in democracy. It gives us new trust in the people and in the government of the people. Let us remember his name with honor. His character is an inspiration to us all. He was a great man, strong and tender, yet just and merciful. Entrusted with the supreme power of life and death, he did not abuse his power, he did not fail. How true the tribute of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, spoken ten years after the war -

"Next to the destruction of the Confederacy, the death of Lincoln was the darkest day the South has ever known." Magnificent the tribute of the distinguished ~~man~~ ^{interpreter of America}

~~ambassador to America~~, the Honorable James Bryce - "If American institutions had

done nothing else than produce the character of Lincoln, they would have justified their right to be." And our own ^{5x-} President Roosevelt, years ago wrote in his

"American Ideals" - "Every American is richer by the heritage of the noble deeds and the noble words of Washington and Lincoln."

and American institutions