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Willam Abbat

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WILLAM ABBAT

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RARE LINCOLNIANA—No. 17

COMPRISING

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THE NATION'S WAIL (The late) Rev. George Duffield (1865)
CAPTAIN LINCOLN vs. PRIVATE THOMPSON (1832) Frank E. Stevens
A NEW LINCOLN STORY M. C. deK.
MEMORIES OF LINCOLN Rev. C. S. Bullock
THE TALL STRANGER ON DORCHESTER HEIGHTS, (The late) Albert D. Penta

TARRYTOWN, N. Y.

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The account of the ragged, destitute, hungry men at Valley Forge, freezing, bleeding in the snow, yet holding on, has been repeated many times and oft. And well it may be; for such a story of deathless heroism it is difficult to parallel in the annals of nations. The men of Valley Forge can never be too highly praised, their heroism too largely dwelt upon. Here they overcame victory. Here they defeated defeat. Here they founded an heritage for, and gave an example to, succeeding generations.

But I have deliberately chosen to fix my attention this morning rather upon the man than upon the men. And I have broadened the scope of my remarks. Valley Forge stands for the supreme struggle of the Revolution. The place is national, therefore, nay, it is epochal in universal history. In my judgment the cause of American independence was settled here rather than on any other battlefield in the war. Surviving this winter its future might be delayed, but it was assured. For man here fought against nature. He had to oppose his feeble powers not to men who differed from him only in degree of strength or capacity, but to those immutable laws which bring the heat in summer and the cold in winter, which produce the thirst pang and the hunger grip. Against these the highest human courage usually avails nothing. Before these man breaks and falters. So did not our forefathers in the snow.

The ambition of Napoleon was finally buried on the ice-heaped plains of Muscovy; the genius of liberty lived, it grew, it thrived at Valley Forge. Therefore, from the long-roll at Lexington to the grounding arms at Yorktown, the supreme incident of the American Revolution is the winter at Valley Forge.

Happy is that great commonwealth, Pennsylvania, keystone of the mighty federal arch, which includes within its borders such hallowed ground; for, as I have said elsewhere and to this

splendid assemblage, no spot on earth—not the plain of Marathon, nor the pass of Sempach, nor the Place of the Bastille, nor the dykes of Holland, nor the moors of England—is so sacred in the history of the struggle for human liberty as are the hills of Valley Forge.

You will bear with me, I am sure, if I take a long leap through the years and call your attention to another fact which justly fills us as children of Pennsylvania with a double pride; that within our borders is a second spot hallowed by the blood of men, of equal importance and of equal interest in our history and in the history of the world with this. That sacred field lies to the westward where rise the slopes of Gettysburg.

(At Valley Forge it was determined whether or not the Republic should die in its childhood; at Gettysburg it was settled whether or not the Republic should exist in its manhood.) As in the winter of '76 the opponents of liberty put forth their greatest efforts, seconded by the bitter circumstance of nature, to stifle the new idea, and failed; so in '63 the Confederacy reached the "high topgallant" of its fortunes when brave Armistead fell before the Pennsylvania soldiers on Cemetery Ridge. There were five years of varying conflict after Valley Forge, and two years of bloody fighting after Gettysburg, but in both cases it was but the ebbing of a tide.

The man who stands to us for the heroism at Valley Forge is George Washington; the man who stands to us for the supreme event at Gettysburg is Abraham Lincoln. At first glance no two men could be more dissimilar, yet the first is the cause of the second, the second the complement of the first. For to George Washington and Valley Forge are due Abraham Lincoln and Gettysburg. In history they can never be disassociated. This is a contrast, a comparison and a consequence.