

**ABRAHAM
LINCOLN: THE
PRACTICAL MYSTIC**

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Abraham Lincoln: The Practical Mystic by Francis Grierson

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FRANCIS GRIERSON

**ABRAHAM
LINCOLN: THE
PRACTICAL MYSTIC**

ABRAHAM LINCOLN THE PRACTICAL MYSTIC

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**ILLUSIONS AND REALITIES OF
THE WAR**

**THE INVINCIBLE ALLIANCE
AND OTHER ESSAYS**

THE CELTIC TEMPERAMENT

**MODERN MYSTICISM AND
OTHER ESSAYS**

PARISIAN PORTRAITS

**THE HUMOUR OF THE UNDER-
MAN**

THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS

LA VIE ET LES HOMMES

(in French)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
THE PRACTICAL MYSTIC
By FRANCIS GRIERSON
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN DRINKWATER

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INTRODUCTION

THE great wonder of poetry, of all art, is that its challenge and consolation transcend all points of view; working not upon our opinions, but upon our fundamental desire for completeness and intelligible form. The man who realizes the true significance of poetry responds with equal satisfaction to Swinburne when he says :

"This life is a watch or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep ;

and to Browning's

"Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake,"

no matter in which direction the trend of his own personal philosophy may be. The life-giving quality lies in the complete realization of a mood in one case as in the other, and it is from this that we draw a knowledge of our own power of fulfilment, by this that we are inspired.

It is no idleness to say that a man's life

becomes endowed with meaning for us exactly in so far as it approaches this perfect unity and conclusion of a great work of art. This has nothing to do with the position that art is greater than life, though it could be shown easily enough that art is merely life in its nearest approach to perfection. A life in which neither intention nor loyalty to intention are left unresolved, in which the nature of the soul stands out to our vision with the sharpness of chiselled marble, and compels its environment always to take on something of its own property, transfiguring, as it were, the external circumstance in which it moves, remains to us for ever an example and a hope. The fear, that if this be so a life of evil will might serve us as profoundly as one of nobility, is baseless. For, by some creative fitness governing the universe, poverty of spirit is always doomed in the last issue to confusion; evil is, indeed, nothing but the lack of this very lucidity and completeness. But it does not at all follow that in matters of opinion many good men may not be in disagreement with the man in whose life we are aware of the radiant spiritual form. The life, most familiar to English-speaking people, in which this unity is loveliest, is

that of Christ. And the man who worships Christ most truly may well be one who would not fear to make this or that question of his teaching, nor would such a one be the least patiently forborne.

In modern history there is no man whose life so finely bears for the world the significance of a great work of creative wisdom as Abraham Lincoln. If it should be asked whether Lincoln was a greater man than Shakespeare, it must at least be remembered, whatever the answer, that in Lincoln his life stands for the *Lear* and *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* and *Tempest* of Shakespeare. And it is the spectacle of the one perfecting his own soul that moves us as deeply and instructs us as surely as that of the other perfecting the creatures of his imagination. It seems to me that it is this faculty in Lincoln for investing the life of a statesman, absorbed in the medley of daily affairs, with spiritual significance, so that what he does, however pregnant, is always of secondary consideration to what he so supremely is, that Mr. Grierson has in mind when he calls him "the practical mystic." The theme is a great one, and Mr. Grierson is to be thanked for dealing by it so justly.

The crowning instance of the independ-