

**ABRAHAM
LINCOLN:
AN ESSAY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649749737

Abraham Lincoln: an essay by Joseph Fort Newton

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JOSEPH FORT NEWTON

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Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Published by The Torch Press
MDCCCX

An address made before the members of The State Historical Society of Iowa and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Iowa City, Iowa, May 25, 1910, and published in this form by the courtesy of The State Historical Society of Iowa

Lincolniana

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TO MY FATHER, WHO FOUGHT ABRAHAM
LINCOLN, THIS ESSAY IS INSCRIBED BY ONE
WHO REVERES THE MEMORY OF BOTH

The Torch Series

Edited by Joseph Fort Newton

“ We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IT IS not easy to speak of Lincoln calmly. He was a man of such high and tender humanity, of personality so appealing and pathos so melting, that almost every study of him ends in a blur of eulogy. No higher tribute could be paid to any man, yet that was just what he did not like and the reason why he refused, in his later years, to read biography. He had no vanity, and being a man of humor he did not pose, nor did he wish any one to draw him other than he was. But men can no more help loving and praising him than they can help loving and praising surpassing goodness anywhere. His very honesty in simplicity makes him all the more winning, and to this day he puzzles any artist for that he was so unlike any model.

Lincoln was a great and simple man,

so simple that many deemed him darkly deep; and, like all simple men, he had a certain mystery about him; a mystery too simple to be found out. That is to say, he was a man who seemed complex because, in the midst of many complexities, he was, after all, simple; an uncommon man with common principles and virtues, who grew up in the back-yard of the republic and ascended to power in a time of crisis. His later fame, so unlike his early life, made men stare, because they had not seen the steps he took along the road. His genius was home-spun, not exotic. It does not dazzle or baffle, does not bewilder or amaze, and is thus an example and a legacy of inspiration. Yet no one who saw him ever saw another like him. He was unique. He stood apart. He was himself — original, genuine, simple, sincere. The more we know about him the greater he seems to be in his totality of powers, none of which was supremely great, but all of which, united and held in poise, made him at once so universal and so unique.

I

Behind Lincoln, as the background of his life, lay the wide melancholy of the western plain, its low hills, its shifting sky, its shadowy forests and winding streams, and the hardship and hazard of pioneer days. There we see the lad in the log cabin, studying by a dim fire-light; the rail-splitter and the reader of books; the flat-boatman going far down the rivers — a strange, heroic, pathetic story which still awaits the touch of a master hand. Then appears the tall, gawky captain in the Black Hawk War, clad in a suit of blue jeans, sworn into the service by Jefferson Davis; the post-master at New Salem who carried his office in his hat; the surveyor whose outfit was sold for debt; the village sceptic, fabulist and athlete; and the young man standing white and forlorn at the grave of a country girl, whose image he kept in his heart wrapped in the sweet and awful sadness of the valley of shadows.

Those early days return in all their monotony of privation and toil, full of