

**THE WISDOM OF ABRAHAM
LINCOLN; BEING EXTRACTS
FROM THE SPEECHES, STATE
PAPERS, AND LETTERS OF THE
GREAT PRESIDENT**

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The wisdom of Abraham Lincoln; being extracts from the speeches, state papers, and letters of the great President by Abraham Lincoln & Marion Mills Miller

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN & MARION MILLS MILLER

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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PREFACE

MOST books of selections from the writings and conversations of Abraham Lincoln are designed primarily to show the peculiarities of his unique personality. Composed largely of his humorous stories, his witty and satirical comments upon his contemporaries, and anecdotes revealing the eccentricities of his genius, they uniformly produce a caricature of the accidental rather than essential features of him who stands as the ideal type of American manhood.

In this anthology this limited and thoroughly culled field has been avoided, and the broader domain of Lincoln's genius explored to find the fruits of his ripened wisdom rather than the flowers of his brilliant and pungent personality. The mind and the soul of the man are shown, possibly too purely and severely. Yet

while softening details are lacking in this portrait, all the strong and well-beloved lineaments of Lincoln are preserved,—each line as he himself drew it. Every passage is authentic and authoritative, the source and date of its utterance being given. The extracts are arranged in chronological order. The index of the book is by subjects.

The compiler acknowledges with thanks permission given him by the Current Literature Publishing Company to use the text of its Centenary Edition of the Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln in making the extracts.

MARION MILLS MILLER.

THE FIRST AMERICAN

Extract from Ode recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 27, 1865

BY JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

W HITTIER leads the path
To ampler fates that leads?
Not down through flowery meads,
To reap an aftermath
Of youth's vainglorious weeds;
But up the steep, amid the wrath
And shock of deadly-hostile creeds,
Where the world's best hope and stay
By battle's flashes gropes a desperate way,
And every turf the fierce foot clings to bleeds.
Peace hath her not ignoble wreath,
Ere yet the sharp, decisive word
Light the black lips of cannon, and the sword
Dreams in its easeful sheath;
But some day the live coal behind the thought,
Whether from Baal's stone obscene,
Or from the shrine serene
Of God's pure altar brought,
Bursts up in flame; the war of tongue and pen
Learns with what deadly purpose it was
fraught,

And, helpless in the fiery passion caught,
Shakes all the pillared state with shock of
men :

Some day the soft Ideal that we wooed
Confronts us fiercely, foe-beset, pursued,
And cries reproachful: " Was it, then, my
praise,
And not myself was loved? Prove now thy
truth ;

I claim of thee the promise of thy youth ;
Give me thy life, or cower in empty phrase,
The victim of thy genius, not its mate ! "

Life may be given in many ways,
And loyalty to Truth be sealed
As bravely in the closet as the field,
So bountiful is Fate ;
But then to stand beside her,
When craven churls deride her,
To front a lie in arms and not to yield,
This shows, methinks, God's plan
And measure of a stalwart man,
Limbed like the old heroic breeds,
Who stands self-poised on manhood's solid
earth,
Not forced to frame excuses for his birth,
Fed from within with all the strength he
needs.

Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,
Whom late the Nation he had led,
With ashes on her head,
Wept with the passion of an angry grief :

Forgive me, if from present things I turn
To speak what in my heart will beat and burn,
And hang my wreath on his world-honored
urn.

Nature, they say, doth dote,
And cannot make a man
Save on some worn-out plan,
Repeating us by rote :

For him her Old-World moulds aside she
threw,

And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
Of the unexhausted West,
With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and
true.

How beautiful to see

Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge, but never loved to
lead ;

One whose meek flock the people joyed to be,
Not lured by any cheat of birth,
But by his clear-grained human worth,
And brave old wisdom of sincerity !

They knew that outward grace is dust ;
They could not choose but trust
In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill,
And supple-tempered will
That bent like perfect steel to spring again
and thrust.

His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind,
Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,
A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind ;