

“Team of Rivals”

The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln

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Kindle Notes: Dave Kraft

They made an exceptional team. Seward was more visionary, more idealistic, better equipped to arouse the emotions of a crowd; Weed was more practical, more realistic, more skilled in winning elections and getting things done. Ambition is a passion, at once strong and insidious, and is very apt to cheat a man out of his happiness and his true respectability of character. There was little to lead one to suppose that Abraham Lincoln, nervously rambling the streets of Springfield that May morning, who scarcely had a national reputation, certainly nothing to equal any of the other three, who had served but a single term in Congress, twice lost bids for the Senate, and had no administrative experience whatsoever, would become the greatest historical figure of the nineteenth century. Insecurity and ambition combined, as ever, to fuel his efforts.

The more successful Chase became, the more his pious family fretted over his relentless desire for earthly success and distinction. “I confess I almost tremble for you,” his elder sister Abigail wrote him when he was twenty-four years old, “as I observe your desire to distinguish yourself and apparent devotedness to those pursuits whose interests terminate in this life.” If his sister hoped that a warm family life would replace how I mourned that the prospect of a little addition to my reputation...should have tempted me away. His guilt rekindled his religious commitment, producing a “second conversion,” a renewed determination never to let his fierce ambition supersede his religious duties. They placed greater value on family, hospitality, land, and honor than on commercial success or monetary wealth. Bates’s biographer Marvin Cain writes, “he at last had a stable situation through which he could achieve the ambition that burned brightly in him.

”The death of Chase’s father forced young Salmon to exchange the warm support of a comfortable home for the rigid boarding school of a domineering uncle, a man who bestowed or withdrew approval and affection on the basis of performance. An insatiable need for acknowledgment and the trappings of success thenceforth marked Chase’s personality. This great storytelling talent and oratorical skill would eventually constitute his stock-in-trade throughout both his legal and political careers.

The passion for rendering experience into powerful language remained with Lincoln throughout his life Books became his academy, his college. The printed word united his mind with the great minds of generations past. He read and reread the Bible and Aesop’s Fables so many times that years later he could recite whole passages and entire stories from memory. A lucid, inquisitive, and extraordinarily dogged mind was Lincoln’s native endowment. At twenty-two, he departed his family home with all his meager possessions bundled on his shoulder He studied geometry and trigonometry while learning the art of surveying. And then, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to study law. After a long day at one of his various jobs, he would read far into the night.

A steadfast purpose sustained him. What Lincoln lacked in preparation and guidance, he made up for with his daunting concentration, phenomenal memory, acute reasoning faculties, and interpretive penetration. Lincoln's inability to take refuge in the concept of a Christian heaven sets him apart from Chase and Bates. Lincoln and Speed shared the same room for nearly four years, sleeping in the same double bed. No longer a boy but not yet an established adult, Lincoln ended years of emotional deprivation and intellectual solitude by building his first and deepest friendship with Speed.

His accomplishments in escaping the confines of his barren, death-battered childhood and his relentless self-education required luck, a stunning audacity, and a breadth of intelligence that was only beginning to reveal itself. "There is an intuitive perception about him, that seems to see & understand at a glance, and a winning fascination in his manners that will suffer none to be his enemies who associate with him. While Bates initially basked in such acclaim, within weeks of the convention's close, he convinced himself he no longer craved what he later called "the glittering bauble" of political success. What a demon is this ambition, he lamented from Albany, baring his soul in a long, emotional letter to his wife.

When I realized most forcibly that 'love is the whole history of woman and but an episode in the life of man'...even he will do what is right. He will not close his eyes and know that a great wrong is perpetrated." ABRAHAM LINCOLN, like Seward and Bates, was drawn to politics in his early years. At the age of twenty-three, after only six months in New Salem, Illinois, he decided to run for the state legislature from Sangamon County. If the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined. He had long held his "ability to keep [his] resolves when they are made...as the only, or at least the chief, gem of [his] character."

Mental health, contemporary psychiatrists tell us, consists of the ability to adapt to the inevitable stresses and misfortunes of life. It does not mean freedom from anxiety and depression, but only the ability to cope with these afflictions in a healthy way. "His face was about the saddest I ever looked upon." Another contemporary described his face as "slightly wrinkled about the brows, but not from trouble. It was intense, constant thought that planted the wrinkles there." Such capacity to intuit the inward feelings and intentions of others would be manifest throughout his career. "Profoundly versed in man, he was profoundly ignorant of men." A disappointed Chase wrote. "We have but a short life to live here my dear friend. But let us make it long by noble deeds. You have great gifts of God, energy, enthusiasm, talent, utterance. And now a great cause demands you." His strengths were those of the public leader, not the bureaucratic manager. "Mr. Lincoln was careful as to his manners, awkward in his speech, but was possessed of a very strong, clear and vigorous mind.

There was something mysterious in his persona that led countless men, even old adversaries, to feel bound to him in admiration. She encouraged his idealism, pressing him repeatedly to consider what should be done rather than what could be done. “Life was to him a school,” fellow circuit rider Leonard Swett observed, “and he was always studying and mastering every subject which came before him.” Lincoln possessed an extraordinary ability to convey practical wisdom in the form of humorous tales his listeners could remember and repeat. This process of repetition is central to the oral tradition;

Though Lincoln did not drink, smoke tobacco, use profane language, or engage in games of chance, he never condescended to those who did. He had addressed the Springfield Temperance Society at the height of the temperance crusade. He had insisted that “such of us as have never fallen victims, have been spared more from the absence of appetite, than from any mental or moral superiority over those who have.” No lawyer on the circuit was better loved than Lincoln, a fellow lawyer recalled.

“He arrogated to himself no superiority over anyone—not even the most obscure member of the bar.... He was remarkably gentle with young lawyers.... No young lawyer ever practiced in the courts with Mr. Lincoln who did not in all his after life have a regard for him akin to personal affection.” The alteration in his attitude was likely spurred by jealousy, an emotion the introspective Chase begrudged in others yet could never subdue in himself. “I made this resolution today,” he had confided in his diary when he was twenty-three years old. “I will try to excel in all things yet if I am excelled, without fault of mine, I will not be mortified. I will not withhold from any one the praise which I think is his due; nor will I allow myself to envy another’s praise or to feel jealousy when I hear him praised. May God help me to keep it.”

As he moved into the second hour of his speech, his conviction gave him ease and confidence. Step by step, he laid the foundation for the “higher law” doctrine that would be forever associated with his name. “I have never heard but one more impressive speaker—and that is our Henry (don’t say this to anybody).” But Clay was mistaken, she claimed, if he believed the wound between North and South could be sutured by his persuasive charm. Though he might make “doughfaces out of half the Congress,” his arguments had not convinced her.

Most upsetting was Clay’s claim that “Northern men were only activated by policy and party spirits. Now if Henry Clay has lived to be 70 years old and still thinks slavery is opposed only from such motives I can only say he knows much less of human nature than I supposed.” At midnight, Douglas began his concluding speech, which lasted nearly four hours. “Then the inspiration that possessed him took possession of his hearers also. His speaking went to the heart because it came from the heart. Mr. Lincoln’s eloquence was of the higher type, which produced conviction in others because of the conviction of the speaker himself.” Lincoln presented his carefully “connected view” for better than three hours. From that moment on, propelled by a renewed sense of purpose, Lincoln dedicated the major part of his energies to the antislavery movement.

Conservative and contemplative by temperament, he embraced new positions warily. Once he committed himself, however, as he did in the mid-fifties to the antislavery cause, he demonstrated singular tenacity and authenticity of feeling. Ambition and conviction united, Lincoln's choice of Stanton would reveal, as would his subsequent dealings with Trumbull and Judd, a singular ability to transcend personal vendetta, humiliation, or bitterness. Success in the law came quickly, the result of an intuitive mind, a prodigious capacity for work, and a forceful courtroom manner. For Douglas, the crux of the controversy was the right of self-government, the principle that the people in each territory and each state should decide for themselves whether to introduce or exclude slavery. "I care more for the great principle of self-government, the right of the people to rule, than I do for all the negroes in Christendom." These statements of Seward and Chase, coming from the leaders of the antislavery cause, reveal that racism, the belief in white supremacy, was deeply embedded in the entire country. His comments on race here and throughout the debates reveal a brooding quality, as if he was thinking aloud, balancing a realistic appraisal of the present with a cautious eye toward progress in the future.

There is no way to penetrate Lincoln's personal feelings about race. There is, however, the fact that armies of scholars, meticulously investigating every aspect of his life, have failed to find a single act of racial bigotry on his part. Although refusing to confuse flattery with fact, yet once he began to speak, people were captivated by his earnest and powerful delivery. His countenance shows intellect, generosity, great good nature, and keen discrimination.... He is an effective speaker, because he is earnest, strong, honest, simple in style, and clear as crystal in his logic." The most popular luncheon in town included a glass of four-year-old ale and a ham sandwich for ten cents.

The many enemies Chase had made and failed to conciliate over the years came back to haunt him at this critical juncture. One Chase supporter later lamented; there was "a weakness in the spinal column in the Ohio delegation at Chicago, most pitiable to behold." You...I think the hardest kind of death to die is that occasioned by indecisive, or lukewarm friends." To reach his goal of becoming everyone's second choice, Lincoln was careful not to disparage any other candidate. Nor was it in his nature to do so. His nomination, finally, was the result of his character and his life experiences—these separated him from his rivals and provided him with advantages unrecognized at the time. Though Lincoln had entered the antislavery struggle later than Seward or Chase, his speeches possessed unmatched power, conviction, clarity, and moral strength.

At the same time, his native caution and precision with language—he rarely said more than he was sure about, rarely pandered to his various audiences—gave Lincoln great advantages over his rivals. His ability to rise above defeat and create friendships with previous opponents was never shared by Chase, who was unable to forgive those who crossed him. Finally, Lincoln's profound and elevated sense of ambition—"an ambition," Fehrenbacher observes, "notably free of pettiness, malice, and overindulgence," Though Lincoln desired success as fiercely as any of his rivals, he did not allow his quest for office to consume the kindness and openheartedness with which he treated supporters and rivals alike. The hearty simplicity of Lincoln's nature shone out."

As the committee members left, Mr. Kelley of Pennsylvania remarked to Schurz: "Well, we might have done a more brilliant thing, but we could hardly have done a better thing." What was more, Bates continued, Lincoln had "earned a high reputation for truth, courage, candor, morals and ability so that, as a man, he is most trustworthy. And as for Lincoln, "he has all the marks of a mind that scans closely, canvasses thoroughly, concludes deliberately, and holds to such conclusions unflinchingly." Had the election been fought on the single issue of slavery, it is likely that Lincoln would have lost. Reporters marveled at Seward's ability to make every speech seem spontaneous and vital, "without repetition of former utterances," surpassing "the ordinary stump speech in fervency...literary quality, elevation of thought, and great enthusiasm on the part of the auditors." Lincoln asked the New Yorker to reassure the audience that Republicans "would not interfere with slavery where it already existed.

"From his earliest days in politics, he had craved the opportunity to accomplish important deeds that would benefit his fellows. In modern parlance, he wanted to make a difference and now he had the opportunity to do so. He resolved that day to surround himself with the strongest men from every faction of the new Republican Party—former Whigs, Free-Soilers, and antislavery Democrats. The president-elect "showed remarkable tact" with every caller. Listening patiently to each applicant, Lincoln revealed a quick-witted "adaptation to individual characteristics and peculiarities. He never evaded a proper question, or failed to give a fit answer to everyone he dealt with,

Villard concluded, agreed that "he is the very embodiment of good temper and affability. They will all concede that he has a kind word, an encouraging smile, a humorous remark for nearly everyone that seeks his presence, and that but few, if any, emerge from his reception room without being strongly and favorably impressed with his general disposition." While more than willing to consult with Weed and Seward on his cabinet selections, Lincoln wanted it known that the ultimate decisions would emanate from Springfield and would be his alone. Though she wanted him to close the curtain on his political career and come home to his family in Auburn, when huge worshipful crowds met his whirlwind summer tour for Lincoln, she had foreseen that his driving ambition would never be satisfied in tranquil Auburn. Nor was she surprised by his grandiose claim that he would try to save freedom and his country.

She often saw her man with a clearer eye than he saw himself. "Mr. Lincoln is not pledged to the ultimate extinction of slavery; does not hold the black man to be the equal of the white. Whatever conciliatory measures he might consider, Lincoln was adamant, he told Trumbull, that there must be "no compromise on the question of extending slavery. He began with Lincoln's resolutions calling for a constitutional amendment to prevent any future Congress from interfering with slavery where it already existed. During the tumultuous time from Lincoln's election in November 1860 to his inauguration in March 1861, "You are in danger of taking the path which led Daniel Webster to an unhonored grave ten years ago. Compromises based on the idea that the preservation of the Union is more important than the liberty of nearly 4,000,000 human beings cannot be right.

The alteration of the Constitution to perpetuate slavery—the enforcement of a law to recapture a poor, suffering fugitive...these compromises cannot be approved by God or supported by good men....Yet Lincoln’s “wonderful vivacity surprised every spectator,” Chittenden marveled. “He spoke apparently without premeditation, with a singular ease of manner and facility of expression.” In the front row, along with Lincoln, sat President Buchanan, Senator Douglas, and Chief Justice Taney, three of the four men Lincoln had portrayed in his “House Divided” speech as conspiring carpenters intent on destroying the original house the framers had designed and built. quoting an earlier speech in which he had promised that he had “no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists.

In a record time of “seven days and seventeen hours,” Lincoln’s words could be read in Sacramento, California. Likewise, Charles Francis Adams, Sr., felt that a great burden had been lifted from his shoulders when Lincoln accepted the controversial amendment that prevented Congress from ever interfering with slavery. portentous came from within the A “LIGHT AND CAPRICIOUS” SLEEPER, Lincoln generally awakened early in the morning. As Lincoln moved throughout the house to take his lunch—which was generally limited to bread, fruit, and milk—“he had literally to run the gantlet through the crowds.” Somehow Lincoln managed, despite the chaos, to focus upon the crisis at Sumter. Late at night, he would sit in the library, clothed in his “long-skirted faded dressing-gown, belted around his waist,” his large leather Bible beside him.

Several hours after the cabinet adjourned, he also implemented a drastic restructuring of his daily schedule. Seward’s success in getting Lincoln to soften the tone of his inaugural address, coupled with the cabinet vote on March 15, decisively echoing his own advice to evacuate Sumter, had left him with the mistaken conviction that he was the power behind a weak president.“ Had Mr. Lincoln been an envious or a resentful man, he could not have wished for a better occasion to put a rival under his feet.” Seward’s effrontery easily could have provoked a swift dismissal. Yet, as happened so often, Lincoln showed an “unselfish magnanimity,” which was “the central marvel of the whole affair.” To the astonishment of Welles, Lincoln “took upon himself the whole blame—said it was carelessness, heedlessness on his part—he ought to have been more careful and attentive.

“The Confederates had fired the first shot. A war had begun that no one imagined would last four years and cost greater than six hundred thousand lives—more than the cumulative total of all our other wars, from the Revolution to Iraq. The devastation and sacrifice would reach into every community, into almost every family, in a nation of 31.5 million. In proportion to today’s population, the number of deaths would exceed five million.

To Lincoln’s mind, the battle to save the Union contained an even larger purpose than ending slavery, which was after all sanctioned by the very Constitution he was sworn to uphold. “I consider the central idea pervading this struggle,” he told Hay in early May, “is the necessity that is upon us, of proving that popular government is not an absurdity.

We must settle this question now, whether in a free government the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose. If we fail it will go far to prove the incapability of the people to govern themselves.” The philosopher John Stuart Mill, in his life, he had taken care not to send letters written in anger. Seward was slowly but inevitably coming to appreciate Lincoln’s remarkable abilities.

“It is due to the President to say, that his magnanimity is almost superhuman,” I will accept the commission,” Butler gratefully told Lincoln, but “there is one thing I must say to you, as we don’t know each other: That as a Democrat I opposed your election, and did all I could for your opponent; but I shall do no political act, and loyally support your administration as long as I hold your commission; and when I find any act that I cannot support I shall bring the commission back at once, and return it to you.”

Lincoln replied, “That is frank, that is fair. But I want to add one thing: When you see me doing anything that for the good of the country ought not to be done, come and tell me so, and why you think so, and then perhaps you won’t have any chance to resign your commission.” By shying from emancipation in these early months of the war, Lincoln aligned himself with the majority of the Northern people, the Republican Congress, and the whole of his cabinet.

Two weeks into its session, the House passed a resolution declaring that the purpose of the war was “to preserve the Union,” not to eliminate slavery. Refusing to acknowledge that the dispute represented an honest clash of opinions, McClellan insisted that the root of contention with Scott was the veteran’s “eternal jealousy of all who acquire any distinction.” Though he himself neither drank nor smoked, he happily watched Seward light up a Havana cigar and pour a glass of brandy. And while Lincoln rarely swore, he found Seward’s colorful cursing amusing.

“Presidents and Kings are not apt to see flaws in their own arguments,” he wrote, “but fortunately for the Union, it had a President, at this critical juncture, who combined a logical intellect with an unselfish heart.” He appreciated the courage it took for Lincoln to share the blame at a time when everyone else had deserted him. Most other men in Lincoln’s situation, Cameron wrote, “would have permitted an innocent man to suffer rather than incur responsibility.” Lincoln was not like most other men, as each cabinet member, including the new war secretary, would soon come to understand. Stanton kept his meetings brief and pointed.

He was “fluent without wordiness.” Maintaining vivid consciousness of his dead child was essential for a man who believed that the dead live on only in the minds of the living. Adhere to your purpose and you will soon feel as well as you ever did. On the contrary, if you falter, and give up, you will lose the power of keeping any resolution, and will regret it all your life.” The boy stayed at West Point, graduating in 1866. Now, in the wake the boy was miserable at the academy and his mother was worried. “Allow me to assure you it is a perfect certainty that you will, very soon, feel better—quite happy—if you only stick to the resolution you have taken to procure a military education.

I am older than you, have felt badly myself, and know, what I tell you is true. Adhere to your purpose and you will soon feel as well as you ever did. On the contrary, if you falter, and give up, you will lose the power of keeping any resolution, and will regret it all your life.” The boy stayed at West Point, graduating in 1866.

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He understood the “differences in the Cabinet on the slavery question” and welcomed their suggestions after they heard what he had to say; but he wanted them to know that he “had resolved upon this step, and had not called them together to ask their advice.” Once Lincoln had made up his mind, Seward was steadfast in his loyalty to him. Lincoln had long believed, as we have seen, that “with public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.” I said nothing to any one; but I made the promise to myself, and (hesitating a little) to my Maker.” While Lincoln rarely acknowledged the influence of faith or religious beliefs, “there were occasions when, uncertain how to proceed,” remarked Gideon Welles, “he had in this way submitted the disposal of the subject to a Higher Power, and abided by what seemed the Supreme Will.”

For Lincoln, the most serious governmental crisis of his presidency had ended in victory. He had treated the senators with dignity and respect and, in the process, had protected the integrity and autonomy of his cabinet. The cynics were wrong. Despite repeated warnings that the issuance of the proclamation would have harmful consequences for the Union’s cause, Lincoln never considered retracting his pledge. As Frederick Douglass had perceived, once the president staked himself to a forward position, he did not give up ground. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that Seward’s pridefulness had led him occasionally to make immodest claims regarding his influence in the administration.

Yet, despite such indiscretions, he was steadfast and loyal to the president. Having relinquished his own future ambitions, he had fought tirelessly to advance the fortunes of his chief and serve the country he loved. Through the worst days of discord and division, Lincoln never lost his confidence that he understood the will and desires of the people. No matter how brutally trying his days, he still found time in the evenings to call at Seward’s house, where he was assured of good conversation and much-needed relaxation. Though he loved good conversation and had built his large house in order to gather interesting people around his table, he stayed in the War Department day and night, rarely enjoying the convivial evenings that replenished Seward and Lincoln or that Kate provided for Chase.

“In order to be able to render most efficient service to our country it is essential for me to be right as well as seem right & to seem right as well as be right.” Before they parted, Lincoln told Douglass that he had read a recent speech in which the fiery orator had lambasted “the tardy, hesitating and vacillating policy of the President of the United States.” Though he conceded that he might move with frustrating deliberation on large issues, he disputed the accusation of vacillation. “I think it cannot be shown that when I have once taken a position, I have ever retreated from.” “Sit down,” Lincoln urged. “What I want is an audience. Nothing sounds the same when there isn’t anybody to hear it and find fault with it.”

Stoddard expressed doubt that “If I had had my way,” he reportedly said during the meeting, “this war would never have been commenced; if I had been allowed my way this war would have been ended before this, but we find it still continues; and we must believe that He permits it for some wise purpose of his own, mysterious and unknown to us; and though with our limited understandings we may not be able to comprehend it, yet we cannot but believe, that He who made the world still governs it.” I have never done an official act with a view to promote my own personal aggrandizement, and I don’t like to begin now.” French lauded Everett’s speech, believing it “could not be surpassed by mortal man.” Several correspondents were less enthusiastic. “Seldom has a man talked so long and said so little,” wrote the editor of the Philadelphia Age. “He gave us plenty of words, but no heart.... He talked like a historian, or an encyclopaedist, or an essayist, but not like an orator.” Although the president listened to the opinions of many, he took pride in arriving at his own decisions in his own way.

The president, announced Congressman Francis Kellogg of Michigan, “is the great man of the century. There is none like him in the world. He sees more widely and more clearly than anybody.” LINCOLN’S ABILITY TO RETAIN his emotional balance in such difficult situations was rooted in an acute self-awareness and an enormous capacity to dispel anxiety in constructive ways. Everything Grant did during his four-day stay in Washington, from his unheralded entrance to his early departure, “was done exactly right,” the historian William McFeely concludes. “He was consummately modest and quietly confident; the image held for the rest of his political career—and beyond, into history.” At this point, according to Chittenden, Lincoln paused. “And yet there is not a man in the Union who would make as good a chief justice as Chase,” he continued, “and, if I have the opportunity,

I will make him Chief Justice of the United States.” Chittenden concluded that this extraordinary want of vindictiveness toward someone who had caused him such grief proved that Lincoln “must move upon a higher plane and be influenced by loftier motives than any man” he had ever known. Mills, who had been initially skeptical of Lincoln, was overwhelmed by “his transparent honesty” and the depth of his convictions. It is likely that McClellan shared Lincoln’s sentiment. The election would tell which man had won the hearts and minds of the more than 850,000 men who were fighting for the Union.

“Now, I know meaner things about Governor Chase than any of those men can tell me,” but “we have stood together in the time of trial, and I should despise myself if I allowed personal differences to affect my judgment of his fitness for the office.”

Probably no other man than Lincoln," Nicolay wrote to Thoreau, "would have had, in this age of the world, the degree of magnanimity to thus forgive and exalt a rival who had so deeply and so unjustifiably intrigued against him. It is however only another most marked illustration of the greatness of the President." With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

More than any of his other speeches, the Second Inaugural fused spiritual faith with politics. While Lincoln might have questioned the higher force that shaped human ends, "as he became involved in matters of the gravest importance," his friend Leonard Swett observed, "a feeling of religious reverence, and belief in God—his justice and overruling power—increased upon him." If his devotion were determined by his lack of "faith in ceremonials and forms," or by his failure "to observe the Sabbath very scrupulously," Swett added, "he would fall far short of the standard."

However, if he were judged "by the higher rule of purity of conduct, of honesty of motive, of unyielding fidelity to the right," or by his powerful belief "in the great laws of truth, the rigid discharge of duty, his accountability to God," then he was undoubtedly "full of natural religion," for "he believed in God as much as the most approved Church member." A decade later, Sherman remained convinced of Lincoln's unparalleled leadership. "Of all the men I ever met, he seemed to possess more of the elements of greatness, combined with goodness, than any other.

"That indescribable sadness which had previously seemed to be an adamant element of his very being had been suddenly changed for an equally indescribable expression of serene joy, as if conscious that the great purpose of his life had been attained." Nonetheless, the marquis marveled, "it was impossible to detect in him the slightest feeling of pride, much less of vanity." Throughout the discussion, Stanton recalled, Lincoln "spoke very kindly of General Lee and others of the Confederacy," exhibiting "in marked degree the kindness and humanity of his disposition, and the tender and forgiving spirit that so eminently distinguished him." "A Cabinet which should agree at once on every such question would be no better or safer than one counselor." why was Lincoln so great that he overshadows all other national heroes? He really was not a great general like Napoleon or Washington; he was not such a skilful statesman as Gladstone or Frederick the Great; but his supremacy expresses itself altogether in his peculiar moral power and in the greatness of his character.