

The Crane Classics

Adventures in Common Sense

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LINCOLN, DEMOCRAT, SERVANT OF ALL

It is rather unfortunate, in the interests of clear thinking, that the two leading political parties of the United States take the titles of Democrat and Republican. It makes it difficult to speak of democracy or republicanism without leading some of your auditors to fancy that you mean one of the two great job-hunting organizations.

When I call Lincoln a democrat I have, of course, no intention of identifying him with any political faction, but refer to the fact that he believed in the rule of the people and not of the classes, which is the root-meaning of democracy.

To me Lincoln was the greatest democrat that ever lived—that is, no one seems to have had such an utter confidence in the common people as he.

In the first place, he knew the people. He did not come down from some higher social level to “do them good.” He was not a missionary to the people. He was one of them. He was born right. His parents, relatives, and all the neighbors of his early life were “just folks.”

It was a free, wide country he lived in. Every-

body worked. There were no endowed loafers, no self-styled superior class. A man was a man for a' that in Sangamon County, Illinois, in the forties and fifties. The only way to know a people is to be born of them and to have your youth soaked in their environment.

And Lincoln "sensed" the people, knew what they wanted, loved, feared, and hoped better than any other man of his age, and, possibly, of any age. He was the people's nerve, part and parcel of their body; he FELT them.

Then he esteemed them. He thought the whole people had more sense than any leader or wise statesman. You are never a genuine democrat until you think that. He expressed it in his wondrous way when he said: "You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all the time."

And the people, he believed, were not only wiser, but they were also honester, purer, holier, and more nearly right than any small number or specially trained or bred group. To him the will of that great people from whom he sprang was the will of God. Their grim purpose was the purpose of God. The majesty of their deep feeling he revered as if it were the majesty of God.

There was none of the clap-trap and hypocrisy of the office seeker in his appreciation of the people. It was through and through his soul.

He was not a ruler, as Julius Cæsar. He was

not a leader, nor teacher, nor guide to the people, as other great men have been. He was one of the greatest SERVANTS of the people that ever lived.

He did not "want to help" them; he knew they could help themselves if they could find the right kind of servant, and that he strove to be.

He knew the people did not need any king or general or statesman to instruct them what to do, nor any philanthropist nor billionaire to do things for them; all they wanted was to be given a chance to do things for themselves, to struggle out of their poverty by their own efforts, to remedy their own wrongs and to carry out their own reforms when they got ready.

And what Lincoln stood for is the thing America, and all the world, for that matter, needs to-day—to wit, that the people do not need so much new laws, new and fantastic schemes of government, new gospels, wise guides, benefactors, and helpers, but they simply need agents who will carry out their will; they need simple justice, a square deal, and a chance to paddle their own canoe.

The world to-day needs the faithful servant, not the superior ruler.

In Lincoln was fulfilled the words of One who also took upon Himself the form of a servant:

"And whosoever will be great among you shall be the servant of all."