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A VISIT WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

This is the Memorial weekend, and I presume from thousands of platforms, pulpits, and rostrums the usual Memorial Day sentiment has been expressed. There has been hope that somehow the sacrifices made and to which tribute was paid on Memorial Day would not be in vain. The hopes and pledges were uttered and I think we can go back to Lincoln a little on the Memorial occasion as he expressed the hope for a new birth of freedom and also that popular government, meaning by the people, and for the people, and of the people, would not perish from the earth.

I associate it, because Memorial Day actually grew out of the War of the Rebellion or the civil strife. And so it is well to go back in the light of the problems that confront us today, and it occurred to me, that perhaps you and me could talk to Mr. Lincoln, and I want you to join me as we talk to him, because here he is.

I like to talk to him in first person as if in the flesh he were sitting here across the table, and so, Mr. Lincoln, it runs in my mind that the thing you emphasized most virtually all your lifetime was freedom. To be sure, you were concerned with the preservation of the Union, but it runs in my mind also that when you made that speech in Bloomington, Illinois, I think in 1856, sometimes called the Law Speech, that there your moral stature really presented itself. And from then on, the great issue of freedom became a great guiding light for you. Well, it's rather

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interesting after all the emphasis that you placed on the matter of freedom that that is still the issue long after you are gone.

You see, it's a hundred years since you uttered the Emancipation Proclamation, or rather that it became effective, because it was effective on the first of January, 1863. But all through your life, you emphasized human dignity and human freedom and so I say it is rather singular that that is still the issue that confronts mankind.

Look for a moment at what's on our doorstep. The issue of Cuba. This man, Fidel Castro, took over probably five years ago. There have been no elections in Cuba, and people are living under the conditions of a very tight police state. Everything they say, everything they do, is monitored, and so there is no freedom there. You had occasion way back in 1858 to remark on the inhuman government under Spanish rule in Cuba. You voiced your sentiments on that a good many times. After you left us, General Grant who came to the presidency later, wanted to buy Cuba and Spain wouldn't sell. And then came McKinley - another McKinley. We liberated Cuba. Led her by the hand, so she could get on her feet, and now, they are enslaved again under one of their own. I think you would say that is rather astonishing, a hundred years after your Proclamation, and what 98 odd years since you departed from us. So what you emphasized as the great issue in the world is still the great issue.

I think of a situation in our own country, in your country and in mine. It's what happened just a good ten days ago. We had a referendum that was conducted by this government: the government that you left us. It was with respect to the production of wheat, which is in high surplus. An offer was made to the farmers of the

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country who were wheat farmers. At first, they were to register, then have as much as 15 acres or thereabouts: they could vote in a referendum, and what do you think the vote was on? Whether or not they should become enslaved to their own government. That's what it amounted to.

I saw a good many of the work sheets that farmers sent me. A government agent came to sit down with him. Says now if you will come under the compulsion of your government, you get so many dollars. But if, however, you want to somehow run your own business on the farm, you get so many dollars, and on a small parcel of wheat, the farmer could gain perhaps two hundred dollars.

So freedom went on the auction block, except what we tender you, give us your liberty, surrender your freedom, and we will give you an extra two hundred dollars. An amazing thing for your country and mine. I remember you said once that it seems to you and the best principle at that, that was to let people do with their own business pretty much as they will. We seem to live in a different world, and so even here, in a wheat referendum we were asking the farmers of the country to vote themselves under compulsion and as you so well know, compulsion is certainly not freedom.

And then, of course, I think of your Emancipation Proclamation of a hundred years ago. Actually, I don't suppose it liberated any slaves. Your armies first had to conquer those areas before they could be liberated, but it had a tremendous moral effect not only on your country and mine, but on people everywhere in the world. And after that, there came the Fourteenth Amendment. It was proposed a year after you left us, and I think it got into the Con-

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stitution in 1868, three years after you had gone away. There we made everybody who was even naturalized or was born in this country, a citizen in two respects: he was a citizen in the State in which he lived, and he was a citizen of the United States. But he doesn't quite enjoy the equality that you hoped he would. You see it today in the racial tensions that bother us in so many places. It takes on a dangerous character, and it flares up day after day, and it becomes a challenge, I think, to our sense of compassion and to our sense of fairness and equity for which you were so richly noted, and which you exemplified to the very limit. So you see, a hundred years after your Emancipation Proclamation all this has not yet been consummated. So it's interesting that these tensions are with us today. I am sure that they would make you quite unhappy if you were here. But there is an aspect of freedom that you emphasized.

But freedom has been denied elsewhere, and has been liquidated in so many parts of the world. Do you remember that sword that you got from the King of Siam in 1862, and his photograph, and a photograph of his daughter, and you remember in his letter to you, he offered you a pair of elephants, breeding elephants, believing that perhaps they could be useful in this latitude? And what a gracious note you wrote him. Well, it isn't called Siam today. They call it Thailand way out in Asia. But the people in Thailand are under pressure today.

Next door is a little country called Cambodia. There, freedom is under pressure. Still next door, is a little country called Laos. We spent over three hundred million out of the Federal Treasury in

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order to hold the line, but it begins to look rather dubious that freedom can be preserved in Laos. And then a little way south of there, is the southern half of Indo-China. I presume, it was Indo-China when you were here. Now we call it South Vietnam. We have 17 or 18 thousand American boys over there, and they are going in for guerrilla fighting with helicopters and airplanes. You didn't have helicopters and airplanes when you were conducting the Civil War, but there they are. And some of ours have been killed in this guerrilla fighting. But what are they fighting for? They are fighting against the pressure to liquidate their freedom.

You can go into Latin America, and you see these feverish movements. Some of them aligned with Communism. This brutal ideology, this terrible force that has no regard for the freedom and the dignity of human personality. They want to reduce man to an economic unit with no thought above his pocketbook, like perhaps a contented cow in a clean barn. And look what it has done. It has ravaged freedom in all of eastern Europe, and it threatens in all parts of the earth. I would presume that a billion people in this world today are under the limitations and the restrictions and the menacing threats of Communism. So there again, you have the issue of freedom that you emphasized as the greatest problem to confront mankind.

And there is one other thing. There are some treaties pending that haven't been sent to us yet, but one is on slavery - to clarify it, and to refine the definitions of slavery. We joined with one such effort in 1926. We joined with another effort in 1956, and now here comes still another to refine the definition of slavery and then

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get the countries to join in that treaty.

Doesn't this strike you as amazing after all the sacrifices, all the dead, everything that has gone into a hundred years that we should be still putting things on paper because of the fear of enslavement.

So we stand on the pinnacle of virtually a hundred years after your Proclamation, and a hundred years after you bled and fought and sacrificed and struggled so prayerfully and so furiously in the interests of human freedom, and after a hundred years, Mr. Lincoln, it's not a very interesting thing to contemplate, is it? But, God willing, with the compassion that you exhibited, and with the dispassion that you could show, perhaps this we can still conquer before an incandescent movement goes too far.

We should worship with you oftener. We ought to talk to you oftener, and get the inspiration that you have for us, and then we shall in your own language "the better know what to do". Mr. Lincoln, what a privilege that we who are the beneficiaries of your heritage can visit with you.