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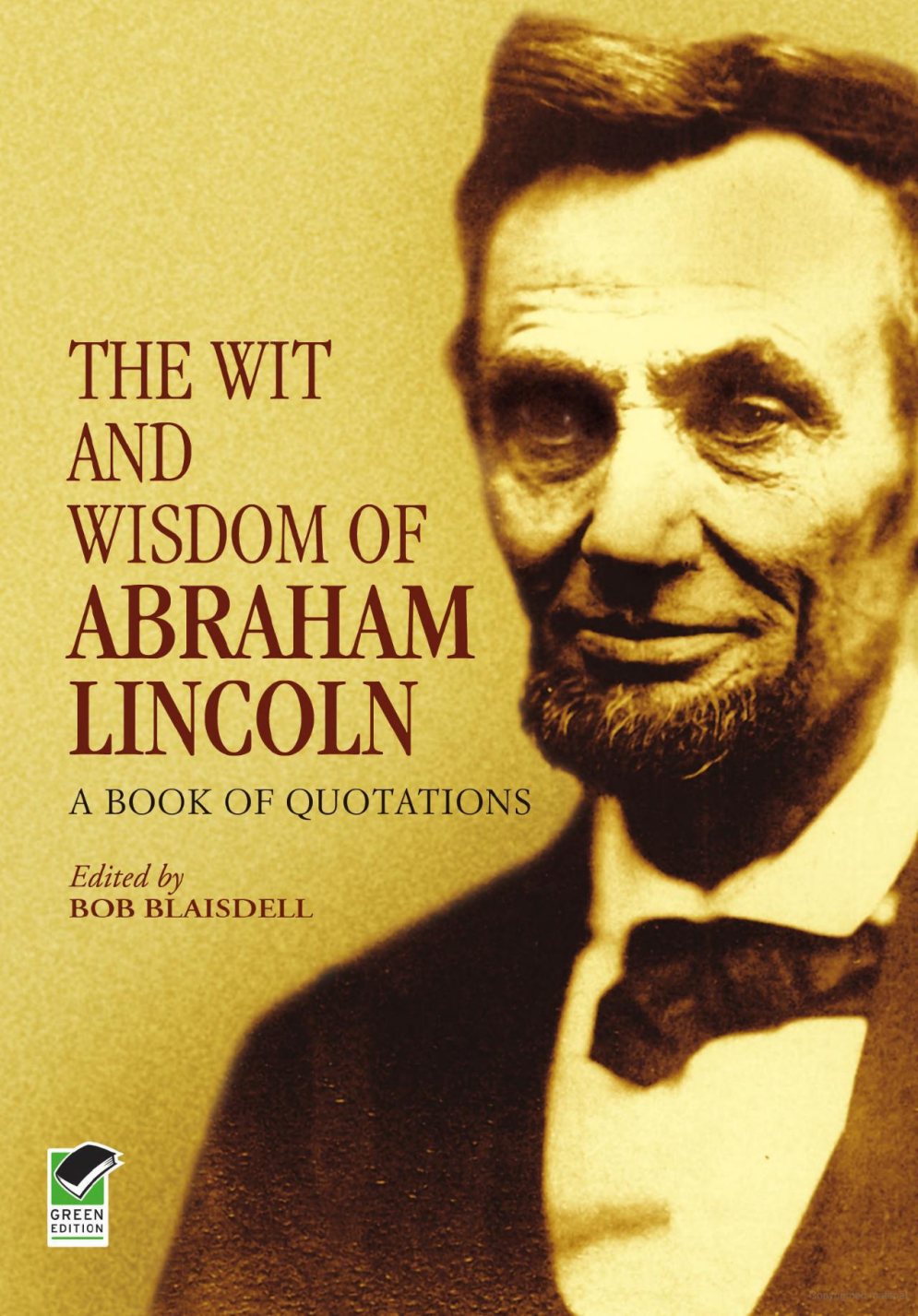

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A BOOK OF QUOTATIONS

Edited by
BOB BLAISDELL

GREEN EDITION

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The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln

A Book of Quotations

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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EDITOR OF THIS VOLUME: BOB BLAISDELL

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Bibliographical Note

The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln is a new work, first published by Dover Publications, Inc., in 2005.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lincoln, Abraham, 1809–1865.
The wit and wisdom of Abraham Lincoln / Abraham Lincoln ; edited by Bob Blaisdell.
p. cm. — (Dover thrift editions)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN-13: 978-0-486-44097-2
ISBN-10: 0-486-44097-4
1. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809–1865—Quotations. 2. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809–1865—Philosophy. 3. Lincoln, Abraham, 1809–1865—Political and social views. 4. United States—Politics and government—1815–1861—Quotations, maxims, etc. 5. United States—Politics and government—1861–1865—Quotations, maxims, etc. I. Blaisdell, Robert. II. Title. III. Series.

E457.99.B63 2005
973.7'092—dc22

2005041331

Manufactured in the United States by Courier Corporation
44097404
www.doverpublications.com

Contents

AMERICA AND LIBERTY

We find ourselves in the peaceful possession of the fairest portion of earth as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate. We find ourselves under the government of a system of political institutions conducing more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty than any of which the history of former times tells us. We, when mounting the stage of existence, found ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings. We toiled not in the acquirement of establishment of them—they are a legacy bequeathed us by a *once* hardy, brave, and patriotic but *now* lamented and departed race of ancestors. Theirs was a task (and nobly they performed it) to possess themselves, and through themselves, us, of this goodly land; and to uprear upon its hills and valleys a political edifice of liberty and equal rights; 'tis ours only to transmit these, the former, unprofaned by the foot of an invader; the latter, undecayed by the lapse of time and untorn by usurpation, to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know.

—"The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions": Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838 [GS]

❖

At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it?—Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never!—All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time or die by suicide.

—"The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions": Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838 [HSW]

On the question of liberty, as a principle, we are not what we have been. When we were the political slaves of King George and wanted to be free, we called the maxim that "all men are created equal" a self-evident truth; but now when we have grown fat, and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves, we have become so greedy to be *masters* that we call the same maxim "a self-evident lie."

—Letter to George Robertson, August 15, 1855 [CW2]

❖

Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men *are created equal*." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except *negroes*." . . . When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.

—Letter to his friend Joshua Speed, August 24, 1855 [HSW]

❖

You can better succeed with the ballot. You can peaceably then redeem the government and preserve the liberties of mankind through your votes and voice and moral influence. . . . Let there be peace. Revolutionize through the ballot box and restore the government once more to the affections and hearts of men by making it express, as it was intended to do, the highest spirit of justice and liberty.

—Speech to Springfield abolitionists, c. 1855 [RW]

❖

We are a great empire. We are eighty years old. We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world, and we must enquire what it is that has given us so much prosperity, and we shall understand that to give up that one thing would be to give up all future prosperity. This cause is that every man can make himself. It has been said that such a race of prosperity has been run nowhere else. . . . we see a people who, while they boast of being free, keep their fellow beings in bondage.

—Speech, Kalamazoo, Michigan, August 27, 1856 [CW2]

❖

As I would not be a *slave*, so I would not be a *master*. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is not democracy.

—Note, c. August 1858 [HSW]

What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? . . . Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in our bosoms. Our defense is in the preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands, everywhere. Destroy this spirit, and you have planted the seeds of despotism around your own doors. Familiarize yourselves with the chains of bondage, and you are preparing your own limbs to wear them.

—Speech, Edwardsville, Illinois, September 11, 1858 [CW3]

If the great American people will only keep their temper, on both sides of the line, the troubles will come to an end, and the question which now distracts the country will be settled just as surely as all other difficulties of like character which have originated in this government have been adjusted. Let the people on both sides keep their self-possession, and just as other clouds have cleared away in the time, so will this, and this great nation shall continue to prosper as heretofore.

—Speech, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, February 15, 1861 [CW4]

That portion of the earth's surface which is owned and inhabited by the people of the United States is well adapted to be the home of one national family; and it is not well adapted for two or more.

—Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862 [GS]

Our national strife springs not from our permanent part; not from the land we inhabit; not from our national homestead. There is no possible severing of this, but would multiply, and not mitigate, evils among us. In all its adaptations and aptitudes, it demands union, and abhors separation. In fact, it would, ere long, force reunion, however much of blood and treasure the separation might have cost.

—Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862 [GS]

The resources, advantages, and powers of the American people are very great, and they have, consequently, succeeded to equally great responsibilities. It seems to have devolved upon them to test whether a government established on the principles of human freedom can be maintained against an effort to build one upon the exclusive foundation of human bondage.

—Letter to the Workingmen of London, February 2, 1863 [CW6]

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

—Gettysburg Address, at the dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, November 19, 1863 [HSW]

❖

I am not accustomed to the use of language of eulogy; I have never studied the art of paying compliments to women; but I must say that if all that has been said by orators and poets since the creation of the world in praise of women were applied to the women of America, it would not do them justice for their conduct during this war. I will close by saying, God bless the women of America!

—Speech at the Sanitary Fair, Washington, D.C., March 18, 1864 [CW7]

❖

The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now, are much in want of one. We all declare for liberty; but in using the same *word* we do not all mean the same *thing*. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men's labor. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things, called by the same name—liberty. And it follows that each of the things is, by the respective parties, called by the two different and incompatible names—liberty and tyranny.

—Speech, Sanitary Fair, Baltimore, Maryland, April 18, 1864 [HSW]

❖

Nowhere in the world is presented a government of so much liberty and equality. To the humblest and poorest amongst us are held out the highest privileges and positions. The present moment finds me at the White House, yet there is as good a chance for your children as there was for my father's.

—Speech to 148th Ohio Regiment, August 31, 1864 [CW7]

EDUCATION AND ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Upon the system of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in. That every man may receive at least a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions, appears to be an object of vital importance, even on this account alone, to say nothing of the advantages and satisfaction to be derived from all being able to read the scriptures and other works, both of a religious and moral nature, for themselves.

—Letter to the people of Sangamo County, March 9, 1832 [HSW]

I cannot read generally. I never read textbooks, for I have no particular motive to drive and whip me to it. I don't and can't remember such reading.

—Remark to William Herndon, his friend and law partner (no date) [DHD]

When I read aloud two senses catch the idea: first, I see what I read; second, I hear it, and therefore I can remember it better.

—Remark to William Herndon, who asked him, with annoyance, why he read aloud (no date) [LAIKH]

The way for a young man to rise is to improve himself every way he can, never suspecting that anybody wishes to hinder him. Allow me to assure you that suspicion and jealousy never did help any man in any situation. There may sometimes be ungenerous attempts to keep a young man down; and they will succeed too, if he allows his mind to be diverted

from its true channel to brood over the attempted injury. Cast about, and see if this feeling has not injured every person you have ever known to fall into it.

—Letter to William Herndon, July 10, 1848 [CW1]

❖

This habit of uselessly wasting time is the whole difficulty; and it is vastly important to you, and still more so to your children that you should break this habit. It is more important to them, because they have longer to live and can keep out of an idle habit before they are in it; easier than they can get out after they are in.

—Letter to John D. Johnston, his stepbrother, December 24, 1848 [CW2]

❖

I am slow to learn and slow to forget that which I have learned. My mind is like a piece of steel, very hard to scratch anything on it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out.

—Remark to his friend Joshua Speed (no date) [RW]

❖

Resolve to be honest at all events; and if, in your own judgment, you cannot be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other occupation.

—Notes for a lecture on law, July 1, 1850 [DHD]

❖

I am from home too much of my time for a young man to read law with me advantageously. If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself, the thing is more than half done already. It is but a small matter whether you read *with* anybody or not. I did not read with anyone. Get the books, and read and study them till you understand them in their principal features; and that is the main thing. It is of no consequence to be in a large town while you are reading. I read at New Salem, which never had three hundred people living in it. The *books*, and your *capacity* for understanding them, are just the same in all places. . . .

Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing.

—Letter to Isham Reavis, November 5, 1855 [CW2]

❖

A capacity and taste for reading gives access to whatever has already been discovered by others. It is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved

problems. And not only so, it gives a relish and facility for successfully pursuing the yet unsolved ones.

—Speech to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 30, 1859 [HSW]

❖

Yours of the 24th asking "the best mode of obtaining a thorough knowledge of the law" is received. The mode is very simple, though laborious and tedious. It is only to get the books, and read, and study them carefully. . . . Work, work, work, is the main thing.

—Letter to John M. Brockman, September 25, 1860 [CW4]

❖

Your good mother tells me you are feeling very badly in your new situation. 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. Take the advice of a friend, who, though he never saw you, deeply sympathizes with you, and stick to your purpose.

—Letter to Quintin Campbell, who had recently started at West Point; written at the request of Campbell's mother and Lincoln's wife, June 28, 1862 [CW5]

❖

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time.

—Letter to Fanny McCullough, December 23, 1862 [HSW]

❖

The advice of a father to his son, "Beware of entrance to a quarrel, but being in, bear it that the opposed may beware of thee," is good, and yet not the best. Quarrel not at all. No man resolved to make the most of himself can spare time for personal contention. Still less can he afford to take all the consequences, including the vitiating of his temper and the loss of self-control. Yield larger things to which you can show no more than equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own. Better

give your path to a dog than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite.

—Letter to Captain James Cutts, October 26, 1863 [CW6]

❖

With educated people, I suppose, punctuation is a matter of rule; with me it is a matter of feeling. But I must say that I have a great respect for the semicolon; it's a very useful little chap.

—Remark to Noah Brooks, early December 1864 [RW]

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

How miserably things seem to be arranged in this world. If we have no friends, we have no pleasure; and if we have them, we are sure to lose them and be doubly pained by the loss.

—Letter to Joshua Speed, February 25, 1842 [HSW]

❖

Say to him that if we could meet now, it is doubtful whether it would not be more painful than pleasant; but that if it be his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before; and where the rest of us, through the help of God, hope ere long to join them.

—Letter to John D. Johnston, his stepbrother,
on Lincoln's father's illness, January 12, 1851 [CW2]

❖

It is my pleasure that my children are free, happy, and unrestrained by parental tyranny. Love is the chain to lock a child to its parent.

—A common remark made, according to his wife Mary, whenever he was "chided or praised" for his indulgence of his children (no date) [LAIKH]

❖

Well, Nicolay, my boy is gone—he is actually gone!

—Remark to his secretary John Nicolay, on the death
from disease of Lincoln's son Willie, February 20, 1862 [DHD]

❖

Did you ever dream of some lost friend and feel that you were having a sweet communion with him, and yet have a consciousness that it was not a reality? . . . That is the way I dream of my lost boy Willie.

—Remark on his son Willie, to Colonel Le Grand Cannon (no date) [RW]

Think you better put Tad's pistol away. I had an ugly dream about him.
—Telegram to his wife, about their son Tad, June 9, 1863 [CW6]

❖

Let him run; there's time enough yet for him to learn his letters and get pokey. Bob was just such a little rascal, and now he is a very decent boy.
—Remark to Noah Brooks on his boys Robert and Tad (no date) [RW]

❖

Do good to those who hate you and turn their ill will to friendship.
—Remark to his wife, Mary, when she "talked to him about former Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase and those who did him evil" (no date) [LAIKH]

HIS LIFE AND CHARACTER: CHILDHOOD TO DEATH

Abraham Lincoln is my name
And with my pen I wrote the same
I wrote in both haste and speed
and left it here for fools to read.

—Verses in his boyhood sum book, c. 1824–1826 [DHD]

❖

Abraham Lincoln
his hand and pen
he will be good but
god knows when.

—Verses in his boyhood sum book, c. 1824–1826 [CW1]

❖

Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men by rendering myself worthy of their esteem.

—Letter to the people of Sangamo County, March 9, 1832 [HSW]

❖

My childhood home I see again,
And gladden with the view;
And still as mem'ries crowd my brain,
There's sadness in it too.

O memory! thou mid-way world
'Twixt Earth and Paradise,
Where things decayed, and loved ones lost
In dreamy shadows rise.

—Poem, c. February 25, 1846 [CW1]

The piece of poetry of my own which I alluded to ["My childhood home I see again"], I was led to write under the following circumstances. In the fall of 1844, thinking I might aid some to carry the State of Indiana for Mr. Clay, I went into the neighborhood in that State in which I was raised, where my mother and only sister were buried, and from which I had been absent about fifteen years. That part of the country is, within itself, as unpoetical as any spot of the earth; but still, seeing it and its objects and inhabitants aroused feelings in me which were certainly poetry; though whether my expression of those feelings is poetry is quite another question.

—Letter to Andrew Johnston, on his poem, April 18, 1846 [HSW]

❖

When first my father settled here,
'Twas then the frontier line:
The panther's scream filled night with fear
And bears preyed on the swine.

—Poem ["The Bear Hunt"], 1846 [HSW]

❖

Being elected to Congress, though I am very grateful to our friends for having done it, has not pleased me as much as I expected.

—Letter to Joshua Speed, October 22, 1846 [HSW]

❖

By the way, Mr. Speaker, did you know I am a military hero? Yes, sir, in the days of the Black Hawk war [1832], I fought, bled, and came away. Speaking of General Cass's career reminds me of my own. I was not at Stillman's defeat, but I was about as near it as Cass was to Hull's surrender; and, like him, I saw the place very soon afterwards. It is quite certain I did not break my sword, for I had none to break; but I bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion. If Cass broke his sword, the idea is, he broke it in desperation; I bent the musket by accident. If General Cass went in advance of me in picking whortleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges upon the wild onions. If he saw any live fighting Indians, it was more than I did, but I had a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes; and although I never fainted from loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry.

—Speech in the U.S. House of Representatives, July 27, 1848 [GS]

Your note, requesting my "signature with a sentiment," was received and should have been answered long since, but that it was mislaid. I am not a very sentimental man; and the best sentiment I can think of is, that if you collect the signatures of all persons who are no less distinguished than I, you will have a very undistinguishing mass of names.

—Letter to C. U. Schlater, January 5, 1849 [HSW]

❖

Herewith is a little sketch [of autobiography], as you requested. There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me.

—Letter to Jesse Fell, for an article in *Chester* (Pennsylvania) *County Times*, December 20, 1859 [CW3]

❖

If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am, in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair, and gray eyes—no other marks or brands recollected.

—Letter to Jesse Fell, for an article in *Chester* (Pennsylvania) *County Times*, December 20, 1859 [CW3]

❖

It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called; but no qualification was ever required of a teacher, beyond "*readin, writin, and cipherin*," the rule of three. . . . There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

—Letter to Jesse Fell, for an article in *Chester* (Pennsylvania) *County Times*, December 20, 1859 [CW3]

❖

I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I don't think I ever got angry at anything else in my life. . . . I could not sleep, though I often tried to, when I got on such a hunt after an idea, until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over, until I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me,

and it has stuck by me; for I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north, and bounded it south, and bounded it east, and bounded it west. . . .

—Conversation with Reverend John Gulliver, March 9, 1860 [LCU]

❖

My dear little Miss,

Your very agreeable letter of the 15th is received.

I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughters. I have three sons—one seventeen, one nine, and one seven years of age. They, with their mother, constitute my whole family.

As to the whiskers, having never worn any, do you not think people would call it a piece of silly affectation if I were to begin it now?

—Letter to Grace Bedell, eleven years old,
who suggested he grow a beard, October 19, 1860 [HSW]

❖

Give our clients to understand that the election of a president makes no change in the firm of Lincoln and Herndon. If I live, I'm coming back sometime, and then we'll go right on practicing law as if nothing had ever happened.

—Remark to his law partner William Herndon, February 1861 [RW]

❖

Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail.

—Speech, on leaving Springfield, Illinois, by train
for Washington, D. C., February 11, 1861 [GS]

❖

If I have one vice, and I can call it nothing else, it is not to be able to say no! Thank God for not making me a woman, but if He had, I suppose He would have made me just as ugly as He did, and no one would ever have tempted me.

—Remark to Egbert Viele, May 1862 [RW]

❖

I long ago made up my mind that if anybody wants to kill me, he will do it. If I wore a shirt of mail and kept myself surrounded by a body-

guard, it would be all the same. There are a thousand ways of getting at a man if it is desirable that he should be killed. Besides, in this case, it seems to me, the man who would come after me would be just as objectionable to my enemies.

—Remark to Noah Brooks, c. Spring 1863 [RW]

❖

Mother has got a notion into her head that I shall be assassinated, and to please her I take a cane when I go over to the War Department at nights—when I don't forget it.

—Remark on his wife Mary's concern, to Noah Brooks, c. Spring 1863 [RW]

❖

Common looking people are the best in the world; that is the reason the Lord makes so many of them.

—Recounting, to his secretary John Hay, a remark made in his dream, December 23, 1863 [ALL]

❖

I was once accosted . . . by a stranger, who said, "Excuse me, sir, but I have an article in my possession which belongs to you." "How is that?" I asked, considerably astonished. The stranger took a jackknife from his pocket. "This knife," said he, "was placed in my hands some years ago with the injunction that I was to keep it until I found a man uglier than myself. I have carried it from that time to this. Allow me to say, sir, that I think you are fairly entitled to the property."

—Anecdote about the period when Lincoln practiced law on the Illinois State circuit, told to his portrait painter Francis Carpenter, 1864 [RW]

❖

It is very strange that I, a boy brought up in the woods, and seeing, as it were, but little of the world, should be drifted into the very apex of this great event.

—Remark to Josiah Blackburn, c. late July 1864 [RW]

❖

It is a little singular that I, who am not a vindictive man, should have always been before the people for election in canvases marked for their bitterness—always but once; when I came to Congress [1846] it was a quiet time. But always besides that, the contests in which I have been prominent have been marked with great rancor.

—Remark to his secretary John Hay on election day, November 8, 1864 [RW]

I cannot bring myself to believe that any human being lives who would do me any harm.

—Remark about a reported threat on his life on the day he arrived in Richmond, Virginia, April 4, 1865 [DHD]

❖

Creswell, old fellow, everything is bright this morning. The war is over. It has been a tough time, but we have lived it out. Or some of us have.

—In conversation to Senator John Creswell of Maryland, April 14, 1865 [CWBQ]

❖

We must both be more cheerful in the future. Between the war and the loss of our darling Willie, we have both been very miserable.

—Remark to his wife Mary, April 14, 1865. (One of their sons had died of disease in 1862. On this night the Lincolns went to the theater, and the President was shot.) [CWBQ]

LAW AND THE CONSTITUTION

When men take it in their heads today to hang gamblers or burn murderers, they should recollect that, in the confusion usually attending such transactions, they will be as likely to hang or burn someone who is neither a gambler nor a murderer as one who is; and that, acting upon the example they set, the mob of tomorrow may, and probably will, hang or burn some of them by the very same mistake.

—"The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions": Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838 [HSW]

. . . by the operation of the mobocratic spirit, which all must admit is now abroad in the land, the strongest bulwark of any Government, and particularly of those constituted like ours, may effectually be broken down and destroyed—I mean the *attachment* of the People. . . . whenever the vicious portion of population shall be permitted to gather in bands of hundreds and thousands, and burn churches, ravage and rob provision-stores, throw printing presses into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons at pleasure, and with impunity; depend on it, this Government cannot last.

—"The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions": Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838 [HSW]

As the patriots of '76 did to the support of the Constitution and laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor; let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample on the blood of his father and to tear the character of his own and his children's liberty.

—"The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions": Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838 [HSW]

How effectual have penitentiaries heretofore been in preventing the crimes they were established to suppress? Has not confinement in them long been the legal penalty of larceny, forgery, robbery, and many other crimes, in almost all the states? And yet, are not those crimes committed weekly, daily, nay, and even hourly in every one of those states? Again, the gallows has long been the penalty of murder, and yet we scarcely open a newspaper that does not relate a new case of crime. If, then, the penitentiary has *heretofore* failed to prevent larceny, forgery and robbery, and the gallows and halter have likewise failed to prevent murder, by what process of reasoning, I ask, is it that we are to conclude the penitentiary will hereafter prevent the stealing of the public money?

—Speech, Hall of the House of Representatives, Springfield, Illinois, December 26, 1839 [HSW]

❖

There is a vague popular belief that lawyers are necessarily dishonest. I say vague, because when we consider to what extent confidence and honors are reposed in and conferred upon lawyers by the people, it appears improbable that their impression of dishonesty is very distinct and vivid. Yet the impression is common, almost universal.

—Notes for a lecture on law, c. July 1850 [CW2]

❖

I dare not trust this case on presumptions that this court knows all things. I argued the case on the presumption that the court did not know any thing.

—Remark to William Herndon (no date) [DHD]

❖

. . . if all men were just, there still would be *some*, though not *so much*, need of government.

—Note for a lecture, c. July 1, 1854 [CW2]

❖

When the white man governs himself that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs *another* man, that is *more* than self-government—that is despotism.

—Speech, Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854 [HSW]

❖

. . . no man is good enough to govern another man *without that other's consent.*

—Speech, Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854 [HSW]

So far as peaceful, voluntary emancipation is concerned, the condition of the negro slave in America, scarcely less terrible to the contemplation of a free mind, is now as fixed and hopeless of change for the better as that of the lost souls of the finally impenitent. The Autocrat of all the Russias will resign his crown and proclaim his subjects free republicans sooner than will our American masters voluntarily give up their slaves.

—Letter to George Robertson, August 15, 1855 [CW2]

❖

In your assumption that there may be a fair decision of the slavery question in Kansas, I plainly see you and I would differ about the Nebraska law. I look upon that enactment not as a *law*, but as *violence* from the beginning. It was conceived in violence, passed in violence, is maintained in violence, and is being executed in violence.

—Letter to Joshua Speed, August 24, 1855 [HSW]

❖

All the powers of earth seem rapidly combining against him. . . . They have him in his prison house; they have searched his person, and left no prying instrument with him. One after another they have closed the heavy iron doors upon him, and now they have him, as it were, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys, which can never be unlocked without the concurrence of every key; the keys in the hands of a hundred different men, and they scattered to a hundred different and distant places, and they stand musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, can be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complete than it is.

—Speech, Springfield, Illinois, June 26, 1857 [CW2]

❖

I am for the people of the whole nation doing just as they please in all matters which concern the whole nation; for those of each part doing just as they choose in all matters which concern no other part; and for each individual doing just as he chooses in all matters which concern nobody else. This is the principle. Of course I am content with any exception which the Constitution or the actually existing state of things makes a necessity. But neither the principle nor the exception will admit the indefinite spread and perpetuity of human slavery.

—Draft of a speech, c. May 18, 1858 [CW2]

❖

A man cannot prove a negative, but he has a right to claim that when a man makes an affirmative charge, he must offer some proof to show the

truth of what he says. I certainly cannot introduce testimony to show the negative about things, but I have a right to claim that if a man says he *knows* a thing, then he must show *how* he knows it. I always have a right to claim this, and it is not satisfactory to me that he may be "conscientious" on the subject.

—First debate with Stephen Douglas, Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858 [CW3]

❖

. . . there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

—First debate with Stephen Douglas, Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858 [CW3]

❖

With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.

—First debate with Stephen Douglas, Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858 [CW3]

❖

What is Popular Sovereignty? Is it the right of the people to have slavery or not have it, as they see fit, in the territories? I will state—and I have an able man to watch me—my understanding is that Popular Sovereignty, as now applied to the question of slavery, does allow the people of a Territory to have slavery if they want to, but does not allow them *not* to have it if they *do not* want it.

—First debate with Stephen Douglas, Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858 [CW3]

❖

. . . the institution of slavery is only mentioned in the Constitution of the United States two or three times, and in neither of these cases does the word "slavery" or "negro" occur; but covert language is used each time, and for a purpose full of significance. . . . and that purpose was that in our Constitution, which it was hoped and is still hoped will endure forever—when it should be read by intelligent and patriotic men, after the institution of slavery had passed from among us—there should be nothing on the face of the great charter of liberty suggesting that such a thing as negro slavery had ever existed among us.

—Seventh debate with Stephen Douglas, Alton, Illinois, October 15, 1858 [CW3]