

The Nation.

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Lincoln and Lee in 1918

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: The great struggle through which we are passing has turned our thoughts to Abraham Lincoln. We have gained confidence and courage from the realization that President Wilson has revealed much of the determination, charity, and adherence to principle which characterized Lincoln's conduct of the Civil War.

Now, however, that we are engaged at last in actual military operations, may we not turn with equal profit to the example of him who was perhaps the greatest of our soldiers? The career and conduct of Robert E. Lee are full of significance for Americans to-day. Before making his momentous decision to cast his lot with the South, he spent the night in meditation and prayer. Though he loved his profession with all his heart, he could yet say in the midst of the Civil War: "'Tis well war is so terrible, else we might grow too fond of it." When invading the North, he issued the general order that, "Duties exacted of us by Christianity are not less obligatory in the country of the enemy than in our own."

His character and ability were the greatest single factor in the long resistance of the South, yet great as he was in war, he was even greater in peace. When final defeat was inevitable, Davis and others wished to disperse the Southern armies and carry on a protracted guerrilla warfare, but Lee said with a solemn indignation, "You must remember we are a Christian people. For us as a Christian people there is but one course to pursue. We must accept the situation; these men must go home and plant a crop and we must proceed to build up our country on a new basis." And again, in reply to an irritated Southern mother, he wrote: "Madam, don't bring up your sons to detest the United States Government. Recollect we are one country now. Abandon all these local animosities and make your sons Americans." He himself accepted the presidency of a small struggling college at a salary of \$1,500 per year and threw himself into the work of training young men with all the ardor that had characterized his defence of the "Lost Cause." In this generous and liberal fashion he lived and died a loyal American.

His conduct, therefore, constitutes a complete refutation of the German plea that war knows no law but necessity, and the salvation of the state justifies any means. He placed honor above success and went down in defeat. But to-day he is honored and respected as few soldiers have been, even in the section against which he fought. When German atrocities are inflicted upon us, as doubtless they soon will be, there will come a strong temptation to resort to at least a measure of retaliation. Will it not then be well to recall Lee's admonition that we are a Christian people?

Democracy is about to be tested as never before. Our success in keeping sane and poised will in a large measure vindicate or condemn free institutions. We are indeed fortunate that at such a moment we have the sustaining example of Lincoln and of Lee. And may we not feel encouraged to believe that a people which produces a Lincoln and a Lee amidst the hatreds of civil war and in the next generation unites in whole-hearted defence of the principles proclaimed by Woodrow Wilson will ultimately succeed in making democracy safe for the world and the world safe for democracy?

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Grinnell College, Ia., March 17