

HARPER'S WEEKLY

MAY 6, 1865

THE TRUEST MOURNERS.



WHILE the nation mourns, and cities are solemnly tapestried with the signs of sorrow, and the funeral train moves across the land amidst tolling bells and minute-guns and slow pealing dirges; while orators and societies and communities speak their grief in impassioned eloquence or in sober narrative of a life devoted in every heart-beat to the common welfare—there is one class of mourners little seen or rudely repulsed, yet whose grief for ABRAHAM LINCOLN is profounder and more universal than all.

To the unhappy race upon whose equal natural rights with ourselves this nation had so long trampled—upon our dusky brothers for whom God has so long asked of us in vain while we haughtily responded that we were not our brothers' keepers, the death that bereaves us all falls with an overwhelming and appalling force. The name of ABRAHAM LINCOLN meant to them freedom, justice, home, family, happiness. In his life they knew that they lived. In his perfect benignity and just purpose, inflexible as the laws of seed-time and harvest, they trusted with all their souls, whoever doubted. Their deliverer, their emancipator, their friend, their father, he was known to them as the impersonation of that liberty for which they had wept and watched, hoping against hope, praying in the very extremity of despair, and waiting with patience so sublime that fat prosperity beguiled us into the meanness of saying that their long endurance of oppression proved that God had created them to be oppressed.

The warm imagination of this people cherished ABRAHAM LINCOLN as more than mortal. He dies; and in his death slavery doubtless seems to them again possible. It is a sorrow beyond any words, beyond any comfort, except the slow conviction of time that the work he did for them was not his work; that he was but the minister of the nation; and that ABRAHAM LINCOLN emancipated them because the American people had declared they should be free. Yet none the less, as the terrible tale is whispered all over the region where for four years a black face has been the sure sign of a true heart, the nameless and inconceivable fear will paralyze

that people. Of the operations of Government of the tides and currents of public opinion of the grateful sympathy of a nation, they know little, but they knew that **ABRAHAM LINCOLN** was the name of the power that was freeing them from darkness into light, from death into life, from a hopeless past into a jubilee future, and the shock of our sorrow can never reveal to us, even in kind, the depth and reality of theirs.

And when the story of his life is told, it will be seen that it was one long act of unwearied service to these least of the little ones. He saw clearly from the beginning that the danger to his country lay out of sight—that it lay deep down in the condition of the most friendless of all classes. He saw that the national peril lay in the demoralization of the conscience of the country, wrought by a growing inhumanity and injustice. He saw and said that all prosperity was delusive which was founded upon immorality; and in a part of the country where the prejudice against the colored race was fiercest, where political disgrace seemed to await the man who persistently pleaded their cause, he never failed to declare in the face of the most subtle sophistry, of the coarsest and most injurious ribaldry, and of the most passionate denunciation, that slavery was, beneath all other considerations, a *moral* question; that it was a moral wrong; and that not until all the lights of truth and morality were extinguished could it cease to vex the country, and then cease only because it had ruined it.

He did not unite with "the abolitionists"—he did not even plead for political privileges for colored men—but he unswervingly proclaimed the right of all innocent men to personal liberty; and while he expressly disclaimed any intention of interfering with slavery in the States which tolerated it, he did not hesitate to say, with incisive and irresistible logic, that the Union could not endure half slave and half free. He hoped that slavery would disappear from the country. He knew that if it did not, liberty would; and he unfolded the details of the great conspiracy, of which the country showed that at last it was aware by electing him President. He believed, also, that the extinction of slavery would be accomplished by legal and peaceful methods. In that he was mistaken. This simple, homely, sagacious man, who declared that the Government could not endure half slave and half free, was called to be the minister of securing its permanence by making it wholly free, and the statesman whom slavery had never deceived, who had exposed its immorality, as the clear calm eye of the old philosopher exposed the serpent in the woman's form, died by a stealthy blow from its desperate, dying hand. His death justifies every word of his life. The shot of the assassin completed the absolute extirpation of the loathsome system which that of the rebels at Sumter four years before had begun.

We are all grateful to the good man whom we are burying, but if we had all been Carolina slaves what speechless woe, what eternal gratitude, would ours be! As time passes they will learn that their cause is also ours. They will see that slavery, not LINCOLN, is dead. For the work in which he was but the minister of the people, the people will fulfill to the utmost with a sacred devotion.