

## 23. "THE MYSTIC CHORDS OF MEMORY"

*It is safe to say that the closing words of Lincoln's First Inaugural will live as long as the English language shall endure. It is one of the crowning majesties of the Anglo-Saxon tongue. The man who thus spoke was in the act of taking up the reins of government of a people rent by civil discord. Brother was on the verge of taking up arms against brother.*

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? In our present differences is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people.

By the frame of the government under which we live, this same people have wisely given their public servants but little power for mischief; and have, with equal wisdom, provided for the return of that little to their own hands at very short intervals. While the people retain their virtue and vigilance, no administration, by any extreme of wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the government in the short space of four years.

My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to hurry any of you in hot haste to a step which you would never take deliberately, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Such of you as are now dissatisfied, still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and, on the sensi-

tive point, the laws of your own framing under it; while the new administration will have no immediate power, if it would, to change either. If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty.

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

LINCOLN, FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS, MARCH 4, 1861.

## 24. "I WOULD SAVE THE UNION"

*During the summer of 1862, there was much criticism and denunciation of Lincoln. McClellan's Peninsular Campaign had ended in failure. Military failures beset the efforts of the Federal Government. Abolitionist groups in the North denounced Lincoln for not emancipating the slaves. They accused him of being pro-slavery. Speaking the sentiments of this group, Horace Greeley published in The New York Tribune his famous editorial, "The Prayer of Twenty Millions." On August 22, Lincoln replied to Greeley in a letter that was also released to the newspapers. Second Bull Run was only a week in the future; Antietam less than a month. Lincoln had been considering the advisability of emancipating the slaves as a military and political measure. He had decided on the proclamation and was only waiting for a favorable opportunity to announce it. In the letter to Greeley there is a hint that the administration's policy on emancipation might change. It was not seen by the abolitionists,*