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Stature

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Guest Editorial

STATURE

One hundred years ago on April 15, 1865, Abraham Lincoln passed into history. He is a part of the heritage which has made the United States a tremendous force in modern civilization. His greatness will live in us forever.

Lincoln grew up in a family which symbolized our country's weaknesses and strengths. There was very little in his background which would presage his greatness. As everybody knows, he lived in a log cabin with hardly any physical comforts and where the children were expected to work rather than to waste time in school. It was a hard life, but Lincoln did have a mother who somehow imbued him with the excitement of books and learning. Lincoln read, by firelight, the *Bible*, *Aesop's Fables*, and a biography of George Washington. He read those books and any others he could find and they helped shape him into what he became. What he became was unique, incomparable.

Once I read an advertisement which, speaking about Lincoln, said: "He was everyone grown a little taller." I like the phrase; it has a meaningful sound, pithy and apt. There is only one thing wrong with the phrase; it's untrue.

Abraham Lincoln was not a large sized everybody. He was himself, unique, great. There was not even any other *one* person who was like Lincoln in a smaller edition.

Lincoln was world-wise, world-weary, and naive. He had an earthliness that made the telling and hearing of impolite jokes fun. He had a facility for the *bon mot*. He was kind and clever, capable and courageous.

But most of all Abraham Lincoln, for all his practicality, was an idealist. He was a politician in its grandest sense. He knew expediency, and perforce, he used it, but he also had the genius to carry the whole country on his back toward our ideal. He fired people up: made the right of every man to be free seem not only the ideal, as written in our Constitution, but the practical, as a way of life.

Abraham Lincoln was *not* everybody, grown a little taller. He was a giant, but peculiar to himself. He was a goal for everyone to aim toward, but a goal only a genius could approach.

We all hope for a genius who can show us again how to fight for an ideal, but when we do, that genius won't be another Lincoln. He will be himself, just as Abraham Lincoln was himself.

Dorothy E. Smith