

E457
2
W2
Lincoln

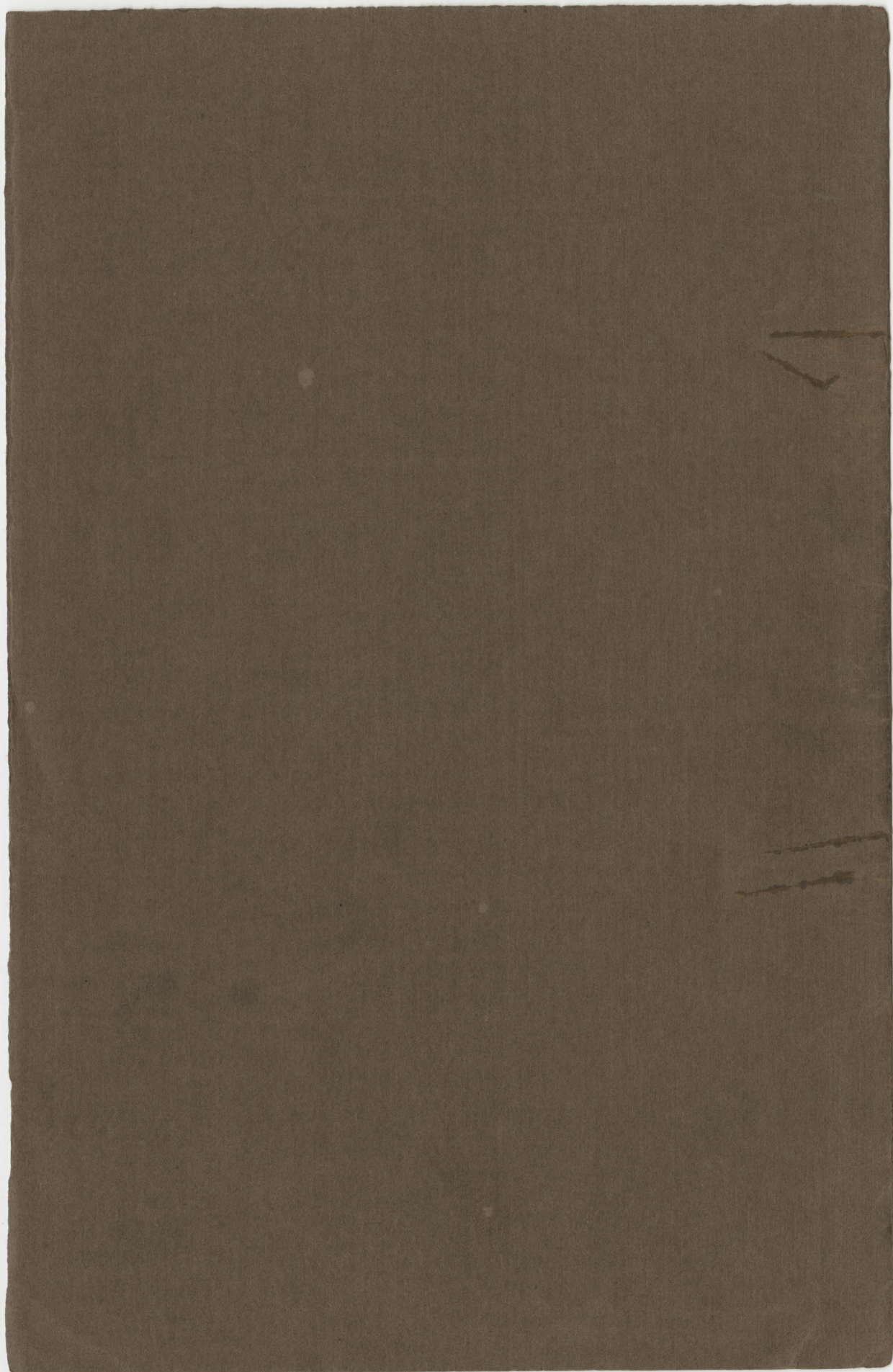
ABRAHAM LINCOLN:
HIS PECULIAR STYLE AS WRITER AND SPEAKER.
By Joseph Wallace.





Baudouin





Original mss by Joseph Wallace.

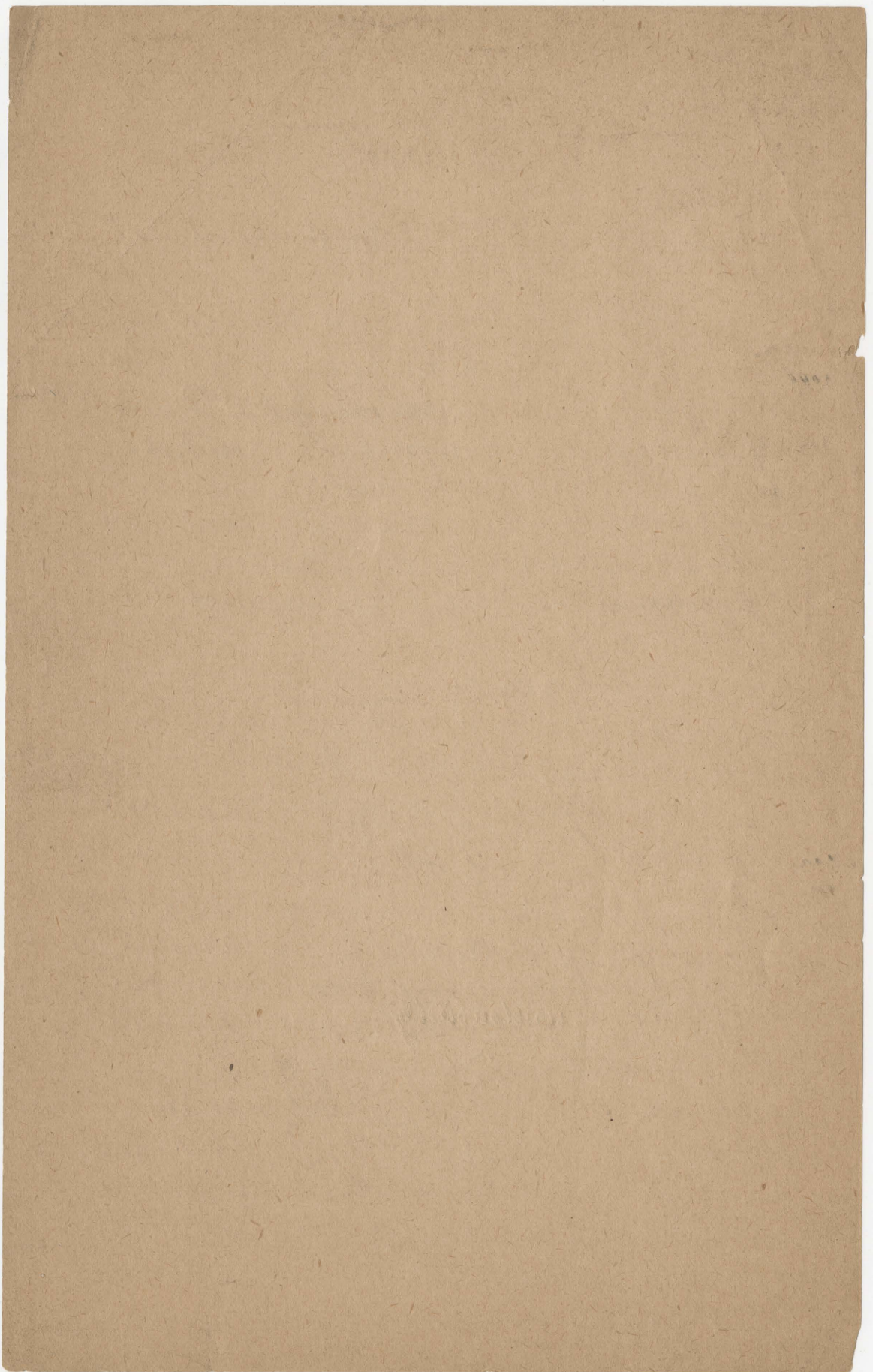
Abraham Lincoln.

25-10

His Peculiar Style as Writer and Speaker.

Although Mr Lincoln has been more extensively biographized and eulogized than any American of his time, one rarely meets with any ^{at a} attempt, critical and comprehensive estimate of his varying style as a writer and speaker, from his early manhood to middle life; nor can the subject be more than cursorily treated in the limits of the present article. Of his ~~matured~~ style in general, it may be premised, that it was plain, argumentative and unimpassioned, yet, even and anon, enlivened with gleams of humor and touches of sentiment. He had none of the graces of a polished and scholarly orator; but his printed utterances are replete with illustrations and comparisons drawn from the scenes of every day life, which, though homely in phraseology, are true to nature, and well adapted to the purposes he had in view. His cast of thought and manner of expression were certainly ^{undoubtedly} his own, and had all the force of genuine originality.

According to the late Wm H. Herndon (his most reliable biographer), Mr Lincoln's style and mode of expression, in 1835, were entirely different from what they were from 1853 to 1864. He had much more emotion, fancy and imagination in 1835, when he was twenty-six years old, than he had



in 1858 to 1864, when ² he was from forty-seven to fifty-five years of age. He grew stronger as he grew older. To better and more fully illustrate the progressive change and improvement in his style, we proceed to cite brief passages from some of the more important of his speeches and writings, beginning with an excerpt from his Address to the voters of Sangamon County, in March, 1832, when he first offered himself as a candidate for the Legislature. In the preparation of this youthful production, he is said to have had the assistance of a ^{friend} Mr. McKimmar, of New Salem, Ill. The address closed as follows:

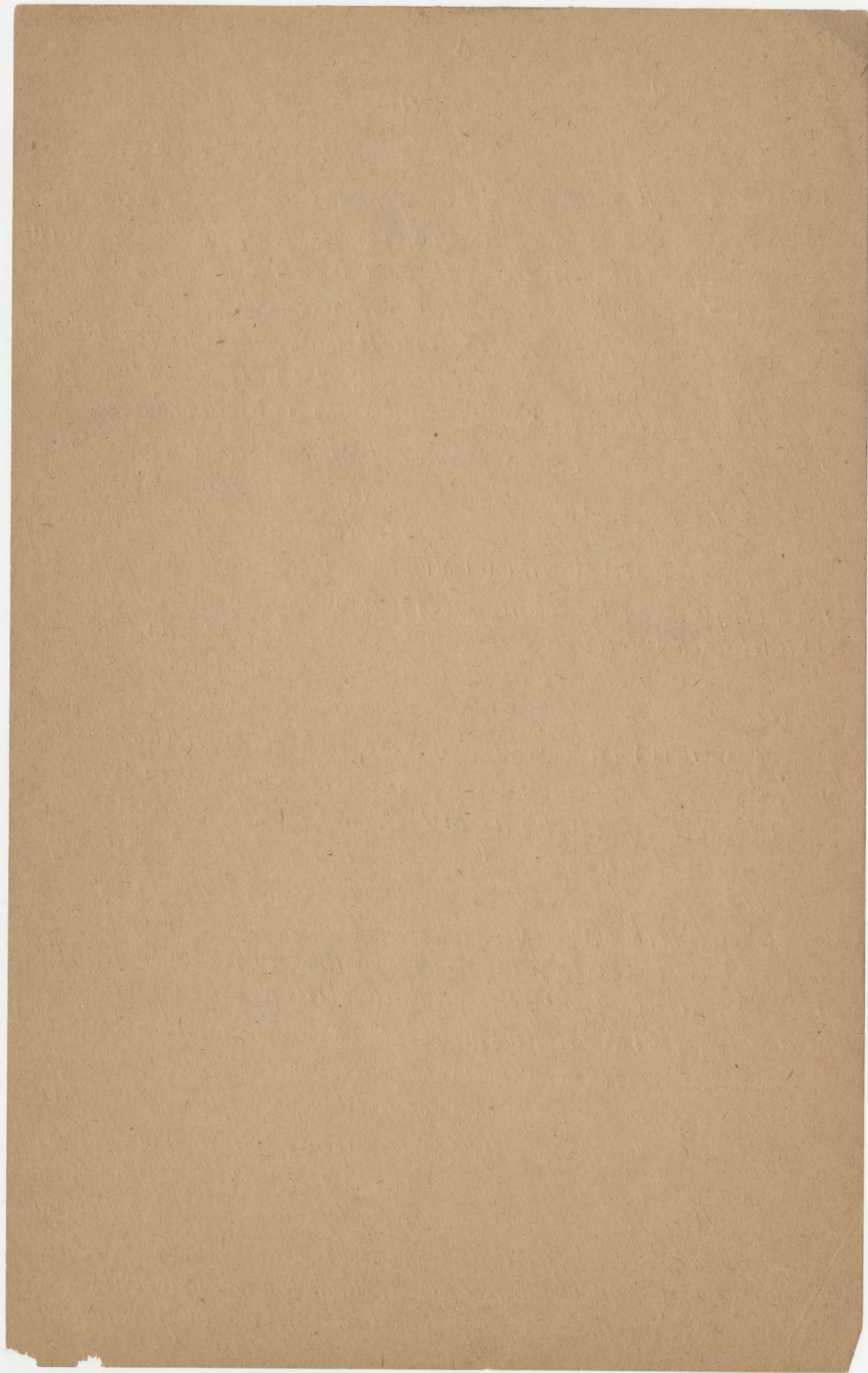
"Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say, for one, that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed by my fellow-citizens, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition is yet to be developed. I am young and unknown to many of you. I was born, and have ever remained, in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relations or friends to recommend me. My case is thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of the county; and, if elected, they will have conferred a favor upon me, for which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. But, if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointment to be very much chagrined."



In the preparation of this address, he is said to have had the assistance:

Passing over an interval of some five busy years, we find that in January, 1837, Mr. Lincoln delivered a lecture before the "Young Men's Lyceum" of Springfield on the subject of the "Pecuniation of Our Free Institutions," which is instinct with the fervid eloquence of the most patriotic 4th of July address. The following is his peroration:

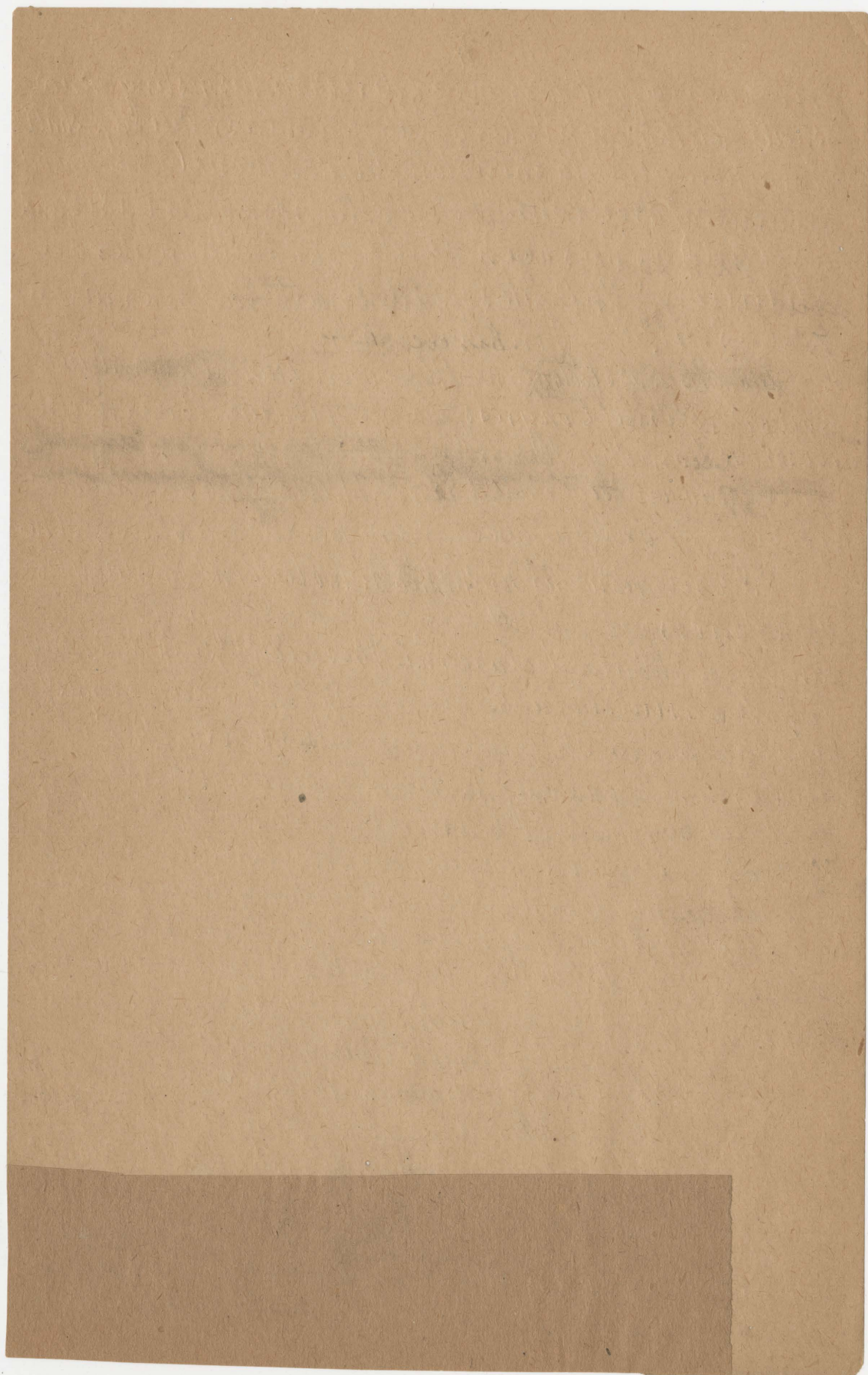
"But those living histories the soldiers of the Revolution are gone. They can be read no more forever. They were a fortress of strength; but what invading footmen could never do, the silent artillery of time has done - the levelling of its walls. They were a forest of giant oaks; but the all-resister hurricane has swept over them, and left only here and there a lonely trunk despoiled of its verdure, shorn of its foliage, unshading and unshaded, to murmur in a few more gentle breezes, and to combat with its mutilated limbs a few more rude storms, then sink and be no more. They were the pillars of the temple of liberty; and now that they have crumbled away, that temple must fall, unless we, the descendants, supply their places with other pillars hewn from the same solid quarry of sober reason. Passion has helped us, but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason - cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason - must furnish all the materials for our future support and defence. Let those materials be moulded into general intelligence, sound morality, and in particular a reverence for the constitution and laws. And that we improved to the last, that we revered his name to the last, that during his long sleep we permitted



no hostile foot to pass or desecrate his resting place, shall be that which to learn the last triumph shall awaken our Washington. Upon these let the proud fabric of freedom rest as the rock of its basis, and as truly as has been said of the only greater institution, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." In his speech on

Eleven years later, the Mexican War, made in the Lower House of Congress, January 12, 1848, Mr Lincoln discloses, among other things, his logical faculty, his ability to analyze and to combine. We can make space ^{here} for only a specimen paragraph. Said he:

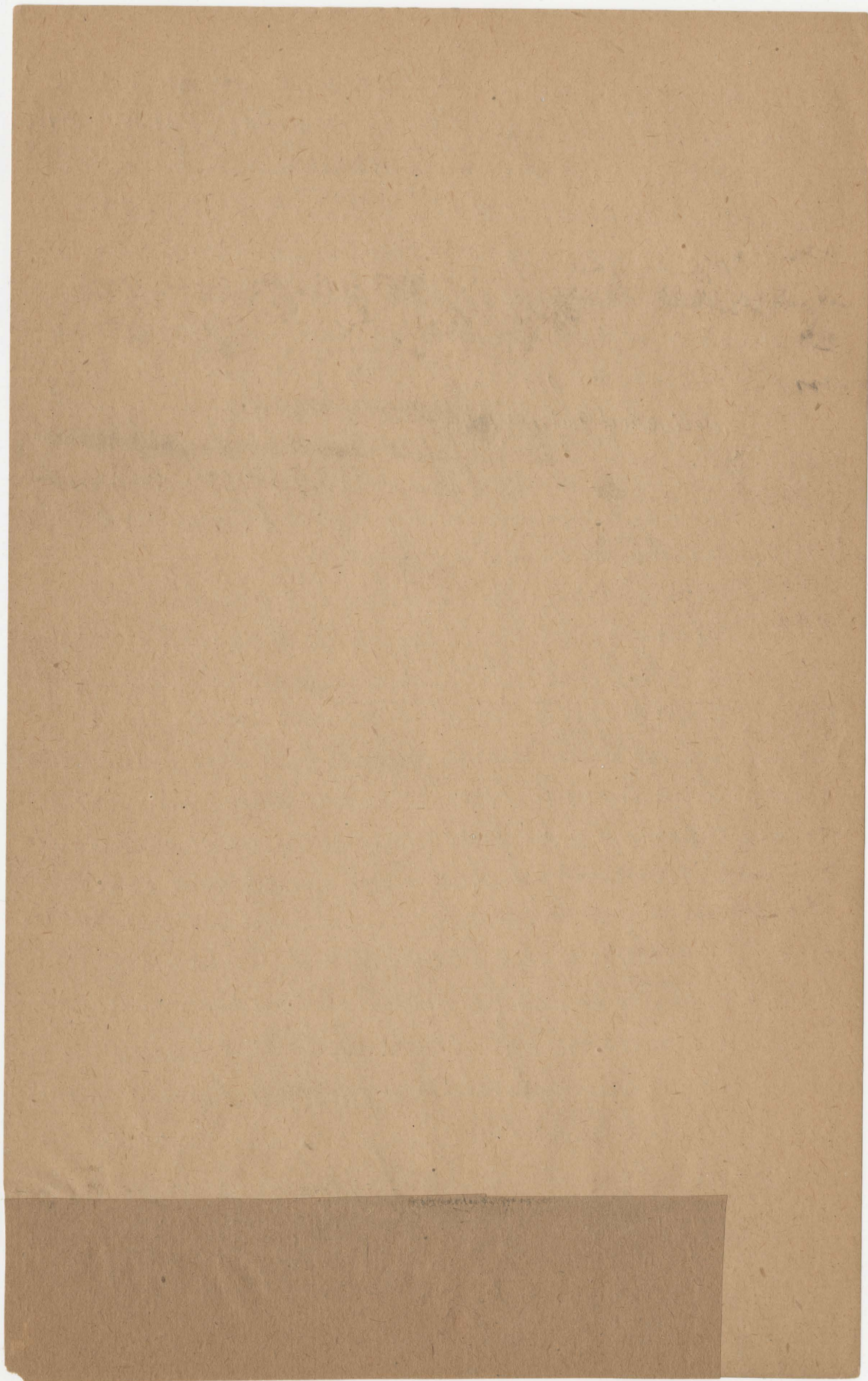
"I am now through the whole of the President's [Polk's] evidence; and it is a singular fact that, if any one should declare the President sent the army into the midst of a settlement of Mexican people, who had never submitted by consent or by force to the authority of Texas or of the United States, and that there and thereby the first blood of the war was shed, there is not one word in all the President has said which would either admit or deny the declaration. In this strange omission chiefly consists the deception of the President's evidence - an omission which, it does seem to me, could scarcely have occurred but by design. My way of living leads me to be about the courts of justice; and there I have sometimes seen a good lawyer struggling for his client's neck, in a desperate case, employing every artifice to work round, beguile, and cover up with many words some position pressed upon him by the prosecution, which he dared not admit and yet could not deny. Party bias may help to make it appear so, but



with all the allowance I can make for such bias, it still does appear to me that just such, and from just such necessity, are the President's struggles in this case."

Mr Lincoln had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and a rare power of awakening that sense in others. His humor was spontaneous and inexpressible, though it usually took the form of story telling. In a Congressional speech on "The Presidency and General Politics," ^{delivered July 27, 1857} after sarcastically commenting on General Cass' military record, Lincoln thus humorously and autobiographically refers to his own services in the Black Hawk war:

"By the way, Mr Speaker, did you know I am a military hero? Yes, sir, in the days of the Black Hawk war, I fought, bled, and came away. Speaking of Gen. Cass' career, reminds me of my own. I was not at Stillman's defeat, but I was about as near it as Cass to Hull's surrender, and like him, I saw the place very soon afterward. 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 Gen. 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 is more than I did, but I had a good many bloody struggles with mosquitoes and although I never fainted from loss of blood I can truly say I was often very hungry."



Mr Speaker, if I should ever conclude to doff whatever our Democratic friends may suppose there is of black-cockade Federalism about me, and thereupon they should take me up as their candidate for the Presidency, I protest they shall not make fun of me as they have of Gen. Cass, by attempting to write me into a military hero."

Mr Lincoln's power of masterly statement is, perhaps, best exemplified in the exordium of ~~graph~~ of his famous Springfield speech, delivered from manuscript, before the Republican State Convention ^{of Illinois}, June 16, 1856, at the beginning of his ^{memorable} canvass with Mr Douglas for the Senatorship.

He said: "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year, since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object and confident promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. A house divided against itself can not stand; I believe this Government can not endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it in the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will

This passage is rough, heavy as compared with
Mr. Edwards' Emancipation conflict, but it is stronger
and more compact

will push it for ward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, - old as well as new - North as well as South."

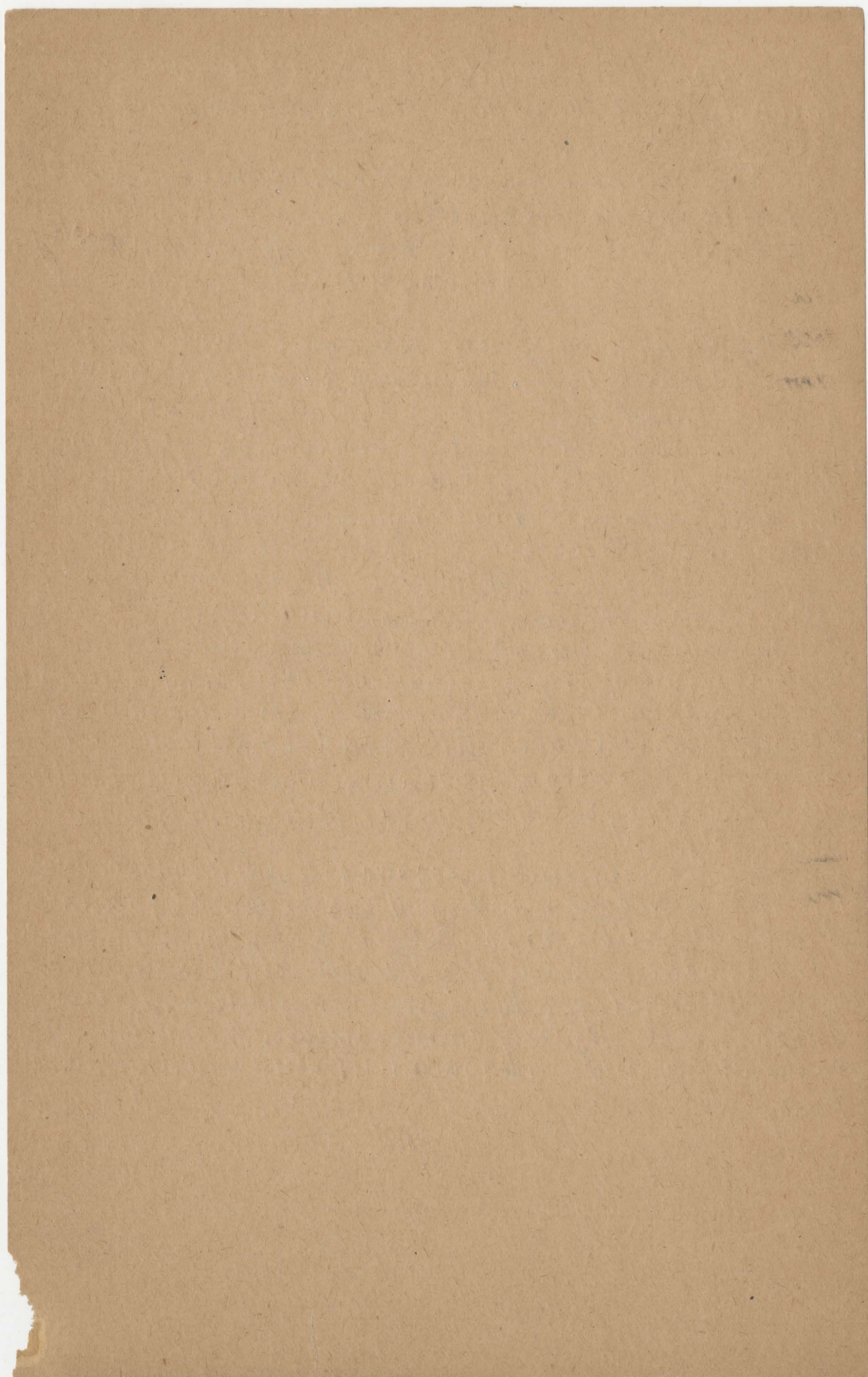
The solemn appeal of Mr Lincoln to the people of the South, in the concluding portion of his Inaugural Address as President (March 4, 1861), has been justly admired for its terseness and felicity of diction. He says:

"In your hands, my dissatisfied 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. 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 hearth-stone, 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."

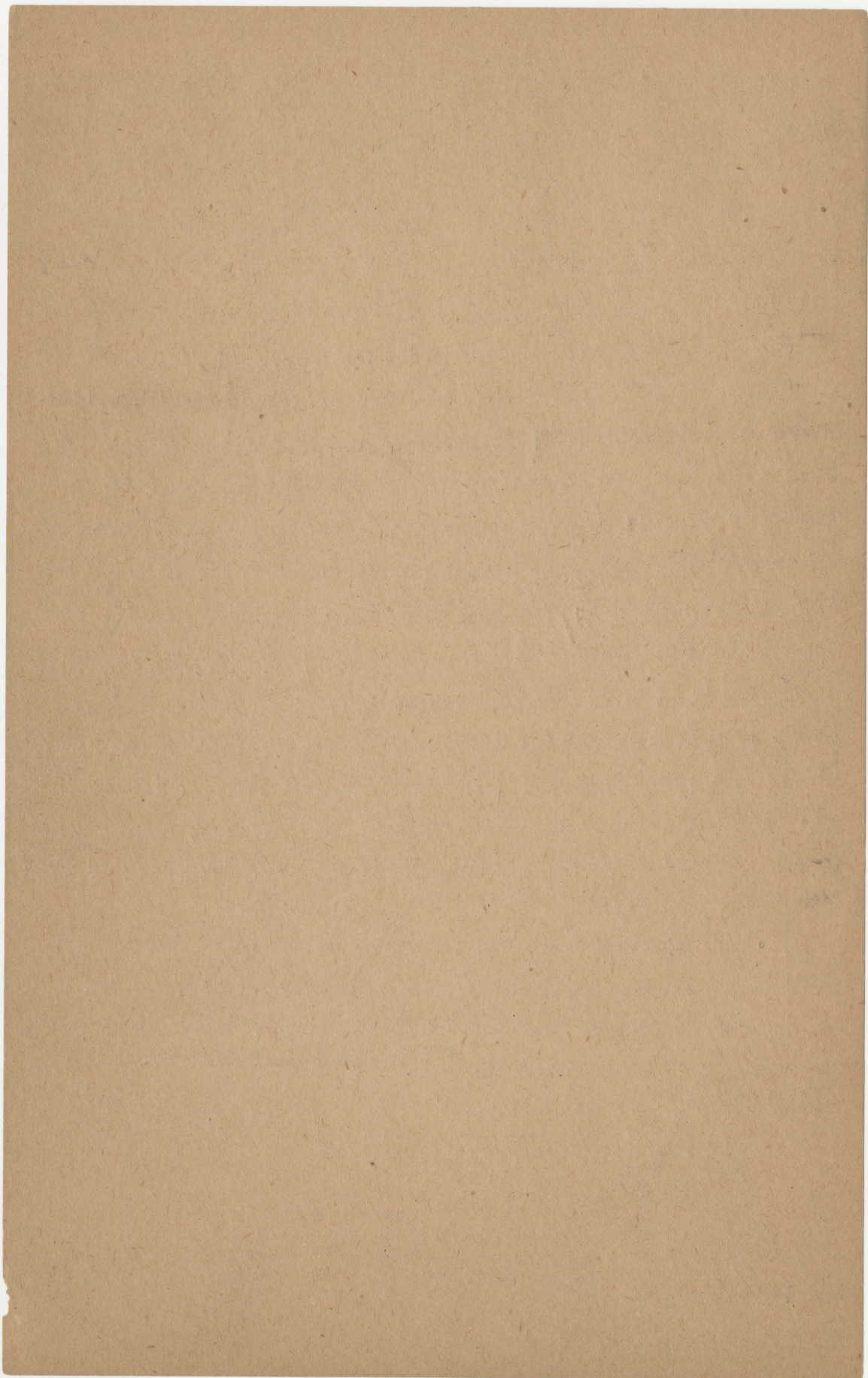
In his annual message to Congress, December 1, 1862, in recommending his plan of gradual emancipation for the Southern slave, we have a fine specimen of the President's persuasive powers, and of his more vehement and impassioned style of composition. The following extract from the message will suffice our present purpose:

"I do not forget the gravity which should characterize a paper addressed to the Congress of the nation by the Chief Magistrate of the nation. Nor do I forget that some of you are my seniors; nor that many of you have more experience than I in the conduct of public affairs. Yet I trust that, in view of the great responsibility resting upon me, you will perceive no want of respect of yourself in any undue earnestness I may seem to display



"Is it doubted, then, that the plan I propose, if adopted, would shorten the war, and thus lessen its expenditure of money and blood? Is it doubted that it would restore the National authority and rational prosperity, and perpetuate both indefinitely? Is it doubted that we here—Congress and executive—can secure its adoption? Will not the good people respond to a united and earnest appeal from us? Can we, can they, by any other means, so certainly or so speedily assure these vital objects? We can succeed only by concert. It is not ^{Can any of us imagine better?} but ^{Can we all do better?} Obect whatsoever is possible, still the question occurs; Can we do better? The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, ^{we} must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

"Fellow-citizens, we can not escape history. We, of this Congress and this Administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down, in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We—even we here—hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving

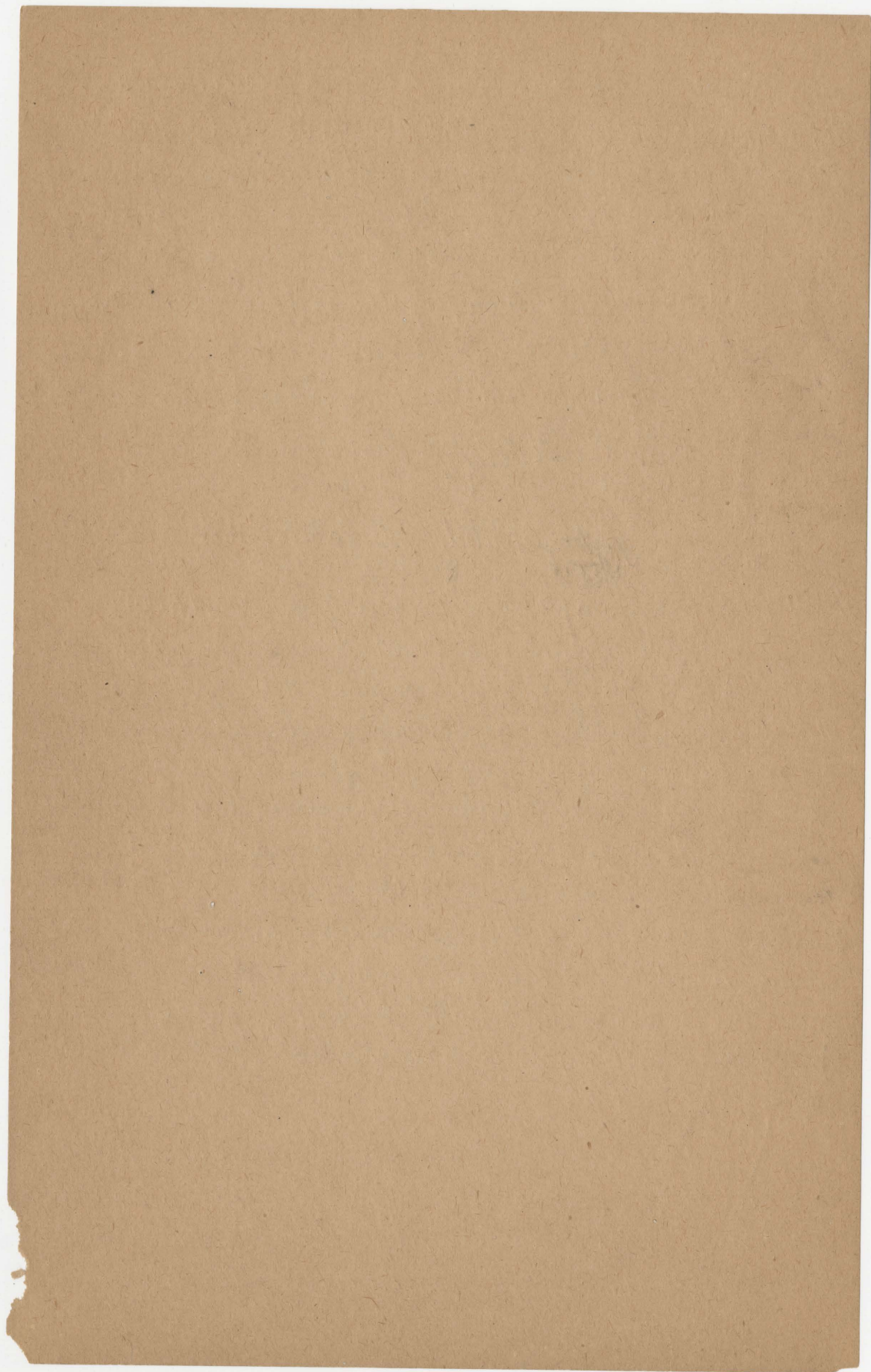


freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope on earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.”

Though not a man of brilliant fancy, or of high imagination, ^{of sensibility} Lincoln was a man of deep feeling, and under this inspiration, he sometimes rose to the height of true eloquence. Take for example his ^{great speech at} short speech on the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Pa., Nov. 19, 1864:

“Four score and seven years ago (said he) our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We are met to dedicate a portion of it as the final resting-place of those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

“But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never



forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work that they have thus far so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain—that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that the Government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

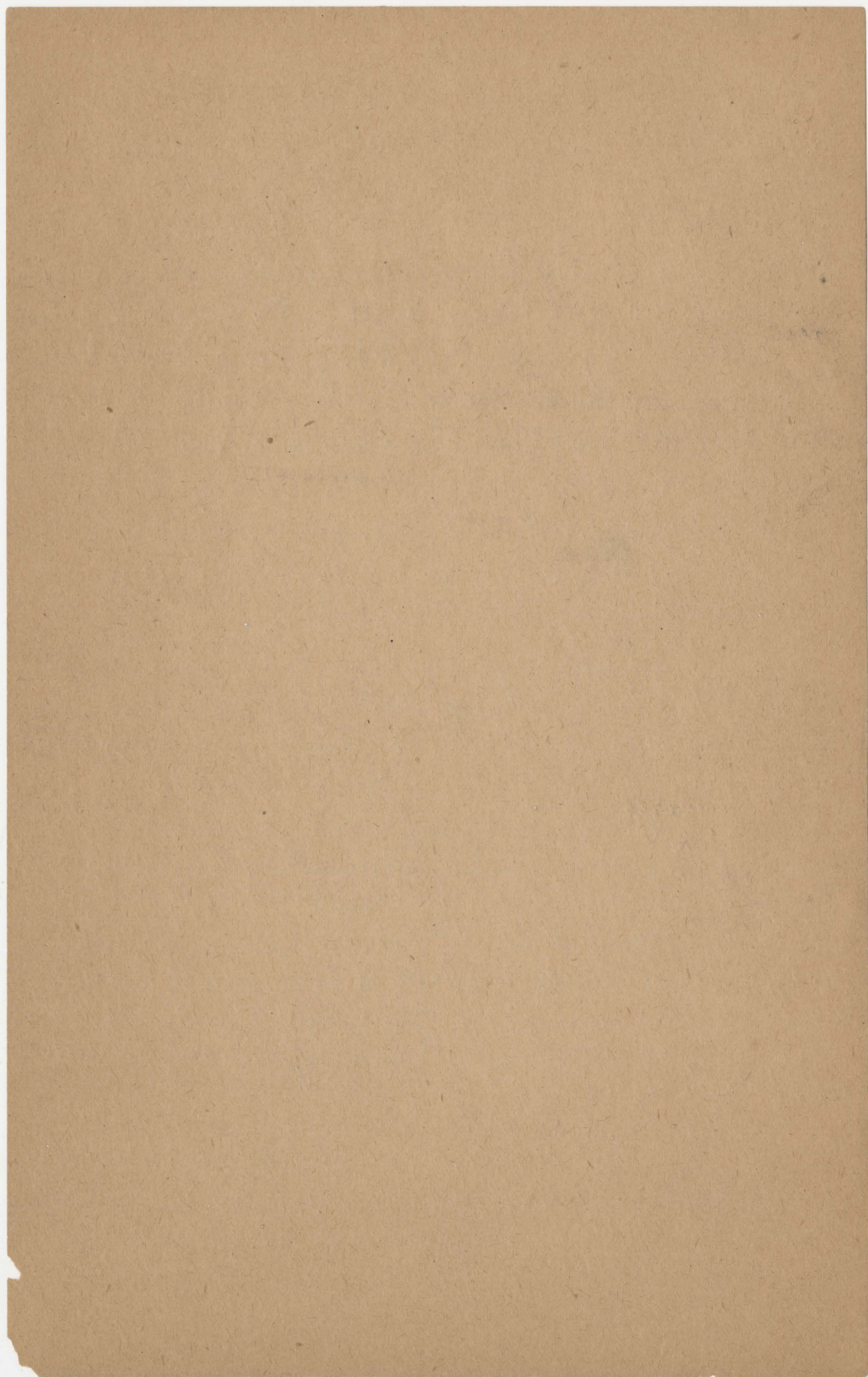
The language employed by Mr Lincoln to clothe his thoughts was not uniformly plain and perspicuous. His sentences are sometimes involved and obscure; and for the reason, chiefly, that, as a ^{wise} politician and party leader, he did not always choose to make himself clearly understood. His quaint ambiguity of style was aptly parodied by Artemus Ward, the humorist; who, in advertising his lectures, was wont to produce sundry certificates from men of national repute, and among these was one purporting to come from Lincoln, as follows:

“Artemus Ward.

“Dear Sir:—I have never heard any of your lectures, but from what I can learn I should say, that for people who like the kind of lectures you deliver they are just the kind of lectures such people like.

Yours respectfully,

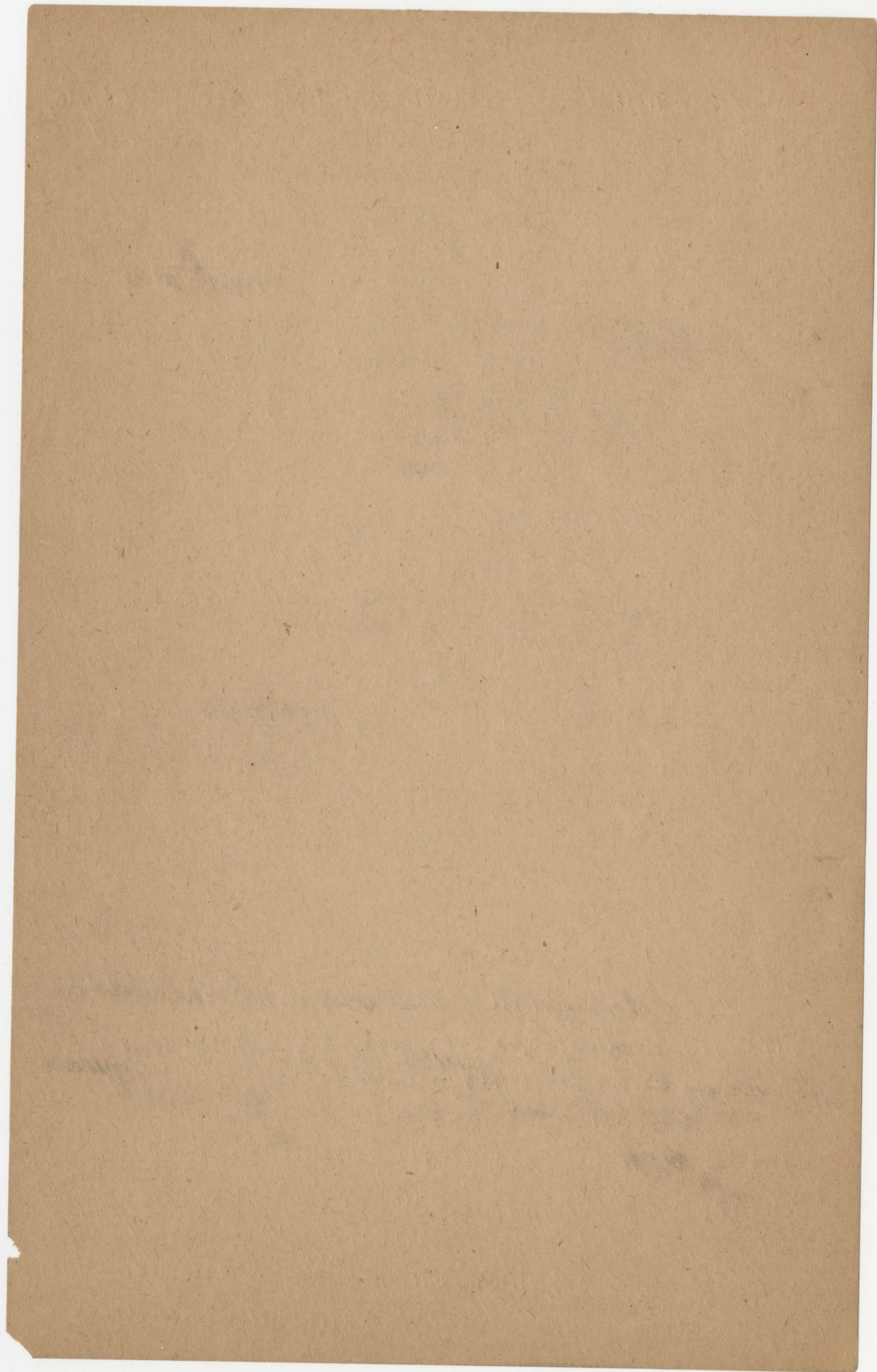
“O. A. Bc.”



A notable characteristic of Mr Lincoln's style was his frequent use of Biblical quotations and illustrations. This seems a little singular, since, in the common acceptance of the term, he could hardly be called a religious man. His employment of Scripture phraseology appears more noticeable in his published utterances, after than before his accession to the Presidency. It suited his ^{own} temper, and, to some extent, the temper of the troublous times in which his administration was cast; and it forms a distinguishing feature of his second Inaugural Address. The closing paragraph of that address, though often quoted, we will quote once more:

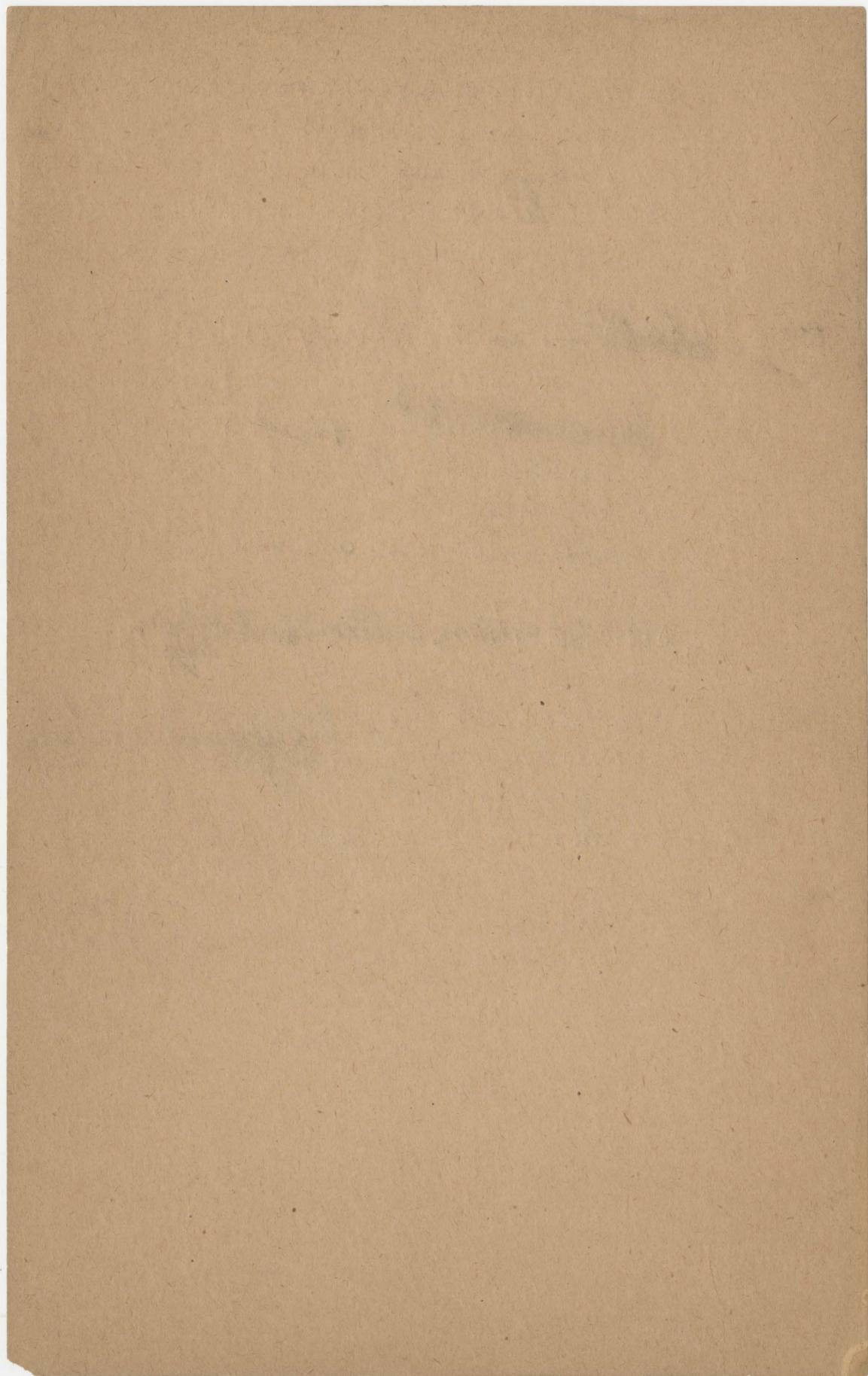
"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness for the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

Something must now be said respecting Mr Lincoln's manner of speaking, or style of oratory. Standing nearly six foot four inches in height, with ^{figure, marked features, and deep-set} ~~his tall and angular form and deep-set~~ ^{dreamy eyes,} ~~ance~~ was well calculated to command and fix the attention of a ^{or a} ~~large~~ promiscuous assemblage. His mind did not work rapidly, and hence his delivery ^{was} slow and measured, yet earnest and emphatic. His voice was rather loud, sharp and clear, but had a tendency, at times, to dwindle into a shrill



and unpleasant tone. He employed but little gesticulation; and when desirous of clinching a point or making a hit, ~~passion~~, he sometimes "proceeded a shrug of his shoulders, an elevation of his eyebrows, a depression of his mouth, and a general malformation of countenance," so comically grotesque that it ~~did not~~ ^{rarely} failed to electrify his hearers. Indeed, the mobility and play of his features formed a marked peculiarity of his delivery, and often excited a merriment which his words alone could not produce.

In public discourse or debate, he discarded declamation and pathos, and relied for success upon the simplicity and clearness of his statements, and the weight and force of his logic. Auxiliary to this was his facility in homely and humorous illustrations, which gave a pleasing variety to his arguments. His forensic and political speeches reveal an analytical turn of mind, that loved to take things apart and put them together again. He was therefore both analytic and synthetic - was a strong ^{and} systematic, rather than a versatile reasoner. His premises being ^{once} conceded, his conclusions were inevitable. His vocabulary was not very copious, but it seemed ample for his purpose, and was mostly composed of pure Anglo-Saxon words. He had been called a master of statement, and perhaps justly so; for when he had studied and understood a proposition of law or fact, no man could state it in simpler terms, or make it



clearer to the comprehension of the common mind. His power and skill, as a dialectician, however, were not attained without long and severe intellectual discipline, and learning to dispense with superfluous words.

After his style had been ^{formed} matured by study and practice, there was no very marked difference between his spoken and written performances, his speeches, letters, and state papers all have a family resemblance; all bear the impress of his odd, original mind, and, together, they present a style eminently Lincolnian.

It may ^{not be amiss to add} be added here, that he was not without some taste or appreciation of poetry, and had a fondness, in particular, for Shakespeare and Burns. But, apart from two or three of his Congressional speeches, it would be difficult to find a line of verse in any of his many printed productions.

It may not be amiss to add here that Mr Lincoln was not without some appreciation of poetry and had a fondness in particular for Shakespeare and Burns. His admiration for the poem called "Immortality" was doubtless strong because of its sentiments accorded with his own in his melancholy moods. But, apart from a line or two here and there in a few of his Congressional speeches, it would be difficult to find a poetical quotation in any of his printed productions.

