

ADAM'S ALE

a debate

drawn from speeches of
Stephen A. Douglas,
Frederick Douglass
& Abraham Lincoln,
additional material

by

H. G. Brown

CAST

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, age: 49

STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS, age: 45

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, age: 40

LINCOLN will be the tallest of the three men, and his voice lies in the tenor range. STEPHEN DOUGLAS is the shortest of the three, and his voice lies in the bass range. FREDERICK DOUGLASS is closer in stature to LINCOLN, and he is a baritone.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS has a short-cropped beard; LINCOLN and STEPHEN DOUGLAS are clean-shaven.

SETTING

ADAM'S ALE can be performed in any theatre, on any kind of stage. It can be performed in an auditorium or any room designed for general use. No scenery is required beyond a podium, where the actors can resort to scripts, if required, much as the characters depicted would resort to notes used in debate.

A small table, holding a pitcher of water and a glass is located stage right. The United States flag is on a staff, stage left.

TIME

The year is 1858, the time of the LINCOLN & DOUGLAS DEBATES, and the costuming can be of that period or modern dress - business suits, for example, as worn by present day politicians.

Note: Chief Justice Taney is pronounced "Tawny."

A Word On Music

Music is recommended at the beginning of the performance, and during transitions between scenes. While I leave this to the discretion of the producer and/or director of a given production, I feel obliged to offer my own idea as to the kind of music used.

I think it ought to be of the simplest kind and suggest mid-19th Century America. A solo violin would be my choice, playing hymns, folk tunes and perhaps Stephen Foster songs, like "Hard Times," and just plain and lively fiddle music, too.

Hymns like John Wyeth's "Come Thou Font of Every Blessing," and "I Am The Rose of Sharon," by William Billings; patriotic numbers, like "Flag of Columbia," and folk tunes like "Barbara Allen," which was a favorite of Lincoln's.

These are my suggestions. It is hoped they provide a guide for the use of music. Above all, keep it simple.

PROLOGUE

LIGHTS UP.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN stands at the podium.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point, then, is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer: If it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could 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 cannot stand."

I believe this government cannot 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 where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Have we no tendency to the latter condition?

LIGHTS FADE

PART ONE

LIGHTS UP.

STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS is discovered at the table, right, finishing a glass of water.

STEPHEN A. DOUGLASS
(Holding up the glass.)

Good, fresh Illinois water - or, as Mr. Lincoln would have it, "Adam's Ale."

(Putting down the glass.)

Mr. Lincoln has a way with words, and he tells a good story, as we all know. He has regaled us all with his humorous tales many times - to our delight, I add, to our delight - but now he goes too far.

(He ranges freely about the stage.)

He tells us "a house divided cannot stand," meaning the Union. The Union cannot endure half slave and half free - as our fathers made it! Why can we not continue as we are? Each section of our bountiful, blessed country is unique, has its own climate, its particular soil and patterns of weather. The harsh, Northern winters are unknown in Alabama; the tropical Southern summer is foreign to our friends in Maine. The great territories to the northwest and southwest are another country entirely - vastly different in climate and soil from each other and from the rest of the Union, North or South. Think of California - the Golden Gate! Think of Oregon; think of the Pacific empire that beckons!

No! We are too varied in climate, soil and conditions to be all one thing or all the other. Let the conditions in each territory - in each State! - determine the domestic institutions best suited to that State. And who better to determine what those institutions should be than the people who live there? This is the policy of my party: the one, truly national party. It is Popular Sovereignty: the right of the people to determine what their domestic institutions shall be. If they want slavery, so be it; if they choose to become a free state, let them so choose at the time their territory has population sufficient for statehood; let them write it in their State Constitution. Let them vote slavery up or down, it don't matter to me, as long as it is an honest vote.

PART TWO

LIGHTS UP.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN is discovered at the table, right, holding a glass of water. He does not range about the stage, but his speech is quite animated.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Adam's Ale: I do recommend it.

(He places the glass on the table, and crosses to the podium, center stage.)

Illinois is blessed with many waterways - rivers and lakes - none dearer to me than the Sangamon River. I suppose I came of age along its banks, and I hold a special affection for its waters. It is said no man can put his foot in the same river twice; both he and the river will have changed. Surely that is true of the river, constantly renewing itself, constantly changing with the earth it washes downstream. I can only wish the same were true for the man, but he is often set in his ways early on, and that so stubbornly that, truly it is said: the child is the father of the man. If the child is taught a lie - and taught the lie often - in the form of prejudice and suspicion and mistrust of people who think differently or speak an unfamiliar tongue - or have skin of a different color - he will find it exceedingly difficult to change his mind on those subjects as a man.

Why will men believe a lie, an absurd lie, that could not impose upon a child, and cling to it and repeat it in defiance of all evidence to the contrary? It is said: only know the truth, and the truth shall set us free. But it is also asked: truth - what is truth? Both the promise and the question come to us from Scripture, the one from our Lord, the other from his judge.

Judge Douglas has said that he heard my speeches north and my speeches south - that he had heard me at Ottawa and at Freeport in the north, and recently at Jonesboro in the south, and there was a very different cast of sentiment in the speeches made at the different points. I will not charge upon Judge Douglas that he willfully misrepresents me, but it seems to me he wants to make a chestnut horse out of a horse chestnut. I call upon every fair-minded man to take

these speeches and read them - the speeches are published in the newspapers within two days of each debate; you can read them - and I dare him to point out any difference between my speeches north and south regarding the matter of slavery.

While I am here perhaps I ought to say a word in regard to my belief that this Government would not endure, half slave and half free. I have said so, and I did not say it without what seemed to me to be good reasons. It perhaps would require more time than I have now to set forth these reasons in detail; but let me ask you a few questions. Have we ever had any peace on this slavery question? When are we to have peace upon it if it is kept in the position it now occupies? How are we ever to have peace upon it? That is an important question. To be sure, if we will all stop and allow Judge Douglas and his friends to march on in their present career until they plant the institution all over the nation, here and wherever else our flag waves, and we acquiesce in it, there will be peace.

Let me ask Judge Douglas how he is going to get the people to do that? They have been wrangling over this question for at least forty years. This was the cause of the agitation resulting in the Missouri Compromise — this produced the troubles at the annexation of Texas, in the acquisition of the territory acquired in the Mexican war. Again, this was the trouble which was quieted by the Compromise of 1850, when it was settled “forever,” we were told, as both the great political parties, Whig and Democrat, declared in their National Conventions. That “forever” turned out to be just four years, when Judge Douglas himself reopened it with the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the effective repeal of the Missouri Compromise. When is it likely to come to an end?

PART THREE

LIGHTS UP

FREDERICK DOUGLASS is discovered at the table, right, drinking from the glass. He finishes it, places the glass on the table and crosses to the podium.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. It will become all one thing, or all the other," Abraham Lincoln.

Well and wisely said. Liberty or slavery must become the law of the land. Liberty and slavery cannot dwell together forever in the same country. One or the other of these must go to the wall. The South must either give up slavery, or the North must give up liberty. They are as opposite as light and darkness - as Heaven and Hell.

I was unable to attend the great debates between Mr. Lincoln and Senator Douglas - or Judge Douglas. The manner of his receiving that title was most unusual, you understand, and I question whether or not he spent much time on the bench, but Mr. Lincoln is satisfied that he is entitled to the appellation, and Mr. Lincoln is a sagacious and seasoned lawyer. He should know. It was a matter of Illinois politics, and Senator Douglas was duly rewarded for his part in it, and honored with one of the expanded seats of the court.

I followed the debates, as many of you did, in the newspapers. The texts of their speeches, being recorded by stenographers, and published within a day of their speaking, were read and re-read, studied and parsed, not only in Illinois, but also throughout the country, from Maine to Missouri, in the North and in the South. There was a lot of Illinois politics in all this, and a lot of name-calling, each accusing the other of twisting the truth, fabricating evidence and outright lying: in other words, politics. But one issue ran through all seven debates - one, clear theme, carried from the first debate in Ottawa to the last in Alton - that of slavery. The issue of slavery was the point of the debates, especially as it related to the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, and all

territories to come from the open lands to the west. For Judge Douglas it is a matter of popular sovereignty, to be decided by the white people in a particular community or Territory -- or State. In his own words he says, "I don't care whether slavery is voted up or down." In this he is supported, in a back-handed way, by the recent Supreme Court decision, for not only was Dred Scott declared a non-citizen, with no rights a white man was bound to respect, it was further judged he could NEVER become a citizen of the United States, by virtue of his African blood. In this same decision, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress had no right to forbid slavery in any Territory, and since Congress had no right, neither had the people of a Territory the right to forbid slavery prior to their becoming a State. You can vote slavery up or down, it doesn't matter, because your vote don't count.

So much for popular sovereignty! Judge Douglas may not care whether slavery is "voted up or down," but the Supreme Court does care. It says, "thou shall not vote it down." The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 - what of that? It prohibited slavery in the territory north of the Ohio River. Unconstitutional! The Missouri Compromise of 1820? It prohibited slavery north of the 36-30 line. Unconstitutional! You know as well as I that a Territory, having admitted slavery within its borders, would be hard put to exclude it when writing its Constitution for Statehood, for that Constitution will have been written by slaveholders.

And what is to prevent the free State of Illinois - or of Ohio, Pennsylvania or New York - from becoming a slave state, when it is judged constitutional for a man to bring his *property* - whether in hogs or whiskey or *men* - into any State, North or South?

EPILOGUE

LIGHTS UP

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
 Signifying nothing.

I have longed to recite that speech, from the stage, not out of desire for acclaim as a Thespian, but for the truth of it; it overwhelms me. We are but poor players that strut and fret the hour granted us upon this stage - our time on earth - and then we are heard no more. Oh, fervently do we pray it may be so! Let our prattle and petty squabbles over pride and place be forgotten, the scrambling for office and position, the esteem of our fellow man. Let it all be forgotten. Is our only interest self interest and nothing more? The Bible says somewhere that we are desperately selfish. I think we would have discovered that fact without the Bible.

Civil war may come, to be followed by generations of hatred and all the uncivil wars of prejudice that divide us racially, economically, politically; by religion; by creed; by wealth or by poverty, making us enemies of each other. It is the ill wind that blows nobody good.

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Our bonds of affection must not fail; we must enlarge those bonds, not through force and the reach for empire, but by ever looking to those words in our Constitution for guidance: to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. Let us be secure in the knowledge that all men are created equal.

LIGHTS FADE OUT

THE END