



# *Steel and Velvet*

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An unusual tribute was paid to Abraham Lincoln by Carl Sandburg. The poet wrote, “Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect.”

Lincoln demonstrated then and now how a person can possess both a will of iron and a heart of tenderness. Nothing deterred the president during the American Civil War from his “noble” cause, and few persons have ever endured more criticism and detractors than Lincoln. Yet he was no more a man of steel than one of velvet.

When General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army, Lincoln sent an unexpected message to the enemy commander. “Tell your men they may keep their horses; they’ll need them for plowing,” said the president. Then this: “Tell your men they may keep their rifles; they’ll need them for hunting.” When Lee read those words he wept.

For each of us there is a time for toughness and a time for tenderness. A time for resolve and a time for compassion. An iron will is not the same as an iron spirit.

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