

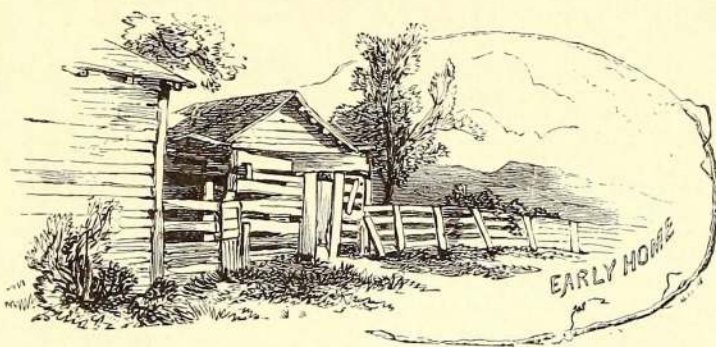


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ABRAHAM LINCOLN *

BY TERENCE VINCENT POWDERLY

(1809-1865)



BORN in obscurity and poverty, with health and a good disposition as a heritage from nature, and with Christian parents as teachers and guides, Abraham Lincoln—sixteenth president of the United States—entered upon life's journey through toil and vicissitude to fame and immortality.

Abraham Lincoln, grandfather of the president, was born in Union, Pa., and in 1759 removed with his parents to a point near Harrisonburg, Va. John Hanks and Squire Boone, father of Daniel Boone, were neighbors of the Lincolns at Union; the former took up his residence at Harrisonburg, Va., and Squire Boone removed to Holman's Ford, on the Yadkin River, in North Carolina. When he was twenty-one years old, Abraham Lincoln went to North Carolina to visit his old neighbors, the Boones, and while there met and married Mary Shipley. He built a log cabin on the banks of the Yadkin and lived there several years. Here it was that Thomas Lincoln, father of the president, was born. Shortly after his birth his parents, in 1778, removed to Kentucky and settled near Elizabethtown, in Hardin County. In 1784, when Thomas was but six years old, his father was killed by the Indians. There were no schools in that neighborhood, and Thomas Lincoln grew to manhood without receiving an education. Joseph Hanks, son of John Hanks, removed to Kentucky about the time that Abraham Lincoln moved there from North Carolina. His daughter, Nancy Hanks, who was born and educated in Virginia, grew up a playmate of Thomas Lincoln, and in 1806 became his wife. Thomas Lincoln selected a farm near Hodgenville, now the county seat of Larue County, Ky., built a log cabin containing but one room, in which, on February 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln, the future president, was born. A poor farmer, with no education and no capital other than his labor, Thomas Lincoln found little to encourage his stay in Kentucky. The institution of slavery, which lived on the toil of the black man, threw a dark shadow across the path of the "poor white" who could claim no title to property in human flesh and sinew, and in 1817 he removed from Kentucky to Spencer County, Ind., and settled in the forest at Pigeon Creek, near the town of Gentryville. On October 5, 1818, Mrs. Lincoln died and was laid to rest at the foot of a tree on the farm which her husband had hewed out of the forest with his axe.

Eighteen months after the death of his wife, Mr. Lincoln married Mrs. Sarah

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Bush Johnston, a widow who had been a neighbor of his in Kentucky. To his stepmother Abraham became very much attached, and he always entertained the greatest respect and affection for her. His education was very simple, his school days few, and his books fewer still. Before leaving Kentucky he learned to read while listening to his mother as she gave lessons to his father. In 1814, a Catholic priest, Zachariah Riney, who travelled through the country, opened a school in an untenanted cabin at Hodgenville, and for a few weeks gave instructions to the youth of the neighborhood. Abraham attended this school during its brief existence. In 1822 Azel Dorsey was employed as teacher at Pigeon Creek, Ind., and during his short stay Abraham Lincoln was his most attentive pupil. Two years after, Abraham went to school for several months, and in 1824 his school days came to an end. His time at school did not exceed twelve months altogether. In the meantime he had read Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe," Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," Æsop's "Fables," The Bible, and Weems's "Life of Washington." In 1824 his father, in need of his assistance as a bread-winner, began to instruct him in the carpenter trade. In 1825 he was employed at \$6 a month to manage a ferry across the Ohio River at Gentry's Landing, near the mouth of Anderson Creek. His wages were paid to his father. The first money he earned for himself came in the shape of two half-dollars paid to him by two gentlemen whose trunks he transferred from the shore to a passing steamer. In 1828 Mr. Gentry engaged him to go to New Orleans on a flat-boat with a load of produce. In 1830 John Hanks, who had removed from Kentucky to Illinois, wrote to Thomas Lincoln, urging him to move to that State. Acting on the advice, Mr. Lincoln removed to Illinois and settled at a point some ten miles west of Decatur. Abraham Lincoln drove the ox team which hauled the household effects of the family, and wearing a coon-skin cap, jean jacket, and a pair of buckskin trousers, he entered the State poor, friendless, and unknown. Thirty years later he left Illinois the foremost man in the nation, and known to all the world. He assisted his father in clearing fifteen acres of land, and split the rails with which to build the fence. Although of age, he had no money, and having but a scant supply of clothing, made a bargain with Nancy Miller to make him a pair of trousers. For each yard of cloth required he split four hundred fence-rails, and as he was over six feet in height it took fourteen hundred rails to pay for his trousers. On April 19, 1831, he went to New Orleans with a flat-boat load of pigs, corn, pork, and beef; the pigs refusing to walk, Lincoln carried them aboard in his arms. John Hanks and Lincoln's half-brother, John Johnston, accompanied him on the trip. While in New Orleans he first saw men and women sold as slaves, and as every instinct of his nature revolted at the spectacle, he said to John Hanks: "If ever I get a chance to hit that institution, I'll hit it hard." Returning from New Orleans, he went to New Salem to clerk in the store of Denton Offut. While waiting for a shipment of goods he acted as clerk on a local election board, and thus filled his first political position. During his stay in New Salem he was frequently called on to exercise his great strength in quelling disturbances, and inspired the turbulent element of the place with a wholesome re-

spect for his powers of muscular persuasion. He was not quarrelsome, never engaged in contention, but never hesitated to take his own part or that of another who might need a helping hand. He subscribed for the *Louisville Journal*, and generously read its contents aloud to those who gathered in the store. During the Black Hawk war he enlisted as private in a company which was raised in the neighborhood, and was at once elected captain. In a short time the company was mustered out, and he re-enlisted in an "Independent Spy Battalion" which continued in service until the end of the war. On returning to New Salem he announced himself an independent candidate for the Legislature, and at a meeting held during the canvass made his first political speech in these words: "Fellow-citizens: I presume you know who I am; I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the Legislature. My politics can be briefly stated. I am in favor of the internal improvement system, and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same."

In the winter of 1832 he became a partner of a man named Berry, in the purchase and management of a store. They had no money, but gave their notes. Berry became dissipated, lost interest in the business, and the firm failed. In 1833 President Jackson appointed Lincoln postmaster of New Salem; he remained postmaster until 1836. While holding the office Lincoln voluntarily established the "free delivery" system in New Salem by carrying the letters around in his hat. He began the study of law, and was soon after appointed deputy surveyor. The note he gave on going into partnership with Berry had been sold to a man who wanted his money, and in the fall of 1834 the sheriff levied on and sold his instruments to satisfy the debt. In that year he was elected to the Legislature, and borrowed the money with which to purchase a suit of clothes to go to the State capital at Vandalia. He was re-elected to the Legislature in 1836, and during the canvass declared his principles as follows:

"I go for all sharing the privileges of the government who assist in bearing its burdens; consequently, I go for admitting all whites to the right of suffrage who pay taxes or bear arms, *by no means excluding females.*"

A few years later, when questioned concerning that utterance, he said:

"All questions of social and moral reform find lodgement first with enlightened souls, who stamp them with their approval. In God's own time they will be organized into law, and thus woven into the fabric of our institutions."

In 1836 he met Stephen A. Douglas for the first time, at the State capital. In 1837 he was admitted to the bar, in 1838 re-elected to the Legislature, and again in 1840. The capital had been removed from Vandalia to Springfield, and in partnership with John T. Stuart he began the practice of law in that city in 1839. On November 4, 1842, he was married to Mary Todd, daughter of Hon. Robert S. Todd. In the presidential campaigns of 1840 and 1844 he canvassed the State as a presidential elector on the whig ticket, and in both campaigns was pitted, in joint debate, against Stephen A. Douglas. In 1846 he was elected to the thirtieth Congress, and was the only whig representative in that body from

Illinois. On January 12, 1848, he made his first speech in Congress, on a resolution which he offered calling on the president to provide a statement relating to the war with Mexico. On January 16, 1849, he introduced a bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and to compensate the owners of the liberated slaves. He declined a re-election to Congress, and in 1849 was an unsuccessful candidate for United States senator. In 1850 he refused to accept the appointment as Governor of Oregon, tendered him by President Fillmore. For a few years he gave no attention to political matters, but the introduction in Congress of the bill to admit Nebraska and Kansas to the Union, and the agitation for the repeal of the "Missouri Compromise," aroused his interest, and in a short time he became the leader of a new party in the State. All who opposed the repeal of that compromise, of whatever party, were known as "Anti-Nebraska" in the beginning, but gradually they began to call themselves "Republicans," and as such they carried most of the "Free State" elections of 1854. Senator Douglas, in defending his course on the "Nebraska Bill," made speeches through Illinois. On October 1, 1854, Lincoln, in reply to one of these speeches, in speaking of slavery said:

"I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world; it enables the enemies of free institutions to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity; is at war with the vital principles of civic liberty; contrary to the Declaration of Independence; and maintains that there is no right principle of action but self-interest. . . . No man is good enough to govern another man without the other's consent. . . . I object to the Nebraska Bill because it assumes there can be moral right in the enslaving of one man by another."

He was a candidate for United States Senator in 1855, but his withdrawal from the contest gave the election to Mr. Trumbull. In 1856 he received one hundred and ten votes for vice-president at the first Republican national convention, and canvassed the State as one of the presidential electors. During this canvass he said:

"Sometimes when I am speaking I feel that the time is soon coming when the sun shall shine and the rain fall on no man who shall go forth to unrequited toil. . . . How it will come about, when it will come, I cannot tell; but that time will surely come."

The Supreme Court of the United States, on March 6, 1857, committed itself to the perpetuation of slavery in the "Dred Scott" decision, and that act, together with the question of admitting Kansas to the Union as a slave or free State, furnished the argument for the legislative campaign of 1858, in which Lincoln was a candidate for United States senator against Stephen A. Douglas. In his speech accepting the nomination he, in referring to the agitation for the abolition of slavery, said:

"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."

On May 16, 1860, the second Republican national convention met in Chicago, and on the third ballot nominated Lincoln for the presidency over William H. Seward, who was at that time the idol of the radical element of the party. Not many who listened to the clergyman who delivered the prayer at the opening of the convention, gave serious thought to these prophetic words as they fell from his lips :

"We entreat Thee that at some future, but no distant, day the evil which now invests the body politic shall not only have been arrested in its progress, but wholly eradicated from the system."

The Northern Democrats nominated Stephen A. Douglas ; the slave-holding, Southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckenridge, and a Constitutional Union party nominated John Bell. The Electoral College gave Lincoln 180 votes, Breckenridge 72, Bell 39, and Douglas 12. In his inaugural address Lincoln said :

"I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so."

Although his inaugural breathed peace and conciliation in every line, it had no effect on the hot-headed advocates of secession. The war began with the bombardment of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and ended with his death. On April 15th, he issued his first call for troops, and during his administration the total number called for was 2,759,049. With the exception of Russia, the foreign powers exhibited evidences of hostility to the Union, and when urged to retaliation Lincoln said : "One war at a time, if you please, gentlemen." On May 20, 1862, he signed the Homestead Law, a boon of inestimable value to settlers on land. On January 1, 1863, he issued the "Emancipation Proclamation" which stamped the seal of eternal truth on the Declaration of Independence. On November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Gettysburg Cemetery, he, in concluding a speech which should be committed to memory by every citizen of the nation, said :

"It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. . . . 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 government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

On June 8, 1864, he was renominated by the Republican national convention, General McClellan was nominated by the Democrats, and at the election Lincoln received 212 of the 233 electoral votes cast. In concluding his inaugural address, March 4, 1865, he said :

"Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces ; but let us

judge not, that we be not judged. . . . Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so, still, it must be said, that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us 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 orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

On the evening of April 14, 1865, while seated in a box at Ford's Theatre, witnessing the play, "Our American Cousin," he was shot by an actor, J. Wilkes Booth, and at twenty-two minutes past seven on the morning of the 15th his life ended. His body was embalmed and taken, in funeral procession, from Washington through Baltimore, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Chicago to Springfield, and was buried on May 4th at Oak Ridge Cemetery. On October 15, 1874, his remains were taken up and placed in a tomb beneath a magnificent and elegantly designed monument consisting of a statue of the martyred president and an obelisk of imposing appearance.

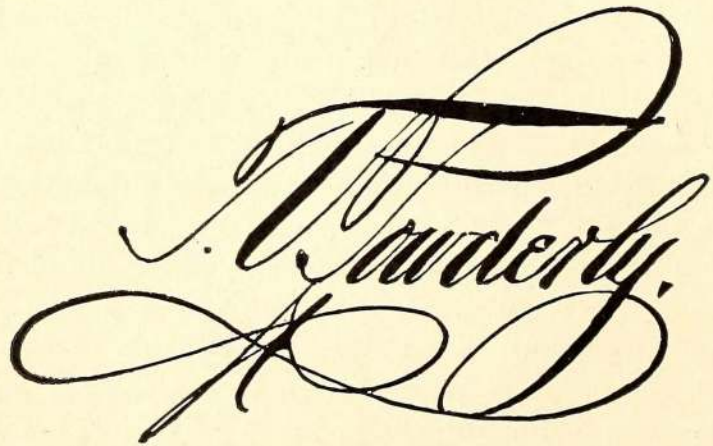
No pen can do justice to the character of Lincoln, for the world will never know of the trials, embarrassments, and misgivings which beset him from his infancy in the backwoods to his tomb in Springfield. During his administration he never knew a moment free from anxiety. Each day he faced a new problem, and finding no precedent to guide him in its solution, he acted in accordance with his own good common sense, and proved equal to every emergency. Frequently misunderstood by the nation and her foremost men, he removed all doubts by the touch of the statesman when the time was ripe. To fully estimate the statesman we must know the man, and as years go by the full nobility of his private character will be disclosed to the world in all its simple grandeur. His was "a spirit of the greatest size and divinest metal" which no temptation could allure from the course of right. His administration was the most trying that could fall to the lot of man, no other furnished so many opportunities to amass wealth through speculation and intrigue, but greed and avarice were strangers to his nature, and no stain rests upon his memory. He was slow to arrive at conclusions, but when deliberation gave birth to conviction he unfalteringly strove for the right. His education was practical, not theoretical, and was acquired in the school of nature and among men rather than among books. The basis of his life was earnestness. No rhetorical display marked his speech, but his oratory fastened the attention, appealed to reason and carried conviction to the hearts of his listeners. He valued public opinion, for he said:

"With public sentiment nothing can fail; without public sentiment nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions."

He opposed the extension of slavery rather than its abolition; but as he divined the real sentiments of its advocates he realized that enduring peace would not bless the nation while the institution lived, a menace to free labor and industrial prosperity. He professed no religion, for his great heart throbbed in sympathy with all humanity, and he would not be separated from even the humblest among men by the artificial barriers of creed. He believed in the gospel of liberty and would guarantee it to all men through constitutional enactment. When he became president he found slavery entrenched behind the bulwarks of constitutional law and judicial decision; he found a united South, resolute in her determination to perpetuate slavery in the nation; a vacillating North, divided in its sentiment on the great question of property in man. He found the nation in the throes of civil war, and died in the triumphal hour of his country's deliverance, with the sceptre of slavery shattered, her fetters broken and in rust, and her power crumbled to ashes.

Public criticism never annoyed him, and he was not averse to taking counsel from the poorest among men. It was love of country, not selfish ambition, which turned his attention to public life, and toward the end of his administration he was rewarded by public confidence and a respect for his honesty and singleness of aim toward the good of the nation. He had a great relish for story-telling and used his fund of anecdote to good advantage in illustrating points in conversation.

His administration stands the guide-post of the centuries, set by the Eternal as the dividing line between the serfdom of the past and the freedom of the future. His monument stands the altar of a nation's fame, and his name will live to guide the world to enfranchisement.



A. S. Vanderly.



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