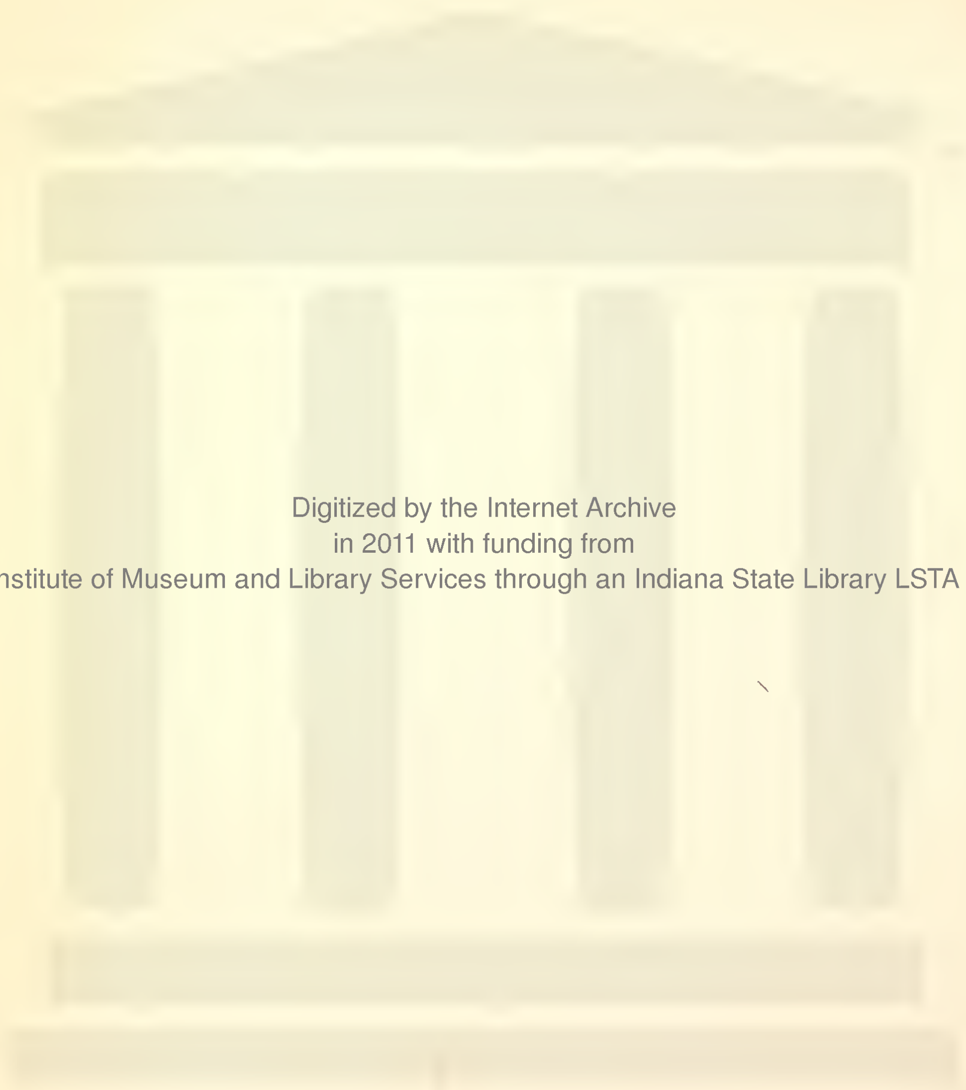
By PAUL M. ANGLE



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He Belongs To The Ages

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By PAUL M. ANGLE
Author and Historian

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"Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us do our duty as we understand it."

From Lincoln's Cooper Institute Speech, February 27, 1860.

Europe dominated the world; Napoleon dominated Europe. The French Emperor had forced the Tsar of Russia and the King of Prussia to conclude humiliating alliances with him. His armies swarmed through Spain and Portugal, reducing the last opposition to his rule on the Continent. Only England continued to defy him, but while the island nation still ruled the seas, its chances of a decisive victory seemed slim.

The year was 1809, the month, February.

The war in Europe had had a disastrous effect upon the maritime trade of the United States, but the young nation had refused to become involved in the fighting. The third American President, Thomas Jefferson, neared the end of his second four-year term and would soon turn over his office to James Madison.

The thirteen original states of the Union had grown in number to seventeen. Most of the country's 7,000,000 inhabitants still lived along the Atlantic coast though each year thousands moved westward, taking up the fertile land that lay beyond the Allegheny Mountains. In this region three new states had already been formed; more would follow soon.

The oldest of the new states was Kentucky, lying south of the Ohio River and extending to the Mississippi. It was a rich land, long prized by the Indians because of the abundance of game to be found on wooded hillsides and in grassy valleys. To the American pioneers it was a paradise. Four hundred thousand men, women and children lived within its boundaries in 1809, yet the state was thinly peopled. There were few towns of any size. Most of the settlers lived in cabins—rough log houses which they had built for themselves. On small fields dotted with stumps they grew corn (maize) for themselves and their livestock—usually a horse, a cow, and a few pigs. They dressed partly in skins from the game that was still plentiful in the woods and partly in clothes made by women from wool which they themselves spun and wove. They had little money, but needed little. They lived in snug houses, and had plenty to eat. They owned their land, governed themselves, and took pride in their independence.

On such a farm, in the north-central part of the state, Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809. His father, Thomas Lincoln, had been brought to Kentucky as a four-year-old boy. There he had grown to maturity and had married young Nancy Hanks. They already had one child, a daughter named Sarah. After Abraham they would have one other son, a boy who died in infancy.

Both parents had grown up without schooling, though the father could sign his name. Their children, they decided, should

have the opportunities that they themselves had been denied. When wandering teachers organized schools Sarah and Abraham attended them. But the schools rarely lasted long. To attend cost money, and of this commodity the Lincolns, like their neighbors, had little.

When Abraham was seven years old the family moved from Kentucky to southwestern Indiana, across the Ohio River. Thomas Lincoln had had trouble with the title to his farm. Besides, he had decided that he preferred to live on free soil where slavery was illegal. There was not a large number of Negroes in Kentucky, but they could be held in slavery. In Indiana they could not.

The new home, however, was in a region much newer and wilder than that which they had left. Squirrels, raccoons even bears, abounded in the thick woods where they had chosen to live. Trees had to be cut for a cabin, and to provide space where a patch of corn could be planted. There were few neighbors to help, so the children had to bear as large a share of the work as they could. Life was harder than it had been in Kentucky.

Soon sorrow was added to hardship. Illness swept the neighborhood, and many settlers died. Among them was Nancy Lincoln. Without her the cabin became a cheerless place. Often the children were poorly clothed and poorly fed, but somehow they managed until their father married again. Their new mother, Sarah Bush Johnston, was a widow with children of her own and enough furniture to brighten the cabin and

make it comfortable. She was kind and helpful to the Lincoln children, and they repaid her with respect and affection.

Neither child had much time for play. As a boy, Abraham husked corn after it had ripened, fed and milked the cow, brought in wood for the fireplace, and carried water from a nearby spring. As he grew older he worked principally with an axe, clearing ground for planting, splitting rails for fences, chopping wood for fuel. He became very strong. All his life he could grasp an axe at the end of its handle and hold it at arm's length—a feat which only a powerful man can perform.

Abraham was sent to school in Indiana as in Kentucky, though not often and only for short periods. Altogether, his

schooling amounted to no more than a year. Yet in that time he learned to add, subtract, multiply and divide, and to read. In this last skill he improved himself, soon progressing from Aesop's "Fables" and "Robinson Crusoe" to a biography of George Washington, a history of the United States, the Bible, and the laws of Indiana—all the books he could find in the sparse pioneer homes. Studying by himself, he made up for much of the formal education he had missed.

Until Lincoln was nineteen years old he knew nothing of the world beyond the immediate region in which he lived. But in the spring of 1828 he was employed to help another young man take a flaboat—a homemade barge—to the distant city of New Orleans where farm produce could be sold to advantage. Day after day, as the flatboat floated down the broad Ohio and the broader Mississippi, the two-man crew saw new sights: luxurious river steamers, towns and cities larger than they had ever dreamed of. And at New Orleans, the gay, sophisticated metropolis of the South, Lincoln for the first time saw slaves in large numbers.

Two years later Thomas Lincoln decided to move again, this time to the state of Illinois, directly west of Indiana. He had heard that there the soil was deep, black, and treeless, and that it would yield enormous crops with little work. In the early spring of 1830 the family loaded all its furniture and tools in wagons, and with the son driving one of the slow-moving ox-teams, started for the new home. Two weeks later the caravan stopped on the bank of the Sangamon River, in the central part of the State ten miles west of the present city of Decatur. There, once more, the men built a cabin, split rails for fences, and planted corn.

By this time Lincoln was twenty-one years of age, a grown man, and free to do as he chose. He remained with his parents a year, helping to establish them in their new home, then struck out to make his own life. After a second trip with a flatboat to New Orleans he decided to settle at New Salem, an Illinois village on the Sangamon River where fifteen or twenty families lived in log cabins. He supported himself by clerking in the general store and working in a grist mill operated by the store owner.

The people of New Salem liked the young newcomer. He was friendly, frank, and honest, and there was something appealing about his homeliness and his awkward height—he was six feet four inches tall. He had wit, and he could tell droll stories inimitably. The villagers, like all American frontiersmen, put a high value on physical strength. When Lincoln threw the neighborhood champion in a wrestling match, they accepted the new arrival as the leading man of the community. A few

months later, when war with the Indian chief Black Hawk broke out in the northern part of the state, the local militia company elected Lincoln captain. The campaign over, he ran for election to the state legislature. In this, his first attempt to win public office, he failed, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that almost all the people of New Salem voted for him regardless of their party ties.

But Lincoln soon had to face the hard fact that popularity alone does not buy clothing and food. Even before the Indian war, the store in which he worked had failed. He decided to become a storekeeper on his own account, and with another man bought a stock of goods on credit. This venture, too, soon failed, leaving Lincoln with a debt which he was years in discharging. Then good luck and good reputation came to his aid: he was appointed postmaster. The office paid

little, but when supplemented by odd jobs, it afforded him a living.

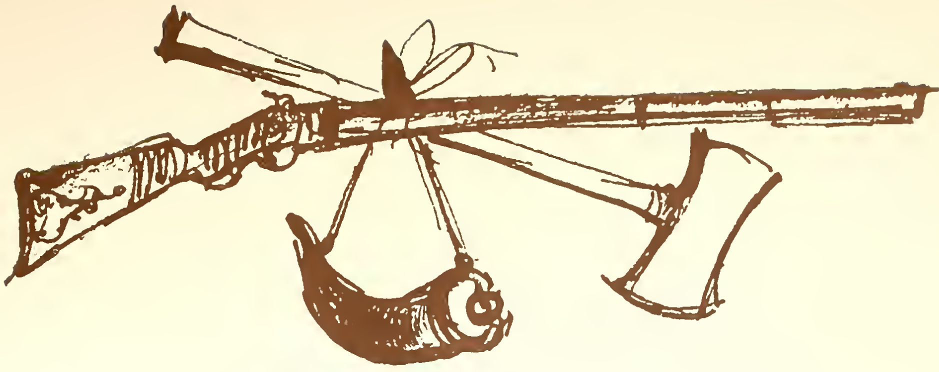
About this time Lincoln was offered a position as deputy county surveyor. Many settlers were purchasing land for farms and town sites, and the services of surveyors, capable of establishing exact boundaries, were in demand. Lincoln knew nothing of the art of surveying, but the fees would be an important addition to his income, and he decided he could learn. He procured a book on the subject, and with the aid of the village schoolteacher, mastered it.

Before this time, Lincoln had realized that unless he could improve his imperfect education he might drift from job to job all his life. He took stock of himself, and came to the conclusion that above all else, he must learn to speak and write with clarity. That meant that he must learn grammar, the structure of language. He found a textbook and studied by himself and with the schoolmaster until he had accomplished his purpose.

Lincoln was encouraged by his success in mastering grammar and surveying. When he first settled at New Salem he had thought of the law as a profession, but had concluded that he was too poorly prepared. Now he reconsidered. Encouraged by John T. Stuart, a lawyer who had served with him in the Black Hawk War, Lincoln began to study. Often he walked the twenty miles to Springfield, where Stuart lived, to borrow books. There were few schools of law at this time, and most lawyers prepared for their profession as Lincoln did—by reading the basic books. Twenty years later he advised a young man: "If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself, the thing is more than half-done already. It is but a small matter whether you read *with* anybody or not. I did not read with anyone. Get the books, and read and study them till you understand them in their principal features.... Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing."

In 1834, two years after his first attempt, Lincoln ran again for election to the state legislature, this time successfully. In the late fall he put away his law books and took the stage coach for Vandalia, then the state capital. For the next ten weeks he mixed with the leading men of Illinois, learned the give-and-take of debate, became familiar with the process of law-making. At the end of the session he returned to New Salem far wiser in the ways of the world than he had been a few weeks earlier.

Lincoln was reelected in 1836. His popularity and ability made him the leader of the Whig party in the legislature. The



Whigs were in the minority, yet Lincoln was able to win a legislative victory: the removal of the state capital to Springfield. The session also gave him an opportunity to go on record as far as slavery was concerned. When the legislature passed a resolution declaring "the right of property in slaves is sacred to the slave-holding States by the Federal Constitution, and that they cannot be deprived of that right without their consent," Lincoln and one other member filed a dissent. While agreeing in general with the resolution, the two dissenters insisted on recording their belief that the institution of slavery was "founded on both injustice and bad policy."

Soon after the session ended Lincoln, now a member of the bar, removed from New Salem to Springfield. New Salem was losing its small population, but Springfield, the new capital would grow and offer many opportunities for a lawyer. His friend Stuart took him into partnership.

Thus, at the age of twenty-eight, Lincoln entered a new calling in a new location. At the same time, he faced an important personal decision. Should he propose marriage to Miss Mary Owens, a young woman from Kentucky with whom he had fancied himself in love for a year or so? He proposed, and was rejected. He turned to Miss Mary Todd, also from Kentucky, who was enjoying an extended visit in Springfield. Sometime in 1840 they became engaged. After a few months the engagement was broken—the reasons are still obscure—but in 1842 they mended their disagreement, and on the fourth of November of that year they were married in the home of an Episcopal clergyman. A week later the bridegroom wrote to a fellow-lawyer: "Nothing new here, except my marrying, which to me, is matter of profound wonder."

Worry over the uneven course of his courtship brought into the open a trait of Lincoln's which his friends would remark for the remainder of his life. In one letter to Stuart, then in Washington as a member of Congress, Lincoln wrote: "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally

distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth." Such moods passed, often turning suddenly into a state of high spirits in which Lincoln, the practiced story-teller, would keep a group of men in laughter for hours. Nevertheless, periods of depression seized him often enough to cause one who knew him well to write: "Melancholy dripped from him as he walked."

Despite his personal difficulties, Lincoln made steady progress in his profession. In the State legislature he served two additional terms—four in all—before he set himself a higher ambition: election to the Congress of the United States. In 1843 and 1844 the nomination eluded him, but in 1846 the Whig Party chose him as its candidate. He was elected, and took his seat late in the following year.

In his single term, Lincoln failed to distinguish himself. He attacked President Polk and the Democrats generally for having brought on the war with Mexico (then nearing its end), although he took pains to vote for supplies for the troops in the field. This was the accepted position of his party, but his stand made him unpopular with his constituents most of whom favored the war. He gave notice that he would bring in a bill ending slavery in the District of Columbia (where the National Capital is located), provided that the residents consented, but he never carried out his intention. Perhaps his fellow members of the House of Representatives remembered him best for a hilarious speech he made against General Lewis Cass, whom the Democrats proposed to run against Zachary Taylor, a Whig, in the presidential election of 1848. Although Lincoln had gone to Congress with the intention of serving one term only, he would have been happy had the people of his district urged him to stand for reelection. His position on the Mexican War, however, destroyed any chances he might otherwise have had. Having enjoyed life in Washington, he sought an appointive office. Embittered when the office was given to another, he returned to Springfield determined to have nothing more to do with politics and to throw himself without reserve into the practice of the law.

Lincoln's partnership with Stuart ended after four years. He then became the partner of Stephen T. Logan, an older lawyer of great ability. Under Logan's guidance, Lincoln progressed steadily. In 1845 he decided to establish his own firm—heretofore he had been a junior partner—and took in as his associate the brilliant William H. Herndon. This partnership would last until Lincoln's election to the presidency.

After 1849, when Lincoln returned from Congress, the practice of law in Illinois became increasingly complex. Corporations—particularly railroads—were growing rapidly; they

needed lawyers with first-rate training and supple minds. In increasing numbers young men were attending colleges and law schools, and Lincoln saw that he would have to study hard or slip back in the competition. He had a further spur in family responsibilities, for he was now the father of two sons. (Two more would be born soon: one in 1850, another in 1853.)

He applied himself so well that in a few years he was recognized as one of the leading members of the Illinois bar. He appeared frequently in the state Supreme Court and in the Federal courts, where he represented important clients in suits involving large sums of money. At the same time he continued to "follow the circuit"—the old English practice of attending county courts as they were held in succession. At this time, urged as always by a passion for logical thought and expression, he undertook the study of the Greek mathematician Euclid and succeeded well enough to be able to say that he had "nearly mastered" the six books. In his carpet bag, with Euclid, he carried a worn volume of Shakespeare's plays, some of which—King Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Richard the Third—he read over and over again.

Lincoln loved life on the circuit, although it kept him away from home for six months in every year, and yielded only a small return in fees. He was in his element when surrounded by other lawyers in small-town inns, and the long rides across the prairies gave him time for the contemplation that was more precious to him than reading. He never worked out a systematic philosophy, but he came to conclusions which he expressed in speeches, letters, and memoranda.

Thinking of his own life, he wrote that "a capacity, and taste, for reading, gives access to whatever has already been discovered by others. It is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved problems. And not only so. It gives a relish, and facility, for successfully pursuing the yet unsolved ones.... The thought recurs that education—cultivated thought—can best be combined with agricultural labor, or any labor, on the principle of *thorough* work—that careless, half-performed slovenly work, makes no place for such combination. . . . Ere long the most valuable of all arts, will be the art of deriving a comfortable subsistence from the smallest area of soil. No community whose every member possesses this art, can ever be the victim of oppression in any of its forms. Such community will be alike independent of crowned-kings, money-kings, and land-kings."

He drew on his own experience for a definition of the relationship between capital and labor. "What is the true condition of the laborer? I take it that it is best for all to leave each man free to acquire property as fast as he can. Some will get wealthy.

I don't believe in a law to prevent a man from getting rich; it would do more harm than good. So, while we do not propose any war upon capital, we do wish to allow the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with anybody else. When one starts poor, as most do in the race of life, free society is such that he knows he can better his condition; he knows that there is no fixed condition of labor, for his whole life. I am not ashamed to confess that twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer, mauling rails, at work on a flat-boat—just what might happen to any poor man's son! I want every man to have the chance—and I believe a black man is entitled to it—in which he *can* better his condition—when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next, work for himself afterward, and finally to hire men to work for him!"

Ever since he was a boy he had thought repeatedly of the struggle for American independence. "I have pondered over the toils that were endured by the officers and soldiers of the army," he said. "I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but something in that Declaration [of Independence] giving liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that *all* should have an equal chance."

The growth of racial and religious intolerance, manifesting itself in the anti-foreign, anti-Catholic Know-Nothing party of the 1850's, disturbed Lincoln. "How can anyone," he asked, "who abhors the oppression of Negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people?"

Had it not been for a sudden turn in the national policy toward slavery, Lincoln might have followed this pattern of law and learning and reflection for the remainder of his life.

Slavery had existed in the English colonies since 1619. The American Constitution, adopted in 1789, recognized the presence of the institution and placed it within the exclusive jurisdiction of the states rather than the federal government. At that time slaves were held in twelve of the thirteen states, although they were relatively few in the North. Statesmen, South as well as North, regretted the existence of human bondage, and the institution might well have died a natural death had it not been for the invention of the cotton gin. This device, by which the seeds were separated from the cotton fibre quickly and efficiently stimulated cotton growing enormously. Negro field hands came to be in great demand. Planters in the cotton states—all in the South—became defenders of slavery instead of

apologists for it. At the same time the Northern States, where slavery was economically unsound, abolished it and became increasingly conscious of what they termed the iniquity of the institution. Thus a sharp division, not only of economic interest but also of moral sentiment, developed between the two sections of the country.

Twice—in 1820 and in 1850—bitter sectional disagreements over slavery brought the United States to the verge of civil war. Both times compromises were devised. An essential feature of the compromises was an agreement by which slavery could be prohibited in the national territories—land owned by the federal government out of which states would eventually be formed—in much of what is now the western part of the United States.

But in 1854, an ambitious politician, Stephen A. Douglas, Senator from Lincoln's own state of Illinois, introduced a bill—the Kansas-Nebraska Act—which nullified this feature of the compromises. By the provisions of the bill, which became law, the people of the territories, before statehood, could decide whether or not they wanted slavery. Thus a large section of the country, previously closed to slavery, was opened to at least the possibility of its introduction.

Lincoln, like many thousands in the North, was shocked by what he considered a dangerous and immoral departure from long-established policy. Although opposed to slavery in principle, he was not an extremist. He would not, like the Abolitionists, abolish slavery at any cost. He was willing that it should remain untouched in the states where it existed, and would base his hope for its ultimate extinction on economic developments and the conscience of his countrymen. But he would not countenance any measure which, like the Kansas-Nebraska Act, looked toward its extension into what had been thought to be free soil.

Aroused as never before—this is his own statement—Lincoln threw himself into politics. In 1854 a congressional campaign was in full swing. He began making speeches in behalf of the local Whig candidate who, as a member of Congress, had opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Lincoln's speeches suddenly exhibited a depth and power and moral fervor that had been lacking in his earlier efforts.

"Our republican robe is soiled, and trailed in the dust," he said in speeches near the end of the campaign. "Let us re-purify it. Let us turn and wash it white, in the spirit, if not the blood of the Revolution. Let us turn slavery from its claims of 'moral right,' back upon its existing legal rights, and its arguments of 'necessity.' Let us return it to the position our fathers gave it; and there let it rest in peace. Let us re-adopt the Declaration

of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it. Let North and South—let all Americans—let all lovers of liberty everywhere—join in the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it, as to make, and keep it, forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it, that the succeeding millions of free happy people, the world over, shall rise up, and call us blessed, to the latest generations."

When Lincoln spoke in this vein, he moved thousands.

He also won himself a position of leadership in a new party, the Republican Party, that was taking shape in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska policy. In 1855 he narrowly missed election to the United States Senate. The following year—the first in which the new party nominated a national ticket—he campaigned unceasingly. He saw the Republican candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency go down to defeat, but he was heartened by the fact that the party swept its Illinois state candidates into office.

Two years later, in 1858, Lincoln had the first great opportunity of his career. Senator Douglas would come up for reelection, and Lincoln was the almost unanimous choice of the Republicans of Illinois to oppose the Democratic Party leader.

The two men had been political rivals since young manhood. While Lincoln was gaining experience in the Illinois legislature, Douglas was ascending the Democratic political ladder, rising from his original position as a state's attorney to a seat in the national House of Representatives. In 1847, when Lincoln entered the same body, Douglas began his first term in the Senate. By 1858, at the expiration of his second term, he had become aknowledged party leader and a prominent contender for the presidency.

The campaign lasted nearly four months. Its most notable feature was a series of seven joint debates in which the candidates spoke from the same platform and divided a three-hour period between them. But each man spoke almost every day to audiences of his own. Each traveled thousands of miles, sometimes on river steamers, sometimes on the primitive railroads, of the time, more often by stage coach or horse and buggy. Travel alone called for great physical endurance, but neither candidate missed a meeting.

Throughout the campaign Lincoln charged Douglas with having needlessly reopened the slavery question and having prepared the way for the expansion of an evil institution. He also maintained that Douglas' principle of "popular sovereignty" —the right of settlers in the territories to admit or bar slavery as they chose—would not work in practice. Douglas, on the other hand, declared that Lincoln was promoting a war between the North and South, and advocating Negro equality. While Lincoln did not, in fact, believe that the Negro was ready for full political and social rights, he hoped that slavery would eventually be abolished and that the Negro would have every opportunity to better himself. Douglas cared nothing for Negro rights, and proclaimed repeatedly that he was willing to have white supremacy continue indefinitely.

Although Douglas was returned to the Senate, in the long run, the victory was Lincoln's. The seven formal debates, reported in newspapers all over the country, made him a national figure. Had it not been for the reputation he acquired in this contest, he would not have been considered for the presidency two years later.

As it was, Lincoln was not a prominent contender when the Republican National Convention met in the spring of 1860 to nominate its candidates. But as the convention progressed it became apparent that the leaders—Senator William H. Seward of New York and Governor Salmon P. Chase of Ohio—had made so many enemies during their long political careers that they could not be nominated. The delegates turned to Lincoln, an "available" candidate. On the third ballot he was nominated.

Events in the summer of 1860 assured his election. The Democratic party broke into two factions, one nominating Douglas, the other choosing a pro-Southern extremist. A fourth party—the Constitutional Union—divided the opposition still further. Lincoln made no personal campaign, but received more votes than any of his three opponents and became President.

Southern states had threatened to leave the Union if a Republican were elected President. Many Southern leaders believed that their section would be discriminated against by an administration composed of enemies of slavery. Southern theorists had long contended that any state had a right to withdraw from the Union peacefully whenever it was to its interest to do so. They now proceeded to put theory into practice. On December 20, 1860, South Carolina, through an ordinance of secession, declared herself an independent state. By March 4, 1861, when Lincoln took the presidential oath of office, six other states all in the deep South, had followed South

Carolina's lead. More than that: they had organized a government of their own, the Confederate States of America.

So far, the seceding states had not been challenged by force. They had taken over nearly all the federal forts, arsenals, post offices, and customs houses within their limits, and hoped to make an amicable settlement of the property rights involved. But neither Lincoln nor the North generally would admit the right of secession, and the President's oath of office required him to "preserve, protect, and defend" the Union. Still, he abstained from hasty action, hoping that time, good sense, and persuasion would induce the Southern states to return to their old allegiance. In his first inaugural address—one of his truly great state papers—he tried to assure the people of the South that they had nothing to fear from a government in Republican hands, argued that secession would lead to anarchy, and urged that time be given a chance to heal the division that had taken place.

"Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people?" he asked. "Is there any better, or equal hope, in the world? In our present differences, is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of nations, with His eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth, and that justice will surely prevail, by the judgment of this great tribunal, the American people....

"My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and *well,* upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to *hurry* any of you, in hot haste, to a step which you would never take *deliberately,* that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Such of you as are now dissatisfied, still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and, on the sensitive point, the laws of your own framing under it; while the new administration will have no immediate power, if it would, to change either. If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied, hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty."

The President dropped argument and closed with an appeal to a people who had shared a national experience for many years.

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. 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 hearthstone, 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."

For a month the situation remained the same, except that Southern Senators and Representatives resigned their seats and Southern officers of the Army and Navy gave up their commissions to enter the armed forces of their states or the Confederacy. Then came the necessity for a decision. Fort Sumter, in the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina, was one of the few forts in the South that remained in Union hands. Its food supplies were running low. Lincoln would not give it up to the South, nor would he risk war by sending reinforcements. He chose the middle course of sending provisions only, and notified the government of South Carolina that there would be no attempt to use force unless the provisioning expedition were resisted. The Confederate authorities replied by opening fire on the fort, which surrendered on April 13, 1861, the day after the bombardment began. Two days later the President proclaimed a state of insurrection and called out the armed forces of the Union. The Civil War had begun.

The fifty-two-year-old Lincoln, faced with the gravest crisis in the nation's history, could hardly be said to be prepared for his responsibilities. His legislative experience had been limited; he had had no training in statecraft; he was untested as an administrator. To complicate matters, he had to decide upon thousands of appointments, aided only by a small untrained staff. The government itself lacked an organization to cope with the problem of raising, organizing, and equipping an army and navy of the size that would be needed.

Yet Lincoln had a great asset. He believed with the fervor of a religious conviction that the cause of the Union was not only righteous but also of supreme importance to all mankind. At every opportunity he stressed this belief, certain that if the people of the North could be brought to share his own conviction, they would put forth the effort that would result in victory. In his first message to Congress (July 4, 1861) he said:

"This issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man, the question, whether a constitutional republic, or a democracy—a government of the people, by the same people—can, or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity, against its own domestic foes. It presents the question, whether discontented individuals, too few in numbers to control administration, according to organic law, in any case, can always, upon the pretences made in this case, or on any other pretences, or arbitrarily, without any pretence, break up their government, and thus practically put an end to free government upon the earth. It forces us

to ask: 'Is there, in all republics, this inherent, and fatal weakness?' 'Must a government, of necessity, be too *strong* for the liberties of its own people, or too *weak* to maintain its own existence?' "

Lincoln soon needed all his faith. For the North, the war went badly. In the first great battle—at Bull Run, Virginia, on July 21, 1861—a supremely confident Union Army suffered a disastrous defeat and retreated in confusion to Washington. New commanders fared no better; other reverses followed. Still, the war was not entirely one-sided. In the West, Confederate forces in Tennessee were overcome, though at heavy cost.

In the lower Mississippi Valley, the Federal Navy forced the approaches to New Orleans and took the city, which would remain permanently in the possession of the Union forces.

But the war could not be won in the West alone. In the East the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by one of the military geniuses of the war, Robert E. Lee, must be destroyed. Reluctantly the President, still not sure of himself in the sphere of the military, made his choice: he would restore General George B. McClellan to the command of the Union Army of the Potomac, even though the General, in an unsuccessful campaign against Richmond, had come dangerously close to insubordination. McClellan justified Lincoln's confidence by stopping Lee's invasion of the North at Antietam, Maryland.

The Battle of Antietam had more than military significance. It signalized a fundamental change in Lincoln's policy. In the beginning he had aimed at only one goal: the restoration of the Union. But as the war progressed, more and more Northerners demanded that slavery, which they considered the basic cause of the conflict, be made a target. Lincoln well knew that in normal times slavery was beyond the reach of even a President, but he believed that the Constitution conferred unusual powers on him in time of war. As early as July 1862, he thought of issuing a proclamation of emancipation which would free the slaves in those states which had left the Union. Such an act would eliminate the possibility of European aid to the Confederacy—the people of Great Britain and France, in particular, would not permit their governments to go to the support of slavery—and it would be an inducement to slaves to leave Confederate masters and enlist in the Union armies. But when Lincoln broached the subject to his Cabinet he was persuaded to drop it. After a succession of Federal defeats, such a radical move would appear to be an act of desperation—"the last shriek on the retreat," in the vivid phrase of his Secretary of State.

Lincoln waited for a turn in the fortunes of the North. The Battle of Antietam, though not a decisive victory, gave him what he needed. On September 22, 1862, five days after the battle, he called a Cabinet meeting. Ever since his youth he had found in humor a temporary release from the world's cares, so he opened the meeting—perhaps the most momentous of his administration—by reading a page from one of the comic philosophers of the day. Becoming serious, the President reminded his ministers of the proclamation to which they had objected two months earlier. "Ever since then," he said, "my mind has been much occupied with this subject, and I have thought all along that the time for acting on it might very probably come. I think the time has come now... When the rebel army was at Frederick, I determined, as soon as it should be driven out of Maryland, to issue a Proclamation of Emancipation such as I thought most likely to be useful. I said nothing to any one; but I made the promise to myself, and"—here Lincoln hesitated—"to my Maker. The rebel army is now driven out, and I am going to fulfill that promise."

The President spoke quietly, but with the voice of authority.

"I have got you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter—for that I have determined for myself.... If there is anything in the expressions I use, or in any other minor matter, I shall be glad to receive the suggestions."

Yet he spoke without arrogance. "I know very well that many others might, in this matter, as in others, do better than I can; and if I were satisfied that the public confidence was more fully possessed by any one of them than by me, and knew of any Constitutional way in which he could be put in my place, he should have it. I would gladly yield it to him. But though I believe that I have not so much of the confidence of the people as I had some time since, I do not know that, all things considered, any other person has more; and, however this may be, there is no way in which I can have any other man put where I am. I am here. I must do the best I can, and bear the responsibility of taking the course which I feel I ought to take."

On the following day the Proclamation of Emancipation was published to the world. It warned that if states in rebellion did not rejoin the Union by January 1, 1863, slaves held within their limits would be declared "forever free." The Confederate states ignored the warning—no one expected them to heed it—so the second and final proclamation was issued as promised. As far as freeing slaves was concerned it had little immediate effect, since it applied only to parts of the country over which the Federal government had no control. Yet it made the abolition of slavery the second major purpose of the war and led directly

to the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution by which, in 1865, slavery was abolished throughout the United States.

In the immediate course of the war, the Proclamation of Emancipation seemed to make no difference. A new commander of the Army of the Potomac, General Ambrose E. Burnside, was disastrously defeated in December, 1862. Lincoln, seeking desperately for a general who could win battles, replaced Burnside with Joseph Hooker, only to see Hooker throw away the Battle of Chancellorsville in early May 1863. In the West, General Ulysses S. Grant appeared to be bogged down in his campaign to take the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg and thus, by opening the Mississippi River to the Union forces, seal off the western part of the Confederacy from the eastern part.

Suddenly fortune favored the Union. In late June, General Lee began an invasion of the North which, if successful, would not only procure badly needed supplies for his army but also win back European sympathy for the South. On July 1 his army stumbled into the Army of the Potomac under still another commander, General George Gordon Meade, at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. For two days the armies lunged at each other, taking heavy losses with neither side gaining a decisive advantage. On the third day the Confederate general tried a desperate expedient, a frontal attack. In a magnificent display of military valor 15,000 gray-clad troops hurled themselves against the Union center, only to reel backward leaving half their number on the field.

The next day Lee, with a defeated, dejected army, headed south. As his troops moved toward the Potomac River, the telegraph wires brought word that the Confederate forces in Vicksburg had surrendered to Grant. Not since July 4, 1776, when the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, had there been such a joyous celebration of the natal day of American independence.

Although Lincoln was bitterly dissappointed when Meade failed to pursue Lee after Gettysburg and smash the Confederate army, the President soon came to see that the North had scored victories that eventually assured the successful termination of the war. His confidence showed in a letter that he wrote to his old neighbors in Springfield six weeks after the twin victories. "The signs look better," he said. "The Father of Waters* again goes unvexed to the sea."

"Peace does not appear so distant as it did," he continued. The end of the war, with the Union cause triumphant, would prove that "there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet; and that they who take such appeal are sure to lose their case, and pay the cost." For those who had criticized

* The Mississippi River

the Proclamation of Emancipation there were eloquent and sobering words: "There will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while, I fear, there will be some white ones, unable to forget that, with malignant heart, and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it."

Lincoln, the novice in warfare, had mastered his job, and knew that he had mastered it. So did his associates. It was at this time that one of his young secretaries, witty and not unduly impressed by authority, wrote of his superior: "The old man sits here and wields like a backwoods Jupiter the bolts of war and the machinery of government with a hand equally steady and equally firm."

Yet the war would drag on for almost two years more. And there would be severe reverses for the Union. But the set-backs neither shook the President's faith in ultimate victory nor caused him to question in the least the goal for which he strove. If anything, the continuing loss of life, the suffering and pain and hardship that would not come to a speedy end, posed an ever-greater challenge to those who had so far escaped war's horror and destruction. Dedicating the military cemetery at Gettysburg four months after the battle, Lincoln told his audience that the brave men who had died on that field had created their own imperishable memorial. Their blood had hallowed the ground beyond the power of the living to add or detract. But the living had an obligation: "to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

That was the essence of the matter: not the restoration of the Union for its own sake, but the restoration of the Union to prove to the people of the whole world that democracy, a new form of government, could maintain itself against the most formidable attack.

With the year 1864, Lincoln's four-year term of office neared its end. Even within his own party he had many opponents. He was called too indecisive or too dictatorial, too lenient toward the enemy, too often an earthy humorist. But party discipline overcame the malcontents, and the President was nominated to succeed himself. However, nomination did not assure election. In the Democratic party large numbers despaired of Union

victory, and were willing to make peace with the South on any terms short of complete surrender. The turn of military events strengthened their position. In the spring of 1864 Grant, now in command of all the Union armies, had hurled the Army of the Potomac toward Richmond, Virginia, at the same time that Sherman had moved against Atlanta in Georgia. By midsummer neither commander had reached his goal, and a cloud of pessimism had lowered over the country. Grant's troops in the East had taken so many casualties that the newspapers were referring to him as "the butcher" and while he had laid Richmond under siege, the Confederate capital gave no sign of surrendering. Sherman, though advancing steadily, was still short of his objective.

To President Lincoln the future looked bleak. One August morning he asked the members of his Cabinet to endorse a document without knowledge of its contents. In it he had written:

"This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this administration will not be reelected. Then it will be my duty to so cooperate with the President-elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he cannot possibly save it afterwards."

Eight days later Atlanta surrendered. Northern morale stiffened, Republican prospects brightened. Early in November Lincoln was triumphantly reelected, this time by an absolute majority of more than 400,000 votes. With characteristic humility, he refused to accept the result as a personal tribute. The election, he told a group of serenaders, proved that a democracy could choose a new administration even in the midst of a great national crisis. Yet the election had not ended the rebellion. "May not all, having a common interest," he asked, "re-unite in a common effort, to save our common country? For my own part I have striven, and shall strive to avoid placing any obstacle in the way. So long as I have been here I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom."

On March 4, 1865, when Lincoln took the oath of office a second time, it was obvious that the end of the war was very close. Sherman had cut a broad lane of desolation from Atlanta to Savannah on the Atlantic coast, and was now moving north toward a junction with Grant, who was slowly strangling Richmond and Lee's army. In the West, the last strong Confederate army had been shattered by Federal troops.

Under the circumstances, most men would have been jubilant. Not Lincoln. Throughout the war he had mused on the role of God in the terrible conflict. He had been able

to discern no purpose, yet his faith in an all-wise, omnipotent Providence had not been shaken. Reverently he spoke his thoughts:

"The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? 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 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' "

If the ways of Providence were inscrutable, the path of duty remained clear.

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in 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 orphans—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

Less than a month after Lincoln spoke, Lee made his last desperate move: he abandoned Richmond and tried to escape to the West. A week later overwhelming Union forces cornered his dwindling army. On April 9, 1865, he surrendered. The war was over.

Two days after the surrender the tired, gaunt President, his face worn with four years of care and sorrow, greeted a group that gathered on the White House lawn. "We meet this evening," he told them, "not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart. The evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond, and the surrender of the principal insurgent army, give hope of a righteous and speedy peace whose joyous expression cannot be restrained. In the midst of this, however, He, from Whom all blessings flow, must not be forgotten. A call for a national thanksgiving is being prepared, and will be duly promulgated."

The call would never be issued in Lincoln's name, nor would there be any other formal document, over his signature, proclaiming the end of the war. On the night of April 14 he attended the theater with Mrs. Lincoln. Midway through the play a half-mad actor, John Wilkes Booth, burning to avenge the South, slipped into the theater and fired at short range. The President never regained consciousness, and died the following morning. As he drew his last breath, one of his Cabinet members murmured: "Now he belongs to the ages."

* * * *

The sudden tragic death of Lincoln made him a hero overnight. Even bitter critics turned to eulogy. Yet it is a mistake to assume, as many Americans do, that no one recognized Lincoln's greatness in his lifetime. When he spoke at Gettysburg the first person to acclaim the merit of the address was Edward Everett, the principal orator of the occasion and one of the most cultivated men of the time. Before twenty-four hours had passed, Everett wrote to the

President: "I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes." Three days after Lincoln had delivered his second inaugural address Charles Francis Adams, Jr., a member of a family renowned for intellectuality and leadership, wrote to his father, the United States Minister to Great Britain: "This inaugural strikes me in its grand simplicity and directness as being for all time the historical keynote of this war; in it a people seemed to speak in the sublimely simple utterance of ruder times."

Many Europeans saw Lincoln's greatness as soon as his own countrymen recognized it. *Punch*, the English magazine which had lampooned Lincoln without mercy, retracted its sneers and spoke of the American President as a "true born king of men." Disraeli said of the "Great Emancipator" that he had fulfilled his duty "with simplicity and strength" in "one of the severest trials which ever tested the moral qualities of man." French Liberals, headed by Victor Hugo, Lois Blanc, and Eugene Pelatan, caused a medal to be struck on which were inscribed these words: "Dedicated by French Democracy to Lincoln, President, twice elected, of the United States—Lincoln, honest man, who abolished slavery, reestablished the Union, saved the Republic without veiling the figure of Liberty." A contemporary observer wrote that when news of Lincoln's death reached Sweden, "Our men clenched their fists in vain fury and our blue-eyed women shed many tears in memory of the remarkable man."

Nevertheless, widespread recognition of Lincoln's true stature was years in coming. The full record of the war and his part in it had to be made known. His famous letter of consolation to Mrs. Bixby on the loss of her sons—"I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom"—was published in 1864, when it was written, but not until after Lincoln's death was the extent of his benevolent sympathy revealed. Then soldier after soldier testified to the fact that the President himself had remitted a severe sentence for some breach of military discipline; and many a mother told of husband or son released from the army because Lincoln, in the midst of crushing burdens, had heard the plea of one in dire trouble. Even toward those who had led the South to

secession and had guided her in civil war he left no resentment. "Judge not, that ye be not judged," was his response to men of his own party who talked of harsh penalties.

Moreover, the world itself had to move in the direction of democracy before this advocate of democracy could be valued at his worth. Then ever growing numbers could understand that Lincoln spoke for something far larger than an abstract system of government, that he had stood for a way of living in which each individual would have the greatest possible opportunity to make the most of his capacities. "It is not merely for today," he told a group of soldiers late in the war, "but for all time to come, that we should perpetuate for our children's children that great and free government that we have enjoyed all our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen, temporarily, to occupy this White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has."

The world would see, too, that Lincoln had been faithful to the ideal. Believing himself to be authorized by the Constitution, he had exercised more arbitrary power than any other American President, and his critics had been numerous and outspoken. With the perspective that comes with the passage of time, it was seen that he had made no move to establish a dictatorship. Men had been imprisoned for disloyalty—and then released after short periods; when overzealous officers had suppressed critical newspapers he had set their orders aside. Nationwide elections were held twice during the course of the war, and not even Lincoln's bitterest opponents had suspected him of an intention to disregard the will of the people.

A fine biography of Lincoln, by Benjamin P. Thomas, published in the United States in 1952, today is available in the German, French, Spanish, Slovenian, Greek, Arabic, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese languages—more eloquent testimony than monuments and tributes that the son of obscure parents, born in a lowly cabin, "imperfectly" educated through his own efforts, has become a figure of world significance.

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