



• LINCOLN •
THE POLITICIAN
—
T. AARON LEVY

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LINCOLN THE POLITICIAN

BY
T. AARON LEVY



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PREFACE

LOVE of kind alone transcended Lincoln's political ambition. His career as President, Statesman, Emancipator is a mystery unless his preparation for leadership is demonstrated. He was no product of sudden elevation, no creature of opportunity. No American Statesman was better equipped to meet a national emergency. Lincoln the plain politician, the Illinois legislator, the congressman, and the prairie debater, was a child of the grocery store, of the pioneer gathering, of caucus and convention. It was this political training that determined the mode in which he breathed life into the momentous proclamation of the nineteenth century. The world that admires his charity is in equal need of his policy.

Until the coming of the industrial movement following the Civil War, the Commonwealth commanded the best heart and intelligence of the Republic. Captains of industry had not usurped the places of power. A degraded conception of devotion to the general welfare is in itself a sign of degeneration. A corrupt political system is incompatible with a healthy national existence. When individual aggrandizement is often preferred to the common good, when private institutions frequently allure the genius of a people, it is an inspiration to return to a politician who in simplicity and sincerity believed that civil service and patriotism are better than gold. An abounding demand of the day is a practical political philosophy.

In spite of golden vision, of saintly Grail, civilization still

questions its real progress, and the sphynx of human suffering baffles understanding. Life has ever been a ceaseless compromise between spirit and matter, dream and reality, shadow and substance. In the never ending conflict between the hosts of darkness and of light, of radicalism and of conservatism, the battle often has been won by the use of superior strategy. Wasted energy, a lack of well directed idealism and indifference to the laws of human progress are the main obstacles to human advancement. There is an ever present need of a fine sense of proportion between vision and reality. The reformer needs more method, while the practical representative needs more vision. The solution of vexing governmental problems will be hastened by a clearer and more general comprehension of the gigantic difficulties that stand in the way of the domination of ideas over matter. High political success comes from a profound knowledge of the character of the hostility thwarting human progress. Patience as well as faith must be the guide. Society suffers from misdirected emotion on the one hand and from impervious apathy on the other. Sensational onslaught on evil has been often tested and its futility proved. Likewise the common politician has made many despair of democratic government. Abraham Lincoln represents the sanest example of wise political action, his political life the best platform for eternal warfare on organized evil.

The artist is measured not alone by his sleepless imagination but also by the technic through which his vision assumes external form. Dante skillfully gave voice to "ten silent centuries." Even so the dreams of prophet and humanitarian await the touch of the political artist to find immortality in visible manifestation. Neither a politician without a luminous idea nor a dreamer without political craft ever develops into a statesman. Democracy can solve its destiny

only by an adequate appreciation of the importance of working out its intrinsic mission. The national ideal must become a reality. Dreamer and reformer are needed and likewise the politician, the man of method, the student of matter, the wielder of the tool. A heroic past will not save a nation. "The central idea" of a people cannot be safely relinquished, but must restlessly follow the law of practical evolution in each generation.

Abraham Lincoln was a child of American Democracy. He was trained in the college of republican institutions. The danger to Democracy is the treason of her own children. Lincoln stayed with his teachers—the plain people. He never longed for a place they could not give nor an honor they could not bestow. The aristocracy of externality, of clothes, fashion, wealth, station and descent ever remained shadows to him. He valued them at their real worth, with finer judgment than any man in modern history. The possibility of such a career is in itself a justification of republican government.

He walked the way of the average citizen, labored in the factory of political methods. Living in the common atmosphere, loving the strife of debate, near to the pioneer heart and mind, a student of popularity and party organization, he was from the beginning a champion of the better and broader humanity. He lived his democracy and led his people to a higher realization of the resistless purposes of the republic. Striking the better chords of their being, he led them to make a mere declaration of freedom the possession of a forgotten people. During his political pilgrimage he ever sought to widen in a practical way the Declaration of Independence. Many prate much of Democracy but Lincoln dared to make it the bread of humanity.

Abraham Lincoln used political machinery for the welfare

of the people. He was ambitious and loved success but not for its own sake. Station gave him wider opportunity to practice his philosophy of life, his affection for his fellow-men, and sympathy for the downtrodden. He is a guide to the perplexed, to those who have not bartered their idealism in the stifling fight. His life is richly calculated to deepen faith in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, to lead to the conviction that spirit and method are not sundered of necessity, that the vision is not essentially a stranger to the party worker, that policy and compromise have their place in the domain of progress. †

He looms up in American History as a politician who glorified his craft, who kept his hands clean in all of the sordidness of material success. Vicarious government in a republic is ruinous. Lincoln is therefore an inspiration for political consecration and the prophet of permanency. He dedicated his talent to the external manifestations of the destiny of the republic. His common sense, his practical sagacity and knowledge of human nature and of its limitations for progress, his prudent recognition of the labored advance of ethical sentiment and of the solidarity of vested interests, as well as his superb idealism and exalted spirit may well become food and life to those who believe in the better politics. As these become the property and the possession of a broader community, the republic will know no fear, dissension will little disturb her serenity and she will be equal to every emergency that may threaten her integrity.

Beginning with the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Abraham Lincoln became and remained a national figure. From that time his life belongs to the history of the United States and has been dwelt upon with ever increasing fullness and eulogy. By contrast his early political life has been almost forgot-

ten. This work covers that neglected period, dealing with Lincoln the politician, showing his development and his training for national leadership. The story is largely told in the words of Lincoln himself, stress being laid on crucial incidents hitherto, in the main, indifferently considered. A unity, dramatic in its simplicity, appears in his recital, giving glimpses of a man who was guided by a supreme political philosophy in seeking to externalize his gospel of the brotherhood of man in statute and decision. Considerable attention is devoted to Lincoln in Indiana and at New Salem, showing the peculiarity of his power, his political popularity, and the rapid maturity of his convictions as to the wisest methods of attacking entrenched evil. An earnest, reverent and impartial study of his political career is an enriching education. There is no need of hiding its humble, rude phases. The more his life is lingered over, the greater the wonder grows at the emerging of Lincoln from the humility and the poverty of his environment with a "message of range and sweep," to the sons of men the world over.

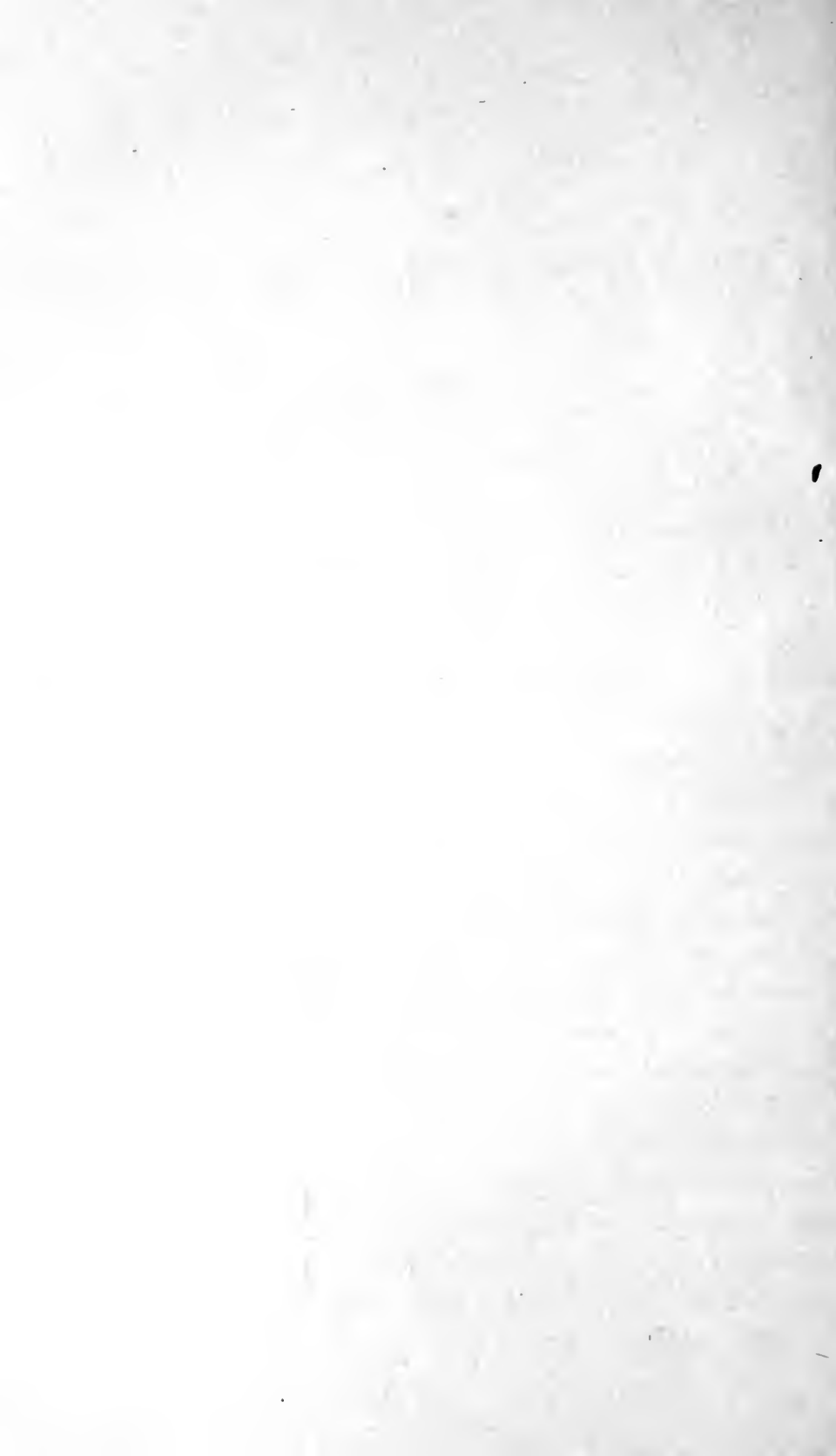


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LINCOLN THE POLITICIAN



LINCOLN THE POLITICIAN

CHAPTER I

LINCOLN IN KENTUCKY

THE forefathers of Abraham Lincoln, like thousands of Western pioneers, were of a sturdy English lineage. His immediate ancestry, however, was less distinguished than that of many whose names are forgotten and whose influence on American history is imperceptible. Every effort to explain his career through an illustrious parentage has proved altogether futile.

Lincoln's grandfather belonged to that band of fearless adventurers in Kentucky, whose ideal was a lonely house in the middle of a vast farm, even though maintained in the presence of skulking redskins.¹ It was in this land that earned the title of "the Dark and Bloody Ground," that a common frontier tragedy made the grandmother of Lincoln a widow. For one day while her husband was in the fields, a short distance from the house, with their youngest son Thomas, a sudden shot from an Indian ambush broke the stillness of the woods and the father fell dead. The oldest son Mordecai looking out of the loop hole in the loft of the house saw an Indian raising his little brother from the ground. Aiming at a silver ornament on the breast of the redman, he brought him down. The boy ran to the cabin

¹ Shaler, 116.

and the mother opened the door. She hastened to a more settled community where her son Thomas, the father of the President, grew to a shiftless manhood.²

The inhabitants of Kentucky were bred in the school of hardship. The battle with the forest and buffalo abated, but there remained the heroic fight with the soil. Splendid virile qualities were born in the strife with the Indians and the forest. Inventions were yet unknown and a living was drawn from the earth only through grinding labor. Yet frontier life rapidly gave way to the march of civilization, the trail and the path to the highway.

Hunters and warriors became tillers of the field. The merchant and manufacturer, the pioneer preacher, physician, lawyer and politician appeared with the onward tide of events.

The places of learning were few. Now and then a struggling teacher gave all that he had from his humble store to the young confidently entrusted to his care. Still something in the little log cabin school-house, even on unfrequented paths, developed character. Out of the battle with adverse conditions, with few advantages and manifold difficulties, came statesmen, and even scholars, men who laid the foundation of states, who guided the nation through its crises, and were equal to every emergency that endangered its vitality.

The law abiding character of the people was notably evinced by the supreme patience with which they effected their separation from the mother state, Virginia.³ With wisdom they established courts of justice and the law of the land was speedily enforced. A malefactor who violated the statute against card playing, after imprisonment, turned his back on Kentucky, swearing "that it was the meanest country a white man ever got into."⁴

² Lamon, 7-8.

³ Shaler, 107.

⁴ Milburn, 65.

The pioneers of Kentucky had in a high degree the instinct of government, the passion for politics. Their sense of liberty was tempered by devotion to constitutional principles and reverence for the written law. The restless spirit of adventure was tamed by the potency of political responsibilities. At an early day, they displayed interest even in national problems. Their views were kindred to those of Virginia. Accustomed to restrain their own freedom, they did not favor the coercive measures of a distant, unknown, strong and centralized government.⁵ The political policy of Washington was far from popular; that of Adams was odious.⁶ The presidential contest between Adams and Jefferson agitated Kentucky. Discussions were frequent and widespread and even women participated. A pioneer boy was so elated over the triumph of Jefferson that, sitting in his chamber alone, he drank in cold water thirteen toasts in celebration of the triumphant event.⁷

It is probable that even in his infancy Lincoln listened at the fireside to many political controversies. In that case he heard doctrines advocated destructive of the national sovereignty, vitally hostile to those avowed and cherished by him in his public career. Traces of his early political surroundings on his vital convictions are hardly discernible. Lincoln became a national politician with little patience for the popular doctrine of State Sovereignty. He belonged to the Federal party by instinct. No American statesman was broader in his outlook of the general welfare. It is worthy of note that he passed his infancy in Kentucky; his boyhood and minority in Indiana, and a varied career in the State of Illinois. Not being the son of a single community or commonwealth, he did not look to any individual state with fullness of affection. He was a citizen of the Republic.

⁵ Ranck, 181-2, 216.

⁶ Collins, 1, 284.

⁷ Drake, 211.

As early as 1790, an effort was made in Kentucky to promote the gradual abolition of slavery. The arrival of Clay strengthened this movement. Strong passions were aroused by the angry discussions that followed this futile endeavor. About 1810 the number of slaves increased perceptibly. The blighting effects of the institution soon began their revelation. Labor was deemed disgraceful and demeaning. The possession of slaves, not "high intellectual and moral endowments," became the test of social status. Almost everything was subordinate to the dominating institution.

Such, in general, was the state of society in Kentucky when Thomas Lincoln, in 1816, made his weary trail through tangled woodland to the wild forests of Spencer County, Indiana. He was one of the multitude discouraged with prospects in the Southern states. It was frequently the overbearing conduct of slaveholders, rather than hatred to slavery, that led the pioneer to leave the land of his nativity. Still it is amazing that the majority of these emigrants bore no resentment to the institution that provoked their removal, but became or remained vigorous advocates in maintaining its supremacy.⁸

Efforts have been made to account for Thomas Lincoln's movement by reason of his extreme hostility to slavery. Lamon indulges in a more prosaic explanation, stating that there were not more than fifty slaves in Hardin County; that it was practically a free community; that his more fortunate relatives in other parts of the State had no scruples to their ownership; that he was wanderer by nature gaining neither riches nor credit; and that a quarrel with a neighbor, whose nose he bit off, made him more anxious than ever to leave Kentucky.⁹ Lincoln in his campaign biography

⁸ Palmer, 9. Drake, 208-209.

⁹ Lamon, 16-17.

remarks that this removal was partly on account of slavery, but chiefly on account of the difficulty in land titles in Kentucky.¹⁰ Ida Tarbell even endeavors to make a sort of Abolitionist out of Thomas Lincoln. She quotes an old man, who claims that he was present at the wedding of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, and that Tom Lincoln and Nancy and Sally Bush were steeped full of Jess Head's notions about the wrong of slavery and the rights of man, as explained by Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine.¹¹ If this were the fact, it is very strange that Thomas Lincoln never thereafter manifested any hatred of slavery during a long life. If Thomas Lincoln had been a zealous advocate of the rights of the black man, is it not stranger still that his son never even hinted at receiving the slightest impetus to anti-slavery opinions from his father? The long silence of Thomas, Abraham and Sally Bush Lincoln disproves the contention that Thomas Lincoln was a friend or champion of the enslaved, or that his views differed from the prevailing sentiment in regard to Abolitionism.

One incident looms up in the brief stay of Abraham in Kentucky. "I had been fishing one day," said Lincoln, "and caught a little fish which I was taking home. I met a soldier in the road, and having always been told at home that we must be good to the soldiers, I gave him my fish."¹² This story strikingly displays the influence of his mother. Events were few in his early life, and made a correspondingly abiding impression.

Lincoln was seven years old when he passed beyond the borders of Kentucky. There he received the rudiments of an education from two nomadic teachers. At the time of his departure, caste feeling was beginning to dominate society in Kentucky, but Lincoln never showed any of its mani-

¹⁰ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 639.

¹² Nicolay and Hay, 1, 27.

¹¹ McClure, 234.

festations. "He was," says Frederick Douglas, "the first great man that I talked with in the United States freely, who in no single instance reminded me of the difference between himself and myself of the difference of color, and I thought that all the more remarkable because he came from a state where there were black laws."¹³

No human mind would have selected Hardin County for the birthplace of the man who was to grapple with the most portentous problem in all American history. For the slavery question baffled the wisdom of the makers of the Constitution. It darkened the last hours of the stalwart statesmen, Webster, Clay and Calhoun. It tried and tested the endurance of this nation in a crisis of grave moment.

¹³ Rice, 193.

CHAPTER II

LINCOLN'S ENVIRONMENT IN INDIANA

THE year that marked the advent of Indiana into national statehood, witnessed the humble and unheralded entrance of Thomas Lincoln and his family into Spencer County. The State was a haven for the pioneer of peaceable disposition. The danger of the Indian no longer haunted the land. Still life was a grim struggle, hewing the way through solid forests to reach the new home, cutting the trees to build the log cabin, patiently raising the first crop of corn. It took time to construct the trail and then the road. Yet with marvelous rapidity, these early settlers soon caused the church to appear, the schoolhouse and the hamlet.¹

Party politics is largely the product of a settled community. When men are engrossed in establishing a home matters of national significance seem of little moment. The kitchen is more important to the log cabin than the parlor. So the most pressing problems of a pioneer settlement are those of local concern. Conventions and parties were unknown for some time. Any man could proclaim his candidacy for office. Voters were known as "Jones-men" or "Smith-men," after the candidate of their choice. The earliest manifestations of party spirit arose over the slavery question. Even under territorial government, delegates to Congress were called "Slavery" or "Anti-Slavery." During

¹ Birbeck, 90.

the canvass in which John Quincy Adams was selected as President, the Whig and Democratic parties were little recognized in Indiana. On election day, the workers shouted, "Here are Jackson tickets! Here are Clay!"² The defeat of Jackson hastened the growth of partisanship. With the introduction of party politics came resort to trickery in elections.³

Politics was a recreation to the early settler. When the newspaper was a luxury, when there were few forms of amusement, it was an indulgence as well as an educational influence to listen to the orator on the questions of the day. Politics was the school of the nation, and in it there were few truants.

The following incident illustrates a primitive political gathering. School was dismissed at the time of the militia election, and so the teacher took part in the festivities. A tin cup of whiskey was passed around twice, then a two gallon jug and bucket of water. A warm discussion arose about Indiana accepting the land donated by Congress for the construction of the Wabash and Erie Canals. Dr. Stone was most noisy against accepting. "Friends of the canal chose me," said the teacher, "to reply." "I was 'half seas over' from free and frequent use of the cup. I was puzzled to know what to do. Soon a fence rail was slipped into the worn fence near by and a wash tub turned up and placed upon it. Two or three seized hold of me and placed me on the eminence amid shouts of the friends of the canal. I could scarcely preserve my equilibrium. My lips refused utterance. After a long pause, I smote my breast with my hand, and said, 'I feel too full for utterance.' (I meant whiskey—they, full of indignation at the Dr.'s effrontery of opposition). The ruse worked like a charm. They shouted,

² Smith, 1, 220.

³ Smith Misc. Ind., 119.

‘Let him have it!’ I raised my finger and pointed a moment steadily at the Doctor. They shouted, ‘Hit him again.’ I made my first speech twenty-five minutes. The Dr. talked again thirty minutes. I closed the debate and there was a viva voce vote in favor of the canal.”⁴

As the early settler succeeded the hunter, agriculture became the main means of subsistence, but it could not become a source of profit without improved methods of transportation. The movement for internal improvements was to have a profound influence on the course of events in the West. The splendid enthusiasm that lately concerned itself with a hostile environment was now employed in competing for the markets of the East. The Westerner was not accustomed to wander in the realm of dreams, yet he grew romantic in contemplating the resources of his fertile soil, and believed the time would come when nations would pay tribute to his products. The completion of the Erie Canal marked a distinct epoch in this movement. It increased prices in some cases more than two hundred per cent. This advance called for better shipping facilities. As times became better, the people of the West became the missionaries of the internal improvement system.⁵

Nothing so vividly revealed this enthusiasm as the reception afforded Governor Clinton when he visited Ohio in 1825. He was hailed as a hero, as a friend, as a benefactor. A contemporary observer thus described the occasion:

“The grave and the gay, the man of gray hairs and the ruddy-faced youth, matrons and maidens, and even lisping children, joined to tell his worth, and on his virtues dwell, to hail his approach and to welcome his arrival. Every street, where he passed, was thronged with multitudes, and the windows were filled with the beautiful ladies of Ohio,

⁴ Cox, 30.

⁵ Squirrel Hunters of Ohio, 298.

waving their snowy white handkerchiefs, and casting flowers on the pavement where he was to pass on it." The Governor was deeply affected by such an unusual demonstration, and even shed tears in the presence of his worshippers.⁶

A vast system of internal improvements in Indiana was the fruition of a campaign of more than a decade. It was an unfailing argument of those seeking political preferment. The construction of roads and canals was urged as one of the fundamental purposes of human society. This policy was declared to be the highway from poverty to prosperity. It fairly became the political religion of the day. Indiana, in 1836, started with rejoicing on the path that was before long to involve it in disasters that led it close to the chasm of bankruptcy and repudiation.

Spencer County was in the southern part of the State, bordering on the Ohio River. The country was very rough and covered with forests, sparsely inhabited and poorly adapted for prosperous farming. There being no market for the products of the soil, the most primitive methods in agriculture were in operation. Wild turkeys and deer were had at the door of every man's cabin. Bears, wild-cats, even panthers, were still in evidence.

Thomas Lincoln, though he often changed his home, did not modify his character. He remained to the end a shiftless man of roving disposition without effectual ambition. A carpenter by trade, while other men built substantial homes in the wilderness, he was content to live in a primitive log cabin without windows, floor or furniture. It was only the influence of his second wife that secured those urgent improvements. A man of supreme physical strength, slow to anger, yet dangerous when once aroused, he was not without deep affection. Still he did not hesitate to knock his in-

⁶ Squirrel Hunters of Ohio, 288.

quisitive son off the fence for answering traveler's questions. He was a master in the telling of stories. It was his chief accomplishment, the main gift that his son owed to him. The nature of his mind is somewhat shown by his rambling religious opinions. In Kentucky he was a Free Will Baptist; in Indiana he espoused the cause of Presbyterianism, and in Illinois he became a Campbellite. A relative quaintly observes that happiness was the end of life with him.⁷ John Hanks, the uncle of Lincoln, was the most sturdy of his relatives; yet, this same Hanks was so illiterate that when Lincoln became President, he could not endow him with an Indian Agency.

The somberness of Lincoln's childhood was brightened by the memory of his mother. In intellect, she was far above those with whom she enacted the sad and short drama of her life. Even as a child in Kentucky he felt the spell and potent influence of her words. When she died, young as he was, he lived alone with his grief. The passing years hallowed the early impression of his sorrow, yet during all these years the memory of his mother was a mystic influence in his development; and so when he stood almost at the summit of his career, he declared, "All that I am, all that I hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."⁸

The greatness of Lincoln grows upon us when we contemplate the conditions from which he emerged, and consider the manner of men among whom he lived. Despite the efforts of many biographers to brighten his early surroundings, we have the highest evidence in his conduct and speech that he was nurtured in hopeless adversity; in poverty that was not alone incidental to pioneer conditions, but continued long after it was the common fate. He comprehensively described his environment in the statement that

⁷ Lamon, 15.

⁸ Arnold, 20.

there was absolutely nothing in his associations to excite ambition for education.⁹ There was little in his ancestry to quicken his pride. He ever maintained a peculiar reticence about his youthful days and his parentage. He may by constant thinking have exaggerated the distressing state of his childhood, but in the main there can be little addition to, or modification of, his reluctant testimony.¹⁰

He made his own way in the trail of letters. He pursued plans of educating himself infinitely better than those followed in schools and universities. He has left us priceless testimony of the manner of his intellectual development. "Among my earliest recollections," said Lincoln, "I remember how when a child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I do not think I ever got angry at anything else in my life; but that always disturbed my temper and has ever since. I can remember going to my little bedroom, after hearing the neighbors talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings. I could not sleep though I tried to, when I got on such a hunt for an idea until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over again; until I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me; for I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north and south and bounded it east and west. But your question reminds me of a bit of education which I am bound in honor to mention. In the course of my law reading I constantly came upon the word demonstrate. I thought at first that I un-

⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 596-597.

¹⁰ Lamon, 17-18.

derstood its meaning, but soon became satisfied that I did not. I said to myself, 'What do I mean when I demonstrate more than when I reason or prove?' I consulted Webster's Dictionary. That told of certain proof,—proof beyond the probability of a doubt, but I could form no sort of idea what proof it was. I thought a great many things were proved beyond the possibility of a doubt, without recourse to any such reasoning as I understood demonstration to be. I consulted all the dictionaries and books of reference I could find, but with no better results. You might as well have defined blue to a blind man. At last I said, 'Lincoln, you can never make a lawyer if you do not understand what demonstrate means;' and I left my situation in Springfield, went home to my father's house, and stayed there until I could give any proposition in the six books of Euclid at sight. I then found out what demonstrate meant, and went back to my law studies." ¹¹

Inadequate as his education may have been objectively, Lincoln was supremely trained in the college of lonely thought. No American of eminence owes less to the public school system. His entire career is a mystery unless full value is given to the statement of Herndon that "Lincoln read less and thought more than any other man of his time." *

His love of learning amounted to a passion. The time his companions squandered in recreation he largely employed in mental improvement. His literary education was a painful process and was gained without help. His plan was slow but effective. "He read every book he could lay his hands on; and, when he came across a passage that struck him, he would write it down on boards if he had no paper. Then he would rewrite it, look at it, repeat it. He had a copy-

¹¹ Tarbell, 1, 43.

* Oldroyd, 533.

book, a kind of scrap book, in which he put down all things, and thus preserved them.”¹²

By this method he gradually evolved a style of supreme strength and sincerity. The Bible was the main force in its fruition. For a long time he dabbled in “crude rhymes” and “awkward imitations of scriptural lore.” With all the gentleness of his nature, he was a master of satire, and slowly learned to use this dangerous gift with moderation. One of his early compositions was an impulsive effort to condemn cruelty to the helpless toad and turtle. More ambitious products followed. The reading of a newspaper article on temperance induced him to contribute something on that theme. A minister found it a place in a newspaper, to the ecstasy of the writer for the first time tasting the sweetness of publicity. This success led him to indulge in other dissertations. His political environment and his readings in American history germinated. With exultant spirit he proclaimed that “the American Government was the best form of government for an intelligent people; that it ought to be kept sound, and preserved forever; that general education should be fostered and carried all over the country; that the Constitution should be saved, the Union perpetuated, and the laws revered, respected, and enforced.”¹³ This effort met with instant approbation. A lawyer, to whose criticism it was soberly entrusted, declared, “The world can’t beat it.”¹⁴

Three books had a pervasive influence upon his political opinions, “The Revised Statutes of Indiana,” Weems’ “Life of Washington,” and a “History of the United States.”¹⁵ Lincoln has left us indisputable evidence of the profound power of Revolutionary History in moulding his patriotic sentiments. For in his memorable speech in the Senate

¹² Lamon, 36-37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

Chamber at Trenton, New Jersey, he said:

“May I be pardoned if, upon this occasion, I mention that away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book, such a one as few of the younger members have ever seen, Weems’ ‘Life of Washington.’ I remember all the accounts there given of the battlefields and struggles for the liberties of the country, and none fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here at Trenton, New Jersey. The crossing of the river, the contest with the Hessians, the great hardships endured at that time, all fixed themselves on my memory, more than any single Revolutionary event; and you all know, for you have all been boys, how these early impressions last longer than any others. I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that these men struggled for. I am exceedingly anxious that that thing—that something even more than national independence; that something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come—I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made, and I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be a humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost most chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle.”¹⁶

The influence of Weems’ “Life” is indicated by the fact that Lincoln did not lose his boyish enthusiasm for the character of Washington. He once exclaimed, “Let us believe as in the days of our youth that Washington was spotless; it makes human nature better to believe that one human being was perfect: that human perfection is possible.”¹⁷ This

¹⁶ Lincoln’s Speeches, 1, 688.

¹⁷ Whitney, 45-46.

devotion is still more significant as Lincoln very rarely indulged in hero worship.

We shall not at all comprehend the political life of Abraham Lincoln unless we fairly understand the momentous subjective influence of these few volumes. One of them, the Revised Statutes of Indiana, contained the Declaration of Independence. He was scarcely more than eighteen years old when he brooded over the significance of that immortal utterance.¹⁸

His stepsister says, he was an indefatigable preacher. "When father and mother would go to church, Abe would take down the Bible, read a verse, give out a hymn, and we would sing. Abe was about fifteen years of age. He preached, and we would do the crying. Sometimes he would join in the chorus of tears. One day my brother, John Johnston, caught a land terrapin, brought it to the place where Abe was preaching, threw it against the tree and crushed the shell. It suffered much,—quivered all over. Abe then preached against cruelty to animals, contending that an ant's life was just as sweet to it as ours to us."¹⁹

Often mounting a real tree stump his quaint stories and impressive manner gathered all his fellow laborers. It is related that Lincoln's father and sometimes his employers, angered at the loss of labor, would drag the orator from his eminence. It was about this time that Lincoln said that his father taught him to work but never to love it.²⁰

Lincoln's wit was no small part of his forensic eloquence. He was more ready at the beginning of his career than in after years to ridicule censorious conduct. So James Larkin found it, who was a great hand to brag. He stepped up before Abe, who was in the crowd, and boasted of his horse. "I have got the best horse in the country," he shouted to

¹⁸ McClure, 167.

¹⁹ Lamon, 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-40.

his young listener. "I ran him three miles in exactly three minutes, and he never fetched a long breath."

"I presume," said Abe, rather dryly, "that he fetched a good many short ones though."²¹

Lincoln further found opportunity for exercising his oratorical talent in the speaking exhibitions at Gentryville. Public debates were no minor attraction to the community. Discussions as to whether the Indian or negro had the greater right to find fault with his treatment were frequent and intense. The closing day of school was duly celebrated by declamations, debates and dialogues. Many selections for these occasions came from the Kentucky "Preceptor," rich in such utterance as Pitt's "Speech on the Slave Trade."²²

Lincoln was present on one occasion at a dramatic murder trial in which John V. Brackenridge appeared for the defendant.²³ Lincoln heard the polished and eloquent advocate as in a dream. After the trial the humble backwood speaker freely praised the eloquence of the mature advocate. Brackenridge glancing at his awkward shabby admirer turned away without a word.

Lincoln learned that ability does not always go hand in hand with sympathy. He crawled into his own world where pride was to have no home, where humble appearances were not to be despised. When Lincoln as President met this same Brackenridge, he simply said, "If I could, as I then thought, have made as good a speech as that, my soul would have been satisfied; for it was up to that time the best speech I had ever heard."²⁴

The people of Gentryville were largely of a rough hardy sort. Like other pioneers they were ready to escape the

²¹ Herndon, 1, 43.

²³ Spencer County, 313.

²² Tarbell, 1, 36.

²⁴ Herndon, 1, 49-50. Lamon, 67.

monotony of their life by engaging in exciting games. The rude joke, the vulgar gibe was prized. To laugh loud was somewhat of a luxury to the hard working settler. Refining influence was fairly unknown.

However, social distinctions gradually asserted themselves with the progress of prosperity. Parties of some pretensions came into vogue, and distinctions were made in the guests invited. Lincoln, who had been welcomed at the ruder gatherings, log rollings and similar entertainments, was not in favor with those seeking social prominence. Fond of popular applause, he resented this treatment, and in spite wrote satires and "chronicles," chastising the offenders.²⁵ These productions were coarse, vulgar and even indecent, spiced with no lack of wit. They appealed to many, though it is said that some were shocked.

On one occasion Lincoln placed certain reflections on the Grigsby family where they could be readily discovered. Being found, they brought on a fight for the family honor. Lincoln had his stepbrother, Johnston, first stand "the brunt" of the contest. A terrible fight ensued, and when Lincoln saw that Grigsby was too much for Johnston, he burst through the ring, caught Grigsby, and threw him off some feet away. Then swinging a bottle of liquor over his head swore that he was "the big buck of the lick." "If any one doubts it," he shouted, "he has only to come on and whet his horns." A general engagement resulted, but soon the field was cleared and the wounded retired amid the exultant shouts of the victors.²⁶

From such an origin Lincoln came. Biographers seek to illumine its poverty in vain. He was reared amid a shiftless family. No external inducement guided him in his wearisome journey. He was in the daily presence of vulgarity. He

²⁵ Lamon, 63.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

alone of all his companions started in a titanic conflict with an enslaving environment.

The store was the social center of the pioneer town, the place to hear the latest gossip. There the neighbors met to pass judgment on events of general and local interest. The proprietor was often the only possessor of the weekly newspaper. It was not as in later days the abode of loungers mainly. It played a big part in the education of the frontier community. It was the school of many men and the home of wit and wisdom. Politics, religion and other problems were here subjected to the scrutiny of men blest with good sense and judgment.

The store drew the choice spirits in story telling, and its hero was the man who could best kindle laughter. In a community where this art was the highway to the general good will, Lincoln soon became the master among the many contestants for that distinction.

Wherever men congregated Lincoln sought supremacy. Political discussions were frequent. The newcomer soon tried his hand in the art of controversy. He gradually gained headway in the esteem of the soberminded for the clearness of his statements, for the keenness of his vision, and the honesty of his manner. Day by day he gathered strength and wisdom. It is improbable that any other young man so soon won the general good will or was so widely respected by all classes of men. In this, even as a youth, he was unique. He had the splendid tact, the inherent humanity that appealed to the various elements that constituted the transitional frontier when it was evolving into a higher community.

There is very little satisfactory evidence of the political opinions of Abraham Lincoln in Indiana. Lamon states that his family were all Jackson Democrats; that Lincoln's em-

ployer, Jones, the grocery keeper of Gentryville, was a Jackson Democrat, and that Lincoln read papers that championed the principles of the Democratic party of that day, and that he was in the beginning a follower of that eminent political sage.²⁷ There is no corroboration of this testimony that Lincoln was ever avowedly an attendant in the school of Jackson. Lincoln frequently refers to the fact with pride that he was an old time Whig, and it might be inferred from his speeches and statements that he was a devoted follower of Clay from the very first. However, Lincoln was somewhat an admirer of Andrew Jackson. It may be that early in life he passed through the several stages of political development, and was thus aided in becoming a tolerant politician.

From childhood until 1829, Lincoln lived in Gentryville. In that year he made a trip by boat to New Orleans with Allen Gentry. It was on this venture that Lincoln had his first vital meeting with the members of the race in whose destiny he was to be so deeply concerned. While their boat was moored near Baton Rouge and they were fast asleep, they were startled by footsteps on board. They knew "that it was a gang of negroes come to rob, and perhaps to murder them. Allen, thinking to frighten the intruders, cried out, 'Bring the guns, Lincoln; shoot them.' Abe came without a gun, but he fell among the negroes with a huge bludgeon, and belabored them most cruelly," but "received a scar which he carried with him to his grave."²⁸ It is strange that this incident did not jaundice the youthful Lincoln against the unfortunate people. Though his life was endangered by these wayward sons of Ethiopia, it did not affect his sympathy in any degree for the burdened and oppressed race, nor change his judgment as to the injustice of their

²⁷ Lamon, 57, 123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 71, 72.

treatment.

The origin of Lincoln's anti-slavery sentiments is somewhat of a mystery. That Stephen Douglas, reared in New England, should become the foremost champion of the Southern slavery policy, and that Abraham Lincoln, a son of Kentucky, that of the bondsman, baffles the wisdom of the historian.

Various efforts have been made to account for his views on the slavery issue. The claim that he derived them from his parents in Kentucky has been noted. Ida Tarbell enumerates the various abolition movements in the western domain that may have influenced him. In 1819, Charles Osborn published a paper advocating emancipation. A few years after Benjamin Lundy issued the *Genius* at Shelbyville. Scarcely one hundred miles from Gentryville the *Abolition Intelligencer* was started. There were abolition societies in Kentucky and Illinois. The same author states that "it is not impossible that as Frederick Douglas first realized his own condition in reading a school speaker, the 'Columbian Orator,' so Abraham Lincoln first felt the wrong of slavery in reading his 'Kentucky' or 'American Preceptor.'" ²⁹

Considering the slowness of communication, the casual appearances of even well-known journals, it is doubtful if Lincoln heard of the abolition movement to any serious extent. It is at least significant that Lincoln alone, of his entire family and of his associates, saw the magnitude of the slavery evil. Like his sympathy for the suffering animal world, his anti-slavery sentiments baffle explanation. He hated the infliction of wrong instinctively.

There is a duality to the life of Lincoln that should command more attention. Intellectually, he lived in a world

²⁹ Tarbell, 1, 35, 36.

of his own, a world in which he found little companionship. Still he was not altogether the fruition of a subjective life. He shared the common pioneer craving for human society. It may have been rendered even more intense in his case by the loneliness of his mental existence. Neither the forest, prairie nor storm, the sunset or constellation were his friends as men were. He loved his kind more than nature.

During his last years in Indiana he lived fully the life of the people around him. Their ideals seemed his ideals. Athletic superiority was the road to respect and honor, and Lincoln became the foremost man in physical games. He first won renown as a wrestler. Stories of his superior strength were heralded far and wide and his place was unchallenged. He was a leader in the rude crowd where might was the test of standing. Living among men devoted to hunting, he seldom indulged in that common recreation. In this his individuality asserted itself. He would not sanction suffering even in the animal world, and he seldom swerved from his convictions even in the day when the wolf howled at the cabin door.

The maturity of Lincoln's development at the time of his departure from Indiana has not received just consideration. Gaunt and awkward in appearance there was little in him to attract favorable attention. He was without trade or profession. Nothing appeared to distinguish him from the other members of the shiftless Lincoln and Hanks family. A stranger would hardly have chosen him as a future son of fortune, even from that humble crowd of wanderers. Uncouth in dress and manner, he would have found small favor in polite society, and among those who judge by things seen on the surface.

Viewed subjectively there is another Lincoln, a man of promise and inevitable distinction. Those who have dwelt

extensively on the objective aspect of Lincoln have squandered sympathy on his want of education. For though poor in material things, he was rich in mental wealth, in the qualities that make manhood, in those virtues that survive the mutations of time, that future generations dwell on with ever increasing fondness. At the threshold of his majority he was already possessed of elemental ability and greatness. He was one of those rare souls that do not lose the golden ideals of youth with passing years. The sneers of selfish men never changed the primal sweetness of his nature.

The fourteen years that Lincoln lived in Indiana were years of splendid fruition. By his peculiar process of self-development his mind had attained a maturity far beyond his age. He mingled freely in the world of men and events. He was close to the human heart, to the sorrows of the humble, to the mute and deep emotions of the lonely dweller on the western farms. He loved the plain people. He had the command of style, the ease and pith of statement that schools rarely give. Ready of speech, he could command the attention of the rough as well as the sober minded. He was already renowned as a dispenser of laughter through the magic of his stories. But above all he was rarely gifted with good sense, with a mind not easily diverted by false lights, by the glitter of objectivity. He went irresistibly to the root of things. A man of fine emotions, wanting in the small social amenities, he seldom went astray in the domain of reality.

It is also essential to mark the practical character of all his learning. His knowledge was all useful and vitalizing. His mind was not cumbered with waste materials. His education was sound to the core, was all genuine, well calculated for a man in the very strife of life. Judged by the standard of schools and universities he was not an educated man, but

judged by the broader standard of thought and action he was supremely educated, the best educated man of his time. He served his apprenticeship in the school of experience and only needed opportunity to be of royal service to his fellowmen. Honest, homely and humble, he was in harmony with the average man of his time, and was well fitted to become a representative of the people.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL HERO OF NEW SALEM

THE immediate occasion for the departure of Thomas Lincoln from Indiana was the visitation of the mysterious ailment widely known as the "milk sick." The scant progress made by the family in Spencer County strengthened his desire to try his fortune in a new land,—a land that in the distance held forth alluring promises of betterment.

They arrived in Illinois at the transitional period when the progressive settler was putting on the clothing of civilization. The concentration of population scattered the obstacles of progress. The wilderness was subdued, and the worth of the prairie land proved. The howl of the wolf ever growing fainter and fainter marked the hurrying advance of another dominion.¹ Shyly but steadily style showed itself in the home, food and dress. Through the surface it betokened the coming of a settled community; it was the un-failing external sign of prosperity and of fellowship with religion and education.

The old pioneer mourned the change. He saw the loom put away, and ribbons supplant the cotton frock. With saddened heart, he met the new civilization. To him, it was the doom of the old hospitality, of his freedom, the coonskin cap; the deer shoes; the log cabin built with his own hands. "Hog and hominy" no longer waited on hunger. What his

¹ Ford, 94-95.

child named progress did not compensate him for the flight of the companions of his youth. The pioneer had in the name of civilization cleared the land of the Indian, who could not adapt himself to its way, and now the victor was in turn to yield to the same unrelenting monarch.

John Hanks was the path finder for the little colony. He selected a place close to Decatur as a home for the wanderers. Lincoln took a hand in making the cabin which soon housed his father and family. But rather than engage in manual labor, he was alert to show his skill as a speaker. "After Abe got to Decatur," says John Hanks, "or rather to Macon (my county), a man by the name of Posey came into our neighborhood, and made a speech; it was a bad one, and I said Abe could beat it. I turned down a box or keg, and Abe made his speech. The other man was a candidate. Abe wasn't. Abe beat him to death, his subject being the navigation of the Sangamon River. The man, after the speech was through, took Abe aside, and asked him where he had learned so much, and how he did so well. Abe replied, stating his manner and method of reading, and what he had read. The man encouraged Lincoln to persevere."²

Lincoln fretted under the tutorage of his father, and longed for the hour of his legal freedom. When that period came, he promptly joined John Hanks in guiding a flat boat to New Orleans for one Denton Offutt.³

Perhaps the most critical incident in the life of Lincoln was this second visit to New Orleans. Hitherto, with a single exception, his life was simple and close to nature and the human heart. Young as he was, the solemnity of the forest, the expanse of the prairie, the nearness to the heart of things, the problems of life and their seriousness already cut their lines in his sensitive organism. Knowing little of the mer-

² Lamon, 78.

³ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

cantile world, in the realm of thought he was already master of those around him. There was something of Hamlet in this gaunt youth.

The varied amusements of the southern city that fascinated his companions did not move or detain him. One sight alone riveted his attention. A mulatto girl was on sale. She was trotted up and down like an animal. Others saw the scene without flinching. It was nothing to them; no lash on their backs. According to Herndon, the whole thing was so revolting that Lincoln moved away from the scene with a deep feeling of hate, saying to his companions, "By God, boys, let's get away from this. If I ever get a chance to hit that thing (meaning slavery), I'll hit it hard."⁴

From that time Lincoln hated slavery with all his soul. The slave dynasty was an organized evil of national power. It dominated the actions and even the opinions of men; its whisper silenced the voice of conscience; its power dictated legislative policies, and was even known to intrude into the sanctuary of judicial tribunals. It was not a stranger in distinguished pulpits.

Lincoln was weak, helpless, unregarded. A blow from his hand would then fall impotent and unnoticed. Three courses of conduct confronted him. He might, with the majority have become an apologist of slavery, as this was the popular highway. Thus he might have gained the fame of Stephen A. Douglas, but he would not have saved the nation. He might have become an aggressive assailant of slavery. Such conduct would have made him a political outcast in New Salem. In this way, he might have won the renown of a Wendell Phillips but he would not have become the national helmsman. He was neither abolitionist nor apologist.

One other way was open. He knew his weakness. The

⁴ Herndon, 1, 67.

day to strike a blow had not yet come. He held his anger and bided his hour. He would not rush, but await the time when a blow from his hand would long leave its traces on the evil. He turned back to his work and to his associates. Objectively, he was the same as ever, but a soul had been awakened to the crime of the ages that would not rest until the auction block should be shattered and the American soil rendered uneasy at the presence of the human auctioneer. He knew that sooner or later the occasion for action would rejoice his soul. This faith reconciled him to the sluggish march of events.

Some time in the summer of 1831, there drifted into the thriving village of New Salem one who was to add lustre to her name. Some days later Minter Graham, the school master, was "short of a clerk" at election. Asking a tall stranger if he could write, he was met with the quaint reply that he could make a few rabbit marks. "Lincoln," says the school man, "performed the duties with great facility, much fairness, and honesty and impartiality. This was the first public official act of his life."⁵

Lincoln first gained prestige in New Salem through his droll stories. It was the fast road to the good will of an audience. In those days when amusement was scant it was no mean gift. It was then a kind of legal tender for a dinner or similar hospitality, and in a pioneer community popular favor is a harbinger of high honor. Lincoln found little to do until he became the chief clerk of the presuming store of Denton Offutt. Here he rapidly won the regard of the listener and participated in many discussions; here he met and talked with the people, and he made another advance in the public esteem.

Like many pioneer communities New Salem was largely

⁵ Lamon, 89.

dominated by a rough crowd of young men, known there as the "Clary Grove Boys." They were typical of the class in Illinois that stubbornly yielded to the reign of the law. They rapidly disappeared in settled communities, but in the outlying towns, for a long time, they maintained their power. Usually acting in unison, they were much sought by those seeking political preferment. They attended church, heard the sermon, wept and prayed, shouted, got up and fought an hour, and then went back to prayer just as the spirit moved them.⁶ Rude and even cruel to the traveler, they made mercy the companion of the orphan. They had no sympathy for weakness, or patience with culture. No stranger could attain standing in their affection unless he proved his worth in the gantlet of a physical contest with one of their leaders.

The enthusiasm of Offutt for Lincoln was boundless. He declared that, "Abe knew more than any man in the United States," that "he would some day be President of the United States." All this did not disturb the boys of Clary Grove, but when he bragged "that he could, at that present moment, outrun, whip or throw down any man in Sangamon County," then the pride of the gang was awakened. A bet of ten dollars was made that Jack Armstrong, their leader, "was a better man than Lincoln." The newcomer could not well avoid a combat. In the presence of a host of sympathizers of the Clary Grove leader, the fight began. Lincoln put forth his strength and the crowd saw Armstrong's supremacy endangered. In the heat of the fray, they forgot the rules of fair fighting and broke through the ring. This angered Lincoln, and with a giant's effort, he gathered their champion in his arms and shook him like a child. Lincoln's bearing won the regard of Armstrong. He grasped the hand of the victor, proclaiming in the presence of his followers

⁶ History of Sangamon County, 211.

that Lincoln was the best fellow that ever broke into the settlement.⁷ A wonderful friendship resulted. "Whenever Lincoln worked Jack 'did his loafing'; and, when Lincoln was out of work, he spent days and weeks together at Jack's cabin, where Jack's jolly wife, 'old Hannah,' stuffed him with bread and honey, laughed at his ugliness, and loved him for his goodness."⁸

This was an eventful occasion in the life of Lincoln. The humble ask little of friendship and give much. A lover of the law, in a single hour he became the idol of the lawless element in New Salem. From that time, they submitted to his guidance. Respect for his strength grew into admiration for his learning. Slowly and surely, the latest addition to the gang tempered its harshness. As a member, he achieved what would have been impossible as a stranger. He loved their virtues, and was gentle with their vices. So it was that, though he did not drink or smoke with them, they did not think the less of him. Lincoln did not laud his freedom from failing, so they were patient as children with him, even in his chiding. The source of his influence was sympathy, and not ability; solidity of character, not brilliancy; the simple virtues, not genius.

Lincoln was dowered with supreme physical strength. Rumor claimed that he could lift a load of a thousand pounds. This renown brought him further influence with the rougher element. He was also skilled in manual labor. A settler relates that he was the best hand at husking corn on the stalk that he ever saw. He grew in the estimate of the farmers around New Salem, in a community where agriculture was almost the sole source of wealth and prosperity.

Lincoln's boyish enthusiasm for athletic events was doubtless somewhat calmed with passing years. As other inter-

⁷ Lamon, 90-94.

⁸ *Ibid.* 93-94.

ests dawned on him he was persuaded to concern himself with horse races and other games of chance more than his judgment advised. An admirer states, "I got Lincoln, who was at the race, to be a judge of the race, much against his will, and after hard persuasion. Lincoln decided correctly; and the other judge said 'Lincoln is the fairest man I ever had to deal with; if Lincoln is in this country when I die, I want him to be my administrator, for he is the only man I ever met with that was wholly and unselfishly honest.'" ⁹

The steamer *Talisman* in 1832 made a trip to determine the navigability of the Sangamon. Lincoln was selected as helmsman from Beardstown to New Salem. The *Talisman* on the return trip "stuck" at the mill dam. Equal to the emergency, Lincoln "rigged up" an apparatus in the presence of the entire assembly of New Salem. All were sure that he had saved the steamer. The trip was of vast worth to Lincoln. Making several speeches and shaking hands with every one, in this one week, he learned to know more people than he would have otherwise met in many months. ¹⁰

Lincoln was not only honest, but men trusted him. His personality pervaded the community. So a biographer states, "I once asked Rowan Herndon what induced him to make such liberal terms in dealing with Lincoln, whom he had known for so short a time." "I believed that he was thoroughly honest," was the reply, "and that impression was so strong in me that I accepted his note in payment of the whole. He had no money, but I would have advanced him still more if he had asked for it." ¹¹

Lincoln was not endowed with business skill. The only failure he ever made in life was as a merchant. He had no capacity for business. His partner claimed that Lincoln could wrap himself up in a great moral question; but that

⁹ Lamon, 154.

¹⁰ Ross, 112. Lamon, 81-83.

¹¹ Herndon, 1, 98.

in dealing with the financial and commercial interests of a community or government he was as inadequate as he was managing the economy of his own household, and that in that respect alone he always regarded Mr. Lincoln as a weak man.¹²

Lincoln's fairness vied with his sympathy in giving him a peculiar influence over his fellowmen. He made peace a daily guest of the rude crowd. His method was novel in New Salem. A stranger, angered by the abuse of Jack Armstrong, struck him a blow that felled the giant. Lincoln made himself the judge of the event. "Well, Jack," said he, "what did you say to the man?" Whereupon Jack repeated the words. "Well, Jack," replied Abe, "if you were a stranger in a strange town, as this man is, and you were called a d——d liar, &c., what would you do?" "Whip him, by God!" "Then this man has done no more to you than you would have done to him." "Well, Abe," said the honest bruiser, "it's all right," and, taking his opponent by the hand, forgave him heartily, and "treated." "Jack" always treated his victim when he thought he had been too hard upon him.¹³

Esteemed for his strength he was loved for his kindness. None could resist the charm of his help to the poor and the lowly, to the waifs of misfortune. Ab, a barefooted fellow, was chopping wood on a wintry day to earn a dollar that he might buy a pair of shoes. Lincoln, seeing his plight, seized the axe, and soon the job was done. The story runs that "Ab remembered this act with the liveliest gratitude. Once he, being a cast-iron Democrat, determined to vote against his party and for Mr. Lincoln; but the friends, as he afterwards said with tears in his eyes, made him drunk, and he had voted against Abe."¹⁴ Chandler, a poor settler, desir-

¹² Herndon, 1, 165-6.

¹³ Lamon, 94-95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

ing to enter a small tract of land that was coveted by a rich neighbor, started for Springfield at the same time with his rival and on the same mission. On the way Chandler met Lincoln. Noticing that the horse of Chandler could not stand a forced march, Lincoln gave him his horse—fresh and full of grit. Between the two, a friendship sprang up which all the political discords of twenty-five years never shattered nor strained.¹⁵

He was active in the first debating organization of New Salem. Those who knew him for his strength were amazed at the logic of his statements. The president of this society said to his wife that there was more in Abe's head than wit and fun; that he was already a fine speaker; that he only lacked culture to enable him to reach the high destiny in store for him. Thereafter the president displayed a deeper interest in his progress. During one of the debates, Lincoln dashed into a controversy on slavery, dilating on its malignancy, deploring the dark and hopeless state of the poor white man. With discernment he placed his hand on the mischief, the creation of an aristocracy in a republic; the resulting conflict between the doctrine of the fathers and that of the children; between the North and the South. His discussion ranged over the consequences. He pictured the grapple of opposing principles; a land drenched with fraternal blood.¹⁶ A biographer is justified in contending that he became as familiar for the goodness of his understanding as for the muscular power of his body, and the unfailing humor of his talk.¹⁷

With the arrival of spring in 1832, the Black Hawk War broke out. A company was organized in Sangamon County for immediate service. The first fruit of Lincoln's popularity with "the boys" was his decisive election as captain.

¹⁵ Herndon, 1, 115-116. ¹⁶ Maltby, 33.

¹⁷ Lamon, 96.

His opponent was a man of means. The manner of election was democratic. Lincoln and his antagonist stood some distance apart, while the men showed their preference by taking their place near the man of their choice. The one with the most adherents was selected for leadership. Lincoln made a very modest speech to his comrades, expressing his gratification, and telling them how undeserved he thought it was and promised that he would do the best he could to prove himself worthy of their confidence.¹⁸

The captain needed the mastery of his temper to control the lawless spirit of the volunteers. Accustomed to be cajoled in politics, they were not ready for obedience even in the shadow of war. A story has been told that Capt. Lincoln's first command was answered by being told to "go to the devil."¹⁹

Lincoln was jealous of the welfare of his men. Thinking them maltreated, he told an officer of the regular army that they were volunteers under the regulations of Illinois, and that resistance would thereafter be made to unjust orders; that his men must be equal in all particulars, in rations, arms and camps, to the regular army. The officer saw that Lincoln was right, and thereafter they were treated like the regular army. This efficient service in behalf of the volunteers drew officers and rank to him.²⁰

During the march a peaceable Indian strayed into camp and was at the mercy of the soldiers. This old man showed a letter from General Cass testifying to his fidelity; the enraged men pronounced it a forgery, and rushed upon him. The captain stepped between. "Men, this must not be done. He must not be shot and killed by us." The passion of the mob was stayed by this exhibition of courage, not allayed. One bolder than his fellows cried out, "This is cowardly on

¹⁸ Lamon, 101-102.

¹⁹ Stevens, 277.

²⁰ Lamon, 111.

your part, Lincoln." The captain towered in lonely power. "If any man thinks I am a coward let him test it." A new voice was heard, "You are larger and heavier than we are." "This you can easily guard against. Choose your weapons." The word coward was never again coupled with his name. "He has often declared himself, that his life and character were both at stake, and would probably have been lost, had he not at that supremely critical moment forgotten the officer, and asserted the man. To have ordered the offenders under arrest would have created a formidable mutiny; to have tried and punished them would have been impossible. They could scarcely be called soldiers; they were merely armed citizens, with a nominal military organization. They were but recently enlisted, and their term of service was just about to expire. Had he preferred charges against them, and offered to submit their differences to a court of any sort, it would have been regarded as an act of personal pusillanimity, and his efficiency would have been gone forever."²¹

Lincoln and other volunteers arrived home just before the State election. That New Salem should present Lincoln as a candidate for the Legislature was the natural culmination of his position in the community. His friends were heart and soul in the cause. His record as a soldier increased the interest of his companions and his associates in the election.

Lincoln allied himself with the Whig organization and championed its principles. The popular party in Sangamon County prided themselves on their devotion to Andrew Jackson. They derisively called their opponents "Federalists," while the latter struggled "to shuffle off the odious name."²² Lamon argues that Lincoln was a nominal Jackson man on the ground that he received the votes of all parties at New

²¹ Lamon, 109.

²² *Ibid.*, 122.

Salem, that he was the next year appointed postmaster by General Jackson; that the Democrats ran him for the Legislature two years later, and that he was elected by a larger majority than any other candidate.²³ These reasons are without weight. Party lines at the time were not yet closely drawn, and the supreme personal popularity of Lincoln suffered little from the partisanship of that period. It is a distinct mark of Lincoln's courage and his love of principle that he devoted himself to the weaker party of Illinois. Selfish ambition would have advised alliance with the dominant organization. Still, the better element in Sangamon County was largely attracted to the Whig side. Lincoln coming from the company of the Clary Grove boys, enthusiasts for Jackson, fearlessly decided his political relations. National history might have been changed if Abraham Lincoln had consulted his companions, or temporary interest in the selection of party affiliation.

After his return from the war, he threw himself into the campaign of 1832. In his first speech, just as he started, he saw that a friend was getting worsted in a fight near by. Hurrying from the platform, he grasped the offender and threw him some ten feet away. He then again mounted the eminence and delivered the following address: "Gentlemen and Fellow Citizens, I presume you all 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 are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I am in favor of a national bank. 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."²⁴

Making a speech under such conditions was a more thor-

²³ Lamon, 123-124.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

ough preparation for the activities of life than the training of schools and even universities afford its votaries. This talk is frank and bold. It early avows sentiments hostile to the administration in power. It reveals the "Whiggism" of the orator. It is a product of the times; a speech to be expected from a young speaker sensitive to his surroundings.

The testimony of Judge Logan shows that Lincoln had in his youth a mature mind. "He was a very tall, gawky, and rough looking fellow then; his pantaloons didn't meet his shoes by six inches. But after he began speaking I became very much interested in him. He made a very sensible speech. His manner was very much the same as in after life; that is, the same peculiar characteristics were apparent then, though of course in after years he evinced more knowledge and experience. But he had then the same novelty and the same peculiarity in presenting his ideas. He had the same individuality that he kept through all his life."²⁵

A companion allows us a view of Lincoln as a politician at this period. Deferential to the rich, agreeable to the poor, he was at home everywhere. He talked with the husband and wife about their hopes in life, about the school and the farm. The mother would hear with joy of her fine children; Willie was the image of father; Sarah the most beautiful, and looked like her mother. The distribution of nuts and candy captured the children. During the preparation for supper, he would walk over the farm with his host, and be shown its worth. After the meal he would tell the boys and girls stories of the trials of frontier life in Indiana. He thus secured the esteem of all.

Early in this campaign, he issued a political circular. This first written address of Lincoln should command attention. It contains abundant evidence of close thinking, political

²⁵ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 108.

sagacity and quaint utterance. This youthful appeal of Lincoln is a sober production expressing thoughts that go straight to the mind. The circular is conclusive that his style and his thought were not altogether the fruition of his maturity.

The address deals mainly with the navigability of the Sangamon River. No theme was closer to the people in the county. The arrival of the steamer *Talisman* had been hailed with rapture. A newspaper thus gave utterance to the common feeling: "We congratulate our farmers, our mechanics, our merchants and our professional men, for the rich harvest in prospect, and we cordially invite emigrating citizens from other states, whether rich or poor, if so they are industrious and honest, to come thither and partake of the good things of Sangamon."²⁶ The enthusiasm reached the women, for they indulged in a grand ball to honor the occasion.²⁷ The ardent championship of this vain proposal, for it was never either effected or seriously attempted, is proof that Lincoln was a student of popularity. At this period he proclaimed the doctrine that the representative of the people should reflect the known views of his constituency.²⁸

He next paid heed to the problem of usury. Money, always seeking the highest bidder, preyed on the industry of the people. The common contract rate was about fifty per cent. In many instances it rose to more than one hundred, and unfortunates even paid two or three times as much.²⁹ "It seems," Lincoln said, "as though we are never to have an end to this baneful and corroding system, acting almost as prejudicial to the general interests of the community as a direct tax of several thousand dollars annually laid on

²⁶ History of Sangamon County, 53.

²⁸ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Lamon, 133.

each county for the benefit of a few individuals only, unless there be a law made fixing the limits of usury. A law for this purpose, I am of the opinion, may be made without materially injuring any class of people. In cases of extreme necessity, there could always be means found to cheat the law; while in other cases it would have its intended effect. I would favor the passage of a law on this subject which might not be easily evaded. Let it be such that the labor and difficulty of evading it could only be justified in cases of greatest necessity.”³⁰ This rather remarkable admission is interesting in view of his subsequent utterances on the sacred enforcement of all laws lest single relaxations prove an inducement for other violation.³¹

A rather becoming modesty pervades the conclusion of his address. He maintained that he might be wrong in regard to any or all the subjects he discussed, declaring that it was better only sometimes to be right than at all times to be wrong, that he was ready to renounce his opinions as soon as he discovered them to be erroneous.³²

“Every man,” he observed, “is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow-men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem.”³³ This illumines our limited knowledge of his attitude toward an essential problem of life. Lincoln did not fling away ambition. With patient footstep he restlessly followed the vision of higher place along the road of helpful service to his fellow-men. As he rose in influence, he never forsook his early ideals; that the measure of success was worthiness and not station, that power was only respectable as it was mercifully exercised. He believed that altruistic responsibil-

³⁰ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³³ *Ibid.*

ity expanded with growing opportunities. His good deeds, not his personal wants, grew with his growth.

He did not rest with an appeal to the reason of men. He deftly put in motion the human chord in democracy that vibrates to the poor and the struggling. He declared that he was young and unknown; that he was born, and would ever remain, in the most humble walks of life; that he had no wealthy or popular relations or friends to recommend him; that his case was thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of the county; and that, if elected, they would have conferred a favor upon him, for which he would be unremitting in his labors to compensate.³⁴

"But, if the good people," he concluded, "in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined."³⁵ Suffused with seeming humor and the pathos of half hidden tragedy this averment brings us face to face with a life reluctantly asserting its individuality. It is hardly strange that one who pronounces himself a companion of many disappointments when only twenty-three years old should soon get the name of "Old Abe." Sorrow had already left its traces on his heart and brain, so that the appellation was fitting. Still, he encountered uncomplainingly the exigencies of human events.

"The Democrats of New Salem worked for Lincoln out of their personal regard for him. That was the general understanding of the matter here at the time. In this he made no concession of principle whatever. He was as stiff as a man could be in his Whig doctrines. They did this for him simply because he was popular—because he was Lincoln."³⁶ Despite the efforts of his friends in New Salem, Lincoln was

³⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 4.

³⁶ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 102-103.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

yet too little known to be elected a representative of Sangamon County.

One fact stands out boldly. Out of the total 300 votes cast in the precinct of New Salem, where he was best known, Lincoln received 277.³⁷ This did not pass without the scrutiny of those who studied the details of local politics. It revealed an amazing popularity. It was a defeat that practiced politicians knew betokened future triumphs. It marked the trail of a triumphing career in the common course of events. With ardent pride, he later said of this defeat, that it was the only time he was ever beaten on a direct vote of the people.³⁸

John Calhoun, a stalwart Democrat, a surveyor in Sangamon County, and later infamous in Kansas history, needed a deputy. He selected Lincoln, who thereupon retreated to a farm of the schoolmaster Graham, where he studied a book on surveying. Struggling with the task for six weeks, he came forth prepared for his new work. He so mastered the subject that he became renowned for the accuracy of his measurements. "If I can be perfectly free," Lincoln is reported to have said, "in my political action, I will take the office, but if my sentiments or even expression of them is to be abridged in any way I would not have it or any other office."³⁹ This story is rather heroic. The work was of a business character, and politics did not dictate every act of Calhoun; he was willing to help a worthy ambitious young man. On the other hand, the store of Lincoln had "winked out"; he had nothing to do; he was eager to enter into an honorable vocation without an inquisition into the motives of Calhoun. It was a friendly act without any suggestion of political obligation; a kindly service that cemented a

³⁷ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 109. Tarbell, 1, 91. ³⁸ Herndon, 1, 111.

³⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 641.

friendship never severed, though they met as rivals on the field of controversy. Even in the days when it was common to blacken the name of Calhoun, Lincoln never joined in the general hue and cry.⁴⁰

The acceptance of the office of postmaster at New Salem, under the administration of General Jackson, had no particular bearing upon the political views of Abraham Lincoln. The office was of so little monetary importance, that Lincoln carried its whole contents in his hat. He was the only man of standing in the community that could afford to give it abundant attention for the small pay. The office was doubtless freely tendered, the more freely as Lincoln was not of a partisan temperament. It was of value to him. It enabled him to be of service and thus gain the good will of many. He readily made known the contents of letters to the illiterate. He also read aloud to the inhabitants gathered at the store, all the news from the recent papers.⁴¹

"The first time I ever saw Abe with a law-book in his hand," says Squire Godbey, "he was sitting astride Jake Bale's wood pile in New Salem. Says I, 'Abe, what are you studying?'—'Law,' says Abe. 'Great God Almighty!' responded I."⁴² Lincoln states in his campaign biography that one of his fellow candidates, Major John T. Stuart, in his first canvass encouraged him to study law, and that after election he borrowed books of Stuart and went at it in good earnest. He also states that he never studied with anybody.⁴³

During his legal apprenticeship of three or four years, he was at the call of every citizen. He wrote deeds, contracts and other legal papers, and often appeared before the local Justice of the Peace. All this service was free. He was not forgotten by those he helped. Even when he moved to

⁴⁰ Lamon, 148.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 642.

Springfield, his New Salem friends found that his counsel was ever at their disposal. His door was as open to poverty as to riches. His study of the law widened the exercise of his sympathy and his usefulness. Then, too, every satisfied client was likely to become a political supporter.

It would have been amazing if Lincoln had come short of being the hero of New Salem. He won "golden opinions" from every class of men. His popularity had a substantial basis. He rode into favor on the tide of service to his fellow-men. Wholesale dispenser of laughter and sympathy, clerk at a store of the village, athlete of renown, arbiter of fights and games, pilot on a memorable journey, a debater of singular skill, an orator commanding attention, a sincere student, a soldier of some distinction, popular postmaster, a skilled surveyor, and later a lawyer and legislator—master in all these relations, he proved his worth and value to the community. No man was more thoroughly gifted in the qualities of manhood and character that lodge in the human heart. He took up the harp of pioneer life and smote all "the vital chords with might." Attuned to the lowly sentiments, to the humble ways and the hardships of the people of the prairie, his sympathies were as broad as the plains of Sangamon County. The drunkard, the outcast, the children and the women, the rowdy and the ruffian, the teacher, the store keeper, and politicians, all were his friends. He was odd in liking so many of his kind, in the universality of his sympathies.

While Lincoln acted from a "full warm heart," policy could not have dictated wiser conduct for a political career. Could genius have planned the course, it would not have added greater skill to its success. His very faults were the highway to public esteem. Almost every man, each woman and child in New Salem were gladdened by his honest handshake, the cheer of his voice and the charm of his character.

CHAPTER IV

PRACTICAL LEGISLATOR

THE fame of Lincoln as a law student and lawyer, as surveyor and postmaster, spread beyond New Salem, and the qualities that had attracted local distinction continued to find him admirers in a broader world. He steadily gained headway with an ever growing audience.

Naturally, the Whigs gave him concerted support as one of their candidates for the Legislature of 1834. In addition he made large inroads into the Democratic party. Its leaders sought to diminish the strength his name would add to the Whig ticket by adopting him as one of their candidates.¹ The flattering proposal was not swallowed by Lincoln. He realized that acceptance might involve estrangement from his own party—no small matter for one who was ambitious politically. He was wise enough to counsel with the leading Whigs and his personal friends as to the prudence of such an alliance. They advised an agreement. It is claimed by Lamon that Lincoln and Dawson made a bargain with the Democratic party that nearly demoralized the Whigs, decidedly weakening the vote of their favorite champion, Major Stuart.² In fact, the alliance was more disastrous to the enemy. The Whigs fared well, as it was, in the campaign; and in a year or two, Sangamon County, a former stronghold of Jackson, passed into the control of the followers of Clay.

¹ Lamon, 155-156.

² *Ibid.*, 156.

We have no evidence as to whether Lincoln was less a partisan in the campaign as the result of Democratic endorsement. It was largely a "hand shaking" canvass, a man to man combat. Affable to every one, Lincoln was master in this mode of securing support. On one occasion he came upon thirty men in a field. They declared they would not vote for a man unless he could make a hand. "Well, boys," said he, "if that is all, I am sure of your votes." Taking hold of the cradle, he led the way all the round with perfect ease, and the boys were satisfied.³

"The next day he was speaking at Berlin. He went from my house with Dr. Barnett, the man that had asked me who this man Lincoln was. I told him that he was a candidate for the Legislature. He laughed and said, 'Can't the party raise no better material than that?' I said, 'Go to-morrow, and hear all before you pronounce judgment.' When he came back, I said, 'Doctor, what say you now?' 'Why, sir,' said he, 'he is a perfect take-in; he knows more than all of them put together.'"⁴

"Mr. J. R. Herndon, his friend and landlord, heard him make several speeches about this time, and gives us the following extract from one, which seems to have made a special impression upon the minds of his auditors: 'Fellow citizens, I have been told that some of my opponents have said that it was a disgrace to the County of Sangamon to have such a looking man as I am stuck up for the Legislature. Now, I thought this was a free country; that is the reason I address you to-day. Had I known to the contrary, I should not have consented to run; but I will say one thing, let the shoe pinch where it may; when I have been a candidate before you five or six times, and have been beaten every time, I will consider it a disgrace, and will be sure never to try it

³ Lamon, 156.

⁴ *Ibid.*

again; but I am bound to beat that man if I am beat myself. Mark that!"⁵

Voting at this period was *viva voce* and not by ballot. One seeking the vote of Lincoln, pompously supported him. Lincoln thereupon voted against that candidate. Those who witnessed the action marveled much and approved his conduct.⁶ At this election, of the four successful candidates for Sangamon County, Dawson received 1390 votes; Lincoln followed with 1376. Stuart, the popular Whig, had nearly 200 votes less.⁷ These figures speak with eloquence of the advance made by the surveyor in two years.

"After he was elected to the Legislature," says Mr. Smoot, "he came to my house one day in company with Hugh Armstrong. Says he, 'Smoot, did you vote for me?' I told him I did. 'Well,' says he, 'you must loan me money to buy suitable clothing, for I want to make a decent appearance in the Legislature.' I then loaned him two hundred dollars, which he returned to me according to promise."⁸

Compelled by events to be his own teacher, Lincoln learned to depend on his own resources. Reared in a rough school, accustomed to be a leader among his intellectual inferiors, still, in all humility, he looked to his legislative experience with joy. Deprecating his kind of education, open minded he anxiously awaited the privilege of associating with many of the leading men of the State. There gathered at the Capitol its best blood, the choice sons of Illinois, the representatives of the ambition, the intelligence, and the popularity of the State. "The society of Vandalia and the people attracted thither by the Legislature made it, for that early day, a gay place indeed. Compared to Lincoln's former environments, it had no lack of refinement and polish. That he absorbed a

⁵ Lamon, 127.

⁷ Herndon, 1, 118.

⁶ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 67.

⁸ Lamon, 157.

good deal of this by contact with the men and women who surrounded him, there can be no doubt. "The 'drift of sentiment and the sweep of civilization' at this time can best be measured by the character of the legislation. There were acts to incorporate banks, turnpikes, bridges, insurance companies, towns, railroads and female academies. The vigor and enterprise of New England fusing with the illusory prestige of Kentucky and Virginia was fast forming a new civilization to spread over the prairies."⁹

Lincoln with modesty remained a witness of the doings of the Legislature. Content to wait for the fitting time to make an impression, he did not rush into debate. It was a scouting period. Scanty of talk, rich in thought, ever on the lookout for information, steady in attendance, studying parliamentary procedure, he gained a name for solidity, far better than brilliancy or oratory for real influence in a legislative body.¹⁰

Lincoln forgot the prudence expressed in his first circular, for he jumped into the movement that hurried along the internal improvement policy. His practice was behind his theory in matters of finance.

Lincoln made little stir in this session, he took no glorious part in its deliberations, and made no record for independence. He usually voted with the members of his party. He became grounded in the finesse of law making, an art whose acquirement and importance are seldom considered. For method as well as merit is an element in the making of the statute. Still, in measuring himself with his associates, he gained confidence and found that he was not far behind in the training for political prosperity. While he would not deceive, he learned how not to be deceived. He discovered that men in the Senate are not of a far different order from

⁹ Herndon, 1, 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

those in the field; that culture often hides a mean soul; that polish is often the tinsel of education. He remained the same Lincoln, longing for the reality of the old life without pretense. He was content to return to his admirers in Clary Grove, with no exaltation or pride in his new distinction as legislator.

A special session of the Legislature was held in December, 1835. One of the evils of the time was the eagerness of representatives for public offices of a more permanent character than the uncertain tenure of popular election. New offices were constantly created. Lincoln took a bold stand on the danger. He voted with the majority that the election of a member of the Legislature to a State office was corrupting. He voted with the minority to apply the principle also to relatives and connections of the members. Lincoln remained a persistent supporter of internal improvements. Some of the advocates shifted their votes from time to time, but he remained constant in his devotion.

The influence of Lincoln extended over a widening territory and his fame spread with new opportunities. After two scant years of public life, he was considered among the leaders of his party. No longer waiting on the advice of friends, he offered himself as a candidate for renomination. He initiated his campaign with the following political fulmination:

“To the Editor of the *Journal*: In your paper of last Saturday I see a communication, over the signature of ‘Many Voters,’ in which the candidates who are announced in the *Journal* are called upon to ‘show their hands.’ Agreed, here’s mine.

“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).

“If elected, I shall consider the whole people of Sangamon my constituents, as well those that oppose as those that support me.

“While acting as their representative, I shall be governed by their will on all subjects upon which I have the means of knowing what their will is; and upon all others I shall do what my judgment teaches me will best advance their interests. Whether elected or not, I go for distributing the proceeds of the sales of the public lands to the several States, to enable our State, in common with others, to dig canals and construct railroads without borrowing money and paying the interest on it.

“If alive on the first Monday in November, I shall vote for Hugh L. White for President. Very respectfully. A. Lincoln.”¹¹

In commanding contrast to his first circular, this fairly seems to crowd out every dispensable expression. Contact with the pioneer had taught him to court the power of brevity, so this announcement is more like a creed than an address. Homely and curt in character, it suited the time. It was the best way to the heart of the average voter. Democracy found in it its own image. Lincoln leans more than a little to the popular. He advocates the distribution of the public lands money for the building of canals and railroads without borrowing money, and openly declares his subserviency in being governed by the public will on all questions.

Much attention has been dedicated to the suggestion advocating an equality of suffrage. This expression loses considerable significance considering its random character. There is little subsequent evidence of his belief in female suf-

¹¹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 7.

frage as a wise and just political measure. Still, it may be fairly assumed that the untrammelled mind of Lincoln, with a sure faith in universal suffrage, followed the cherished doctrine to the end. "All such questions," he observed one day to Herndon as they were discussing temperance in his office, "must first find lodgment with the most 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."¹²

The request of candidates to "show their hands" was of special significance at this time. It was a transitional period, the parting of ways between the "whole hog Jacksonite" and the moderate Democrat. There was no room for lukewarm adherents. It was a period of positive alliance. Diplomacy was no longer a factor. The center of gravity shifted from local to national affairs. Contests became partisan controversies on general issues.

The campaign of 1836 is the low ebb of the old personal campaign, where every man fought his own battle on his own worth, where the people judged every candidate on individual merit. This is the last time seekers of office are asked "to show their hand." From that time, political affiliation and not personal worth began to be the marrow of a contest. Partisan devotion submerged personal fealty. The people involuntarily created parties, and straightway became slaves of their own handiwork, selling independence for party loyalty. Partisanship held them in its clutches, and they hardly dared to loosen its embrace. The man who ventured to exercise his judgment was charged with being a weakling, or opened himself to the impious accusation in a democratic community that he regarded himself greater than his party. The vision of the average worker in the ranks

¹² Herndon, 1, 158.

became near sighted, and the bias of his judgment knew no limit. Party spirit set free an element of discord among men that sundered friendships, wrought enmities between brothers, and banished reason. From that time even Lincoln ceased to gather any considerable support from his political antagonists.

Lincoln was wise enough to note the tendency of these events. Wasting no regrets over the new conditions, he bound himself to the party of his choice without equivocation. Fairly but energetically maintaining the sanctity of the Whig principles, he became a fearless and feared champion of its doctrine. He displayed keen political wisdom in this conduct. Partisanship seldom rewards the laggard in the day of prosperity.

That Lincoln entered with zeal into this campaign and indulged in the fashion of the day in the issuance of handbills of a flaring character, the following is significant evidence:

“TO THE PEOPLE OF SANGAMON COUNTY—Fellow Citizens: I have this moment been shown a handbill signed ‘Truth Teller’ in which my name is done up in large capitals. No one can doubt the object of this attack at this late hour. An effort is now made to show that John T. Stuart and myself opposed the passage of the bill by which the Wiggins loan was paid. The handbill says—the only vote taken on the bill when the yeas and nays were taken was upon engrossing the bill for a third reading. ‘That’s a lie!’ Let the reader refer to pages 124, 125 and 126 of the Journal and he will see that the yeas and nays were taken *twice* upon the bill *after* the vote referred to by this lying Truth Teller, and he will also see that my course toward the bill was anything but unfriendly. It is impossible to make a lengthy answer at this late hour. All I have to say is that the author is a liar and a *scoundrel*, and that if he

will avow the authorship to me, I promise to give his proboscis a good wringing. A. Lincoln." ¹³

One of the sure signs of the spirit of increasing partisanship was the virulence and bitterness of political gatherings. Contests between leaders became frequent. Debates were had on the prairie that equaled in earnestness senatorial controversies. There was all the high tension of the gladiatorial combat intensified by the championship of something more than a personal issue—the stake of party principles. We are informed that on one occasion a Whig candidate, at the top of his voice, branded the statement of a Democratic opponent, as false. As passion ran high, a duel seemed a likely result. Lincoln followed on the program. With his marvelous fairness he discussed the subject gently and serenely so as to satisfy friend and foe. Judicial, though earnest in advocacy, he fully calmed the tumult.¹⁴

It was doubtless at this time that the following incident deeply disturbed his calmness. Something had displeased the "wild boys" who had been his supporters from the first. Perhaps a rumor that he affected strange ways, or voted for some measure not to their liking, caused the trouble. The leader at once gave the call and they gathered. Seldom revealing himself, he then gave freedom to his emotion. He told them that he never would forget those who had given him his start, the men who stood by him, who had made him what he was and all that he hoped to be. He bade them if they still cherished unkindness, if they still held him guilty, to tear him to pieces limb by limb. The generous hearts of the frontiersmen, overcome by this unwonted display of feeling, lost all resentment, and the leader regained his prestige thus rudely shaken.¹⁵

¹³ Hand bill in possession of Dr. Jayne, Springfield, Ill.

¹⁴ Lamon, 188.

¹⁵ Oldroyd, 557.

Early in the campaign Lincoln spoke at Springfield. Some of the Clary Grove boys and other admirers followed him, confident that he would distinguish himself at his first appearance. They were not slow in claiming that he would make a better stump speech than any one at the county seat. He splendidly defended the principles of his party, and produced a profound impression. Among his auditors was a Mr. Forquer, who had the finest house in Springfield, lately protected by the only lightning rod in that locality. Formerly a Whig, his apostasy was rewarded with a lucrative office. He felt the sting of Lincoln's strong presentation of the principles of the Whig party. The recent recruit to the Democratic organization replied by a speech able and apparently fair, still skillfully mingled with sarcasm. Scorn and satire were freely used, so that the anxiety of the friends of Lincoln was awakened. Speed relates that his reply to Forquer was characterized by great dignity and force; that he would never forget the conclusion of that speech. "Mr. Forquer commenced his speech," said Lincoln, "by announcing that the young man would have to be taken down. It is for you, fellow citizens, not for me to say whether I am up or down. The gentleman has seen fit to allude to my being a young man; but he forgets that I am older in years than I am in tricks and trades of politicians. I desire to live, and I desire place and distinction; but I would rather die now than, like the gentleman, live to see the day that I would change my politics for an office worth three thousand dollars a year, and then feel compelled to erect a lightning rod to protect a guilty conscience from an offended God."¹⁶

Lincoln showed supreme skill in striking a chord in the pioneer heart. He knew the thoughts of the plain people, knew that they hated every pretension of manner. For many

¹⁶ Herndon, 1, 171-2.

years whenever Forquer rose to speak he was pointed at as the man who put a lightning rod on his house to ward off the vengeance of the Supreme Power.¹⁷ Lincoln was not averse to appeal to other sentiments of the people. At a gathering of farmers in joint debate with his rival, he said: "I am too poor to own a carriage, but my friend has generously invited me to ride with him. I want you to vote for me if you will; but if not then vote for my opponent, for he is a fine man."¹⁸

In this campaign, Lincoln rose to eminence as a political speaker. From that time he was one of the stalwart Whigs selected by common consent for leadership in the contests with their strong disciplined and victorious opponents. Lincoln's services were given popular endorsement. He led all the rest of his able associates.¹⁹

In the Legislature of 1836 Lincoln played the part of a politician. The external side of his career is described by Lamon, who declares that "he was the smartest parliamentarian and the cunningest 'log roller.'"²⁰

The State was now aglow with enthusiasm over the prospects of the policy of internal improvements. A few days before the Legislature assembled, a mass convention in Sangamon County instructed their members to vote for the system of internal improvements.²¹ This was one of the many manifestations of the public sentiment.

Lincoln followed the common political ambition of his time. He became an aggressive champion of the public improvement policy. He told his friend Speed, in confidence, that he aimed at the great distinction of being called the "De Witt Clinton of Illinois." With many other public men of that day he ventured the hope of rivalling the fame of

¹⁷ Herndon, 1, 172.

¹⁹ Herndon, 1, 163. ²¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁸ Tarbell, 1, 130.

²⁰ Lamon, 195.

the builder of the Erie Canal.²² A leading member of the finance committee, he was foremost in urging the popular measures by which everybody was to be enriched by some stroke of statesmanship, some mysterious manipulation in finance. The state loans were to construct railroads, the railroads were to build cities; the cities in turn were to create a demand for farms; capital rushing for investment was to follow, and lands were steadily to rise in value. The tax on real estate was to go into a sinking fund, and thus shuffle off local assessment. In this fine way taxation was to be banished.²³ With untiring step many followed the vision. Politics as well as fancy every now and then has its lamp of Aladdin.

No one voted more persistently for local and State improvements, relief acts and the incorporation of organizations, than Abraham Lincoln. This was not done in darkness. The solemn protest of some sane members was put forth against the prevailing folly that held its repeated jubilations in the Legislature. They commented on the madness of the immense schemes, on the multitude of officers with ample salaries. They dimly prophesied shadow and gloom to the hopes of the enamored majority.²⁴ Another resolution advising consultation with the people before borrowing money for all the contemplated enterprises received only nine votes. Lincoln was not among that eminent minority.²⁵

Governor Ford makes the following stinging comment on those who put into operation the internal improvement policy: They have been excused upon the ground that they were instructed to vote as they did, and that they had every right to believe that they were truly reflecting the will of their

²² Benton, 1, 22. Lamon, p. 195.

²⁴ House Journal of 1836-37, 680.

²³ Lamon, 197.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

constituents. But members ought to resign such small offices, to sacrifice a petty ambition, rather than become the willing tools of a deluded people, to bring so much calamity upon the country.²⁶

The chief task of Lincoln and the other members of the Sangamon delegation in the tenth biennial session of the Legislature was to secure the removal of the capital from Vandalia to Springfield. This called forth his utmost ingenuity. Many rivals sought the prize. It was no mean problem to grasp victory from a crowd of contending communities. Lincoln set himself resolutely to the practical problem. It demanded patience, skill and every art of the legislator. Twice its enemies laid the Springfield bill on the table. He gathered his despairing associates for counsel in the hour of seeming defeat. The bill was squeezed through at the last moment.

Governor Ford and other Democrats seriously believed, and long repeated the charge, that the "Long Nine," as the Sangamon delegation was called, "log rolled the removal" through the Legislature. Nicolay and Hay, however, contend that the removal was due to the adroit management of Mr. Lincoln—first in inducing all the rival claimants to unite in a vote to move the capital from Vandalia, and then carrying a direct vote for Springfield through the joint convention by assistance of the Southern counties. They cite as evidence of this personal influence of Lincoln the statement of a legislator: "He made Webb and me vote for the removal, though we belonged to the southern part of the state. We defended our vote before our constituents by saying that necessity would ultimately force the seat of government to a central position. But in reality we gave the vote to Lincoln because we liked him, because we wanted to oblige

²⁶ Ford, 196.

our friend, and because we recognized him as our leader.”²⁷ This statement is not sufficient to meet the contention that the removal was cunningly attained. The personal power of Lincoln with some legislators may have been an availing factor. Still the majority of the lawmakers were men moved mainly by material considerations. It is not reasonable to assume that in voting on a vital and important proposition they would not highly consider its effect on their own measures; that they would enable the Sangamon delegation to return triumphantly to their constituents without some understanding of reciprocity. That Lincoln reluctantly or otherwise made some peculiar alliances or engaged in some questionable strategy may be reasonably deduced from the admission: “I also tacked a provision onto a fellow’s bill, to authorize the relocation of the road from Salem down to your town, but I am not certain whether or not the bill passed. Neither do I suppose I can ascertain before the law will be published—if it is a law.”²⁸

Still there is stirring evidence that Lincoln would not barter his principles even for the success of his most cherished purpose in that session. An effort was made to unite the friends of Springfield with those of a measure Lincoln refused to sanction. Every argument was used to influence Mr. Lincoln to yield his objections, and thus secure the removal of the capital to his own city, but without effect. Finally after midnight, when the candles were burning low in the room, he rose amid the silence and solemnity which prevailed, and made an eloquent and powerful speech, saying in conclusion: “You may burn my body to ashes, and scatter them to the winds of heaven; you may drag my soul down to the regions of darkness and despair to be tormented forever; but you will never get me to support a measure

²⁷ Nicolay & Hay, 138-139.

²⁸ Tarbell, 1, 137.

which I believe to be wrong, although by doing so I may accomplish that which I believe to be right." *

In matters involving method and detail, he used every art of the politician. Still when principle was at stake, he would not bow to expediency. With rare precision, he keenly followed the hazy border land between principle and policy. In securing results, he surpassed common politicians; in fealty to integrity he rivalled the patriot.

The year 1837 was a crucial period in many respects for Lincoln. He had steadily moved forward until he became the leader of New Salem. He had shown superior skill as a local politician. But his future as lawyer and politician in New Salem was already bounded. With his success as a legislator and the applause of larger communities, his longing for fame and power grew stronger. With no keen regret, he sundered the ties that bound him to Clary Grove where his word was law, to enter upon a life of more varied and extensive character. His entrance into Springfield was as humble as that into New Salem. Speed relates that Lincoln came into his store, set his saddle bags on the counter, and inquired what a single bedstead would cost. Being told that the amount complete was seventeen dollars, Lincoln said that it was cheap enough, but cheap as it was, he did not have the money to pay, but if he would be trusted until Christmas, and his experiment there as a lawyer was a success, he would pay then, if he failed he would probably never pay at all. The tone of his voice was so full of pathos that Speed felt for him, and he thought that he never saw so gloomy and melancholy a face in his life, and he then told Lincoln that he had a very large room and a very large double bed in it, which he was welcome to share with him. Without saying a word Lincoln took his saddle bags on

* Tarbell, 1, 138-9.

his arm, went upstairs, set them down on the floor, came down again, and with a face beaming with pleasure and smiles, exclaimed, "Well, Speed, I'm moved."²⁹

In the special session of 1837, the accusation that the removal of the capital was born of "bargain and corruption," challenged the integrity of the Sangamon delegation. A prominent Democrat, General Ewing, thus taunted them: "The arrogance of Springfield, its presumption in claiming the seat of government is not to be endured; the law has been passed by chicanery and trickery; the Springfield delegation has sold out to the internal improvement men, and has promised its support to every measure that would gain a vote to the law removing the seat of government."³⁰ That Lincoln hurried to the defence of the onslaught of an eminent opponent, is another indication that he was rapidly becoming chief of his fellows. He here displayed the same kind of talent that won him applause from audiences on the prairie.³¹ General Linder states that then, for the first time, he began to conceive a very high opinion of the talents and personal courage of Abraham Lincoln. The intervention of friends alone averted a duel between Lincoln and Ewing.³²

During this session, a resolution was introduced by Mr. Linder for a legislative inquiry into the affairs of the State Bank, generally known to be in a hazardous condition. The introducer ventured to support his resolution with a tone of superiority that invited chastisement. Again Lincoln bore the brunt of the defence, railing at Mr. Linder about his pretensions, saying that in one faculty at least, there could be no dispute of the gentleman's superiority over him and most other men, and that was, the faculty of so entangling

²⁹ Herndon, 1, 176.

³¹ Lamon, 201.

³⁰ Tarbell, 1, 139.

³² Tarbell, 1, 139.

a subject that neither himself, nor any other man, could find head or tail to it.³³

In speaking of the resolution itself, Lincoln indulged in these typical expressions: It is an old maxim and a very sound one, that he who dances should always pay the fiddler. I am decidedly opposed to the people's money being used to pay the fiddler. These capitalists generally act harmoniously and in concert to fleece the people; and now that they have got into a quarrel with themselves, we are called upon to appropriate the people's money to settle the quarrel.³⁴ The people know their rights and they are never slow to assert and maintain them when they are invaded. I make the assertion boldly, and without fear of contradiction, that no man who does not hold an office, or does not aspire to one, has ever found any fault with the bank. No, sir, it is the politician who is first to sound the alarm (which by the way, is a false one.) It is he who by these unholy means, is endeavoring to blow up a storm that he made ride upon and direct. Mr. Chairman, this work is exclusively the work of politicians—a set of men who have interests aside from the interests of the people, and who, to say the most of them, are, taken as a mass, at least one step removed from honest men. I say this with the greater freedom, because, being a politician myself, none can regard it as personal.³⁵

The speech was published in the *Sangamon Journal* with the editorial comment that Lincoln's remarks on Linder's bank resolution were quite to the point; that he carried the true Kentucky rifle, and when he fired he seldom failed sending the shot home.³⁶

Lincoln's bold words about the politician, modified by his

³³ Tarbell, 1, 140, 141.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

quaint admission, allow us a glimpse of the inner man. It took no mean courage to make so unpalatable an assertion. Still tempering his speech with his rare kind of diplomacy, he did not suffer in the estimation of his associates, those whose esteem he valued.

CHAPTER V

PROTESTER AND PATRIOT

THE year 1837 is the culmination of the first period of abolitionism in Illinois. Until then, abolitionism was a hated eastern conception. Despite opposition, and somewhat feeding on it, it slowly filtered its way through an almost impervious public sentiment. A small band encountered with heroism, the continuous martyrdom that waits on the protagonist. Few in numbers, zealous in their gospel, superbly confident in the rectitude of their counsel they aroused the spirit of retaliation. Their excessive zeal transcended all other obligations, rendering them indifferent, if not hostile, to the constitutional compact. They stimulated and encouraged to life a corresponding bitterness among the multitude.

It was in those days a mortal offence to call a man an abolitionist. The popular mind scarcely distinguished between men who stole horses and men who freed negroes. They regarded anti-slavery men as robbers, disturbers of the peace, the instigators of arson, and enemies to the Union which gave us as a people liberty and strength. "In testimony of these sentiments, Illinois enacted a 'black code' of most preposterous and cruel severity,—a code that would have been a disgrace to a slave state, and was simply an infamy in a free one. It borrowed the provisions of the most revolting laws known among men, for exiling, selling, beating, bedeviling, and torturing negroes, whether bond or

free.”¹

That the opposition of slavery was bothering the people of Sangamon County, is evident from the following resolution adopted at Springfield in 1837 at a public meeting, over which Judge Brown presided:

“Resolved that in the opinion of this meeting the doctrine of the immediate emancipation of the slaves of this country (although promulgated by those who profess to be Christians) is at variance with Christianity, and its tendency is to breed contention, broil and mobs; and the leaders of those calling themselves Abolitionists are designing ambitious men and dangerous members of society and should be shunned by all good citizens.”²

Illinois would scarcely brook unchained utterance on the darkest question of all the ages,—the “right of one man to eat the bread which another earned.” A kind of stifling ostracism awaited the lowly or the towering disciple who spoke in the language of Jefferson, of the fear awakening problem. Every generation has its remorseless method of crucifying its heroes of speech and deed. Business and political interests, social influences and religious affiliations concerted in the crushing of abolitionism. Success might have crowned their effort had prudence been their companion, but they mobbed, maltreated, and even murdered the champions of the new movement. Had madness confounded them, they could not have acted more unwisely. This, more than all the agitation of abolition leaders, quickened the moral vitality of the people. There were many white men who cared little for the slave, but much for the gospel of free speech as old as the Anglo-Saxon race. This fatal policy of brute force finally dictated the doom of a power that long mocked all opposition, that dreamed of an im-

¹Lamon, 206.

²History of Sangamon County, 251.

perial government grander than the vision which "Stout Cortez" beheld when he first stared at the Pacific, "silent on a peak in Darien."

The motives that prompted public sentiment in Illinois to throttle discussion on the slave question, almost baffle understanding. The Lovejoys attacked no vested interest in the State, menaced no substantial rights of person or property. While the Southern States busied themselves with the doctrine that it was the privilege of each State to demean itself as it wished, subject only to the Constitution, as it interpreted that instrument, there was small occasion for a Northern commonwealth to curb its own citizens, to sacrifice ancient and cherished rights for the pleasure of an exacting foreign institution.

The anti-slavery forces with keenness of vision saw the weak point of the enemy's attack, so they ranged themselves round the banner, proclaiming the doctrine of free speech and the sacredness of an unshackled press. Nothing more inherently reveals the weakness of the advocates of slavery, than their morbid fear of free and frank inquiry into its policy and wisdom. In the face of an institution demanding mob power, and the sacrifice of priceless principles, the Abolitionists performed a wholesome public service in contending that then more than ever liberty of discussion should be protected, maintained and hallowed.

Suddenly, in the same year up starts Lincoln the statesman, Lincoln the politician sinks. He possessed the rare gift of concealing his most cherished opinions until the time was ripe for expression. He was aware of the folly of mouth-ing truths when no good could come therefrom. In this, he was a politician. Still when the occasion called for an act of fortitude, when the solemnity of the hour summoned heroic utterance, as from "heights afar," the sound of his

voice was heard and the thrill of his words awakened. In this, he was a supreme statesman.

- Strange medley of the ideal and the practical,—at times he appeared the very woof of the visionary, and then stood forth as a petty politician. He was a mystery and a wonder to his contemporaries. They never beheld such a man; they had no standard by which to measure him. First, amazing some by the minuteness of his strategy, he would then startle others by a bold proclamation of immortal truth. There was something elusive in the manifoldness of his nature. The world with childlike simplicity looks for uniformity of action, for consistency. So it was that in later years time-servers called Lincoln the apostle of radicalism, and radicals named him the slave of conservatism.

The legislature instead of branding the black crime of the murder of Lovejoy in 1837, hastened to pass resolutions of sympathy with slavery. No external inducement guided Lincoln to fly in the face of the sentiment of the Legislature, the State and Nation in regard to Abolitionism. His conduct mystifies unless the abiding impress of the incident at New Orleans is fully measured. It was no idle vaunt that stirred him to the declaration that if he ever had the chance he would strike a blow for the enslaved. The testing time was at hand. His oath was "registered in Heaven." It was necessary to join the majority in their defence of slavery, or strike a lonely path in behalf of the enslaved. His soul faced that crisis. No longer helpless, he was widely known, and was distinguished for his services as a political leader. High in position, his act and word carrying weight, he proclaimed his protest. The chance being at hand, he struck slavery a stinging blow. The silence of nearly a decade was broken in words that shall echo for evermore. Only one other representative, Dan Stone, of Sangamon County, dared to sign

the following signal dissent that will save him from an oblivion that has already enshrouded those who voted for the successful resolutions:

“They believe that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy, but that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than abate the evils.

“They believe that the Congress of the United States has no power under the Constitution to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different States.

“They believe that the Congress of the United States has the power, under the Constitution, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, but that the power ought not to be exercised, unless at the request of the people of the District.

“The difference between these opinions and those contained in the said resolutions is their reason for entering this protest.

“Dan Stone,

“A. Lincoln.

“Representatives of the County of Sangamon.”³

The resolutions that passed the General Assembly were still rather conservative for the time and place. The protest of Lincoln is therefore the more significant, as indicating its origin from some deep mental or moral sentiment. Every letter in the protest is weighed. No product of Lincoln is more native to his genius. It is as restrained as a judicial decision. Avoiding unneeded antagonism, it is framed with admirable diplomacy. Radical in thought, still so moderate in expression, it saved his power for further good, not placing him beyond fellowship with

³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 15.

his associates. Yet with all its subdued character, with infinite wisdom it made the assault at the weakest point, declaring that slavery was founded, not only on injustice, but *bad policy*. In the last phrase lurked the sting that was to awaken the self-interest of the North, the same kind of selfishness that solidified the South in defending the institution. Lincoln was among the first to grasp and lay stress on the warp of the issue. He once declared that honest statesmanship was the employment of individual meanness for the public good. When self-interest became enlisted with conscience against the evil, its days were numbered. While Abolitionism was noisily tugging at one of the pillars that supported human bondage, Lincoln serenely forged an argument linking its moral and industrial weakness, an argument that finally shook its very foundation, until the peculiar institution that dominated the destiny of the nation for more than half a century tumbled to destruction. While other men were forced to change their opinions through the malignancy of slavery to keep abreast of public sentiment, Lincoln remained steadfast in his opinions and his policy. At the outset, he foresaw that no institution could last long that rested on injustice and bad policy. Only a change of external conditions separated the man who entered a solemn protest against the iniquity of slavery in a hostile community and the leader who gave life to the momentous act of the nineteenth century.

The period preceding the murder of Lovejoy was an era of unrest. The mob spirit ranged over the land. Thus in commenting upon the murder of the mulatto McIntosh, Lovejoy says: "In Charlestown it burns a Convent over the head of defenseless women; in Baltimore it desecrates the Sabbath, and works all that day in demolishing a private citizen's house; in Vicksburg it hangs up gamblers, three or four

in a row; and in St. Louis it forces a man—a hardened wretch certainly, and one that deserves to die, but not *thus* to die—it forces him from beneath the aegis of our constitution and laws, hurries him to the stake and burns him alive!”*

Without doubt, the murder of Lovejoy and similar incidents drew the mind of Lincoln to the discussion of the subject of the preservation of our institutions. For Herndon has left valuable testimony as to the influence of like events on his own opinions. The cruel and uncalled-for murder aroused anti-slavery sentiments, penetrating the college at Jacksonville where he was attending, and both faculty and students were unrestrained in their denunciation. Herndon's father, believing that the college was too strongly permeated with the virus of Abolitionism, forced him to withdraw from the institution. But Herndon declares that it was too late; that the murder of Lovejoy filled him with more desperation than the slave scene in New Orleans did Lincoln. For while the latter believed in non-interference with slavery, as long as the Constitution authorized its existence, Herndon, although acting nominally with the Whig party up to 1853, struck out for Abolitionism pure and simple.⁴

In the fall of 1837, Lincoln addressed the Young Men's Lyceum at Springfield, Illinois, in a formal discourse bearing traces of considerable preparation. The style is fulsome and fanciful, and unlike his own crisp utterance of previous or subsequent periods. For a time he wandered from his natural self and followed the glitter of what he doubtless deemed a more cultivated form of expression. Thus it begins: "In the great journal of things happening under the sun, we, the American people, find our account running under date of the nineteenth century of the Christian era. We find ourselves

*Lovejoy, 172.

⁴ Herndon, 1, 178-9.

in the peaceful possession of the fairest portion of the earth as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil and salubrity of climate. We find ourselves under the government of a system of political institutions conducing more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty than any of which the history of former times tells us.”⁵

It is especially important to take note of Lincoln's attitude of the prevailing mob spirit. His treatment of that theme, his mode and manner and thought, is so like that of the editor of the *Alton Observer*, that it is reasonable to assume that there was a common origin to the common sentiment. The same scenes and events that stirred the soul of Lovejoy aroused that of Lincoln. His direct onslaught on the mob spirit being largely connected with the slave issue, was an indirect attack on slavery. In this, Lincoln and the Abolitionists stood on the same ground. He extravagantly denounced the malefaction of the mobs, saying that they pervaded the country from New England to Louisiana; and alike sprang up among the pleasure-hunting masters of Southern slaves, and the order-loving citizens of the land of steady habits, that this process of hanging went on from gamblers to negroes, from negroes to white citizens, and from these to strangers, till dead men were seen literally dangling from the boughs of trees upon every roadside. He further insisted that by the operation of this mobocratic spirit, the strongest bulwark of any government might effectually be broken down and destroyed—the attachment of the people. He contended that whenever the vicious portion of population should be permitted to burn churches, ravage provision stores, throw printing presses into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons with impunity, this government could not last.⁶

⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 9.

⁶ Ibid., 10-11.

Under the display of such extravagant expression there is still patriotic apprehensiveness of danger to the national existence. He fought out the solution of the problem unaided until the way seemed clear and plain. To him the remedy was simple—obedience to the law of the land.

“Let reverence for the law be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap; let it be taught in schools, in seminaries and in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling books, and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation, and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay of all sexes and tongues and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars. . . .

“When I so pressingly urge a strict observance of all the laws, let me not be understood as saying there are no bad laws, or that grievances may not arise for the redress of which no legal provisions have been made. I mean to say no such thing. But I do mean to say that although bad laws if they exist, should be repealed as soon as possible, still, while they continue in force, for the sake of example they should be religiously observed. So also in unprovided cases. If such arises, let proper legal provision be made for them with the least possible delay, but till then, if not too intolerable, be borne with.”⁷

His remedy bespeaking reverence for the laws, would destroy the rampant spirit in the slavery movement and in abolitionism, so that neither would violate the law of the land, and so that the controversy might be conducted without intruding on the sanctity of the fundamental principles of the Constitution.

⁷ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 12.

From this time, Lincoln ceased to be a mere local politician. He became intensely concerned over national questions. Naturally, a man of broad views, he soon threw off the coil of locality, and with zeal invaded the arena of national issues. His mind ranged over the general domain for materials. Local issues were only stepping stones to him. Leaving the valley of minor matters, with exuberant spirits, he rejoicingly entered the new land of larger import, and of broader moment to the weal of the nation. For the first time he encountered extensive questions concerning the very foundations of the Republic.

“Towering genius,” he said, “disdains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored. It sees no distinction in adding story to story upon the monuments of fame erected to the memory of others. It denies that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It scorns to tread in the footsteps of any predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves or enslaving freemen.”⁸

We here strike a golden vein in his character. Ranging over the world's activities for an illustration to rival the ambition of towering genius, he finds it in the enslavement or emancipation of a race. Out of the loneliness of his individuality, out of the solemnity of his deliberations, he grew into a great character. It is his own illustration dug out of his mental experience, a product of a mind brooding over a national destiny. He saw with unerring vision, for men did come in his own generation who did not scruple to climb to power upon the back of an enslaved people. The true Lincoln consists not only of the humble man, of homely face, gaunt form, shambling limbs, quaint utterance, rude story and humble way. We may also see him in his early manhood

⁸ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 13.

with Titan power, fighting and triumphing over the brute forces of his being, over his ambition, and towering to the greatness of righteous triumph. Conduct is only the shadow of soul struggle. Nearly three decades before the Emancipation, its destiny was determined in no small measure by the events that led to the murder of Lovejoy.

CHAPTER VI

PARTISAN IN STATE AND NATIONAL AFFAIRS

THE campaign of 1838 did not differ materially from that of previous years. A colleague of Lincoln says that they called at nearly every home; that it was customary to keep some whiskey in the house, for private use and to treat guests; that the subject was always mentioned as a matter of etiquette, but with the remark to Lincoln that though he never drank, his friend might like to take a little. Lincoln often told his associates that he never drank and had no desire for drink, nor the companionship of drinking men.

Some light is thrown on the nature of the conduct of office seekers by the following incident: During this campaign, Douglas and Stuart, candidates for Congress, "fought like tigers in Herndon's grocery, over a floor that was drenched with slops, and gave up the struggle only when both were exhausted. Then, as a further entertainment to the populace, Mr. Stuart ordered a 'barrel of whiskey and wine.'" ¹⁻²

Joshua Speed states that some of the Whigs contributed a purse of two hundred dollars to enable Lincoln to pay his personal expense in the canvass. After the election, the candidate handed Speed \$199.25, with the request that he return it to the subscribers. "I did not need the money," said he, "I made the canvass on my own horse; my entertainment being at the houses of friends, cost me nothing; and my only outlay was seventy-five cents for a barrel of cider, which

¹ ² Lamon, 230.

some farm hands insisted I should treat them to.”³

On one occasion, Col. Taylor, a demagogue of the Democratic party, was hypocritically appealing to his “horny handed neighbors” in language of feigned adulation. Lincoln knew his man. He deftly removed the vest of the orator and revealed to his astonished hearers “a ruffled shirt front glittering with watch chain, seals and other golden jewels.” The speaker stood confused. The audience roared with laughter. When it came Lincoln’s turn to answer, he retorted. “While Colonel Taylor was making these charges against the Whigs over the country, riding in fine carriages, wearing ruffled shirts, kid gloves, massive gold watch chains with large gold seals, and flourishing a heavy gold-headed cane, I was a poor boy, hired on a flat-boat at eight dollars a month, and had only one pair of breeches to my back, and they were buckskin. Now if you know the nature of buckskin when wet and dried by the sun, it will shrink; and my breeches kept shrinking until they left several inches of my legs bare between the tops of my socks and the lower part of my breeches; and whilst I was growing taller they were growing shorter, and so much tighter that they left a blue streak around my legs that can be seen to this day. If you call this aristocracy I plead guilty to the charge.”⁴

When the Legislature convened in 1838, Lincoln was a candidate of his party for speaker. His opponent was chosen by a plurality of one vote. Lamson declares that this distinction was a barren honor, and known to be such at the time, but cites no reason for his statement.⁵ At least the humble representative of Sangamon County continued to rise in the esteem of his associates. His activity was crowned with the approval of those with whom he fought side by side in the turmoil and debate of controversy. It is a sig-

³ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 158. ⁴ Herndon, 1, 186.

⁵ Lamson, 212.

nificant indication of his diplomacy. He had so won the confidence of his companions that even differences on that slavery issue did not cause him the loss of their esteem and favor. The recipient of such an honor is likely to be the possessor of amiable personal qualities that call forth devotion, even more than the sturdy qualities of talent and ability.⁶ In matters of political expediency, Lincoln did not run athwart the sentiments of the majority. Despite the mutterings of discontent in some quarters, despite a growing feeling that the internal improvement policy was likely to involve the State in disaster, the finance committee, of which Lincoln was a prominent member, advised even further indulgence in the fatal policy. Finally, the fearful financial condition of the State stared the people and their representatives in the face. The supporters of the internal improvement system stubbornly began to yield to the policy of retrenchment. Still, in the Special Session of 1839, assembled to deliberate over the momentous state of affairs, Lincoln with peculiar logic urged they were so far advanced in a general system of internal improvements that they could not retreat from it without disgrace and great loss, and that the conclusion was that they must advance.⁷

Lincoln was one of thirty-three members to vote for laying the bill repealing improvements on the table, while sixty opposed this action; and he was one of thirty-five who voted against the repeal of the internal improvement policy, while thirty-seven voted for it.⁸ Thus, to the very end, Lincoln persisted in the disastrous policy that clouded the history and prosperity of Illinois for many years.

⁶ Lamon, 212.

⁷ From Lincoln's Report for Finance Committee on Expediency of Purchasing all Unsold Lands of United States in Illinois, Jan. 23, 1839, 223.

⁸ House Journal of 1839, 265.

Lincoln basked in political events. He was alive to the details in political strategy. In November, 1839, he wrote to Stuart, his partner, in regard to a voter: "Evan Butler is jealous that you never send your compliments to him. You must not neglect him next time."⁹

From the very beginning, he concerned himself with the candidacy of General Harrison. Recognizing its elemental political strength, he watched its growth with increasing interest. Harrison had never distinguished himself as a public citizen. Lincoln looked at the political side of the picture alone, little dreaming that the day was to come when his election was to depend, in some measure, on the same emotions that promoted the triumph of Harrison. In both campaigns the log cabin played a dominant part.

Speed's store in Springfield was the retreat of Lincoln, Douglas and Baker, and other political leaders of the dominant parties. However, partisanship was about to triumph, and common meeting places were soon to become unknown. In December, 1839, just as the campaign of 1840 was looming up, a political discussion between the leaders grew violent in the grocery over the national issue. During the angry debate, Douglas, with his imperial manner, flung forth the taunt: "Gentlemen, this is no place to talk politics; we will discuss the question publicly with you."¹⁰

Lincoln, who had schooled himself in logical dissertation, loved a political contest. He had met the champions of the Legislature without dismay, and was more feared than fearing. Shortly afterward Lincoln presented a resolution to accept the flaunting challenge of Douglas. Logan, Baker, Browning and Lincoln were the chosen disputants of the Whig cause. The Democrats put forth Douglas, Calhoun, Lambourn and Thomas as their champions. Each speaker

⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 41.

¹⁰ Lamon, 232.

was allowed an evening for his address. This controversy was long known as "the great debate."¹¹

That Lincoln was climbing to eminence slowly, that he was marvelously free from egoism and the aggressiveness of the common political orator is manifest from the first paragraph of his address: "It is peculiarly embarrassing to me to attempt a continuance of the discussion, on this evening, which has been conducted in this hall on several preceding ones. It is so because on each of these evenings there was a much fuller attendance than now, without any reason for its being so, except the greater interest the community feel in the speakers who addressed them than they do in him who is to do so now. I am, indeed, apprehensive that the few who have attended have done so more to spare my mortification than in the hope of being interested in anything I may be able to say. This circumstance casts a damp upon my spirits, which I am sure I shall be unable to overcome during the evening."¹²

His manner of holding an opponent to the point at issue, his directness of speech are strikingly displayed: "I now ask the audience, when Mr. Calhoun shall answer me, to hold him to the questions. Permit him not to escape them. Require him either to show that the subtreasury would not injuriously affect the currency, or that we should in some way receive an equivalent for that injurious effect. Require him either to show that the subtreasury would not be more expensive as a fiscal agent than a bank, or that we would in some way be compensated for the additional expense."¹³

Although of limited experience in public controversy, the least known of the Whig debaters, diffident of his own capacity, yet he sought the most brilliant and distinguished

¹¹ Lamon, 232.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹² Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 21.

debater in the Democratic party—Douglas. Free from sham, he was merciless in exposing it in others, as the following attack on his elusive antagonist indicates: "Those who heard Mr. Douglas recollect that he indulged himself in a contemptuous expression of pity for me. 'Now, he's got me,' thought I. But when he went on to say that five millions of the expenditure of 1838 were payments of the French indemnities, which I knew to be untrue; that five millions had been for the Postoffice, which I knew to be untrue; that ten millions had been for the Maine boundary war, which I not only knew to be untrue, but supremely ridiculous also; and when I saw that he was stupid enough to hope that I would permit such groundless and audacious assertions to be unexposed,—I readily consented that, on the score both of veracity and sagacity, the audience would judge whether he or I were the more deserving of the world's contempt."¹⁴

Sober in the main as the speeches of Webster, on the currency issue Lincoln only once let loose his rollicking and suffusing sense of humor: "The Democrats are vulnerable in the heel—I admit is not merely figuratively, but literally true. Who that looks but for a moment at their Swartwouts, their Prices, their Harringtons, and their hundreds of others, scampering away with the public money to Texas, to Europe, and to every spot of the earth where a villain may hope to find refuge from justice, can at all doubt that they are most distressingly affected in their heels with a species of 'running itch.' It seems that this malady of their heels operates on these sound-headed and honest-hearted creatures very much like the cork leg in the comic song did on its owner: which, when he had once got started on it, the more he tried to stop it, the more it would run away."¹⁵

That he was still subject to the fashion of pioneer exuber-

¹⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

ant expression; that he was somewhat entangled in the growing partisanship of the time, is thoroughly evident from his stormy peroration: "Many free countries have lost their liberty, and ours may lose hers; but if she shall, let it be my proudest plume, not that I was the last to desert, but that I never deserted her. I know that the great volcano at Washington, aroused and directed by the evil spirit that reigns there, is belching forth the lava of political corruption in a current broad and deep, which is sweeping with frightful velocity over the whole length and breadth of the land, bidding fair to leave unscathed no green spot or living thing; while on its bosom are riding, like demons on the waves of hell, the imps of that evil spirit, and fiendishly taunting all those who dare resist its destroying course with the helplessness of their effort; and, knowing this, I cannot deny that all may be swept away. Broken by it I, too, may be; bow to it I never will. The probability that we may fall in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just; it shall not deter me." ¹⁶

This fulsome conclusion more than his sustained logical argument swept over his audience and made it a popular success, so that admiring friends promoted its publication in the *Sangamon Journal*. Lamon, however, curtly makes this dampening comment on his eloquent diction: "Considering that the times were extremely peaceful, and that the speaker saw no bloodshed except what flowed from the noses of belligerents in the groceries about Springfield, the speech seems to have been unnecessarily defiant." ¹⁷

The Committee of Whigs in charge of Harrison's political campaign in Illinois issued a circular urging the organization of the whole State for the Presidential contest. Lin-

¹⁶ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 36

¹⁷ Lamon, 236.

coln was a prominent member of this body and his style shows through this appeal. It was a combination of skillful play to party spirit, and a thorough knowledge of the mode of conducting a successful campaign. "To overthrow the trained bands that are opposed to us, whose salaried officers are ever on the watch, and whose misguided followers are ever ready to obey their smallest commands, every Whig must not only know his duty, but must firmly resolve, whatever of time and labor it may cost, boldly and faithfully to do it. Our intention is to organize the whole State, so that every Whig can be brought to the polls in the coming presidential contest. We cannot do this, however, without your cooperation; and as we do our duty, so we shall expect you to do yours."¹⁸

The circular then proposed a new method of bringing out the full Whig vote, in essence the same that is now employed by every successful political organization. The following was the plan of organization:—

(1) To divide every county into small districts, and to appoint in each a subcommittee, with the duty to make a perfect list of all the voters, and to ascertain their choice with certainty, all doubtful voters to be designated in separate lines.

(2) To keep a constant watch on the doubtful voters, and from time to time have them talked to by those they trusted, and to place in their hands convincing documents.

(3) To report, at least once a month, and on election days see that every Whig was brought to the polls.¹⁹

Lincoln was brought up in a practical school where votes are a matter of calculation, where the things done on the stage were plotted and planned behind the stage. Few men were more thoroughly trained in the methods of secur-

¹⁸ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

ing results. He eagerly wrote to Stuart for copies of the "Life of Harrison," and also requested "The Senate Journal of New York" of September, 1814. "I have a newspaper article which says that that document proves that Van Buren voted against raising troops in the last war. And in general send me everything you think will be a good 'war-club.'" ²⁰ He was learning that political battles are won and lost, not alone on discussion of principles, but on appeals to the emotions of men.

As a politician, his judgment prevailed over his sentiment. He was not carried away by the enthusiasm of the hour, but looked beneath the surface for events that suggested public sentiment. So he noted with discernment "A great many of the grocery sort of Van Buren men, as formerly, are out for Harrison. Our Irish blacksmith, Gregory, is for Harrison. I believe I may say that all our friends think the chances of carrying the State very good." ²¹

For the first time in years, the Whigs conducted a campaign more aggressive than that of their opponents. General Harrison represented no definite political policy. The log cabin, the coon skin cap, the political songs, the enthusiasm of even the children, all this was more potent than the solid and sober discussion of such issues as the currency, executive power, American labor, protection and internal improvements.

The sober thinking and dignified leaders of the Whig party were somewhat shocked by the uncouth campaign of 1840. It was not in keeping with the dignity of its traditions. Leaders like Webster brooked with impatience a campaign in which judgment was fairly forgotten.

The whole campaign was one of luxuriant freedom, of intense excitement, of exaggerated discourse. A resolution

²⁰ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

adopted at Springfield during March, indicates the language that was abroad: "Resolved, that the election of Harrison and Tyler would emancipate the land from the Catilines who infest it; would restore it to prosperity and peace, and bring back the time when good measures, good principles and good men would control the administration of our government." ²²

Lincoln was foremost in the emotional fight of 1840. With all the zeal of eager youth, he rushed into the contest. As a presidential elector, he traversed a large portion of the State. Thus a newspaper of the day says: He is going it with a perfect rush. "Thus far the Locofocos have not been able to start a man that can hold a candle to him in political debate. All of their crack nags that have entered the list against him have come off the field crippled or broke down. He is now wending his way north." ²³

An incident little known, but of vast importance in illumining the kind of orator Lincoln was in 1840, is found in an almost forgotten book. Therein we find the impression that gaunt Lincoln made upon a cultured resident and distinguished lawyer of St. Louis, who says that at a gathering of Whigs in April, 1840, at Belleville, Mr. Lincoln was the first speaker to an immense crowd. "He rang all the changes upon 'coon skins,' 'hard cider,' 'log cabins,' etc., and among other things he launched forth in true Lincoln style and manner and said he had been 'raised over *thar* on Irish potatoes and buttermilk and mauling rails.' . . . I went to Col. Edward Baker, I think it was, and told him for goodness sake to try and get Lincoln down from the stand; that he was doing us more harm than good . . . when Lincoln goes to weaving his buttermilk, etc., it would seem as if we were verging rather too near onto the ridiculous. We succeeded

²² History of Sangamon County, 252.

²³ Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society, 8, 224.

very soon in getting Lincoln down from the stand and got up another speaker who seemed to have more judgment in managing the canvass.”²⁴

This statement should not be neglected. It is the judgment of a civilization different from that of pioneer Illinois. Events had hardly sobered the style and the manner of the sensitive politician of Sangamon County. Later on he grew to a more reserved and severe exposition of political discussion, grew to appeal to the judgment rather than the sentiments of men, grew to lift the debate of the hour above the clash of partisan controversy.

During this campaign, he once failed to come up to the requirements of the occasion in a debate with Douglas. A friend describes his distress at his failure: “He begged to be permitted to try it again, and was reluctantly indulged; and in the next effort he transcended our highest expectations. I never heard and never expect to hear such a triumphant vindication as he then gave of Whig measures or policy. He never after, to my knowledge, fell below himself.”²⁵

The debates of this campaign were a product of the excited and heated condition of the public mind. Thus, Gen. John Ewing, of Indiana, challenged the whole Democratic party and threatened to annihilate it. Douglas was pitted against him. There was no formality at the meetings. Each was to speak an hour alternately. The debate was to begin at eight and adjourn at twelve; meet at two and continue to sundown each day until the contest would be ended. At the end of the fifth day, Ewing “threw up the sponge,” and a vigorous shout was given by the Democrats. “E. D. Baker, notified of Ewing’s defeat, mounted a butcher block and began to address us. They protested that the game of ‘two

²⁴ Darbey, 447.

²⁵ Herndon, 1, 190.

pluck one' could not be tolerated. He persisted and at once the cry was raised 'pull him down.' At length he yielded, otherwise it would have ended with a number of broken heads."²⁶

Another incident still further discloses the character of the controversy that prevailed at that period. Arnold says that Baker was speaking in a room under Lincoln's office, and communicating with it by a trap door. Lincoln in his office, listened. Baker, becoming excited, abused the Democrats. A cry was raised, "Pull him off the stand!" Lincoln, knowing a general fight was imminent, descended through the opening of the trap door, and springing to the side of Baker, said: "Gentlemen, let us not disgrace the age and country in which we live. This is a land where freedom of speech is guaranteed. Baker has a right to speak, and a right to be permitted to do so. I am here to protect him, and no man shall take him from this stand if I can prevent it." Baker finished without further interruption.²⁷

Lincoln and Douglas often met in debate in this campaign. Lamon states that Lincoln in the course of one speech imputed to Van Buren the great sin of having voted in the New York State Convention for negro suffrage with a property qualification. Douglas denied the fact, and Lincoln attempted to prove his statement by reading a certain passage from Holland's *Life of Van Buren*, whereupon Douglas got mad, snatched up the book, and, tossing it into the crowd, remarked sententiously, "Damn such a book!"²⁸

The above encounter shows Lincoln's method of attack. He followed his brilliant antagonist with facts that all his ingenuity could not evade. From that day, Lincoln loved nothing better than a fray with the feared champion of De-

²⁶ History of Sangamon County, 205.

²⁷ Arnold, 67-68.

²⁸ Lamon, 236.

mocracy. No other Whig orator could fret Douglas as Lincoln did. They were as different in mental and moral outlook, as they were in appearance. Lincoln saw through his skillful opponent. He knew his strength and he knew his weakness. He was prepared for his chameleon-like attacks and onslaughts. While contemporaries hardly saw in Lincoln the future rival of the growing Douglas, still Lincoln was gaining strength in the technic of debate that was later to be of inestimable service to him in controversies of national import.

In the 1840-1 Legislature, Lincoln was again the candidate of his party for speaker. As leader of the minority, he doubtless deemed it an obligation on his part to provide some plan to pay the State debt and save its honor. He no longer cherished the illusion of gaining fame as the DeWitt Clinton of Illinois. There were some in the Legislature who boldly favored repudiation of the whole State debt. Others advocated payment of such part of it as the State actually received an equivalent for. Only a few dared to demand adequate taxation for the payment of the interest on the bonds. That was an unpopular expedient.

Lincoln walked the middle way. He was not a friend of repudiation and still he did not court a loss of public esteem by proposing substantial direct taxation. His bill provided that the Governor should issue interest bonds as might be absolutely necessary for the payment of the interest upon the lawful debt of the State. He declared that he submitted the proposition with great diffidence; that he felt his share of the responsibility in the crisis; and, that after revolving in his mind every scheme which seemed to afford the least prospect of relief, he submitted this as the result of his own deliberations; that it might be objected that the bonds would not be salable; that he was no financier, but that he

believed the bonds would be equal to the best in the market, and that as to the impropriety of borrowing money to pay interest on borrowed money,—he would reply, that if it were a fact that our population and wealth were increasing in a ratio greater than the increased interest hereby incurred, then it was not a good objection.²⁹

He concluded with characteristic modesty that, “he had no pride in its success as a measure of his own, but submitted it to the wisdom of the House, with the hope, that, if there was anything objectionable in it, it would be pointed out and amended.”³⁰

Lamon calls it a loose document, as the Governor was to determine the “amount of bonds necessary,” and the sums for which they should be issued, and interest was to be paid only upon the “lawful” debt; and the Governor was to determine what part of it was lawful and what was unlawful.³¹ Still in essence, Lincoln’s plan of leaving the determination of the lawfulness of the debt to an authority not the legislative, was finally adopted.³²

The shameless interference with the judicial system of Illinois about 1840 luridly illustrates the enslaving partisanship of that time. Under the provision of the State Constitution permitting every white male adult to vote, aliens had known the right of suffrage for years. Nine-tenths of the aliens allied themselves with the Democratic organization so that their support was essential to its success. As the Presidential contest grew in intensity there sprang up a controversy about these unnaturalized voters. Each party arrayed itself on the side of its own interest. The Whigs maintained that the Federal Constitution had provided against the participation of aliens in the affairs of government. A test

²⁹ Lamon, 214.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 213-214.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

³² *Ibid.*, 215.

case was brought to the Illinois Supreme Court which consisted of three Whigs and one Democrat. The latter informed Douglas, in advance, that the majority had agreed upon a decision unfavorable to the alien vote, but that there was a technical error in the record. This knowledge became serviceable to the Democrats. The case, by reason of the imperfection, was put over to the December term, and 10,000 alien votes saved the State for another Democratic administration.

The attitude of the Whig judges was made a pretext to reorganize the judiciary by increasing their number, thus enabling the political complexion of that tribunal to represent the party in power. Early in the winter, however, the Supreme Court rendered a decision that affirmed the contention of Douglas and his party. Still, the advocates for reorganization were not stayed in their purpose, and they moved forward in what they termed a reformation of the judiciary.

This action of making the judiciary dependent on the Legislature was extremely pernicious in immediate results. It also started political impulses malignant and enduring, little appreciated by those who wantonly inaugurated the change. The participation of Douglas in this enterprise was effectively utilized by Lincoln in the debate of 1858. It is not surprising that Lincoln and other Whigs in the Legislature were unwilling witnesses of this degradation. They framed protests, declaring that the immutable principles of justice were to make way for party interests, and the bonds of social order were to be rent in twain, in order that a desperate faction might be sustained at the expense of the people; that the independence of the judiciary had been destroyed; that hereafter the courts would be independent of the people, and entirely dependent upon the Legislature; that rights of property and liberty of conscience could no longer

be regarded as safe from the encroachments of unconstitutional legislation.³³

This strong statement from the Whigs represented the conscience of the State. The protesting element is generally alert in awakening public sentiment or responding to it on the issues of the day, thus affording a wholesome check upon the dominant organization in making inroads upon righteous government. In this way, it becomes the selfish interest of at least one political party to be on the side of honest statesmanship.

At no time was Lincoln more active in legislative affairs than during the early part of the 1840-41 session. In the internal improvement system, bank discussions, the attack upon the Sangamon delegation and in almost every legislative proceeding he was ready to bear his share of the fight.

But during the session, an event occurred that shadowed his political career. Lincoln, the democrat, the man of humility, of common ancestry, was attracted to Mary Todd, a Southern aristocrat, a woman of beauty and ambition. Lamon finds the source of this in selfishness, saying: "Born in the humblest circumstances, uneducated, poor, acquainted with flatboats and groceries, but a stranger to the drawing-room, it was natural that he should seek in a matrimonial alliance those social advantages which he felt were necessary to his political advancement."³⁴

This biographer overlooks the fact that it is not an uncommon event for a homely, humble man to be diverted from the common highway as Lincoln was. It is very hard to read in this story anything of designing selfishness. At one time severing his engagement to Miss Todd, the same dependency that crushed him upon the death of Ann Rutledge again became his master. His own words describe

³³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 47.

³⁴ Lamon, 237-8.

his condition: "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. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me."³⁵

He was absent from the Legislature for nearly three weeks. A visit to his friend Speed in Kentucky recalled him to his better nature.³⁶ The injustice he had done Miss Todd rankled until a reconciliation followed. Out of this there arose events that culminated in a duel. Though this event was soon hushed, yet its echoes lingered, for he said in 1858, "If all the good things I have done are remembered as long and as well as my scrape with Shields, it is plain I shall not soon be forgotten."³⁷

The panic of 1837 and the disintegration of the internal improvement system were holding their requiem over the finances of the State. Money was a furtive visitor. The currency of the State banks, fairly worthless, was nearly the only circulating medium. During the summer of 1841, the Administration invalidated the use of State Bank notes for the payment of taxes but the salary of lawmakers was still payable in currency. The Whigs hastened to charge the state officers with adding to the burdens of the people that they might be assured of their salaries. The Auditor of the State was James Shields. Rather vain and aggressive, he was not inclined "to beware of an entrance into a quarrel."

It was at this time that Lincoln was having stolen conferences with Miss Todd. The restless spirit of the latter sought the political field for adventure. A daughter of lei-

³⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 45.

³⁶ Herndon, 1, 202.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

sure, she had no rival in sarcasm in Springfield. Hunting for material, she found a subject in the pretentious Auditor, and enjoyed worrying the sensitive official. Under such influences, Lincoln aided or sanctioned the composition of an article ridiculing Shields. Like many similar productions, it professed to come from a back-woods settlement, and affected a homely if not a vulgar form of speech. The paragraph that follows is a sample of the effusion:—

“I looked in at the window, and there was this same fellow Shields floatin’ about on the air, without heft or earthly substance, just like a lock of cat-fur where cats have been fightin’.

“He was paying his money to this one, and that one, and t’other one, and sufferin’ great loss because it wasn’t silver instead of State paper; and the sweet distress he seemed to be in,—his very features, in the ecstatic agony of his soul, spoke audibly and distinctly, ‘Dear girls, *it is distressing*, but I cannot marry you all. Too well I know how much you suffer; but do, do remember, it is not my fault that I am *so* handsome and *so* interesting.’ ”³⁸

The production appeared in the *Sangamon Journal*, and at once aroused the wrath of Shields. A demand for the identity of the author followed. Doubtless to save Miss Todd from entanglement, Lincoln announced himself as the writer. Thereupon, Shields demanded a full retraction of all offensive allusions. Strangely enough, Lincoln did not welcome this solution of the situation. He took advantage of the rather ardent demand for an apology and held his ground with these words: “Now, sir, there is in this so much assumption of facts and so much of menace as to consequences, that I cannot submit to answer that note any further than I have, and to add that the consequences to which I suppose you

³⁸ Lamon, 255, 256.

allude would be matter of as great regret to me as it possibly could to you.”³⁹

With such a start, a duel for a time seemed inevitable. At the last moment, common friends conveniently, and doubtless to the great satisfaction of the contestants, calmed the affair without a real encounter.

Duelling was the rage of the hour.⁴⁰ Lincoln was too sensitive to the good opinion of the community to fly in the face of popular sentiment. So he violated the law of the State to engage in a transaction unsanctioned by his judgment, not ready to defy the general taste in a matter where the standard was still that of the pioneer community. It is not therefore surprising that in later years, Lincoln was abashed by his part in this fight. This was his last personal quarrel, and marks a decisive epoch in his career.⁴¹ Thereafter, he became a champion of principles and was prepared to play a part in debates of world-wide moment.

A dramatic contest ran through this session on the part of the banks to obtain further condonation in the suspension of specie payments. The Whigs were friendly, calling them, “the institutions of the country,” branding opposition unpatriotic. The Democrats, however, were on the whole hostile to the banks. They called them “rag barons, rags, printed lies, bank vassals, ragocracy, and the ‘British-bought bank, bluelight, Federal, Whig party.’”⁴²

The contest was rendered closer by “opportune loans to Democrats.” The fight grew in intensity as if the wealth, the industry and the very happiness of the people were at stake. The Democrats, in order to kill the banks, were bent on a *sine die* adjournment of the special term. The Whigs in their zeal to save them invented what was a novel expedient

³⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴¹ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 211.

⁴² Lamon, 217.

at that time in parliamentary tactics. The Whigs absented themselves to prevent a quorum, leaving Lincoln and Gillespie to call the ayes and noes. The Democrats discovered the game, and the sergeant-at-arms was sent out. There was great excitement in the House, which was then held in a church at Springfield. Soon several Whigs were caught and brought in and the plan was spoiled. Then Lincoln and his accomplice determined to leave the hall. Going to the door, and finding it locked, they raised a window and jumped out, but not until the Democrats had succeeded in adjourning. Mr. Gillespie remarked that "Lincoln always regretted that he entered into that arrangement, as he deprecated every thing that savored of the revolutionary."⁴³

This incident discloses Lincoln the politician, Lincoln the student of methods engaging in practices that his judgment subsequently disapproved. He was thoroughly schooled in securing results. The student of Lincoln should not hurry over this incident, nor minimize its significance. He mingled in common, sordid, political events.

Though Lincoln engaged freely in the political machinations of his day, he did not sanction corruption. He stood out as a champion of an untainted franchise. He did not still his conscience with the soothing medicine that corruption was the common practice. He moved at this session that the part of the Governor's message relating to fraudulent voting be referred to the Committee on elections, with instructions to prepare and report a bill for such an act as might afford the greatest possible protection of the elective franchise against all frauds.⁴⁴

Bred in the school of partisanship, where the doctrine that spoils is the fruit of victory, was almost a creed, Lincoln never enslaved himself by the acceptance of that dogma,

⁴³ Lamon, 217.

⁴⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 42.

either in practice or theory. Early in life he had reasoned out the principle that public office is a trust. He dared to assert its integrity at a time when it met little favor. He wrote in 1840 that he was opposed to removal of public officials to make places for friends.⁴⁵ Still, the malevolent conduct of an office holder stirred his resentment. In the same letter he said there was no question as to the propriety of removing the postmaster at Carlinville, that the latter boldly refused to deliver during the canvass all documents franked by Whig members of Congress.⁴⁶

By his tact and service, Lincoln stood well with the party leaders, so that in 1841 he was widely mentioned as a worthy candidate for Governor. A formal protest from his hand and that of his close friends against such a movement was put in the *Sangamon Journal*: "His talents and services endear him to the Whig party; but we do not believe he desires the nomination. He has already made great sacrifices in maintaining his party principles, and before his political friends ask him to make additional sacrifices, the subject should be well considered. The office of Governor, which would of necessity interfere with the practice of his profession, would poorly compensate him for the loss of four of the best years of his life." Whether he could have attained the nomination is not known. Lincoln was not accustomed to put aside political honors. It is significant that the young legislator readily availed himself of a mode of self-glorifying declination popular with politicians to this day.⁴⁷

With this session, Lincoln concluded his duties as the representative of the people. In 1832, he entered Vandalia, a son of poverty, timid of his ability, ungifted in appearance. In eight years, he plowed his way to the very front as the

⁴⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 43.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁴⁷ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 217-8.

champion of his associates, a skillful leader of his party. Still it is amazing how faint a trace Lincoln left on the history of Illinois, hewing out no legislative enactment endearing his memory to the people of the State. Ford only notes him as a Congressman who in the State Legislature followed the glitter of a false finance, and a destructive plan of public improvement. Had his career ended here, no one would have ventured to rescue his name from oblivion. One act only, overtops the events submerged by time, an event that sober history passed by, little knowing that it was the one fact, richer than all others, in the annals, under its scrutiny. For in the light of later events, the protest of 1837 showed an enkindled soul that in the goodness of time thrilled the land with a second edition of the Declaration of Independence.

CHAPTER VII

RESTLESS POLITICAL AMBITION

THE termination of Lincoln's legislative career, his marriage and his increasing legal practice did not stay his hunger for political distinction. Music, society or nature did not allure him. His range of interest was limited. His pleasure was not in his fame as a counselor. He was impatient of the tiresome devotion to detail demanded of the lawyer. Longing to be a leader in the world of events, he sought a wider field of activity for the full expression of his personality, splendidly realizing that his greatest service to himself and his fellows was in guiding and interpreting a righteous public opinion.

Lamon has portrayed Lincoln's political ambition with merciless vividness, claiming that he was never agitated by any passion more intense than his thirst for distinction; that it governed all his conduct, from the hour when he astonished himself by his oratorical success in the back settlements of Macon County, to the day when the assassin marked him as the first hero of the restored Union; that he was ever ready to be honored, and struggled incessantly for place.¹ Politics was his world,—a world filled with enchantment. "In his office," says Mr. Herndon, "he sat down, or spilt himself on his lounge, read aloud, told stories, talked politics,—never science, art, literature, railroad gatherings, colleges, asylums, hospitals, commerce, education, progress,

¹ Lamon, 237.

nothing that interested the world generally except politics." ²

Yet Lamon and Herndon missed the deeper unity in his life. Neither politics nor distinction was the end with him. They were the paths leading to his palace, not the palace itself. It is not too much to say that love of his kind transcended his love of distinction. At the time when he seemed lost in the maelstrom of partisanship, as Burns in the storm thought of the "ourie" cattle, so Lincoln thought of those hapless sons of misfortune who were biding the "bitter brattle" of slavery. Thus in a letter to his friend Speed, he said, "In 1841 you and I had together a tedious low-water trip on a steamboat from Louisville to St. Louis. You may remember, as I well do, that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were on board ten or a dozen slaves shackled together with irons. That sight was a continued torment to me, and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio or any other slave border." ³

The extent to which he mingled in political affairs is shown by his activity at a mass meeting in March, 1843, at Springfield. He was the master of ceremonies. In a careful statement, he uttered the cardinal principles of his party. He was materially steeped in the party spirit of his day. For the fifth resolution recommends that a Whig candidate for Congress be run in every district, regardless of the chances of success. "We are aware," it continued, "that it is sometimes a temporary gratification, when a friend cannot succeed, to be able to choose between opponents; but we believe that that gratification is the seed time which never fails to be followed by a most abundant harvest of bitterness. By this policy we entangle ourselves." ⁴

Though Lincoln, at first, fought the convention system for

² Lamon, 482.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 216.

the nomination of candidates, as undemocratic, his conversion to its championship further exposes his training in the school of practical politics. The statement declared that the Whigs should not stop to inquire whether the system was just, but that while their opponents used the plan it was madness in them not to defend themselves with it.⁵

The conclusion of this address is also a sure sign of prolonged association with the hue and cry of party spirit: It stated with assurance that the Whigs were always a majority of the nation, and that if every Whig would act as though he knew the result to depend upon his action, that surely a Whig would be elected President of the United States.⁶

Political office being the reward of party service, Lincoln was a zealous worker in the ranks. He was ever at the call of the party managers for speeches or other personal work. They could not charge him with being a laggard in the day of defeat. He did not wait for waves of advancement. He was not in accord with the policy that the office should seek the man. He slowly toiled his way to the eminence he reached. While Lincoln was in Congress, Herndon wrote to him complaining of his sluggish progress in politics, and carped at the old men for usurping all the places of power and profit. In an intimate reply to his associate, we find the plain paths he trod: "You must not wait to be brought forward by the older men. For instance, do you suppose that I should ever have got into notice if I had waited to be hunted up and pushed forward by older men? You young men get together and form a 'Rough and Ready Club,' and have regular meetings and speeches. Take in everybody you can get. Harrison Grimsley, L. A. Enos, Lee Kimball, and C. W. Matheny would do to begin the thing; but as you go along gather up all the shrewd, wild boys about town, whether

⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

just of age or a little under age,—Chris. Logan, Reddick Ridgely, Lewis Swizler, and hundreds such. Let every one play the part he can play best,—some speak, some sing, and all ‘holler.’ Your meetings will be of evenings; the older men and the women will go to hear you; so that it will not only contribute to the election of ‘Old Zach,’ but will be an interesting pastime, and improving to the intellectual faculties of all engaged. Don’t fail to do this.”⁷

Lincoln no sooner completed his long term in the Legislature than he cast his eye on a seat in Congress. “Now, if you should hear” he wrote a friend, “any one say that Lincoln don’t want to go to Congress, I wish you, as a personal friend of mine, would tell him you have reason to believe he is mistaken. The truth is I would like to go very much. Still, circumstances may happen which may prevent my being a candidate. If there are any who be my friends in such an enterprise, what I now want is that they shall not throw me away just yet.”⁸

Lincoln’s race for the nomination was full of excitement. When he began his canvass, he was a member of the firm of Logan and Lincoln. Besides Hardin, Baker and Lincoln, Logan also was a candidate. Logan deemed his long service as entitling him to the honor, while Lincoln regarded his legislative career as his claim to distinction. It is not amazing that concord did not dwell in this home of political rivalry. Herndon says he was not, therefore, surprised to have Lincoln rush into his quarters and with more or less agitation tell him that he had determined to sever the partnership with Logan; and Herndon states that although painfully aware of his want of ability and experience, when Lincoln remarked in his earnest, honest way, “Billy, I can trust you if you can trust me,” he felt relieved and accepted

⁷ Lincoln’s Speeches, 1, 131-132. ⁸ Herndon, 1, 253.

the generous proposal of legal partnership.⁹

The most dramatic incident in this fight was the contest between Baker and Lincoln. It was a battle between brilliancy and solidity. No man of his time surpassed Baker in dashing eloquence. Handsome, of winning personality, he was the idol of the young men of Springfield. Lincoln was no longer, as at New Salem, the leader of the gang. His alliance with aristocratic Mary Todd, the demands of his profession and a settled life largely sundered the partnership. It was a natural, not a sudden, intentional separation. Strange rumors were afloat that he was no more a friend to the lowly and that he was seeking new ways. Not free to mingle with the people, he could not readily combat the suspicion. And they were ever demanding a perfect embodiment of their conception of heroism. They found it fully in one of the most dramatic heroes and charming personalities in the panorama of American politics—Edward D. Baker.

When the friends of Baker first put forth the charge that Lincoln belonged to a proud family, he was amused. He met it with a laughing remark: "That sounds strange to me, for I do not remember of but one who ever came to see me, and while he was in town he was accused of stealing a jew's harp."¹⁰ But as the campaign developed in intensity, and he realized that the shameless report was scattered to his harm, he thought bitterly of the false charge. The injustice of the accusation and his incapacity to meet it, quite crushed him. He could meet an open foe with a giant's strength, but the gnat of malignant rumor defied him. Thus the humblest politician that ever trod the soil of the Western continent was not saved from the charge of being "puffed up," and the leader of the lowly traveled in the domain of

⁹ Herndon, 1, 252.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 255.

bitter experience. The enthusiasm of the young men carried the day for Baker in Sangamon County.

After his defeat, Lincoln took his old friend Jim Matheny far into the woods. He unburdened himself, protesting that he was anything but aristocratic and proud. "Why, Jim," he said, "I am now and always shall be the same Abe Lincoln I was when you first saw me."¹¹

The story of the defeat as told by Lincoln to Speed, shows much of his political training: "Baker beat me, and got the delegation instructed to go for him. The meeting, in spite of my attempt to decline it, appointed me one of the delegates; so that in getting Baker the nomination I shall be fixed a good deal like a fellow who is made a groomsman to a man who has cut him out and is marrying his own dear 'gal'."¹²

Yet, Lincoln did not at once reconcile himself to the selection of Baker. A letter from his friends in Menard County led him still to contemplate possibilities and induced him to skirmish on the frontier of his duty to the choice of Sangamon County. He wrote to a supporter: "You say you shall instruct your delegates for me unless I object. I certainly shall not object. That would be too pleasant a compliment for me to tread in the dust. And besides if anything should happen (which, however, is not probable) by which Baker should be thrown out of the fight, I would be at liberty to accept the nomination if I could get it."¹³

In this same letter, he gave an account of the factors that conspired to his defeat, saying that it would astonish the older citizens to learn that he (uneducated, penniless boy, working on a flatboat at \$10.00 per month) had been put down there as a candidate of pride and wealth; that there

¹¹ Lamon, 273.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹² Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 79.

was, too, the strangest combination of church influence against him; that Baker was a Campbellite, and with few exceptions got all that church; that his wife had some relations in the Presbyterian churches, and some with the Episcopal churches, and wherever it would tell, he was set down as either one or the other, while it was everywhere contended that no Christian ought to go for him, because he belonged to no church, was suspected of being a deist, and had talked about fighting a duel.¹⁴ In the long letter Lincoln did not even mention the personal strength and popularity of his opponent, or suggest that Baker was the victor by his own merit.

Though Lincoln returned to the practice of his profession with increased devotion, he kept his interest in local and national events. He still remained a student of the whims of individual voters as well as a keen observer of political affairs of general moment. A letter to Hardin at Washington illustrates this: "Knowing that you have correspondents enough, I have forborne to trouble you heretofore; and I now only do so, to get you to set a matter right which has got wrong with one of our best friends. It is old Uncle Thomas Campbell of Spring Creek—(Berlin, P. O.). He has received several documents from you, and he says that they are old newspapers and documents, having no sort of interest in them. He is, therefore, getting a strong impression that you treat him with disrespect. This, I know, is a mistaken impression; and you must correct it. The way, I leave to yourself. Robert W. Canfield says that he would like to have a document or two from you.

"The Locos here are in considerable trouble about Van Buren's letter on Texas, and the Virginia electors. They are growing sick of the Tariff question; and consequently are

¹⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 80.

much confounded at V. B.'s cutting them off from the new Texas question. Nearly half the leaders swear they won't stand it." ¹⁵

As early as 1837, Webster publicly declared that it could not be disguised that a desire, or an intention, was already manifested to annex Texas to the United States.¹⁶ Under the nursing of Tyler and Calhoun, a treaty of annexation was concluded and the scheme almost consummated. The Senate, in 1844, alone stood in the way. The proposal of annexation overtopped all other issues in the campaign of that year. It proved at the time a dominating incident and left abundant traces on American history. Van Buren, rising to the solitary eminence of statesmanship, uttered a firm and subdued protest against the southern policy. But the edict of the Calhoun democracy, that Texas must be annexed was remorseless, and their old friend, Martin Van Buren, in the homely language of Lincoln, was "turned out to root."¹⁷ It proved the beginning of the cleft on the slavery question that in less than twenty years hopelessly divided the successors of the triumphant Jackson party.

In June, 1844, Clay fairly represented the views of the Whigs declaring that the annexation of Texas, at this time, without the consent of Mexico, as a measure compromising the National character, involving war with Mexico, probably with other foreign powers, dangerous to the integrity of the Union, inexpedient in the present financial condition of the country, was not called for by any general expression of public opinion.¹⁸ Later coquetting with southern sympathies on this issue, he modified his opposition to the present annexation of Texas with the fatal statement that he had no hesitation in saying that, far from having any *personal* ob-

¹⁵ Tarbell, 2, 290.

¹⁶ Greeley, 1, 152.

¹⁷ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 140.

¹⁸ Greeley, 1, 164.

jection to the annexation of Texas, *he should be glad to see it*—without dishonor, without war, with the common consent of the Union and upon just and fair terms.¹⁹ This seeming retreat, despite all explanation, insured his defeat. The diversion gained him no strength in the South and alienated needed support in the North.

The Southern States openly put forth their reasons for annexation. To keep pace with the northern growth they needed new States, otherwise they saw the doom of the institution that they deemed the very palladium of their prosperity and happiness. The unresting Calhoun finally triumphed in awakening dormant fears and sentiments.²⁰

The main contention in the famous letter of Jackson was better calculated, than this southern claim, to appeal to the northern democracy, and was more in harmony with the substantial trend of the national destiny. "I do not hesitate to say that the welfare and happiness of our Union require that it should be accepted. If, in a military point of view alone, the question be examined, it will be found to be most important to the United States to be in possession of the territory.

"Great Britain has already made treaties with Texas; and we know that far-seeing nation never omits a circumstance, in her extensive intercourse with the world, which can be turned to account in increasing her military resources. May she not enter into an alliance with Texas?"²¹

While the Texan issue stirred the Garrisonian Abolitionists, it did not allay their hostility to organized political action, they declared that they would open no road to political preferment; that the strength of their cause was in the humble, fervent prayer of the righteous man, which availeth

¹⁹ Greeley, 1, 166.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

²¹ *Ibid.*

much, and the blessing of that God who had chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; that it was to be expected that some political wolves would put on the clothing of Abolitionism, and seek to elevate themselves and manage the anti-slavery organization for their own purposes.* The political Abolitionists, however, named James G. Birney for President.

There was then, already, a complexity of opinion on the slavery question that shadowed forth the future alignment of parties. While many were confounded by wavering lights, Lincoln picked his way with sure footed precision through maze and pitfall. His unprejudiced mind wondered at the conduct of the "Liberty men" that deprecating the annexation of Texas, deliberately promoted its success by indirection. Their application of the proposition "we are not to do evil that good may come of it" he reduced to plain sophistry, saying that if by their votes they could have prevented the extension of slavery, it would have been good, and not evil, so to have used their votes, even though it involved the casting of them for a slaveholder, and he earnestly asked if the fruit of electing Clay would have been to prevent the extension of slavery, could the act of electing him have been evil?²² He held that it was a paramount duty of the free States to let the slavery of the other States alone, while it was equally clear that they should never knowingly lend themselves, directly or indirectly, to prevent slavery from dying a natural death—to find new places for it to live in, when it could no longer exist in the old.²³ Here, is clearly announced the seeming paradox that, though slavery was an evil, there still remained the duty to let it alone in the States where it then existed. This further piles up evidence that his views suffered little change with years.

* Johnson, 307.

²² Tarbell, 2, 293.

²³ *Ibid.*, 293-294.

Lincoln boldly participated in the campaign of 1844; Clay was the political hero of his youth and manhood as Washington was of his boyhood. Like many other Whigs, he, too, was enthralled by the magic of the far famed eloquence of the name, that, in the words of the orator who nominated Clay, expressed more enthusiasm, that it had in it more eloquence than the names of Chatham, Burke, Patrick Henry, and, more than any other and all other names together.²⁴

During the campaign, Lincoln encountered his former employer, John Calhoun, and other old antagonists. It is said that Calhoun came nearer whipping Lincoln in debate than Douglas did.²⁵ Nothing survives of those speeches. Still, his enthusiasm and skill in the controversies of the campaign awakened a demand for his services throughout the State. His name as an orator even invaded Indiana. In the closing hours of the contest his voice was heard on the soil that he hastened from some fifteen years before as an adventurer. While speaking at Gentryville, his old friend Nat Grigsby entered the room. Lincoln stopped and crying out "There's Nat," scrambled through the crowd to his modest associate of former days. After greeting him warmly, he returned to the platform. When the speech was done, he passed the rest of the evening with Nat. Then Lincoln insisted that they should sleep together; and long into the night, they talked over old times and were once more Abe and Nat.²⁶

The appearance of Clay's August letter stirred the political Abolitionists to fateful activity. They insisted that his antagonism to annexation, not being founded on anti-slavery convictions, was of no account.²⁷ They polled enough votes to elect pro-slavery Polk. Mingled with the ribaldry, the din and howl of abandoned politicians over the election of

²⁴ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 225.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 274-5.

²⁵ Lamon, 274.

²⁷ Greeley, 1, 167.

Polk, were the exultant shouts of the sober and respectable men of the Liberty Party. They celebrated in unison the victory they both promoted.

The solemn selection of James K. Polk instead of Henry Clay as President, was a discordant incident that the Whig patriot did not linger over willingly. That a pigmy should sit in the seat of the statesman, that a puppet should stand in the place of the nature-dowered son of American policies,—this opinion made Clay's followers doubt the wisdom of republican government. To them this defeat was more than a partisan grief, it was a national loss. From loyal supporters hurried a grand tribute to their uncrowned champion in his retreat: "We will remember you, Henry Clay, while the memory of the glorious or the sense of the good remains in us, with a grateful and admiring affection which shall strengthen with our strength and shall not decline with our decline. We will remember you in all our future trials and reverses as him whose name honored defeat and gave it a glory which victory could not have brought. We will remember you when patriotic hope rallies again to successful contest with the agencies of corruption and ruin; for we will never know a triumph which you do not share in life, whose glory does not accrue to you in death."²⁸

²⁸ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 236.

CHAPTER VIII

LINCOLN OPPOSES THE INCEPTION OF THE MEXICAN WAR IN CONGRESS

IT is quite generally believed in Sangamon County that a bargain was entered into between Baker, Lincoln, Logan and Hardin whereby the "four should 'rotate' in Congress until each had had a term."¹ There is evidence in the writings of Lincoln that there was some kind of an understanding between Baker, Lincoln and Logan. There is a startling story as to the character of the arrangement. A delegate to the Pekin Convention of 1843 states, that he was asked by Lincoln immediately after the nomination of Hardin, if he would favor a resolution recommending Baker for the next term. On being answered in the affirmative Lincoln told the delegate to prepare the resolution, and he would support it. It created a profound sensation, especially among the friends of Hardin. After angry discussion, the resolution passed by a bare majority.² This incident illustrates the sagacious policy of Lincoln in furthering his restless political ambition. He publicly declined to contest the nomination of Baker in 1844. Pursuant to a widespread expectation, Baker did not stand in the way of Lincoln two years later.

Lincoln kept close to those who moulded public opinion,—the men of the press. Then the personality of an editor was a weighty factor in the decision of political contests. He

¹ Lamont, 275.

² Tarbell, 195-6.

wrote to an editor and supporter in 1846 that as the paper at Pekin had nominated Hardin for governor and the Alton paper indirectly nominated him for Congress, it would give Hardin a great start, and perhaps use him up, if the Whig papers of the district should nominate Hardin for Congress, and that he wished that the editor would let nothing appear in his paper which might operate against him.³

To this, he received a reply that this supporter had, in fact, nominated Hardin for governor. The tactful response deserves attention: "Let me assure you that if there is anything in my letter indicating an opinion that the nomination for governor, which I supposed to have been made in the Pekin paper, was operating or could operate against me, such was not my meaning. Now that I know that nomination was made by you, I say that it may do me good, while I do not see that it can do me harm. But, while the subject is in agitation, should any of the papers in the district nominate the same man for Congress, that would do me harm; and it was that which I wished to guard against. Let me assure you that I do not for a moment suppose that what you have done is ill-judged, or that anything that you shall do will be."⁴

"I should be pleased," he wrote another friend, "if I could concur with you in the hope that my name would be the only one presented to the convention; but I cannot. Hardin is a man of desperate energy and perseverance, and one that never backs out; and I fear, to think otherwise is to be deceived in the character of our adversary. I would rejoice to be spared the labor of a contest; but 'being in', I shall go it thoroughly, and to the bottom." He then admonished his friend not to relax any of his vigilance.⁵

³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

He was sensitive to the shifting changes of the campaign. "Nathan Dresser is here," he wrote a friend, "and speaks as though the contest between Hardin and me is to be doubtful in Menard County.—I know he is candid and this alarms me some—I asked him to tell me the names of the men that were going strong for Hardin; he said Morris was about as strong as any—Now, tell me, is Morris going it openly? You remember you wrote me, that he would be neutral. Nathan also said that some man he could not remember had said lately that Menard County was going to decide the contest and that that made the contest very doubtful. Do you know who that was?"

"Don't fail to write me instantly on receiving telling me all—particularly the names of those who are going strong against me."⁶

The splendid generalship of Lincoln, his telling blows gradually disposed of the gallant Hardin, who gracefully declined to be longer considered as a candidate. Through the inspiration of Lincoln, with equal gallantry, there promptly appeared in the leading Whig journal, a statement superbly designed to soothe the dignity of his late antagonist: "We have had, and now have, no doubt that he (Hardin) has been, and now is, a great favorite with the Whigs of the district. He states, in substance, that there was never any understanding on his part that his name was not to be presented in the canvasses of 1844 and 1846. This, we believe, is strictly true. Still, the doings of the Pekin Convention did seem to point that way; and the general's voluntary declination as to the canvass of 1844 was by many construed into an acquiescence on his part. These things had led many of his most devoted friends to not expect him to be a candidate at this time. Add to this the relation that Mr. Lincoln

⁶ Tarbell, 1, 204.

bears, and has borne, to the party, and it is not strange that many of those who are as strongly devoted to Gen. Hardin as they are to Mr. Lincoln should prefer the latter at this time. We do not entertain a doubt, that, if we could reverse the positions of the two men, that a very large portion of those who now have supported Mr. Lincoln most warmly would have supported Gen. Hardin quite as warmly.”⁷

He was a thorough politician. He attended to details himself. Like a general on the battlefield, he kept his reserve forces well in hand. He would rather minimize his own strength than mistake the power of opposing forces. He never lost a victory through misplaced confidence. Though he looked darkly at a contest, this rather increased than abated his activity. From policy as well as inclination he did not engage in the crimination of his adversaries. He had a marvelous capacity of personally commanding the conduct of men.

Out of their ranks, the Democrats called the famed preacher—Peter Cartwright, as their standard bearer in this Congressional contest. Until he was sixteen years old, he was a slave to the common vices of his day. His dramatic conversion during the revival of 1801 precluded the marvelous career of a man who unflinchingly, for sixty years, “breasted the storm and suffered the hardships” of his calling in forest and prairie. His heroic treatment of Jackson shows the man. “Just then,” Cartwright says, “I felt some one pull my coat in the stand, and turning my head, my fastidious preacher, whispering a little loud, said: ‘General Jackson has come in: General Jackson has come in.’ I felt a flash of indignation run all over me like an electric shock and facing about to my congregation, and purposely speaking

⁷ Lamon, 276-7.

out audibly, I said, 'Who is General Jackson? If he don't get his soul converted, God will damn him as quick as he would a Guinea negro!' " ⁸

The reasons that prompted Cartwright to follow the trail from Kentucky to Illinois are of historical importance. "First, I would get entirely clear of the evil of slavery. Second, I could raise my children to work where work was not considered a degradation. Third, I believed I could better my temporal circumstances, and procure lands for my children as they grew up. And fourth, I could carry the gospel to destitute souls that had, by their removal into some new country, been deprived of the means of grace." ⁹ The South poorly reckoned the cost to her, of the institution that drove into exile such master spirits, who enriched the states of their adoption.

Hating human bondage, still he was no friend of abolitionism. He declared that it riveted the chains of slavery tighter; blocked the way to reasonable emancipation; threw fire brands into legislative halls; that millions were expended every year in angry debates and that laws for the good of the people were neglected; talents and money thrown away; that prejudice, strife, and wrath, and every evil passion stirred up until the integrity of the Union was in imminent danger, and that not one poor slave was set free; not one dollar expended to colonize them and send them home happy and free; that through unchristian, excited prejudices mobs were fast becoming the order of the day.

He maintained that after more than twenty years' experience as a traveling preacher in slave states, he was convinced that the most successful way to ameliorate the condition of the slaves and Christianize them, and finally secure their freedom was to treat their owners kindly and not to

⁸ Cartwright, 192.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

meddle politically with slavery!

Patriot and prophet alike, he contended that abolitionism awakened a bitter and wrathful spirit among the guardians of the black man that made discord a partner in the Federal Union; that despite the legion moral evils of slavery, he had never seen a rabid abolition or free soil society that he could join, because they resorted to unjustifiable agitation, confounding the innocent with the guilty, and that if force was resorted to the Union would be dissolved, a civil war would follow, death and carnage would ensue, and the only free nation on the earth would be destroyed.¹⁰ In early manhood, Cartwright cherished sentiments that were brother to those Lincoln later avowed at the outset of his career.

In his autobiography, Cartwright states that he was twice elected as a representative from Sangamon County, and he found that almost every measure had to be carried by a corrupt bargain and sale.¹¹

For nearly half a century he had traversed the western states. In nearly every Methodist Church and mission his voice had summoned many to a better life. His ministrations to the sick, his rides at night over the lonely prairie to the death bed had endeared him to thousands of homes. He had a host of relations in the Congressional district. All this and his steady advocacy of Jacksonian Democracy constituted him no paltry antagonist.

An active campaign ensued. Lincoln was again subjected to the harsh charge of religious infidelity. The Whigs, taking up the challenge rallied to his support, Their activity soon turned the tide. Lincoln carried the district by 1511, exceeding the vote of Clay in 1844 by nearly 600. Sangamon County showed her loyalty by piling up a larger majority than ever before given to a political favorite.¹²

¹⁰ Cartwright, 129.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹² Herndon, 1, 259.

The battle largely centered around the wisdom of a preacher participating in politics. The pioneer, who twenty years before, had voted for Cartwright had now become a citizen of a settled community. After this election, there was no question as to the deep seated distrust of the average voter permitting a church official to be the political representative of the people.

A Democrat who loathed the canvass of Cartwright still deemed it a hard thing to vote against his party. So Lincoln told him that he would give him a candid opinion as to whether the vote was needed or not. On the day of election, Lincoln told the Democrat that he had got the preacher, —and didn't want his vote.¹³ With this power to foretell results, Lincoln was more richly dowered than any modern leader. It was this gift that enabled him to do and speak things that to other men seemed ruinous.

The victory of Polk in its immediate results hardly surprised friend or foe. His election was the signal gun of the Mexican war. Events were rapidly hurried forward under the fostering guidance of the Tyler administration and in its last gasp a messenger was dispatched to Texas to mature the annexation.¹⁴ In weighty words Greeley uttered the protest of the aroused North, declaring that the annexation of Texas challenged the regard of mankind and defied the consciences of our own citizens; that for the first time our Union stood before the nations, not merely as an upholder, but as a zealous, unscrupulous propagandist of human slavery.¹⁵ It required no special genius to provoke martial hostilities and anxiety soon found ammunition to drive even a reluctant opponent to the chance of battle. So Mexico was almost dared into the inevitable combat.

Until this time the nation was little stirred by political

¹³ Lamon, 278.

¹⁴ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 236.

¹⁵ Greeley, 1, 178.

unrest and strife. The battles in Congress that form so vast an asset of the historian, hardly disturbed the daily life of the inventor, farmer, mechanic and student. Lincoln entered the national Legislature at a momentous period. For more than a third of a century, "grim visaged war had smoothed her wrinkled front." The nation was lost in industrial pursuits, the hero of the community was the business man. Patriotism slumbered, national impulses seemed dead. Then the wild passion for war awakened the people from apathy, they rejoiced that the spirit of the fathers was still strong in them, that they had not forgotten Bunker Hill and New Orleans. Commerce for the time forewent its eminence, the soldier stepped to the front. In a moment the standard of the nation shifted from the dollar to the deed. Men did not stop to debate the righteousness of the war or what the end would be. They did not reason as to its effect on the status of slavery. Emotion, not judgment, was their guide. They knew only the pulsation of a subtle and subduing patriotism. Many marched to the front, while others hurried on supplies and ammunition to the seat of trouble. The present alone absorbed their interest, busied every impulse.

Lincoln did not willingly come into conflict with this public sentiment. He, too, was moved by the heroism of the hour, he too saw with pride the flag unfurled and heard the throbbing drum. When Hardin and Baker and Shields hastened from Springfield for the field of glory and danger, he was one of the speakers at the parting public meeting. The Congressman-elect urged a sturdy, vigorous prosecution of hostilities, admonished all to permit no shame to the government and to stand by the flag till peace came with honor.¹⁶ This was not a reluctant politic approbation, as Lamson inti-

¹⁶ Herndon, 1, 260.

mates,¹⁷ but a benediction upon the cause of his country that came deep from the heart.

The attitude of Lincoln toward the annexation of Texas is of importance, not alone for its own intrinsic interest but as illustrating the opinion of thousands of sober, patriotic citizens throughout the land. These had no kinship with the radicals who regarded the conduct of the war, as well as its inception, with bitter hostility; who feared the visitation of Divine Power upon a conflict conceived in aggression. They were not akin to the Democrats who looked neither to the right nor left but marched over cherished principles of the Republic for the sake of extending the territory and enlarging the activity of a sectional institution.

Lincoln entered Congress with no thought of opposition to any phase of the war. Like Grant, he doubtless knew that the man who criticized a war in which his nation is engaged, no matter whether right or wrong, occupies no enviable place in life or history, and that he might better advocate "war, pestilence and famine," than to act as an obstructionist to a war already begun.¹⁸

The President and his advisors would not allow the Whigs to vote alone for supplies. They sought to interpolate resolutions expressing the original justice of the war. Lincoln's interesting commentary on this uncalled for procedure is worth quoting. "Upon these resolutions when they shall be put on their passage I shall be compelled to vote; so that I cannot be silent if I would. Seeing this, I went about preparing myself to give the vote understandingly when it should come. I carefully examined the President's message, to ascertain what he himself had said and proved upon the point. The result of this examination was to make the impression that, taking for true all the President states as

¹⁷ Lamon, 281.

¹⁸ Grant, 45.

facts, he falls far short of proving his justification; and that the President would have gone farther with his proof if it had not been for the small matter that the truth would not permit him. Under the impression thus made I gave the vote before mentioned.”¹⁹

The issue once made, Lincoln and other Whigs did not hesitate; he did not even hide in silence. He took up the challenge of the President that war existed by the act of Mexico. He followed with probing resolutions, with a series of penetrating questions that precluded quibbling. The first one well illustrates the series.

“RESOLVED, By the House of Representatives, that the President of the United States be respectfully requested to inform the House—

“First, whether the spot on which the blood of our citizens was shed, as in his message declared, was or was not within the territory of Spain, at least after the treaty of 1819 until the Mexican revolution.” *

The President never heeded them, nor does it appear that any friend of the administration soberly attempted the sore task of facing their keen, sabre-like stroke. They allowed little room for shifting, and demanded a logical response. Three weeks later, came the speech which was responsive to the desire of his Springfield friends to distinguish himself.²⁰ It was sober and restrained in expression; curbed in statement, concise in logic and comprehensive in treatment. He spoke more like a distinguished jurist than a partisan pleader.

“Now, sir, for the purpose of obtaining the very best evidence as to whether Texas had actually carried her revolution to the place where the hostilities of the present war

¹⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

* *Ibid.*, 97.

commenced, let the President answer the interrogatories I proposed, as before mentioned, or some other similar ones. Let him answer fully, fairly and candidly. Let him answer with facts and not with arguments. Let him remember he sits where Washington sat and so remembering, let him answer as Washington would answer. As a nation should not, and the Almighty will not, be evaded, so let him attempt no evasion—no equivocation. And if, so answering, he can show that the soil was ours where the first blood of the war was shed,—then I am with him for his justification.”²¹ Then a sentence follows, painful and remorseless in its treatment of the vacillating policy of the President stating that his mind, taxed beyond its power, was running hither and thither, like some tortured creature on a burning surface, finding no position on which it could settle down and be at ease.²²

This speech should have won him a high place in the national arena of controversy and debate, were it not that the shifting standard of public judgment often exalts the thing of the hour for intrinsic value, ostentation for merit, popularity for worth. This speech may in itself command the interest of those who would know the motives that led the Whigs to their course of conduct. They did not seek hard duties, but still they would not shirk or retreat when they showed their front.

Lincoln soon learned that his resolutions and speech, however unanswerable, did not save him from the damaging charge of opposition to the war of his country. Dissatisfaction ran through the Whig ranks in Illinois. General discontent with the course of his partner even turned Herndon into one of the malcontents. A letter soon advised Lincoln of the condition, who sent a sturdy reply to the complaint on his vote on Ashmun’s amendment,—“That vote affirms

²¹ Lincoln’s Speeches, 1, 105.

²² *Ibid.*, 107.

that the war was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President; and I will stake my life that if you had been in my place you would have voted just as I did. Would you have voted what you felt and knew to be a lie? I know you would not. Would you have gone out of the House—skulked the vote? I expect not.—You are compelled to speak, and your only alternative is to tell the truth or a lie. I cannot doubt which you would do.”²³

Later Herndon forwarded a constitutional argument in favor of the policy of Polk ingeniously saying that it was the duty of the President as Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy, in the absence of Congress, if the country was about to be invaded, to go, if necessary, into the very heart of Mexico and prevent the invasion; that it would be a crime in the executive to let the country be invaded in the least degree; that the action of the President was a necessity.²⁴

The reply that hurried to Springfield was a supreme answer. No judge of a high tribunal, no statesman of mature experience could have more thoroughly disposed of a specious contention.²⁵ In this letter of Lincoln there appears a might and an ability to grapple with a great issue, a sincerity of purpose, a soberness of thought that well betokens a student and patriot, whose heart was in unison with the inherent purposes of the Republic. He insisted that the imperial function of the Constitution in leaving the declaration of war with Congress was that no one man should hold the power of bringing the oppression of war upon the people.²⁶ Through this letter there looms up the man, who above all men hated kingly power and domination, and the consequent impoverishment of the people. Herndon, the

²³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 110.

²⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 112.

²⁴ Herndon, 1, 266.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Abolitionist, would, for the sake of policy, sanction the inception of an unjust aggression, while the conservative Lincoln stood resolutely when the hour summoned uncompromising conduct; then his knees were as "unwedgeable as the gnarled oak." When principle was at stake he sent policy to the rear. At such times he was more aggressive than the radical.

A letter to the Editor of the *Tribune* shows the deep hold that this subject had on Lincoln, his restlessness to be rightly understood on the theme. And the fact that he undertook to correct Horace Greeley in a familiar tone is an indication that he was coming to the front as a champion in the Whig ranks. He wrote the editor that he discovered a paragraph in the *Tribune* in which it was said that all Whigs and many Democrats contended that the boundary of Texas stopped at the Nueces. He contended that such a statement was a mistake which he disliked to see go uncorrected in a leading Whig paper; that the large majority of Whigs in the House of Representatives had not taken that position and that as the position could not be maintained it gave the Democrats advantage of them. In conclusion Lincoln asked the editor to examine what he said in a printed speech that he was sending him.²⁷

He earnestly wrote to a minister that he would be obliged for a reference to any law, human or divine, in which an authority could be found for saying that the action of the Government constituted "no aggression." He then asked is the precept "'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them' obsolete? of no force? of no application?"²⁸

He was not so elated with patriotism that he lost his standard of righteousness. As he was an honest judge of his own conduct, so he was of that of his country. This rare

²⁷ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 133.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

ability became a force of moment in later years.

During the tumult of the debate on the Mexican war Lincoln wrote in his own rare way that Stephens, of Georgia, a little slim, pale-faced, consumptive man, with a voice like Logan's, had just concluded the very best speech of an hour's length he ever heard; that his old withered dry eyes were full of tears yet.²⁹

His appreciation knew no sectional limits. His range of vision was not bounded by the Mason and Dixon line. He was as much at home with the sons of the South as of the North; he took the same interest in the speech of Stephens of Georgia as he would in that of Webster.

²⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 111.

CHAPTER IX

LINCOLN'S ATTACK ON SLAVERY IN CONGRESS

LINCOLN'S main assignment in congressional committee work was on Post-office and Post-roads. He plodded through the detail duties with industry. There was no more earnest worker in the ranks of Congress. On an important occasion, Lincoln stood by the Democratic Postmaster General, and opposed the policy of the Whig members of the Committee. He worked out a painstaking plan for certain postmasters receiving subscriptions for newspapers and periodicals. He declared it to be in accordance with republican institutions, which could be best sustained by the diffusion of knowledge and the due encouragement of a universal, national spirit of inquiry and discussion of public events through the medium of the public press.¹

Lincoln prepared himself thoroughly in the logic of protection to American industries. He advanced considerably in a serious understanding of its fundamental importance. Not satisfied with old and common contention, he sounded the depths of discussion, by his quaint and original method.

He had intense sympathy for the toiler. He deemed a wise and just distribution of wealth a national duty. He pronounced that rather than production the deeper object of government. "And inasmuch," he said, "as most good things are produced by labor, it follows that all such things of right belong to those whose labor has produced them.

¹Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 113.

But it has so happened, in all ages of the world, that some have labored, and others have without labor enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits. That is wrong, and should not continue. To secure to each laborer the whole product of his labor, or as nearly as possible, is a worthy object of any good government.”²

He was in advance of the thought of his day in insisting that all transportation, commerce, distribution, not essential, was a heavy pensioner upon industry, depriving it of a large proportion of its just fruits. He advocated the remedy of driving useless toil and idleness out of existence. He announced that all work done directly or indirectly in carrying articles to the place of consumption, which could have been produced in sufficient abundance, with as little effort at the place of consumption as at the place they were carried from, was useless labor.³ These fragments show the intellectual power of a growing man of fine sympathies, the sound conviction of a benefactor of his kind.

That Lincoln rapidly adapted himself to the ways of Congress appears from the variety of the subjects he discussed. Few of the new comers were more in evidence. His speech on internal improvements reveal the secret of his power. He sought no name to sanction his opinions, he used his own illustrations and reached his conclusions unaided. He attacked the opinions of those high in power and station. President Polk maintained that the burden of improvements would be general while the benefits would be local, thus involving a pernicious inequality. The reply of Lincoln is a sign of his political wisdom. He argued that inequality was never to be embraced for its own sake; but that if every good thing was to be discarded which might be inseparably connected with some degree of inequality, then all govern-

² Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 92.

³ *Ibid.*, 93.

ment would have to be discarded. The Capitol, he continued, was built at the public expense, but still it was of some peculiar local advantage, and to make sure of all inequality Congress would have to hold its sessions, as the loafer lodged, "in spots about." He added that there were few stronger cases in this world of "burden to the many and benefit to the few," of "inequality," than the Presidency itself; that an honest laborer dug coal at about seventy cents a day, while the President dug abstractions at about Seventy Dollars a day, and the coal was clearly worth more than the abstractions. He declared that the true rule, in determining whether to embrace or reject anything, was not whether it had any evil in it, but whether it had more of evil than of good; that almost everything, especially of government policy, was an inseparable compound of the two; so that the best judgment of the preponderance between them was continually demanded.⁴

A great national party witnessed only the malign consequences of the internal improvement policy. To avoid its abuse, they practically advocated its abatement. Seeing only the danger of extravagance, the Democratic party was not free to contemplate prudent expenditures. Lincoln with his keen sight presented a solution indicative of statesmanship. His plan permitted the States working in a smaller sphere of activity in local improvements to cross paths and to work together in larger national matters under the guidance of sober and restrained general legislation, based on statistical information.

The keen, shrewd instinct of the politician in Lincoln shows through his strenuous advocacy of General Taylor as the Whig candidate for the Presidency. He was in the van in fighting opposition in Illinois to the silent soldier and un-

⁴Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 126.

tried statesman. In April he wrote his friend Washburne to let nothing discourage or baffle him, but, in spite of every difficulty, to send a good Taylor delegate from his circuit, and to make Baker, who was a good hand to raise a breeze, to help about it.⁵ On the same day he admonished another associate in his inimitable manner. "I know our good friend Browning is a great admirer of Mr. Clay, and I therefore fear he is favoring his nomination. If he is, ask him to discard feeling, and try if he can possibly, as a matter of judgment, count the votes necessary to elect him.

"In my judgment we can elect nobody but General Taylor; but we cannot elect him without a nomination. Therefore, don't fail to send a delegate."⁶

His admiration for Clay was subdued in his zeal for political success. He would not do honor to the statesman as an idle tribute so he would put him aside and call to the leadership of the Whig party a man whose strength was largely in the uncertainty of his views, in silence not in known sincerity. He saw its cause could triumph with Taylor; that the extension of the slave power was more likely to come from the northern non-slave-holding Cass than from the southern slave-holding Taylor. To still further confound the jumble, the Whig convention avoided annunciation of distinctive principles, and even dared to vote down an affirmation of the Wilmot Proviso.⁷ After the selection of "Old Rough," with Stephens, Toombs and Preston, he continued an aggressive interest in his candidacy.⁸ He again pleaded with his friends for support from his State.

"By many, and often, it has been said they would not abide the nomination of Taylor; but since the deed has been done, they are fast falling in, and in my opinion we shall

⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 118.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Greeley, 1, 192.

⁸ Tarbell, 1, 216.

have a most overwhelming glorious triumph. One unmistakable sign is that all the odds and ends are with us—Barburners, Native Americans, Tyler men, disappointed office-seeking Locofocos, and the Lord knows what. This is important, if in nothing else, in showing which way the wind blows. Some of the sanguine men have set down all the states as certain for Taylor but Illinois, and it as doubtful. Cannot something be done even in Illinois? Taylor's nomination takes the Locos on the blind side. It turns the war thunder against them. The war is now to them the gallows of Haman, which they built for us, and upon which they are doomed to be hanged themselves.”⁹

According to a peculiar and prevalent method in the House, of spending public money for personal or partisan purposes, Lincoln availed himself of the privilege of making a campaign speech. It has met with varied comment. Lamson freely and soberly passes this judgment. “Few like it have ever been heard in either of those venerable chambers. It is a common remark of those who know nothing of the subject, that Mr. Lincoln was devoid of imagination; but the reader of this speech will entertain a different opinion. It opens to us a mind fertile in images sufficiently rare and striking, but of somewhat questionable taste. It must have been heard in amazement by those gentlemen of the House who had never known a Hanks, or seen a New Salem.”¹⁰

Herndon, twenty years later, pronounced it a masterpiece and declared that one who would read it would lay it down convinced that Lincoln's ascendancy for a quarter of a century among the political spirits in Illinois was by no means an accident, and would not wonder that Douglas, with all his forensic ability, averted, as long as he could, a contest with a man whose plain, analytical reasoning was not less

⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 122.

¹⁰ Lamson, 298.

potent than his mingled drollery and caricature were effective.*

Lincoln entered on the *hard job* of showing that it was sound doctrine for the President to shun defined public opinions and allow Congress its own way without hindrance from the chief executive. The history of the United States has been a vigorous answer to this contention. As President he made short shrift of that policy, though his splendid statement of the Whig position may well attract more than passing attention. He maintained that the Democrats were in favor of laying down in advance a platform as a unit, and then of forcing the people to ratify all of its provisions, however unpalatable some of them might be; that the Whigs were in favor of making Presidential elections, and the legislation of the country distinct matters; so that the people could elect whom they pleased, and afterwards legislate just as they pleased. The difference, he insisted, was as clear as noon day, and that leaving the People's business in their hands was the true Republican position.¹¹

No more dramatic attack during the entire session, arraigning the Democratic candidate was made than in this speech for his attitude on the Wilmot resolution. "In 1846," says Lincoln, "General Cass was for the proviso at once; that in March, 1847, he was still for it, but not just then; and that in December, 1847, he was against it altogether. This is a true index to the whole man. When the question was raised in 1846, he was in a blustering hurry to take ground for it. He sought to be in advance, and to avoid the uninteresting position of a mere follower; but soon he began to see glimpses of the great Democratic ox-goad waving in his face, and to hear indistinctly, a voice saying, "Back! Back, sir! Back a little!" He shakes his head and bats his

* Herndon, 1, 273.

¹¹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 139.

eyes, and blunders back to his position of March, 1847; but still the goad waves, and the voice grows more distinct and sharper still, "Back, sir, Back, I say! Further back!"—and back he goes to the position of December, 1847, at which the goad is still, and the voice soothingly says, "So! Stand at that!" *

That Lincoln had not fully forgotten the form of utterance that angered Darbey and has bothered most biographers since, appears in the following selection: "Like a horde of hungry ticks you have stuck to the tail of the Hermitage lion to the end of his life; and you are still sticking to it, and drawing a loathsome sustenance from it, after he is dead. A fellow once advertised that he had made a discovery by which he could make a new man out of an old one, and have enough of the stuff left to make a little yellow dog. Just such a discovery has General Jackson's popularity been to you. You not only twice made President out of him out of it, but you have had enough of the stuff left to make Presidents of several comparatively small men since; and it is your chief reliance now to make still another." ¹²

At least it may be said that he was not the aggressor or the sole participant in such a "scathing and withering style," ¹³ nor is it at all hard to find like statements and oratory in every period of our history. This is almost the last time that the historian need halt in his comment on the expression of Lincoln. Years of experience brought him to a higher conception of public utterances. When the subject matter bade exalted expression he grew to the occasion with amazing avidity.

This speech revealed Lincoln to Congress. It gained prestige among the fulminations of the session. The *Baltimore*

* Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 143.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹² *Ibid.*, 140.

American named it the "crack speech of the day." It labeled Lincoln as a very able, acute, uncouth, honest, upright man and a tremendous, wag withal.¹⁴

His reputation as a Congressman and orator, begot him the honorable privilege of addressing in September, the same audience in the east that often listened to the triumphant Webster. Only a faint echo of these speeches of the Illinois representative remains.

A representative Boston newspaper reports him as saying that the people of Illinois agreed entirely with the people in Massachusetts on the slavery question, except, that they did not think about it as constantly; that all agreed that slavery was an evil, which could not be affected in the slave states; but that the question of the *extension* of slavery to new territories was under control. In opposition to this extension Lincoln believed that the self-named "Free Soil" party was far behind the Whigs; that the "Free Soil" men in claiming that name, indirectly attempted a deception, by implying that Whigs were not free soil men; that in declaring that they would "do their duty and leave the consequences to God," merely gave an excuse for taking a course they were not able to maintain by fair argument. Making this declaration, he further argued, did not show what their duty was, that if it did there would be no use for judgment; that men might as well be made without intellect, and when divine or human law did not clearly point their duty, they had no means of finding out what it was by using their most intellectual judgment of the consequences, and that if there were divine law or human law for voting for Martin Van Buren, then he would give up the argument.¹⁵

New England testified to its liking for the western advocate of Taylor. The *Boston Advertiser* stated that at the

¹⁴ Tarbell, 1, 217.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2, 297-298.

close of his masterly speech, the audience gave three enthusiastic cheers for Illinois, and three more for the eloquent Whig member from that state.¹⁶ His Boston speech was so effective "that several Whigs who had gone off on the 'Free Soil' fizzle returned again to the Whig ranks."¹⁷

Ida Tarbell contends that at this time Lincoln first experienced the full meaning of the "Free Soil" sentiment, as Massachusetts was then quivering under the impassioned protests of the great Abolitionists, and Sumner was beginning to devote his life to freedom and was speaking often at riotous meetings. Miss Tarbell further maintains Lincoln was sensitive to every shade of popular feeling in New England, and was stirred as never before on the question of slavery; that he heard Seward's speech in Tremont Temple, and that night, as the two men sat talking, said gravely to the great anti-slavery advocate:

"Governor Seward, I have been thinking about what you said in your speech. I reckon you are right. We have got to deal with this slavery question, and got to give much more attention to it hereafter than we have been doing."¹⁸

This evidence does not prove that Lincoln then began to take radical ground on the slavery question. Ten years before in the Illinois Legislature, he made his protest, and later at every opportunity when circumstances favored. His hatred to slavery had long been kindled. He needed little inspiration from the New York orator on New England soil to start his indignation. His statement to Seward shows that he was ready for radical conduct as soon as the event permitted the onslaught. He rejoiced at the growth of the public opinion that betokened the doom of the artificial institution. But he did not need to sit at the feet of eastern teachers. The New England trip was an incident, not an

¹⁶ Tarbell, 2, 299.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, 128.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

epoch in his career.

The second session of this Congress was rather free from turbulence. Lincoln was a silent spectator. He went with his party on the main issues and voted for the Wilmot Proviso "about 42 times."¹⁹ The Northern Democrats in the House returned in a resentful spirit at the support rendered Taylor by eight slave states. They were not backward in supporting legislation to exclude slavery from California and New Mexico.²⁰ The Senate, true to its love of vested interests speedily disposed of the proposal.

During the session a New York representative let loose a resolution with the clanging preamble of a "law rooting out the slave trade in the District of Columbia."²¹ Lincoln was one of three or four northern Whigs who voted to lay this exuberant measure on the table.²²

As the sole Whig representative of his State, coming from a constituency hardly distinguished for its anti-slavery sentiments, while most Whigs even from the New England states were silent; no external duty beckoned him; no powerful organization called him to ride the storm by branding the jealous institution. Selfish ambition whispered prudence and calmed the voice of protest.

But within the very shade of the Capitol, the slave girl was coined into drachmas. He felt the world shame that had come upon the nation by this blot on its professions. The desire to strike another blow grew strong in him. As he tried a decade before in the legislative halls of Illinois, so now in the national assembly, in a very home of slavery, he rang forth his hate of the old injustice. Still he did not give way to an outburst of vengeance; he husbanded his anger; thought only of the consequence, planned with wisdom the

¹⁹ Lamon, 309.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 286.

²⁰ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 283-284.

²² Lamon, 308.

most effective stab at the national disgrace.

The politician walked hand in hand with the patriot. He gathered discordant elements to the support of a common cause calling forth admiration at the unrivalled policy. He consecrated to the high purpose of dedicating the national Capitol to a free citizenship, a devotion and sagacity that made him the peer of any strategist of his day. He conceived and carried out a daring plan of securing the support to his astounding proposal of the Mayor of Washington, a representative of the intelligent slave-holding citizens of that community. With equal skill, he secured the reinforcement of the radical Giddings, who says in his diary that Lincoln's bill to abolish slavery was approved by all; that he believed it as good a bill as we could get at this time, and was willing to pay for slaves in order to save them from the southern market, as he supposed every man in the District would sell his slaves if he saw that slavery was to be abolished.²³ Lincoln held together two such leaders in advocacy of the same measure affecting the sore subject, thus revealing the supreme tactician, who in later years held to the public service a Seward, a Stanton and a Chase in the same cabinet.

He persuaded the slave holder that it was wiser to adopt his measure than in later years confront the danger of more exacting legislation. He convinced the Abolitionists that his law was the best then attainable. His alarming proposition was as innocent in expression as patience and wisdom could make it. It provided for the ultimate emancipation of all slaves born after 1850 and the manumission of existing slaves on full payment to willing owners. After soberly providing for the return of all fugitive slaves the whole plan was made dependent upon the approval of a popular vote.²⁴

The slaveholders were more illiberal than the Abolitionists.

²³ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 286-287.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

They spurned all compromise. They would admit no suggestion that laid bare the injustice of their institution. They knew that when an inroad was once made, its days would be numbered; that compromise was the dawn of the end. They brought all their power into being. The social influences of Washington were called into polite requisition and the Mayor, under this duress, withdrew his sanction.²⁵ The biographers, who knew Lincoln in the days of trial, have given expression to a splendid tribute to his constancy. "Fifteen years afterwards, in the stress and tempest of a terrible war, it was Mr. Lincoln's strange fortune to sign a bill sent him by Congress for the abolition of slavery in Washington; and perhaps the most remarkable thing about the whole transaction was that while we were looking politically upon a new heaven and a new earth,—for the vast change in our moral and economical condition might justify so audacious a phrase,—when there was scarcely a man on the continent who had not greatly shifted his point of view in a dozen years, there was so little change in Mr. Lincoln. The same hatred of slavery, the same sympathy with the slave, the same consideration for the slaveholder as the victim of a system he had inherited, the same sense of divided responsibility between the South and the North, the same desire to effect great reforms with as little individual damage and injury, as little disturbance of social conditions as possible, were equally evident when the raw pioneer signed the protest with Dan Stone of Vandalia, when the mature man moved the resolution of 1849 in the Capitol and when the President gave the sanction of his bold signature of the act which swept away the slave shambles from the City of Washington."²⁶

He warred against slavery not the slave holder. He took

²⁵ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 287-288.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

full account of the conditions leading to the ownership of human property. He realized that it was a legacy of a former age, that it was not a product of present and individual responsibility, that it was a national fault not a private one, that the slave holder was the victim of the system not the cause. So he would not have the change come with a rush lest it might not be abiding. He was willing to wait. Lincoln knew that progress is a slow and labored process and that haste is often the companion of reaction. He would awaken no just and general resentment, a resentment that still lingers in the hearts of men from a war-won emancipation. It would have been well for the North and South had this measure of gradual compensated emancipation have become the settled policy of the nation. The most cankerous conflict of the age might have been spared and the problems resulting therefrom less perplexing. Like a wise surgeon, he dared an early operation rather than delay the necessity of a more drastic remedy. When passion forged to the front as the guide, when North and South had ample occasion to dwell on mutual wrongs, when the Constitution of the Union ceased to be the prevailing measure of the individual and general welfare, the days of peace were being numbered. Lincoln realized that compromise is only available when wisely adapted to opposing forces at the fitting time.

Thus, there stood forth in Congress a man who subdued his passion for the Declaration of Independence and yet who was not willing that the down-trodden should eternally remain in the darkness of vicarious government. He knew that slavery could not always dwell in the seat of government, that the time would come when there would be no human chattel on American soil. Still, Lincoln did not shift to others the whole burden of bringing the day to pass, but

took his stand against the iniquity of human bondage with sublime wisdom. He tempered but did not dull his sense of justice. He struck a second blow at the national evil, a sign that he still was true to his vow at New Orleans and his protest at Vandalia.

Like other legislators, Lincoln was obliged to deal with the issue of handing out offices as party spoil. Trade and industry were still in their infancy and had not yet begun to attract the activity of the aspiring. The highway to general distinction and to honor was largely that of public office. Hence, there ensued, in the words of Lincoln, a "wriggle and struggle for office" and an effort to find "a way to live without work."²⁷

The attitude of Lincoln in days when the Jackson theory was in its full vigor is noteworthy. As the sole Whig representative, beside Colonel Baker, Lincoln asked, in 1849, to be heard on all appointments in Illinois. His remarkable action is seen in the following letter: "Mr. Bond I know to be personally every way worthy of the office; and he is very numerously and most respectably recommended. His papers I send to you; and I solicit for his claims a full and fair consideration. Having said this much, I add that in my individual judgment the appointment of Mr. Thomas would be better. . . . I add that from personal knowledge I consider Mr. Bond every way worthy of the office, and qualified to fill it. Holding the individual opinion that the appointment of a different gentleman would be better, I ask especial attention and consideration for his claim, and for the opinions expressed in his favor by those over whom I can claim no superiority."²⁸ As Congressman he selected a postman of a village with the same precision that he later did a war minister.

²⁷ Herndon, 1, 279.

²⁸ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 151-152.

The activity of Lincoln in securing the nomination and election of Taylor commanded the regard of some leading politicians. They advised his candidacy for the General Land Office. Lincoln was poorly equipped to seek the favor of those dispensing patronage. He was not gifted with assiduity or forwardness so often essential to bearing away the palm. Seldom has a hunter for alluring official service so gently put obstacles in the way of his success. Though it is claimed he was even eager for the prize, he was careful to a nicety, to avoid a false position, while others were bending every effort and using every means at their disposal.

To several friends he wrote the following unique letter: "Some months since I gave my word to secure the appointment to that office of Mr. Cyrus Edwards, if in my power, in a case of a vacancy; and more recently I stipulated with Colonel Baker that if Mr. Edwards and Colonel J. L. D. Morrison could arrange with each other for one of them to withdraw, we would jointly recommend the other. In relation to these pledges, I must not only be chaste, but above suspicion. If the office shall be tendered to me, I must be permitted to say: 'Give it to Mr. Edwards, or if so agreed by them, to Colonel Morrison, and I decline it; if not, I accept.' With this understanding you are at liberty to procure me the offer of the appointment if you can; and I shall feel complimented by your effort, and still more by its success."²⁹

But even his patience gave way when Justin Butterfield, a late opponent of Taylor, was considered for the place. He burst forth with the statement that if anything should be given to the State, it should be so given as to gratify friends, and to stimulate them to future exertions, and that it would mortify him deeply if General Taylor's administra-

²⁹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 153-154.

tion should trample all his wishes in the dust merely to gratify friends of Clay.³⁰

It was not surprising that the laggard procedure of Lincoln lost him this place. Political offices, like opportunity, do not wait long. And so it came to pass that the former opponent of the President was selected in the place of one who was his earnest advocate from the beginning. Though not backward in his claim for an elective office, he was still little inclined to play the servile part in an appointive position. He was willing enough to submit to the democratic judgment of his fellow men when he was given a public opportunity to present his claim, but he timidly shrank from a personal solicitation of a Presidential favor.

His final letter on the history of this affair is rather tinged with another sorrow. Mr. Edwards being offended with him, he wrote that the better part of one's life consisted of his friendships; that at a word he could have had the office any time before the Department was committed to Mr. Butterfield; and that word he forbore to speak chiefly for Mr. Edwards' sake,—losing the office that he might gain it, and that to lose his *friendship*, by the effort for him would oppress him very much, were he not sustained by the utmost consciousness of rectitude.³¹

The selection of Butterfield for the General Land Office did not shake the efforts of the friends of Lincoln to secure recognition of his valiant services in the Whig ranks. He was tendered the governorship of Oregon by Fillmore. The new land held forth enticing political promises, it was soon to become a state and a senatorship was a fair prospect. Close associates advised acceptance. Lamon says that Lincoln saw it all, and would have accepted "if his wife consented," but she refused to do so; and that time has shown

³⁰ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 155.

³¹ Tarbell, 2, 300-301.

that she was right.³² What part Lincoln would have played in history if he had become a senator from Oregon may be interesting but none the less vain speculation. If the Lincoln and Douglas debates had been shifted from the prairies of Illinois to the national arena at Washington, who can say that Lincoln and Douglas might not have become rivals for the Presidency? It has been quite the fashion to assume that the Senate would have been destructive to the future of Lincoln, overlooking the plain fact that the National Assembly was the home of the renown of Douglas and his ladder to the Presidential nomination. Lincoln was not spoiled by the highest office in the land and there is no surety that the senate would have proved the grave of his career.

Two scant years of Congressional life worked a change in the politician from Illinois. He had come in a subdued mood to mingle in national affairs. Shrinkingly, he measured his humble equipment with that of illustrious legislators in Washington. While he left a respectable, but not an eminent record of achievement, he departed with a store of confidence in his worth. His intimate association with northern and southern leaders, his sure, inner knowledge of national legislative methods, his insight into the uncompromising character of the slavery controversy were not wasted in the part he was soon to play in events that would shake the very foundation of the nation.

Still, he returned to Springfield unhonored. In the opinion of his constituency, he made a series of blunders. His attitude on the war lost the district to the Whig party. His "Spot Resolutions" had become a by-word in the community, they were liberally satired in song and story. The political career of Lincoln had seemingly come to an inglorious conclusion.

³² Lamon, 334.

CHAPTER X

THE SCHOOL OF SOLITUDE

UPON his return from Washington, Abraham Lincoln attended to a growing legal practice. He apparently lost his interest in communal matters, having tasted the allurements and bitterness of public service. He had largely outgrown the passion for ordinary official distinction. He was ready to go back to the circuit with its hardships and rudeness. To win renown as a lawyer now seemed his sole ambition.

Still as the compromise measures of 1850 ended another national crisis, he readily renewed his interest in the march of events. A loyal Whig, still, he acceded to the Clay and Webster solution of the perturbed political conditions with some misgiving. He poorly tolerated the burdens added to the yoke of the fugitive slave—the premium placed upon bondage rather than freedom. During this stormy period of general controversy, in his lonely way he settled the main issue. A story told by a close friend is significant of the seriousness of the struggle. As they were coming down a hill, Herndon said to Lincoln that the time was coming when they should all have to be either Abolitionists or Democrats. Lincoln thought a moment and then answered ruefully that when that time came his mind would be made up, for he believed the slavery question could never be successfully compromised.¹

¹ Herndon, 2, 31.

Though zealous for action, for a time, he was in the gloom of despair. Most men were lost in their own affairs. The furtive Abolitionist raised his voice as in a wilderness. The busy world took mean note of the cry of anguished slave. About this time Herndon states that Lincoln was speculating with him about the deadness of things, and deeply regretted that his human strength was limited by his nature to rouse the world, and despairingly exclaimed that it was hard to die and to leave one's country no better than if one had never lived for it.² Here is again communion with the soul whose thoughts were of the despised and the lowly. To Lamon and other men who cannot rise to kinship with him in such an hour, he must forever remain a mystery. It is for this reason that some who were near him seldom comprehended the extensiveness of his sympathy, seldom knew the divinity of his hopes, and his surpassing love of kind.

Lincoln was a stumbling student in the domain of eulogy. His mind scorned fanciful statement. He was no hero worshipper. Washington, alone, remained the shrine of his homage. He mastered indiscriminate devotion to person in his loyalty to principle. For this reason, to many, he seemed impassive and self centered. It is strange that the man so little prone to adulation should, himself, be the recipient of almost universal adoration. So his address in 1852 on the death of Clay shows little of the devotional element. Even in the shadow of the grave of the great Compromiser, there is no chant of an admiring friend—no speech leaping from the heart. Lincoln himself felt its limitations.³ In this address, he called attention to the striking fact that Clay never spoke merely to be heard, that his eloquence was always directed to practical action.

It is only when Lincoln approached the discussion of the

² Lamon, 335.

³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 171.

slavery question that he ceased commonplace commendation. He gave much time to that issue. That he brooded over the solemn statement of the patriots of the Republic is shown in his use of the far-famed utterance of Jefferson: "I had for a long time ceased to read newspapers or to pay any attention to public affairs, confident that they were in good hands and content to be a passenger in our bark to the shore from which I am not distant. But this momentous question, like a fire-bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed, indeed, for a moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated, and every irritation will mark it deeper and deeper." ⁴

He likewise dwelt on the exulting protest of Clay against the enemies of liberty and ultimate emancipation, who would go back to the era of our liberty and independence and muzzle the cannon which thunders its annual joyous return, who would blow out the moral light and penetrate the human soul, and eradicate the light of reason and the love of liberty. ⁵

We learn something of the trend of his thoughts in his discussion of the colonization proposal of Clay that there was a moral fitness in the idea of returning to Africa her children, whose ancestors had been torn from her by the ruthless hand of fraud and violence, who, transplanted in a foreign land, would carry back to their native soil the rich fruits of religion, civilization, law and liberty. Lincoln passes this benediction on the plan: "May it indeed be realized. Pharaoh's country was cursed with plagues, and his

⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 173.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

hosts were lost in the Red Sea, for striving to retain a captive people who had already served them more than four hundred years. May like disasters never befall us! If, as the friends of colonization hope, the present and coming generations of our countrymen shall by any means succeed in freeing our land from the dangerous presence of slavery, and at the same time in restoring a captive people to their long-lost fatherland with bright prospects for the future, and this too so gradually that neither races nor individuals shall have suffered by the change, it will indeed be a glorious consummation.”⁶

Lincoln was seeking no temporary expedient. He saw that abolitionism was only a step in the problem, that beyond freedom was the greater question that still terrifies the Union. Statesmanlike, he was not willing merely to trifle with the casual remedy. Like Clay, he would have put an end to the baffling issue by an operation titanic in contemplation and astounding in sweep. So this eulogy on Clay is largely a discussion of a looming problem of his time, a safe sign that he was awake to the gathering storm.

The campaign of 1852 was colorless. Both parties were arrayed on the side maintaining the sacredness of the Compromise Measures. All slavery agitation was severely deprecated. While the South feared and shunned the triumph of the Whig party, there was still scant surface appearance of a sectional contest. There was little in the issues involved to awaken moral vitality. Lincoln took no glowing part in the electoral contest. Lamon declares that his speeches during the campaign were coarse, strained in humor, petulant, unworthy of the orator, and pervasive with jealousy at the success of his rival—Douglas.⁷

Though Lincoln was sure from the first, of the sin of

⁶ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 176.

⁷ Lamon, 341.

slavery, still, even at this period, he continued in conduct with slow paced movement as if half afraid of being ahead of the sweep of events. Herndon aided in helping him keep abreast with advanced abolition literature, and sought to win him to a championship of the radical school. Like Washington, he marked out his own path. Neither friend nor foe could swerve him, hasten or check his advance. Broad-minded, open to appeal, no man was less influenceable in final judgment. Herndon's weighty statement confirms this distinctiveness of Lincoln's individuality. "I was never conscious of having made this impression on Mr. Lincoln, nor do I believe I ever changed his views. I will go further and say, that, from the profound nature of his conclusions and the labored method by which he arrived at them, no man is entitled to the credit of having either changed or greatly modified them." ⁸

At first, he began in his office in plain speech to comment upon the virulent contest between freedom and slavery, contending that delay was intensifying the ultimate clash, that like two wild beasts in sight of each other, but chained and held apart, the deadly antagonists would some day break their bonds, and then the question would be settled.⁹

He spoke bitterly of the attitude of the judiciary, the men who should have been in the very front of the fight; who seemed more zealous of the right of property than that of personal liberty. He said that it was singular that the Courts would hold that a man never lost his right to his property that has been stolen from him, but that he instantly lost his right to himself if he was stolen.¹⁰ Thus his mind moved faster than public sentiment, and thus he became prepared for decisive action before the culminating Kansas and Nebraska affair threw the North into commotion. He

⁸ Herndon, 2, 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36

seemed the barometer of the national conscience, and though his slow progress appeared painful to the radical yet it was genuine and far more remorseless than immature reform. When the conservative mind of Lincoln was stirred to action, it was a definite sign of progress. He saw that the steady march of slavery was slowly perverting the very principles of democracy, that it was a challenge to the integrity of the republic, that sooner or later it would subvert the government or be subverted by the government.

He noted that there were about six hundred thousand men non-slaveholding whites in Kentucky to about thirty-three thousand slave holders; that when a convention recently assembled, there was not a single representative of the non-slaveholding class. He told a friend that the thing was spreading like wildfire over the country and that in a few years Illinois would be ready to accept the institution. When asked to what he attributed the change that was going on in public opinion, he said that he had put that question to a Kentuckian shortly before, who answered by saying that one might have any amount of land, money or bank-stock, and while travelling around, nobody would be wiser; but, if one had a darky trudging at his heels, everybody would see him, and know that he owned a slave; that if a young man went courting, the only inquiry was, how many negroes he or she owned. He added, that the love for slave property was swallowing up every other mercenary possession; that its ownership betokened, not only the possession of wealth, but indicated the gentleman of leisure, who was above and scorned labor.¹¹

It has been a historical fashion to brand Douglas as the author of all the ills that came in the course of the Kansas-Nebraska agitation. He has suffered more than any other

¹¹ Lamon, 347.

northern leader for participation therein. He did not inaugurate; he reluctantly adopted radical action to maintain his leadership in the Democratic party. The abolitionists were growing more resolute and exacting in their demands, startling the northern conscience. No compromise could still their protests; they would not tolerate constitutional obligations that stood in the way of immediate emancipation. At the South, the slave dynasty was daily growing more restless under the real or assumed danger from northern agitation. New enactments were deemed indispensable, as if legislation could stay the rising tide of sentiment against the return of fugitive slaves. The South was, under the educational tutelage of Calhoun, prepared to demand the right to carry slaves throughout every inch of the national territory without restraint from Congress.

Compromise could delay but not settle such a contest. When moral instincts were aroused on one side and fear on the other, the inevitable clash could not be permanently avoided. Dixon of Kentucky, through his far-reaching statement upon the question of slavery he knew no "Whiggery" and no Democracy,¹² decisively noted the new era in American politics, and showed the desperate chasm that daily grew more divisive, not to be covered over until the blood of a million men was offered up as a sacrifice to the most momentous martyrdom in history. Atchison of Missouri, who declared he would sacrifice everything but his hope of heaven for slavery,¹³ was anxious for the place of Douglas that he might champion the legislation that would secure the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. To gain this position, he would relinquish his distinction as Acting President pro tem of the Senate.

For twenty years, Douglas had fought in the party ranks

¹² Greeley, 1, 229.

¹³ Nicolay & Hay, 1, 346.

until he stood fair to become its leader. He had either to become champion of the new policy, or as he saw it, to sacrifice the work of a lifetime. In the party councils he contested the wisdom of the policy and eloquently portrayed its far-reaching consequences. He loved his country but not all of his kind. Patriot but not humanitarian, he would not peer behind the curtain of a clashing North and South. The nature of the bitter conflict through which Douglas passed before he submitted to the southern policy, appears from his counsel to a young student and friend never to go into politics; that if he did, no matter how clear it might be to him that the present was an inheritance from the past, no matter how conscientiously he might feel that his hands were tied, with loyalty to ancient institutions rather than what he might prefer to do if free to choose, still he would be vilified, traduced, and finally sacrificed to some local interest or unreasoning passion like Adams, Webster and Clay. He continued that he was surprised that the proposal to repeal came from the South and dreaded the effect, and said so; still for nearly twenty years he had fought for a place among the leaders of the party which seemed to him most likely to promote the prosperity of his country, and had won it. . . . If he retained his leadership, he argued that he might help to guide the party aright in some graver crisis, and if he threw it away, he not only destroyed himself, but he became powerless for good forever after.

He then impetuously contended that an individual ought not to oppose his judgment to that of a great party, and besides though surprised at its source, he believed that the repeal would work to the advancement of freedom rather than otherwise, as his vilifiers charged. He finally pleaded that he was politically right in keeping within the pale of the Constitution; and right as to the moral effect, and right

as a party leader anxious to help in keeping his party true to the whole country.¹⁴ Thus Douglas made his way to the sons of the South and became the father of the Nebraska controversy and of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

Douglas had not trained himself in the school of political defeat and hesitated to forego his prestige of leadership. To gain the South, he risked his hold on the North. Had he had the courage to dare, the wisdom to know, the moral heroism to do, he might have become the foremost personality in American politics, honoring instead of shadowing the history of his time. In a solemn moment he took counsel of his fears rather than his integrity, and doubted the triumph of the one cause that has revolutionized history. With all his political sagacity, he lacked the supreme instinct that transcends the shrewdness of the day and links itself to the final triumphing movement.

During the spring and summer of 1854 when the whole North quivered with the hurrying march of events following the Nebraska agitation, and thundered its protests into Washington, Lincoln grew to the demands of the hour with his wonted sureness. He turned over and over the whole issue. He did not halt at the injustice of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, but went beyond its consideration to the problems of the age, of which that act was only a grave symptom.

Now and then in small meetings, he spoke out of the fullness of his feelings. His friends scanned a strange change. Coming to listen to his quaint stories, they returned, exalted by hearing a speaker who raised the controversy above the shifting events of the hour to the broad tableland where right and wrong meet on the field of battle. They beheld a man who lifted the discussion into the pure realms of eternal

¹⁴ Illinois State Historical Society, IV. 49.

justice, above all questions of policy, into the arena of the higher humanity. Prejudices of a lifetime trembled in the balance. Men were baptised with a new political faith. They instinctively turned to the master and yielded, to the power of a personality speaking in the name of immortal righteousness. He was no longer in his former haunts, the tavern or the grocery. He was seen "mousing" around libraries. He was communing with the Fathers of the Republic, seeking wisdom from them.

These five years following his Congressional experience are noteworthy in his life, though scantily known. Now and then a chance remark, the eulogy on Clay, a letter to a friend, reveal a strong man struggling with a giant problem. During all this time, he was thinking out the portentous question that was agitating a tempest. The greatest contests of the world are not fought on the battlefield, in the presence of vast armies, when the drum beats or the bugle calls to action. The sublimest battles in history are waged in the lonely soul. There, the destiny of nations is determined before its formal expression in legislative discussion, judicial decision or national controversy.

The grasping disposition of slavery convinced Lincoln that the encounter was inevitable. Before the formation of the Republican party, he sanctioned the statement that the time was approaching when it would be necessary to take a determined stand either for or against slavery. During this period, he waited and bided his time; all these years he saw with joy, clouded with occasional despair, the day approaching when another blow could be struck for freedom, for the principles of the fathers and for the spreading of democratic influence. These were splendid years of preparation.

CHAPTER XI

AN EMANCIPATED POLITICIAN

THE indignation that rushed through Illinois when the first news from the Capitol forecast the repeal of the Missouri Compromise had not yet abated, when Douglas dauntlessly sought to explain his course of conduct in Chicago. He was howled down and denied liberty of speech. This naturally brought on a reaction. The contention that the distinguished senator had been struck before being heard, added martyrdom to his bold conduct.

As he wandered down the State closer to the home of ardent democracy, he was met with growing enthusiasm. His ingenious sophistry turned popular sovereignty into a seeming contest for a principle and Illinois was being carried away by his triumphant oratory and logic. There is little wonder that the man who breasted the storm of debate in the Senate should make headway in the land of his friends where office holders and supporters gloried in his fame and were elated when he chanted forth his alluring doctrine as a solution to political conditions.

His main effort was made at the State Fair in October, 1854, an occasion that called together the intelligence of Illinois in days when few occasions permitted the satisfaction of social life. Enhancing its importance, this political gathering was to mark the opening of the campaign to determine the selection of a Senator. The speech of Douglas was to be almost a national event. Upon him the hopes of the

State democracy centered in the conditions following the late political tempest. Douglas was equal to the occasion and his friends rejoiced.

Lincoln had made such a profound impression at the time among the Whig orators, that he was chosen to bear the brunt of the reply to the "State Fair Speech" of the wily leader of the Democratic party. Lincoln surpassed every expectation. Neither side was prepared for the terrible onslaught. A new and dauntless advocate appeared giving power to the gathering protesting elements against the aggressive championship of Douglas. Herndon, himself, was thoroughly amazed, and tells us that the speaker quivered with emotion, that he felt upon his soul the truths burn which he uttered, that crushing with his logic the Nebraska bill he rent it into shreds and held it up to the scorn and the mockery of the crowds, that he took the heart captive and broke like a sun over the understanding.¹ In his reply Douglas was excited, and his voice loud and shrill. Lamon relates that shaking his forefinger at the democratic malcontents, and declaiming rather than debating, he occupied to little purpose the brief interval remaining until the adjournment for supper; that then, promising to resume his address in the evening, he went his way, and evening came but not the orator.²

While Lincoln was moving in the moral realm, still, at this very time, note must be taken of the politician in the valley. The enthusiasm that followed his baptismal oration had not calmed when Lovejoy announced a gathering that evening of the friends of freedom. The Nebraska movement fed the Abolitionists with abounding faith in a speedy triumph. With a rising sense of their strength, fairly "snuffing" the coming victory they looked for, Lovejoy and

¹ Herndon, 2, 37-8.

² Lamon, 349-350.

his associates hastened to command Lincoln's attendance at their meeting. Herndon vividly describes the occasion, saying that their plan was to induce Lincoln to speak for them, yet he doubted the propriety of Lincoln's taking any stand yet. Lincoln was ambitious to climb to the United States Senate, and on grounds of policy it would not do for him to occupy at that time such advance ground as they were taking. On the other hand, it was equally dangerous to refuse a speech for the Abolitionists. Herndon then hunted up Lincoln and urged him to avoid meeting the enthusiastic champion of Abolitionism. "Go home at once," he said. "Take Bob with you and drive somewhere into the country and stay till this thing is over." Lincoln under the pretense of having business in Tazewell County drove out of town in his buggy, and did not return until the apostles of Abolitionism had gone to their homes. Herndon believes that this arrangement saved Lincoln, for if he had endorsed the resolutions passed at the meeting, or spoken simply in favor of freedom that night, he would have been identified with all the rancor and extremes of Abolitionism, and if, on the contrary, he refused to take a position as advanced as theirs, he would have lost their support.³

Another incident told by the same writer makes it necessary ever to keep track of Lincoln, the wary politician: "One day I read in the *Richmond Enquirer* an article endorsing slavery, and arguing that from principle the enslavement of either whites or blacks was justifiable and right. I showed it to Lincoln, who remarked that it was 'rather rank doctrine for northern Democrats to endorse. I should like to see,' he said, with emphasis 'some of these Illinois newspapers champion that.' I told him if he would only wait and keep his own counsel I would have a pro-slavery organ in

³ Herndon, 2, 40-41.

Springfield publish that very article. He doubted it, but when I told him how it was to be done, he laughed and said, 'Go in.' I cut the slip out and succeeded in getting it in the paper named. Of course it was a trick but it acted admirably. Its appearance in the new organ, although without comment, almost ruined that valuable journal, and my good natured friend the editor was nearly overcome by the denunciation of those who were responsible for the organ's existence. My connection and Lincoln's too,—for he endorsed the trick,—with the publication of the condemned article was eventually discovered, and we were thereafter effectually prevented from getting another line in the paper. The anti-slavery people quoted the article as having been endorsed by a democratic newspaper in Springfield and Lincoln himself used it with telling effect. He joined in the popular denunciation, expressing great astonishment that such a sentiment could find lodgment in any paper in Illinois, although he knew full well how the whole thing had been carried through."⁴

Lincoln was alive to the best methods of persuasion. He knew that men were the children of emotion and that while many would be calloused to the slavery of the black man, nothing would arouse the North quicker than this doctrine of the bondage of the white man. While slavery was making every effort to fasten its fangs on the nation, Lincoln was not averse to take advantage of a shrewd move to strike heavy blows at the potent institution.

He entered deeply into the contest. Lincoln knew that it involved the painful rending of party allegiance. His letter to Palmer sheds light on the intensity of the struggle, the heroism of the democratic minority whose loyalty to country and righteousness surpassed a deep-seated partisan-

⁴ Herndon, 2, 39-40.

ship: "You are," he said, "and always have been, honestly and sincerely a Democrat; and I know how painful it must be to an honest sincere man to be urged by his party to the support of a measure, which in his conscience he believes to be wrong. You have had a severe struggle with yourself, and you have determined not to swallow the wrong. Is it just to yourself that you should, in a few public speeches, state your reasons, and thus justify yourself? I wish you could; and yet I say, 'Don't do it if you think it will injure you.'"⁵

Lincoln recognized that political progress is not alone the result of intellectual supremacy; that it is a painful struggle; that policy must be mingled with principle; that the world does not welcome the unadulterated gospel; that through the centuries, humanity has groped its way to the far light with eyes blinded by the superstition of ages and selfishness.

The moral prophet is seldom the political leader of his time. He stands above his age. The politician is part of it. One sees things as they should be, the other as they are. One is splendidly indifferent to results, the other keenly appreciative of them. Lincoln made no false step. Had he walked too fast for his day he might have been the Garrison of the West, but not the party guide. With sure instinct he felt that the time was not ripe for companionship with the Abolitionists. Illinois was not ready. If he was to continue his hold on public sentiment, to guide it, he could not flash the truth before the gaze of humanity. Despite the suffering of martyrs, the heroism of statesmen, the sacrifices of seekers of the truth, wrong was still "upon the throne," and "truth upon the scaffold," the world was not slow in crucifying its heroes of speech and deed. Lincoln recognized the weaknesses of men, the shortcomings of human nature, the superstition of centuries. He was content with

⁵ Tarbell, 1, 275.

slow progress, uncowed by disappointment, and realized that the grumbling world emancipated its heart and mind slowly.

Under the spell of the State Fair speech, Whig leaders earnestly besought Lincoln to follow Douglas up until election.⁶ So again at Peoria, Lincoln broke forth in impassioned utterances that took captive the judgment. His logic throbbed with passion for freedom, for liberty and emancipation. He lifted his hearers above the jangling of everyday life, above the mists of hate, of jealousy, of selfishness, into a region of the brotherhood of man. Unlike his speech at Springfield, this was written out. It demonstrates that his supremacy among the eminent leaders of Illinois was not a matter of the choice of the hour.

With marvelous power of directness, he plotted out the line of discussion. He made much of the fact that the Fathers of the Republic regarded slavery as an evil worthy of restriction and looked forward to the day of its ultimate abolition, saying that as the subject was no other than part of the larger question of domestic slavery, he wished to make the distinction between the existing institution and the extension of it so clear that no honest man could misunderstand him, and no dishonest man could successfully misrepresent him.⁷

With telling effect he quoted the words of Douglas himself as to the sincere observance of the Missouri Compromise that put a barrier in the way of the progress of slavery: "It had its origin," said Douglas, "in the hearts of all patriotic men, who desired to preserve and perpetuate the blessings of our glorious Union—an origin akin to that of the Constitution of the United States, conceived in the same spirit of fraternal affection, and calculated to remove forever the only danger which seemed to threaten, at some distant day,

⁶ Lamon, 354.

⁷ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 181.

to sever the social bond of Union. All the evidences of public opinion of that day seemed to indicate that this Compromise had been canonized in the hearts of the American people, as a sacred thing which no ruthless hand would ever be reckless enough to disturb.”⁸ His comment on this unanswerable statement of Douglas is significant of the nature of Lincoln’s peculiar fairness and consequent strength. Lincoln said that he did not read the extract to involve Judge Douglas in an inconsistency, for if he afterward thought he was wrong, it was right for him to change, but he brought it forward merely to show the high estimate placed on the Missouri Compromise by all parties up to so late as the year 1849.⁹

In the North and South passion had unloosed its tongue and crimination and recrimination were daily becoming steady servants in debate and discussion on the slavery question. With it all, Lincoln calmly sat in judgment.

“Before proceeding let me say that I think I have no prejudices against the Southern people. They are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist between them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist among us, we should not instantly give it up. This I believe of the masses North and South. . . . When Southern people tell us they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery than we are, I acknowledge the fact. When it is said that the institution exists, and that it is very difficult to get rid of it in any satisfactory way, I can understand and appreciate the same. I surely will not blame them for not doing what I should not know how to do myself. If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, to their own na-

⁸ Lincoln’s Speeches, 1, 184.

⁹ *Ibid.*

tive land. But a moment's reflection would convince me that whatever of high hope (as I think there is) there may be in this in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible—what then? Free them all, and keep them among us as underlings? Is it quite certain that this betters their condition? I think I would not hold one in slavery at any rate, yet the point is not clear enough for me to denounce people upon. What next? Free them and make them politically and socially our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this, and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of whites will not. Whether this feeling accords with justice and sound judgment is not the sole question, if indeed it is any part of it. A universal feeling, whether well or ill founded, cannot be safely disregarded. We cannot make them equals. It does seem to me that systems of gradual emancipation might be adopted, but for their tardiness in this I will not undertake to judge our brethren of the South.

“When they remind us of their constitutional rights, I acknowledge them—not grudgingly, but fully and fairly; and I would give them any legislation for the reclaiming of their fugitives which should not in its stringency be more likely to carry a free man into slavery than our ordinary criminal laws are to hang an innocent one.

“But all this, to my judgment, furnishes no more excuse for permitting slavery to go into our free territory than it would for reviving the African slave-trade by law. The law which forbids the bringing of slaves from Africa, and that which has so long forbidden the taking of them into Nebraska, can hardly be distinguished on any moral principle, and the repeal of the former could find quite as plausible excuses as that of the latter.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 186-187.

In the domain of literature on the slavery question there is no statement that surpasses this in charity, sanity and wisdom. With his overflowing hatred to slavery, he still kept justice as his guide and was slow to blame the South for the long standing sin. In this he towers above the Abolitionists who put upon the slave holders the burdens of a past as well as a present wrong. Yet unlike the politician he did not lose his ideal and become palsied and apologetic. He saw the need of keeping alive the principles of the Republic. Hastening the coming of the better humanity, with patience for human shortcoming, with zeal for the triumph of emancipation, he continued in his peculiar, lonely and potent way the advocacy of justice to God's dusky children.

In the Senate Douglas with triumphant eloquence charged Seward and Sumner and the North with having repudiated the Missouri Compromise through the Wilmot Proviso and the measures of 1850. Anti-slavery leaders in the Senate were confounded by this sudden charge and grandiloquent accusation. Lincoln took up the challenge and met the arrogant claim of Douglas without flinching. His analysis exposed the glittering sophistry of the man who enraptured the Northern statesmen in the solemn Senate. He not only held his ground in the face of the brilliant strategy of his opponent, but even carried the war into the camp of the foe.

He argued that the contention of Douglas that the North repudiated the Missouri Compromise was no less absurd than it would be to argue that because they had so far forbore to acquire Cuba, they would have thereby, in principle, repudiated former acquisitions and determined to throw them out of the Union; that it was no less absurd than it would be to say that because he may have refused to build an addition to his house, he thereby decided to destroy the existing house.

This speech abounds in plain, hard English, travelling direct to the intellect on a straight line. No labored argument could be half as sure of a welcome to the human mind as his graphic exposal of the injustice of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise: "After an angry and dangerous controversy, the parties made friends by dividing the bone of contention. The one party first appropriates its own share, beyond all power to be disturbed in the possession of it, and then seizes the share of the other party. It is as if two starving men had divided their own loaf; the one had hastily swallowed his half, and then grabbed the other's half just as he was putting it to his mouth."¹¹

In nothing did Douglas show greater genius than in hallowing his doctrine of popular sovereignty. The leaders in Congress feared openly to fight his vaunted "sacred right of self government," they were not sure of their ground. Lincoln with confidence, born of lonely struggle, rushed on the angry battlefield to run the gantlet of debate on the conquering doctrine of popular sovereignty: "When the white man," he said, "governs himself, that is self-government, but when he governs himself and also governs another man, that is more than self government—that is despotism. If the negro is a man, why then my ancient faith teaches me that 'all men are created equal,' and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man's making a slave of another.

"Judge Douglas frequently, with bitter irony and sarcasm, paraphrases our argument by saying: 'The white people of Nebraska are good enough to govern themselves, but they are not good enough to govern a few miserable negroes!' Well! I doubt not that the people of Nebraska are and will continue to be as good as the average of people elsewhere.

¹¹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 192.

I do not say the contrary. What I do say is that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent." ¹² In a single weighty phrase he crushed the elaborate argument of the Senator of Illinois and left its fair form so that only a shattered frame remains.

At times he spoke like a seer lifted above the petty prejudices of the time. He declared that the spirit of mutual concession—that first wrought the Constitution, and thrice saved the Union—and that trust in a national compromise, would thus be strangled; that the South flushed with triumph would provoke and aggress, and the North, brooding on wrong, would resent and retaliate. He alleged that already a few in the North defied all constitutional restraint, and even menaced the institution of slavery in the southern States; that already a few in the South claimed the constitutional right to hold slaves in the free States and demanded the revival of the slave trade. That it was a grave question for lovers of the Union whether the final destruction of the Missouri Compromise, and with it the spirit of all compromise, would not fatally increase the number of both. ¹³

His sanity enabled him to guide the erring and confounded in the days of doubt. "Some men," he said, "mostly Whigs, who condemn the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, nevertheless hesitate to go for its restoration, lest they be thrown in company with the Abolitionists. Will they allow me, as an old Whig, to tell them, good humoredly, that I think this is very silly? Stand with anybody that stands right. Stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong. Stand with the Abolitionists in restoring the Missouri Compromise, and stand against him when he attempts to repeal the fugitive slave law. In the latter case you stand with the Southern disunionist. What of that?"

¹² Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 195.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 201.

You are still right. In both cases you are right. In both cases you expose the dangerous extremes. In both you stand on middle ground, and hold the ship level and steady.”¹⁴

Above all, this speech will live for its moral intensity, hatred of injustice and hunger for righteousness. Throughout this long appeal and uniting its links of logic is an overpowering and pervasive sentiment of the highest humanity. Now and then an outburst against oppression comes forth resistlessly, yet in the company of a sober expression, logical intensity and a broad outlook peculiar to him. These rival the most impassioned utterances of Phillips and Garrison. Like O’Connell, he sent his voice “careering like the thunderstorm against the breeze, to tell the slaveholders of the Carolinas that God’s thunderbolts are hot, and to remind the bondman that the dawn of his redemption is already breaking.”¹⁵

With elation he passed from the sordidness and the turmoil of the courtroom and daily pettiness of common political controversy to the championship of an all-mastering principle. He fed the “parched souls of men with celestial anodyne,” with visions of a new and nobler era of humanity. He made the humblest voter a public participant in the high service of ridding the nation of the shame of slavery. He was educating American democracy to practice the principles of the Declaration of Independence, restoring to life seemingly dead doctrines of the fathers. Better than a course in ethics was the uplift of his utterances, the call to higher attitudes.

He declared his hate in ringing words, of the indifference to, if not covert zeal for, the spread of slavery, of depriving the Republic of its just influence in the world, of enabling the enemies of Democracy to engage in the taunt of hypoc-

¹⁴ Lincoln’s Speeches, 1, 202.

¹⁵ Martyn’s Wendell Phillips, 136.

ris, of forcing so many men into open war with the fundamental principles of civil liberty, criticising the Declaration of Independence and insisting that there was no right principle but self interest.¹⁶

In measured language befitting his solemn theme, Lincoln continued his prophetic condemnation of slavery, charging that, steadily as man's march to the grave, the people were giving up the old for the new faith; that they had run down from the declaration that all men were created equal to the declaration that the enslavement of some was a sacred right of self government. He dwelt upon the statement of Pettit that the Declaration of Independence was a "self evident lie" and said that Pettit did what candor required, and that of forty-odd Nebraska senators who listened, no one rebuked him; and asked if that had been said among Marion's men, Southerners though they were, what would have become of the man that said it? He added that if it had been said in old Independence Hall seventy-eight years before, the very doorkeeper would have throttled the man and thrust him into the street.¹⁷

The day after the Peoria speech, Douglas told Lincoln that he understood the Territorial question better than all the opposition in the Senate, and declared that Lincoln had given him more trouble than his combined antagonists in Congress. Then Douglas proposed that he would speak no more during the campaign if Lincoln would do the same, and to that proposition Lincoln acceded.¹⁸ So though a speech by Douglas and Lincoln had been advertised for the following day, Mr. Douglas said that he was too hoarse to speak, and Lincoln declared that he would not take advantage of the judge's indisposition, by addressing the people.

¹⁶ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 186.

¹⁸ Lamon, 358.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

His friends could not see the affair in the same light, and they "pressed him for a speech," but Lincoln mysteriously and unaccountably refused.¹⁹

Wisely did shrewd Douglas, the imperial leader in debate, appeal to the generosity of his opponent to conclude further controversy. Douglas was an over-match for all of the radical Abolitionists, the men who spoke of the higher law, who made war on the charter of American liberties. His better nature rejoiced in such conflicts. But his genius was rebuked in the presence of the plain product of the West, the man who neither relinquished his confidence in the Constitution nor yet in the ultimate triumph of the freedom that first gave it its being. Douglas could wage triumphant war on a Lovejoy and Chase, but the common logic and simple honesty of Lincoln disconcerted him. The elaborate oratory of the Senate never confused the Senator of Illinois. For the first time in his career the national leader was worried and perplexed. He was neither used to nor prepared for the combination of talent that could not be diverted from its way, that met every movement with a baffling complacency. There was something unanswerable in Lincoln's manner and mode of discussion. Douglas could fight other men at a distance, but this opponent made it a hand-to-hand grapple. At length a man had arisen in the American arena as skillful in defense of freedom as other men were in that of slavery. An orator had come who combined the solidity of Webster, the moral fervor of Phillips, and the logic of Calhoun; who mingled justice, patriotism and argument so as to astonish the foremost figure in Washington. It was no idle sentiment that brought Douglas to tender his rival the high tribute of a truce.

The Peoria and State Fair speeches created a supreme

¹⁹ Lamon, 359.

place for Lincoln in the anti-slavery movement. He was looked to as likely to gather great strength in the transitional period of party dissolution. A dominating passion for place again took hold of him. He declared he prized a full term in the Senate more than the Presidency. To advance local political conditions Lincoln was unwisely made a candidate, in his absence, for the State Legislature that would soon elect a Senator. Mrs. Lincoln, however, had Lincoln's name taken off the list of candidates. When Mr. Lincoln returned, "I went to see him," says Jayne, "in order to get his consent to run. That was at his house. He was then the saddest man I ever saw,—the gloomiest. He walked up and down the floor, almost crying; and to all my persuasions to let his name stand in the paper, he said, 'No, I can't. You don't know all. I say you don't begin to know one-half, and that's enough!' I did, however, go and have his name reinstated." After election Lincoln resigned and by a "still hunt" a Democrat was elected in his stead. The interference of Mrs. Lincoln, the loss of a vote in the approaching close contest, according to Jayne, angered the people of Sangamon County so that for the time being they hated him.*

Lincoln managed his senatorial campaign with adroitness. Herndon shows that Lincoln did not calmly sit down and gather his robes around him, waiting for the people to call him. The vicissitudes of a political campaign brought into play his management, and developed to its fullest extent his latent industry. Like other politicians he never overlooked a newspaper man who had it in his power to say a good or bad thing of him. Writing to the editor of an obscure little country newspaper that he had been reading his paper for three or four years and had paid him nothing for it, he

* Lamon, 359-360.

enclosed \$10.00 and admonished the editor with complacency to put it into his pocket and say nothing further about it. Very soon thereafter Lincoln prepared a political article and sent it to the rural journalist, requesting its publication in the editorial columns of his valued paper. The latter, having followed Lincoln's directions, declined saying that he long ago made it a rule to publish nothing as editorial matter not written by himself. Lincoln read the editor's answer to Herndon, who remarks that although the laugh was on Lincoln the latter enjoyed the joke heartily, and said that that editor had a lofty but proper conception of true journalism.²⁰

His correspondence shows that he was in constant contact with the ever shifting events of the campaign; that he was on the lookout for dangerous symptoms; that he was careful to nicety to measure his strength soberly, and displayed the same splendid generalship that distinguished him in his Congressional canvass. The history of his effort to gain a seat in the Senate may be well trailed in his own letters. A curt and crisp note advised his friends of his intention. The following is a sample of many: "You used to express a good deal of partiality for me, and if you are still so, now is the time. Some friends here are really for me, for the U. S. Senate, and I should be very grateful if you could make a mark for me among your members. Please write to me at all events giving me the name, postoffices and 'political position' of members around about you."²¹

Lovejoy had only some twenty-five adherents at the convention following the "State Fair speech" of Lincoln. Nothing daunted by the paltry attendance, they adopted a bold platform. "Ichabod raved," said the Democratic organ in derision, "and Lovejoy swelled, and all endorsed the senti-

²⁰ Herndon, 2, 44-45.

²¹ Tarbell, 2, 305.

ments of that speech." Not content with this, without consent or consultation, they placed Lincoln's name on the list of their State Central Committee.²² Lincoln's reply shows that he was not unwilling to confer with the abolition leaders and that he deemed it well to keep the way open to an understanding. "I suppose my opposition to the principle of slavery is as strong as that of any member of the Republican party; but I have also supposed that the extent to which I feel authorized to carry that opposition, practically, was not at all satisfactory to that party. The leading men who organized that party were present on the fourth of October at the discussion between Douglas and myself at Springfield, and had full opportunity to not misunderstand my position. Do I misunderstand them? Please write and inform me."²³

Like other candidates for public office he was subjected to all manner of hostility and opposition. He was not spared the humility of defending his most cherished integrity. Lincoln was not a common egoist and he sparingly bared his view. He was little trained in the easy language of self-praise. Yet once across the bar he displayed rare skill in the presentation of his position.

"For a senator to be the impartial representative of his whole State is so plain a duty that I pledge myself to the observance of it without hesitation, but not without some mortification that any one should suspect me of an inclination to the contrary. I was eight years a representative of Sangamon County in the legislature; and although in a conflict of interest between that and other counties it perhaps would have been my duty to stick to old Sangamon, yet it is not within my recollection that the northern members ever wanted my vote for any interests of theirs without getting

²² Nicolay & Hay, 1, 386.

²³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 210.

it." ²⁴

Self interest in the campaign did not once lead him astray in partial judgment of the course of events. Early in January he informed Washburne that he did not know that it was of much advantage to have the largest number of votes at the start; that if he did know it to be an advantage, he should feel better, for he had more committals than any other man.²⁵ He remained a master in the study of the attitude of the individual voter and delegate. He not only had the enthusiasm of the orator, but also the keen, calm sense of the politician, knowing that battles are largely won by strategy and plan. He did not leave the decision to chance. He studied the way to reach men, the method of attaching and calling friends. He was methodical rather than brilliant.

His last letter dealing with the event opens with the statement that the agony was over at last. He then unfolded the story of his defeat, how his forty-seven adherents yielded to the five of Trumbull, how Governor Matteson by a secret candidacy gathered some anti-Nebraska men to his support; how five of the latter declared they would never vote for a Whig and twenty Whigs resentfully contended that they would not vote for the man of the five. He then stated that the signal was given to the Nebraska men to turn to Matteson on the seventh ballot; that soon he only wanted three of an election; that to detain the bolters Lincoln's friends turned to Trumbull until he had risen to thirty-five and he, Lincoln, had been reduced to fifteen; that they would never desert him except by direction; that he then determined to strike at once and accordingly advised the fifteen to go for Trumbull and thus elected him on the tenth ballot.

"Such is the way," said Lincoln, "the thing was done. I think you would have done the same under the circumstances;

²⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 212.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

though Judge Davis, who came down this morning, declares he never would have consented to the forty-seven being controlled by the five. I regret my defeat moderately, but I am not nervous about it. I could have headed off every combination and been elected, had it not been for Matteson's double game—and his defeat now gives me more pleasure than my own gives me pain. On the whole, it is perhaps as well for our general cause that Trumbull is elected. The Nebraska men confess that they hate it worse than anything that could have happened. It is a great consolation to see them worse whipped than I am.”²⁶

Here a composite Lincoln confronts the student—a politician much concerned over defeat and getting pleasure out of the failure of an unfair opponent. Yet at the same time another Lincoln reveals himself. Determined to run no risk in the cause of freedom he yielded cherished hopes and gave way to an obstinate minority. He would not allow his own fortune to stand in the way of striking a blow at the slave power. Lincoln emancipated himself from selfish egoism, rising in the hour of disappointment to the calmness of duty.

²⁶ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 213-215.

CHAPTER XII

THE PILOT OF THE NEW FAITH IN ILLINOIS

ABOLITIONISM as a gospel showed rather paltry results for thirty years of unceasing labor. Still its essential dogma, hatred to human bondage, slowly but steadily held a larger place in the public thought. Mistakes of the South and its Northern friends hurried on a crisis. The Kansas controversy made the issue of a remorseless conflict, clearer by a concrete example of the incompatibility of freedom and slavery. The nation was thus educated for aggressive action on the long mooted question. The time was becoming ripe for the translation of public sentiment into party platform, statute and decision. The Abolitionist with relentless gospel even of war on the Constitution was altogether too radical for the general mind. The slowly dying Whig party had not kept pace with the advanced public thought, it was too conservative. The democratic party kept on its path either of indifference to the slavery issue or ardent support of the southern view and was the refuge of those who were dead to the sweep of events. Hence the necessity of a new party, with a platform that should sturdily proclaim resistance to the spread of slavery in the territories; that should register a rising spirit in the North, growing restless and sensitive as it contemplated the increasing demands of the Southern institutions, as it grasped the significance of the issue involving the continued existence in their primal integrity of cherished principles of the Re-

public, a grappling for political supremacy of the free labor of the North and the slave power of the South. Mingled with the essential spirit of justice pervading Abolitionism was the growth of the opinion that slavery was a social and political evil. The public wrath at the repeal of a venerated Compromise, the increasing discontent at the violent manifestations of the friends of slavery in Kansas, prepared the public for the formation of a radical party.

Lincoln being a man of power, was beset by three parties. He was urged to remain a Whig by the conservatives, to become a Know-nothing by those drifting on the political waters. Others sought to baptise him in the spirit of Abolitionism. Lincoln had long since made his resolution to array himself on the side of freedom. He was awaiting the right moment. He saw the time for leadership was coming, that events were rapidly sweeping forward to a climax. In the perturbed political condition he was anxious not to go ahead of events and still not play the laggard. Among all politicians in American history he was the wisest student of the public mind.

With true vision, Lincoln foreshadowed the solemn consequences of the Kansas struggle. He asked if there could be a more apt invention to bring about collision and violence on the slavery question than the "Nebraska project," and whether "the first drop of blood so shed would not be the real knell of the Union."¹⁻² Behind the fair form of the Douglas doctrine of popular sovereignty, he saw the lurking serpent. He was not deceived by fine, smooth words. In the beginning, he beheld the gaping wounds of Kansas, the hypocrisy of the policy professing the name of peace and bringing in its train the devildom of discord, the curse of a broken, plighted compact. A letter to his friend Speed in 1855

¹ ² Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 200.

illuminates the whole subject, and is a contribution to the political history of the time—unsurpassed in statement, in clearness of understanding, in subdued calmness of judgment:

“You know I dislike slavery, and you fully admit the abstract wrong of it. So far there is no cause of difference. But you say that sooner than yield your legal right to the slave, especially at the bidding of those who are not themselves interested, you would see the Union dissolved. I am not aware than any one is bidding you yield that right; very certainly I am not. I leave that matter entirely to yourself. I also acknowledge your rights and my obligations under the Constitution in regard to your slaves. I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down and caught and carried back to their stripes and unrequited toil; but I bite my lips and keep quiet. . . . It is not fair for you to assume that I have no interest in a thing which has, and continually exercises, the power of making me miserable. You ought rather to appreciate how much the great body of the Northern people do crucify their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the Constitution and the Union.”³

He then bared with remorseless logic the common southern attitude: “You say, if you were President, you would send an army and hang the leaders of the Missouri outrages among the Kansas elections; still, if Kansas fairly votes herself a slave State she must be admitted or the Union must be dissolved. But how if she votes herself a slave State unfairly, that is, by the very means for which you say you would hang men? Must she still be admitted, or the Union dissolved? That will be the phase of the question when it first becomes a practicable one.”⁴

The same letter shows he was aware of the potency of the

³ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 217.

⁴ *Ibid.*

partisan lash, was an observer of the methods of securing results, of the cowardice and timidity of leaders where political policy appeared on the horizon. He confessed that in their opposition to the admission of Kansas, they would probably be beaten; that the Democrats standing as a unit among themselves, could, directly or indirectly, bribe enough men to carry the day as they could on the open proposition to establish a monarchy; that by getting hold of some man in the North whose position and ability was such that he could make the support of the measure, whatever it might be, a party necessity, the thing would be done.⁵

Then came a biting comment on the pretenses and practices of those who were spreading the national disease, of those who had one doctrine in public and another in private, who worshipped the God of Liberty with speech and Mammon with their deeds. In the same letter Lincoln said that although in a private letter or conversation the slaveholders would express their preference that Kansas should be free, they would not vote for a man for Congress who would say the same thing publicly and no such man could be elected from any district in a slave State; that slave-breeders and slave-traders were a small, detested class among them; and yet in politics they dictated the course of the Southerners, and were as completely their masters as they were the master of their own negroes.⁶

A vivid picture of party uncertainty is seen in his answer to the inquiry of Speed as to where he then stood. "I think I am a Whig; but others say there are no Whigs, and say that I am an Abolitionist. When I was at Washington, I voted for the Wilmot proviso as good as forty times; and I never heard of any one attempting to unwhig me for that. I now do no more than oppose the extension of slavery. I

⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 217-218.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

am not a Know-nothing; that is certain. How could I be? How could any one who abhors the oppression of negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it, 'all men are created equal except negroes.' When the Know-nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal, except negroes and foreigners and Catholics.' When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty,—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy."⁷

To him "Know-nothingism" transcended all questions of policy, denied the very mission of Democracy, turned back the hour hand of political progress and was traitor and recreant to its teachings. He was not sure of his standing in the transitional period of party dissolution and showed something in his mental attitude of the spirit of unrest abroad in the nation and hardly knew whither the trend of events would carry the American people. Cautious in moving forward on matters involving method, he was unwedgeable when the principles of the Republic were at stake. His note of scorn rings clear and loud to these who, in selfishness and bigotry, sought exceptions to and a narrow interpretation of the Declaration of Independence.

By nature Lincoln was a friend of peace. He would have rejoiced at any plan that produced a peaceful solution of the vexed problem. No matter how slow the march of freedom, he would have bridled his wrath. But the aggressiveness of the South in the Kansas struggle opened his vision to the fatuity of gradual emancipation. He grew bitter as Garrison in statement as he contemplated the hypocritic

⁷ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 218.

limits on freedom, the spread of an institution hostile to democracy with an ever widening promise of future abatement: "On the question of liberty as a principle," he wrote a friend, "we are not what we have been. When we were the political slaves of King George, and wanted to be free, we called the maxim that 'all men are created equal,' a self evident truth, but now when we have grown fat, and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves, we have become so greedy to be masters that we call the same maxim 'a self evident lie.' The Fourth of July has not quite dwindled away; it is still a great day—for burning fire-crackers!!!"⁸

The groping of a giant mind concerning itself with a mammoth problem, the germ of the great speech of Springfield that was soon to startle the nation with its boldness likewise shows itself in this same letter. "Our political problem now is, 'Can we as a nation continue together permanently—forever—half slave and half free?'" The problem is too mighty for me—may God, in his mercy, superintend the solution."⁹

Finally the nation changed. The people, once dead to the cry of the slave, were alive to the evil of slavery. Doctrines once deemed the outburst of the fanatic were now on the lips of conservative men, and Lovejoy had become the consort of the political leader. All these years, Lincoln had waited in patience for the day when white men should be ready to fight for the freedom of others. Civilization comes from a sure, steady and progressive enlightenment of public sentiment. Genius alone is helpless in the presence of a palsied national opinion. Consider Lincoln in South Carolina in 1856, and the hopelessness of the ideal without the company of circumstances is manifest. Living history comes

⁸ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 215.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

from the union of the great man and the happy moment for the crystallization of advancing public sentiment. In this sense alone the individual makes history, and it becomes the record of the few. The great man is the symbol of the marching life of the multitude and through him humanity moves resistlessly to its higher attitude.

A gathering of editors opposed to the Nebraska bill on February 22, 1856, marked the first visible step in the formation of the Republican party in Illinois. Lincoln was, of course, not entitled to participate in the public deliberations of that convention. That he promptly heard the tramp of coming events is seen in his readiness to play a commanding part in the early manifestation of the protesting movement.

Declaring that the black cloud of the American party was threatening to drive the Germans from the ranks of the party about to be formed, Hon. George Schieder said that he entered the Decatur convention with a resolution in opposition to that movement, and helped to form a platform containing a paragraph against the proscriptive doctrine of the so-called American party. That portion of the platform condemning Know-nothingism raised a storm of opposition, and, in despair, he proposed submitting it to Mr. Lincoln and abiding by his decision. After carefully reading the paragraph, Lincoln made the remark that the resolution introduced by Mr. Schieder was nothing new, that it was already contained in the Declaration of Independence, and that they could not form a new party on proscriptive principles. Mr. Schieder states that this declaration of Lincoln saved the resolution and helped to establish the new party on the most liberal basis, and that it was adopted at the Bloomington Convention, and next at the First National-Republican Convention at Philadelphia. He further states that Lincoln crystallized public sentiment, gave it a focal

point, so that the great majority of the Germans entered the new party that later made Lincoln President.

Lincoln was in the van of the leaders who rallied to the support of the infant party that has written such luminous pages in American history. He showed his wonted sagacity, when an editor suggested his name as a candidate for Governor, in immediately advising the nomination of an anti-Nebraskan Democratic candidate, on the ground that such a nomination would be more available.¹⁰

To Herndon the caution of Lincoln seemed to partake of brotherhood with inaction. He hardly realized the sureness of the unremitting character of his progress. As Lincoln's partner felt the thrilling approach of a political crisis, he resolved to unloose Lincoln from his conservative connections without realizing that the latter was ready to dare the future on the bark of the coming party. Delegates were to be elected for the State Convention at Bloomington that was to breathe life into the Republican party in Illinois. Herndon signed Mr. Lincoln's name to the call for the Sangamon County Convention without authority and published it in a local paper. A dramatic incident ensued:

"John T. Stuart was keeping his eye on Lincoln, with a view of keeping him on his side—the totally dead conservative side. Mr. Stuart saw the published call and grew mad; rushed into my office, seemed mad, horrified, and said to me, 'Sir, did Mr. Lincoln sign that Abolition call which is published this morning?' I answered, 'Mr. Lincoln did not sign that call.'—'Did Lincoln authorize you to sign it?' said Mr. Stuart. 'No, he never authorized me to sign it.'—'Then do you know that you have ruined Mr. Lincoln?'—'I did not know that I had ruined Mr. Lincoln; did not intend to do so; thought he was a made man by it; that the time had come

¹⁰ Transactions McLean Co., 3, 39.

when conservatism was a crime and a blunder.'—'You, then, take the responsibility of your acts; do you?'—'I do, most emphatically.'"

Herndon then wrote Lincoln. He instantly replied that he adopted what Herndon had done, and promised to meet Lovejoy and other radicals.¹¹

Lincoln did not serve freedom in word only. A free young negro was in danger of being sold into slavery. The Governor of Illinois was seen. He responded that he had no right to interfere. Lincoln rose from his chair, hat in hand, and exclaimed: "By God, Governor, I'll make the ground in this country too hot for the foot of a slave, whether you have the legal power to secure a release of this boy or not."¹²

During all the trying time when the liberty of Kansas was in the balance, when violence was being met with violence, when even conservative men drifted into the movement to aid the free state men in opposing the Government, he remained master of himself, looked beyond the passion of the moment to the abiding realities. Herndon, who was a participant in this movement, unfolds a view of the calm, far sighted man, who knew that violence was the father of great evils and not a safe foundation for a free state. He says that Lincoln was informed of their intents, and took the first opportunity that he could to dissuade them from their partially formed purpose. They spoke of liberty, justice, and God's higher law. He answered that he believed "in the providence of the most men, the largest purse, and the longest cannon"; that if they were in the minority, they could not succeed, and that if they were in the majority they could succeed with the ballot, throwing away the bullet. He advised them that, "In a democracy where the majority rule by the ballot through the forms of law, physical rebellions

¹¹ Lamon, 374-375.

¹² Herndon, 2, 47-48.

and bloody resistances" were radically wrong, unconstitutional, and were treason. He besought them to revolutionize through the ballot-box, and "restore the Government once more to the affections and hearts of men, by making it express, as it was intended to do, the highest spirit of justice and liberty." Their attempt, he continued, to resist the laws of Kansas by force, was criminal and all their feeble attempts would end in bringing sorrow on their heads, and ruin the cause they would freely die to preserve.¹³ Well might Herndon say that this speech saved them from the greatest follies.¹⁴ Instead of desperate measures, money was forwarded under legitimate conditions, Lincoln joining in the subscription.

The second step in the formation of the Republican party was the Convention at Bloomington. Tragic events had taken place in the State and Nation; signs of the sombre character of the approaching conflict. Sumner was struck down in the Senate by the dastard attacks of Brooks, an act which sent a shudder of anger and indignation through the North and a wave of approbation through the South. This incident alone showed the strain that the moorings of the Nation were undergoing. In Illinois, too, violence asserted its hideousness, and a delegate, Paul Selby, was treacherously assaulted by political opponents. The spread of the Civil War in Kansas heightened the magnitude of the occasion. The seriousness of the National and State situation had taken hold of the delegates. The gravity of public affairs aroused mad instincts. Many were ready for radical conduct, were ready to meet force with force, and violence with violence.

From the four corners of the State, dauntless anti-Nebraska Democrats, conservative Whig, distraught Know-

¹³ Lamon, 372-373.

¹⁴ Herndon, 2, 49.

nothing, bitter Abolitionist, and those drifting on the tide of events, gathered under a common impulse in opposition to the vaunting slave party. Beneath the surface there was memory of former antagonism. The problem of the hour was the uniting of these discordant elements into the homogeneity of common conviction; submerging old and cherished affiliations with a flood of fealty to a new gospel; the transmuting raw recruits; quickening the martial spirit commonly the product only of long service.

It was a time for a momentous speech. Several leaders of distinction had addressed the convention, when the audience, with instinctive wisdom, called for Lincoln to make the closing address. It was one of those rare moments in human affairs when words may turn the tide of events. He caught the wandering thoughts of troubled men and gave them continuity.¹⁵ Those long without a political faith were rejoiced to find a home. Like an inspired giant, he was aglow with the greatness of his theme. He spoke as the spirit of the age might have spoken, if it had broken into eloquence sublime and resistless. Men were brought face to face with immortal justice, with eternal righteousness. The humblest hearer lived in the thrill of such communion. Reporters dropped their pencils and forgot their work; even Herndon, who was wont to take notes when Lincoln spoke, threw pen and paper aside, subdued and overcome by the majesty of his partner's speech.

It was not alone a triumph in immediate results, but also a triumph in moulding the abiding convictions of men. Above all the enthusiasm of the moment, there still remained his solid logic, a logic that made Republicans of life-long Democrats. John M. Palmer declared that he remembered only one expression of speech, "We will not dissolve the Union,

¹⁵ Transactions McLean Co., 3, 91.

and you shall not do it." Others dwelt on his declaration to meet the occasion with ballots and not bullets, and so the minds of men as well as the impulses were wisely educated. The address became famous as "the lost speech." Its renown grew with age. It became sacred to the memory of those who heard it and time hallowed its history.¹⁶

In the light of later events, the platform adopted at the Bloomington Convention seems conservative. It simply rebuked the administration for its attitude on the Kansas issue, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the extension of slavery into Territories.¹⁷

When the first flood of enthusiasm, after the Bloomington Convention, subsided, a mysterious apathy, a stifling indifference, met the new movement, a no unusual phenomenon in politics or human affairs. Such a time had now come. It was at this period dark and trying that Lincoln towered in lonely grandeur. It was easy enough to be brave and vaunting at a convention when thousands hung on every word. But now it took a higher heroism to be true to the cause. Then Lincoln did not flinch. With superb step, with elated soul, with increasing intrepidity, he continued the championship of the same principles that took captive the delegates at Bloomington. He spoke like one in the wilderness.

Lamon tells the story of a ratification meeting five days after the Bloomington Convention:—"Mr. Herndon got out huge posters, announcing the event, and employed a band of musicians to parade the streets and 'drum up a crowd.' As the hour of meeting drew near, he 'lit up the Court House with many blazes,' rung the bells and blew a horn. At seven o'clock the meeting should have been called to order, but it turned out to be extremely slim. There was nobody

¹⁶ Tarbell, 1, 296.

¹⁷ Lamon, 376.

present, with all those brilliant lights, but A. Lincoln, W. H. Herndon and W. H. Pain. 'When Lincoln came into the Court-room,' says the bill-poster and horn-blower of this great demonstration, 'he came with a sadness and a sense of the ludicrous on his face. He walked to the stand, mounted it in a kind of mockery,—mirth and sadness all combined,—and said: 'Gentlemen, this meeting is larger than I knew it would be. I knew that Herndon and myself would come, but I did not know that any one else would be here; and yet another has come,—you, John Pain. These are sad times, and seem out of joint. All seems dead, dead, dead: but the age is not yet dead; it liveth as sure as our Maker liveth. Under all this seeming want of life and motion, the world does move nevertheless. Be hopeful. Now let us adjourn and appeal to the people.'"¹⁸

In June the first National Republican Convention met at Philadelphia. Young, aggressive and flushed with enthusiasm, it put forth as the standard bearer, John C. Fremont, the daring, romantic pathfinder. Lincoln received one hundred and ten votes for the vice-presidency. So little was this distinction anticipated, that at first he refused to believe that he was the recipient of the flattering compliment, saying that it must have been the great Lincoln from Massachusetts.

Like the Bloomington gathering the National Convention instinctively linked itself in strength to the impressing principles of the Declaration of Independence. It took a bolder and more advanced stand than the Illinois Convention, denying the authority of Congress to give legal existence to slavery in any Territory and that it was its right and duty to prohibit therein those "twin relics of barbarism, polygamy and slavery."¹⁹

In the ensuing campaign, Lincoln, as a presidential elec

¹⁸ Lamon, 377-378.

¹⁹ Nicolay & Hay, 2, 36-37.

tor and orator towered in the State as strong in his invigorating championship of the Republican policies. He made fifty speeches. Indiana, Wisconsin and Iowa sent for him. The impress of his personality was humbly, but pervasively winning the hearts and minds of men. One man wrote with sure faith, "Come to our place, because in you do our people place more confidence than in any other man. Men who do not read want the story told as you only can tell it. Others may make fine speeches but it would not be 'Lincoln said so in his speech.'" ²⁰ A college president spoke of him with reverence, as, "one providentially raised up for a time like this, and even should defeat come in the contest, it would be some consolation to remember we had Hector for a leader." ²¹

He was most skillful in seeing the danger of Fillmore as a candidate in withholding strength from Fremont. He studied the problem as keenly as a legal proposition. No man in all of the United States saw the issues more plainly or could state it as precisely. To a Fillmore man he wrote that every vote withheld from Fremont and given to Fillmore in Illinois actually lessened Fillmore's chance of being President, for if Buchanan got all the slave states and Pennsylvania, and one other State, he would be elected, but if Fillmore got the slave states of Maryland and Kentucky, then Buchanan would not be elected and Fillmore would go into the House of Representatives, and might be made President by a compromise. Likewise he argued that if Fillmore's friends threw away a few thousand votes on him in Indiana, it would inevitably give those states to Buchanan, which would more than compensate him for the loss of Maryland and Kentucky; that it was as plain as adding up the weight of three small hogs for Fillmore who had no possible chance to carry Illinois for himself, to let Fremont take it, and thus keep

²⁰ Herndon, 2, 56.

²¹ *Ibid.*

it out of the hands of Buchanan. Lamon remarks that this letter was discovered by the Buchanan men, printed in their newspapers, and pronounced, as its author anticipated, "a mean trick," and that it was a dangerous document to them, and was calculated to undermine the very citadel of their strength.²²

Lincoln's fear of Fillmore was justified by events. While Fremont was defeated, Bissel the Republican was elected Governor by a fair margin. To Lincoln, the defeat of Fremont was prophetic of future triumph. With infinitely surer vision than President Pierce, he perceived the trend of events. Beyond seeming setback, he beheld the triumphing movement. He likened the President to a rejected lover making merry at the wedding of his rival, in felicitating himself hugely over the late presidential election, in considering the result a signal triumph of good men, and a very pointed rebuke of bad ones. To the statement of Pierce that the people did it, Lincoln called attention to the fact that those who voted for Buchanan, were in a minority of the whole people by about four hundred thousand votes, and thus the "rebuke" might not be quite as durable as he seemed to think and that the majority might not choose to remain permanently rebuked by that minority.²³

Strong in the belief that slavery was at war with the essential spirit of the Republic, he declared that the government rested on public opinion; that public opinion, on any subject, always had a "central idea," and that "central idea" in American political public opinion was until recently "the equality of man," and although it submitted patiently to some inequality as a matter of actual necessity, its constant working was a steady progress toward the practical equality of all men and the late Presidential election was a struggle

²² Lamon, 382.

²³ Lincoln's Speeches, I, 225.

by one party to discard that central idea and to substitute as a central idea the perpetuity of human slavery and its extension to all countries and colors.²⁴

This conviction vivified him with new hopes. The leader called to those in the valley of doubt and indifference to leave their low-vaulted chamber: "Then let by-gones be by-gones; let past differences as nothing be; and with steady eye on the real issue, let us reinaugurate the good old 'central idea' of the republic. We can do it. The human heart is with us; God is with us. We shall again be able not to declare that 'all States as States are equal,' nor yet that 'all citizens as citizens are equal,' but to renew the broader, better declaration, including both these and much more, that 'all men are created equal.' " ²⁵

²⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 225.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

CHAPTER XIII

LINCOLN AND THE DRED SCOTT DECISION

WITH unfailing vision Lincoln was attracted to the larger issues under all professed and alleged reasons, both North and South, as to the cause of difference in attitude on the slavery question. He believed it was largely an industrial and economical problem, a moral conflict in the North mainly through the absence of a controlling material interest. With plain, blunt speech, he laid bare the national cancer in October, 1856, showing that there was no difference in the mental or moral structure of the people North and South, but that in the slavery question the people of the South had an immediate, immense, pecuniary interest, while with the people of the North it was merely an abstract question of moral right.

The slaves of the South, he continued, were worth a thousand millions of dollars, and that financial interest united the Southern people as one man; that moral principle was a looser bond than pecuniary interest. Hence if a Southern man aspired to be President, they choked him down, that the glittering prize of the presidency might be held up on southern terms to Northern ambition. And their conventions in 1848, 1852 and 1856 had been struggles exclusively among Northern men, each vying to outbid the other, the South standing calmly by finally to cry "Going, going, gone" to the highest bidder.¹

¹ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 223.

The Dred Scott decision throws a shadow over the judicial history of the United States. That in an hour of crisis the supreme judicial tribunal should ally itself with the potent institution of injustice rather than with humanity, should interpret the principles of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence in a paltry and impoverished manner, should cringe before title and power and grovel in gloom in the dawn of a new era of American citizenship, an era that was to hurl its thunderbolts with ever increasing daring against the further advance of the slave sovereignty, is baffling and astounding.

Lincoln realized that the Supreme Court to be venerated, must be in the van, and not a laggard in the world spirit and progress; a guide and not a pupil in the best kind of citizenship and sensitive to the rising tide of public conscience. The Dred Scott decision did more than any malice of foe to weaken the general regard for the august tribunal—the one supreme discovery of American politics.

It is of interest to study Lincoln's attitude to this decision and to the tribunal responsible for it. Above most men, he had preached the gospel of sacred devotion to law and to the iniquity of mob rule. He was an enemy of all violence. Yet he rebelliously abided the adjudication that made the prospective emancipation of the black man more uncertain, that imprisoned the enlightened principles of the Fathers of the Republic, that manacled America in her Titan march on the highway of humanity.

Lincoln maintained in 1857 that judicial decisions had two uses, to absolutely determine the case decided, and to indicate to the public how other similar cases would be decided. Lincoln then argued that if the decision had been made by the unanimous concurrence of the judges, without partisan bias, in accordance with legal public expectation,

and in no part based on assumed historical facts which were not really true; or if it had been before the court more than once, and had there been reaffirmed through a course of years, it then might be even revolutionary not to acquiesce in it as a precedent.²

Still, by the side of the impassioned outbreaks of the abolitionists and radicals this criticism seems cold and measured. But Lincoln with his usual apprehension justified his opposition by democratic example. He confounded Douglas by recalling the action of his ideal Jackson on a Whig measure, the National Bank, with the statement that the same Supreme Court once decided a national bank to be constitutional; but President Jackson disregarded the decision, and vetoed a bill for the recharter, partly on constitutional ground declaring that each public functionary must support the Constitution as he understood it. And then to the further discomfiture of Douglas he declared that again and again he had heard Judge Douglas denounce that bank decision and applaud General Jackson for disregarding it; that it would be interesting for him to look over his recent speech, and see how exactly his fierce philippics against resisting Supreme Court decisions fell upon his own head.³ Still Douglas might have retorted that in those days the Whigs were violent in their denunciation of General Jackson for that very opposition.

In the same speech Lincoln burst into indignant eloquence at the policy that was a departure from the old ideas of justice and liberty and the still more radiant hope of the future indulged in by Washington, Jefferson and Franklin, that in time slavery would no longer darken or endanger the national life, for Lincoln said that in those days the Declaration was held sacred by all, and thought to include all; but

² Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 228.

³ *Ibid.*, 229.

that at this time it was construed, hawked at and torn, till, if its framers could rise from their graves, they could not at all recognize it. He observed that all the powers of earth seemed rapidly combining against the negro; that Mammon, ambition, philosophy and theology of the day were fast joining the cry; that they had him in his prison-house, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys, which could never be unlocked without the concurrence of every key—the keys in the hands of a hundred different men, and they scattered to a hundred and distant places; and they still stood musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, could be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complete than it was.⁴

Less than a decade of history proved Lincoln wiser than those who framed the momentous majority opinion in the Dred Scott case. Lincoln was learned not alone in legal knowledge, but was also familiar with the mighty national movements that laugh laws and decisions to scorn; that ultimately and finally determine progress. These judges were students of the past, slaves of precedent, defenders of antiquity, while Lincoln was a student of the present and the future and the ambassador of abiding justice. He had as deep and ultimate a knowledge of the national character and capacity as the statesman, and was a student of political and social progress in order to follow and wisely lead the deep public sentiment and conscience that alone measures true civilization.

⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 231.

CHAPTER XIV

LEADER OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN ILLINOIS

FEW pages in our history present a darker picture than the ruffianism of the friends of slavery in Kansas, and the retaliating spirit of its opponents. Still, the gloom is illumined by patriotic politicians, democratic slave holders and sympathizers, who sternly put duty before party. There are few more glorious incidents in our political annals than the unwavering fidelity of Robert J. Walker of Mississippi. As Governor of Kansas he lived up to his public pledges, though the offer of the Presidency of the United States was dangled before him.¹ Like Washington, himself, Walker towered above temptation. If the Mississippi statesman had held the place of Buchanan, slavery, instead of being nursed by the palsied policy of the Northern statesman, would have been startled by another Jackson, and the nation might have owed its salvation to a Southern leader instead of to the prairie politician.

In the fine language of Seward: "The ghosts on the banks of the Styx constitute a cloud scarcely more dense than the spirits of the departed Governors of Kansas, wandering in exile and sorrow for having certified the truth against falsehood in regard to the elections between Freedom and Slavery in Kansas."² The strange fact above all is that the admission of Kansas as a slave state against the wishes of its people was not asked for by the South. It was freely ten-

¹ Gilmore, 9-104.

² Nicolay & Hay, 2, 118.

dered to the slave dynasty by a majority of northern democrats in the executive and legislative branches of the Government.³ And so again the North shared with the South in the zeal for spreading slavery.

The final scene in the drama was the Lecompton Constitution. Douglas then saw the fatal result that Lincoln had foretold in his June speech of 1857, when he declared that Douglas, since the famous Nebraska Bill, saw himself superseded in a presidential nomination by one generally endorsing his measure, but standing clear of the odium of its untimely agitation and its violation of the national faith; that he saw his chief aids in his own State, politically speaking, successfully tried, convicted and executed for an offense not their own, but his, and that now he saw his own case standing next on the docket for trial.⁴

Northern Democrats refused to brook longer the crime in Kansas. To refuse submission of the Constitution to that people made a mockery of the popular sovereignty of Douglas. With desperate constancy he had impressed that great principle, as he called it, on his constituency. It was now so shorn of all dignity that even a child might see it. He either had to lose Illinois or fight the policy of the administration. Once having decided to differ he took a bold stand. No Abolitionist or Republican used plainer or more impelling language: "But if this Constitution is to be forced down our throats, in violation of the fundamental principles of free government, under a mode of submission that is a mockery and insult, I will resist it to the last. I have no fear of any party associations being severed. I should regret any social or political estrangement, even temporarily; but if it must be, if I cannot act with you and preserve my faith and my honor, I will stand on the great principle of popular

³ Sheahan, 326.

⁴ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 231.

sovereignty, which declares the right of all people to be left perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way. I will follow that principle wherever its logical consequences may take me, and I will endeavor to defend it against assault from any and all quarters. No mortal man shall be responsible for my action but myself.”⁵

The former distinction of Douglas as a slave advocate made his seeming accession to the ranks of its opponents all the more marked. Stirring stories were told of his peerless courage when Buchanan told him to remember that no Democrat ever yet differed from an administration of his own choice without being crushed, and to beware of the fate of Tallmadge and Rives.

“Mr. President,” retorted Douglas, “I wish you to remember that General Jackson is dead.”⁶ Like an undaunted Abolitionist he flung aside all compromise, refused to accede to the English bill that many administration opponents welcomed as an exit from the dilemma of party recusancy. Many began to believe that Douglas was about to turn into a black Republican. He had stolen conferences with their leaders, inducing them to believe that it was policy for him to conceal his present real intention; that he would soon unmask himself and fight their battles. He often said that he had checked all his baggage and taken a through ticket.⁷

He convinced his foes that the Nebraska bill was a daring device in behalf of freedom. One Republican said that the plan of Douglas for destroying the Missouri line and thereby opening the way for the march of freedom beyond the limits forever prohibited and conceded to belong to the Slave States, and its march westward, from the British possessions to Mexico, struck him “as the most magnificent scheme ever

⁵ Sheahan, 319.

⁷ Lamon, 390.

⁶ Nicolay & Hay, 2, 120.

conceived by the human mind." This kind of conversation made the deepest impression upon his hearers, and often changed their opinion of the man.⁸

In this way, Douglas triumphantly vindicated his policy of popular sovereignty for which he protested he was willing to devote all his talent and the remainder of his life. The very prospect of such a convert dazzled the vision of even radicals like Greeley. So these visionaries wandered in the dreamland of politics, and were eager to enter into an unholy alliance. Even shrewd leaders in the party built bridges for the entering of Douglas. It was rumored that Seward and others were in the plot.⁹

A letter from Herndon in 1858 vividly shows the political condition of this time. Speaking of Greeley he said, "He evidently wants Douglas sustained and sent back to the Senate. He did not say so in so many words, yet his *feelings* are with Douglas. I *know* it from the spirit and drift of his conversation. He talked bitterly—somewhat so—against the papers in Illinois, and said they were fools. I asked him this question, 'Greeley, do you want to see a third party organized, or do you want Douglas to ride to power through the North, which he has so much abused and betrayed?' and to which he replied, 'Let the future alone; it will all come right. Douglas is a brave man. Forget the past and sustain the righteous.' Good God, *righteous*, eh! . . . By-the-bye, Greeley remarked to me this, 'The Republican standard is too high; we want something practical.' . . . The Northern Men are cold to me—somewhat repellent."¹⁰

Douglas, after a heroic combat with the administration and after his triumphant championship of the rights of the people of Kansas, returned as a conqueror to Illinois. He

⁸ Lamon, 390-391.

⁹ Herndon, 1, 395.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, 63-64.

was the ideal of the Democrats of his state, save of a few office holders under Buchanan. With Lincoln it was otherwise. Despite his brilliant and consecrated service to the Republican principles, even in Illinois, in the home of his friends, all was not yet serene; he was not yet to taste the sweetness of hero worship. Too proud to resort to dramatic effects, slow to express his resentment, he was almost jealous of the supremacy of his rival. A veteran in the service of freedom, he hardly welcomed the possible entrance of his old foe into the Republican arena. Mingled with personal feeling, was his knowledge of the crafty career of his opponent. Lincoln was not content that Douglas should gain the laurel of a triumphant movement in the hour of victory.

Not alone did Lincoln fear dissension in his own state, but he was also afraid that Douglas might be taken up by the Republican leaders of the party. He grew restless and gloomy at the unjust attitude of Greeley, an attitude that quite vanquished him. To Herndon he unburdened himself, "I think Greeley is not doing me right. His conduct, I believe, savors a little of injustice. I am a true Republican and have been tried already in the hottest part of the anti-slavery fight, and yet I find him taking up Douglas, a veritable dodger,—once a tool of the South, now its enemy,—and pushing him to the front. He forgets that when he does that he pulls me down at the same time. I fear Greeley's attitude will damage me with Sumner, Seward, Wilson, Phillips and other friends in the East."¹¹

He had slowly gained the confidence, more than he realized, of the rank of his party. Though loyalty to him was less pretentious, it was not the less sincere. The Republicans in Illinois did not trust Douglas; they were not deceived by his marvelous strategy. Pursuant to a wide spread sen-

¹¹ Herndon, 2, 60.

timent, the Republican state convention, with unanimity adopted the significant resolution: "That Hon. Abraham Lincoln is our first and only choice for United States Senator to fill the vacancy about to be created by the expiration of Mr. Douglas' term of office."¹²

One incident shows the enthusiasm of the hour. Cook County brought a banner into the convention inscribed, "Cook County for Abraham Lincoln." A delegate from another county proposed to amend the banner by substituting for "Cook County" the word "Illinois." "The Cook delegation promptly accepted the amendment, and during a hurricane of hurrahs, the banner was altered to express the sentiment of the whole Republican party of the State."¹³

¹² Herndon, 2, 65.

¹³ Tarbell, 1, 305.

CHAPTER XV

THE DAWN OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

IN anticipation of his nomination as Senator, Lincoln had carefully prepared an address of acceptance. It was delivered on the 17th of June, 1858, in the presence of an immense audience at Springfield. At the time, it was perhaps the most radical speech that had yet burst forth from a Republican statesman. It is not strange that it astounded his friends. It baffled their comprehension to find him at a single stride in the front rank of the radicals. Herndon, the aggressive abolitionist, was alike bewildered, saying of the first paragraph that it was true; but asking if it was entirely *politic* to read or speak it as it was written. Lincoln said that it made no difference; that it was a truth of all human experience; that he wanted to use some universally known figure, expressed in simple language as universally known that might strike home to the minds of men, in order to rouse them to the peril of the times; that he would rather be *defeated with that expression* in the speech, and have it held up and discussed before the people, than *to be victorious without it*.¹

Lamon questioned whether Lincoln had a clear right to indulge in such a venture, as a representative party man in a close contest, having other interests than his own in charge, and bound to respect the opinions, and secure the success of his party. Lamon states that at the Bloomington Con-

¹Lamon, 397.

vention he uttered the same ideas in almost the same words; and their recognition of a state of incipient civil war in a country for the most part profoundly peaceful,—these, and the bloody work which might come of their acceptance by a great party, had filled the minds of some of his hearers with the most painful apprehensions; the theory was equally shocking to them, whether as partisans or as patriots. Begged to suppress such speech in the future, he vindicated his utterance, but after much persuasion, promised at length not to repeat it.²

The night before its delivery, at a gathering of his close friends, Lincoln slowly read the first paragraph. No uncertain, unsparing criticisms followed. It was called “a fool utterance,” ahead of the time, a statement that would frighten many voters.³ Only one auditor, his partner, approved the far-reaching statement, saying, “Lincoln, deliver it just as it reads. It is in advance of the times, let us—you and I, if no one else—lift the people to the level of this speech now, higher hereafter. The speech is true, wise and politic, and will succeed now or in the future. Nay, it will aid you, if it will not make you President of the United States.”

Then Lincoln rose from his chair, walked backwards and forwards in the hall, stopped and said that he had thought about the matter a great deal, had weighed the question from all corners, and was thoroughly convinced the time had come when it should be uttered; and that if he must go down because of that speech, he would go down linked to truth, and would say again and again that the nation could not live on injustice.⁴

This speech stands alone among American orations. Captivating in its logic, marvellous in its directness, condensed

² Lamon, 397-398.

³ Herndon, 2, 68.

⁴ Lamon, 399.

in utterance, it is as true to Lincoln as the reply to Hayne was to Webster. It is one of the most momentous addresses in American history. It became the angry battle ground of local and general campaigns. It directed the issues of national parties. In a transitional period with the hand of genius it peerlessly traced party demarcation lines. For the moment in advance of the national progress it soon became the very gospel of multitudes, the war cry of the friends of the Union. Plainer to the average man than the fine phrase of Seward as to "the irrepressible conflict," it brought home to the daily worker the issues of the hour, put him face to face with the deep meaning of the whole struggle going on in his very presence. Its strength was in this—that it put in clear speech the question that was agitating the common mind and thus gave it form and being before other men. With prophetic solemnity he indulged in the philosophic utterance that the slavery agitation would not cease until a crisis should be reached and passed, saying: "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 that 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 the course of ultimate distinction, 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." ⁵

Lincoln in the loneliness of his soul passed upon the solemn issue that the hour for speech and action had come; that the time of compromise was over; that justice would no longer be trifled with; that the law of humanity spurned

⁵ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 240.

further outrage. He gave voice to the hitherto silent sentiments of many. The period for the judicious utterance of radical truth had come. In a few years what then seemed the outburst of a perverted attitude became the common thought of the multitude.

And so again Lincoln showed his keen sense of the drift of events. In this he was wiser than the pure politicians. When events justified his foresight, some were found who cherished the notion that Lincoln was guided by self-seeking motives in his radical advocacy. Two biographers think that Lincoln was quietly dreaming of the Presidency, and edging himself to a place in advance, where the tide might take him up in 1860; that as sectional animosities, far from subsiding, were growing deeper and stronger with time, Lincoln knew that the next nominee of the exclusively Northern party must be a man of radical views, and so the speech was intended to take the wind out of Seward's sails.⁶

The biographer who sees a plotting, scheming Lincoln in all this is far from understanding the real man. For mingled with his political sagacity was a sublime communion with the mighty spirit of world justice. Elated at the approaching clash of freedom and slavery, believing that out of the conflict would come a better humanity, he rejoicingly dwelt in the pure realm of the unfettered utterance of a truth, far above the stifling valley of commonplace diplomacy. To him it was a rare moment of utter freedom without calculation, moving through regions of unclouded justice and righteous outlook.

Criticism bitter and biting of political friends did not shake his serenity or his belief in his diagnosis of the national disease. He lived so long with the solution, that he showed the calmness of a historian in judging passing events. Slow

⁶ Lamon, 406.

to value highly his own service, he was proudly aware of the intrinsic worth of this utterance. To a friend who said that the foolish speech would kill him, Lincoln replied that if he had to draw a pen across, and erase his whole life from existence, and he had one poor gift or choice left, as to what he would save from the wreck, he would choose that speech, and leave it to the world un erased.⁷

Withal, the speech was wisely framed. It aroused the fear of the Northerners with the statement that they would lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri were on the verge of making their State free, and they would awake to the reality instead that the Supreme Court had made Illinois a slave state.⁸ The dread that slavery might invade the free States of the North, as it ceased to be something more than a possibility, haunted and horrified the North. Some who bore with complacency the servitude of the black men in the distance fumed with anger as they contemplated even a prospect of a closer relation of the institution. Thus the self interest of the North was played upon. This practical danger more than all abstract arguments awakened free communities. Douglas saw the danger of this appeal. He could no longer hold North and South. It put him on the defensive. Lincoln forced the fighting. It became necessary for Douglas to make the speech of Lincoln the basis of his discussion.

Lincoln weighed his speech at its soul value, and measured its truth and worth in lonely struggle. No counsel could stay his purpose. He had come upon another crisis in his career. He could no longer compromise with himself in safety, the hour of decision could not be delayed. He faced defeat in all its darkness but afar he saw the star of simple duty. If he had faltered or cringed he might have become

⁷ Lamon, 407.

⁸ Lincoln's Speeches, 1, 244.

Senator, but that distinction only would have crowned him. He had the rare perception of knowing when to be firm as the earth beneath, of distinguishing between policy and principle, of ever keeping his integrity unsullied by barter or bargain. It is noteworthy that the very speech, politicians deemed the graveyard of his career in reality became his apotheosis. The politician of Illinois became a national leader. From that time, he loomed large in the history of the Republican party and was regarded as wise in counsel and brave in speech. Before Seward, he put in concrete utterance the very philosophy of Republicanism. And that party had reason to regard him with favor as a possible guide in the gathering contest.

This speech gave Lincoln a prominence that led to the dramatic debates with Douglas and that fastened the attention of the nation on the combat. The Lincoln-Douglas controversy was the fruition of this Springfield speech. This address is the most fitting line of demarcation between Lincoln the Citizen of Illinois and Lincoln the Citizen of the United States.

CHAPTER XVI

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE political condition of a nation is a symptom of its health or disease. Official corruption is an unfailing sign of national degeneration. Art, science and commerce may thrive, yet if dishonesty and selfishness rule in the administration of public affairs, there is no substantial progress. The real civilization of a nation can advance little beyond the state of public service. When citizens are indifferent to the general welfare, when the rights of the many are entrusted to the designing, when talent is dedicated to the acquisition of wealth or the mere promotion of art, then in spite of mountain high learning and world wide commercial prosperity, a nation is in the domain of danger.

A crisis reveals the potency of the politician and statesman. When war or internal conflict shows its "wrinkled front," then the merchant, the manufacturer, the artist, and the scientist forget their pride. The true politician is the incarnation of civil patriotism and guards the nation during the long days of peace, with an unfailing heroism like that of the soldier in the sudden test of war. The devotion of the civil hero is not spectacular and is often undervalued. The whole history of humanity has been a giant effort to beget a democracy where the genius of the few shall become the possession of many. When a nation cannot command the best heart and brain of its citizens for its service it is bankrupt.

The problem of Democratic government is the maintenance of a just balance between the radical and conservative elements of society, between anarchy and apathy. American history was for a long time largely a struggle between visionary abolitionist and slavery adherent. Northern reformers turned all Southerners into vigorous advocates of human bondage, while Southern radicals finally abolitionized the North. Slaveholders were the children of a long established selfish interest. Abolitionists were possessed of a vision. Neither understood the other. Rock and cloud were not more unlike. Each saw only the injustice in the opposing position, and had no charity for the environment and traditions of the other. There could be no compromise between a Wendell Phillips and a Preston Brooks. War was the only solution.

Statesmanship looks to the preservation of the primal principles of the Republic, favors the general welfare whenever circumstances permit, seeks its progressive evolution, encourages prudent reform, a reform that is not the parent of reaction. It avoids alike the radicalism of the demagogue and the stagnation of the materialist. While stupid conservatism is unwittingly the main friend of anarchy, statesmanship is its chief foe. The stability of the Republic depends on wise leadership, courageous enough to combat violence on the one hand and greed on the other.

Egoism and foolish fears are the chief obstacles of human progress. Self interest being the main source of human action, it is the problem of the politician to quicken the public conscience and convince the community that advancement and enlightened selfishness are companions. Altruism is a large factor in human evolution, yet not so basic that it may be made the foundation of abiding government. It is a high mission to lead the people to the conception of making self

interest an every day servant of the general welfare.

Expediency is as essential to the triumph of right as to that of wrong. Cunning materialism may vanquish virtue that is a stranger to wisdom, but prudent integrity never knows final defeat. The following of visions without purpose is as vain as the worship of debasing worldliness. Politics is a larger phase of life than the idealist comprehends, while ideas are more dominant than politicians dream.

In an ideal state diplomats would be no more essential than the physician, lawyer, jurist and minister. Compromise finds its basis in human weakness, conservatism and selfishness. The history of humanity is written in blood and tears largely because men have been prone to passion and prejudice rather than true to reason and judgment. Politics is the art of securing results in government. It is a study of success applied to legislation and administration.

There are few problems of larger moment than the general acceptance of the wisest policy in combating established and organized evil. Civilization itself depends on the manner in which the unresting battle between the constructive and destructive forces in society is conducted and decided. Mighty empires have flourished and fallen, democracies have sprung to life and decayed, dauntless protesters have sacrificed on the altar of conviction, even nations under the spirit of high impulses have for a short time followed the banner of the brotherhood of man. Yet in spite of ages of progress, of heroic martyrdom, the battle is still of the same character as the conflict was on the plains of Palestine, the banks of the Nile and the seven hills of Rome. Human nature has changed largely in outer manifestations, not in essential character. The selfishness of man, vested interests, fear of change, still stand in the way of righteous reforms, which are now as bitterly contested as they were by the patri-

cians of Latium and the barons of the middle ages. In the conflicts of centuries good men have sunk sometimes in a fearless, sometimes in an imprudent encounter with the host of cohesive and malignant interests. Selfish motives unite the supporters of evil, while the forces of righteousness are often discordant and rent with civil feuds. Economic interest is the influence that makes evil gregarious.

Lincoln conceived his plan of warfare on the organized evil of his time in wisdom. He attacked it at its weakest point, its injustice and its bad policy. He made it not only an ethical issue, but an economic one as well. He understood that reform must be founded on self interest as well as on justice. He fought the evil and not the wrong doer. He was aware of the influence of environment on the opinions of men whenever property rights were involved and so would not exact nor expect too much of the individual. He did not favor premature reform, knowing that it was not permanent. A foe to slavery, yet for a long time he was not a friend of abolitionism. He longed for the emancipation of the black man, yet would not buy it by attacks on the Constitution or on the compromises of the statesmen of the Republic.

He admitted the evil of slavery, yet recognized the institution as far as the law sanctioned its existence. So he would fight its transfer to new territory where it had no legal right of entrance. He would circumscribe and starve it, would favor compensated emancipation, and thus slowly and safely eradicate the evil from the nation. His political philosophy is worthy of the study of every citizen, patriot and reformer, of every man who believes in the dawn of better ages. His greatness consists in never having relinquished his lofty ideal in all of the materialism of daily compromise, and in never forgetting charity, justice and policy in his communion with

world-shaking ideas.

No man in history longed for the triumph of justice more earnestly than Abraham Lincoln. He hated evil. Still his main purpose was the preservation of the principles of the republic. Rather than endanger them, the larger good, he would hesitate to begin a campaign against organized selfishness. Such battles for humanity require good generalship as well as those of cannon, fife and drum. It is not enough to hate evil, to strike at it in the dark. To husband strength, to bide the time, to await the solemn moment for attack, is political generalship, a generalship that is as essential in the Senate as on the battlefield.

He was willing to engage in the hard mission of educating men to believe that brotherhood was a more substantial foundation for humanity than hatred and selfishness. There was nothing of Don Quixote in his warfare. Democracy was his religion, the source of his strength and the secret of his influence. All that he was, he largely owed to the privileges of the Republic, to the support of the plain people. He believed in them with a rare faith and they trusted him with remarkable fidelity, as the incarnation of the higher humanity. He was in harmony with the onward movement of sanity, justice and manhood. Charity to all was his platform, justice his program, democracy his guide. His spirit is the spirit of the new age. He almost marks as distinguished an advance in American history as Moses did in that of Israel.

The politician blindly follows, while the statesman wisely educates public sentiment. In his political philosophy Lincoln gave due weight to the potency of the general opinion of mankind. He said, "He who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes or decisions possible or impossible to be

executed." He well knew the principle, so paltrily recognized, by even modern legislators, that it is far more vital to prepare the public mind for righteous legislation than prematurely to pass laws. It would be well to write his supreme statement relating to public sentiment in every legislative hall and judicial tribunal in the whole land. An educated public sentiment will soon enough secure the passage of appropriate legislation, and what is more essential, see to it that it is enforced. The curse of American politics is the passage of multitudinous enactments to please certain organized interests and the deliberate indifference, if not hostility, of public sentiment to their subsequent enforcement. The problem will be far from settled until fewer laws are passed, and such enactments are religiously enforced. Lincoln would not aid in the passage of a law not intended to be enforced or incapable in the common course of events of being substantially enforced, and he recognized that legislation should be a practical science based on the actual character, the ability of a people to move forward. Forward reform is almost as pernicious as selfish conservatism.

So complete was Lincoln's mastery over the masses that many have misunderstood the power of his genius as merely following public opinion. He did infinitely more. He studied the capacity of men for progress, slowly leading them to the higher altitude. Lincoln recognized the limitations of average human advance; that the mind and heart move slowly in the march of centuries. He worked with the materials at hand and builded on the solid foundation of the real national character. He did not stand in the direct way of events, still he deemed it a duty ever to guide them toward the goal of an advancing civilization.

The attitude of Lincoln to party organization is of commanding interest. There was no more valiant, earnest worker

in the Whig ranks. None can question his devotion to the routine, burdensome labor of the campaign. In making speeches, in writing platforms, in arranging meetings, in issuing circulars, and in the tiring work at the polls, he was a persistent toiler, a loyal partisan. In the Legislature he usually voted with his associates. He often sought to strengthen the party in the selection of office holders.

He believed in organized political action. He remained a trusted leader in the party of his choice, seldom alienating himself from the party managers, or the rank and file. Still he was no slave of party or caucus. His party, town or state, could not buy or bribe his integrity, or get him to be false to his duty. He believed that parties were useful to democratic government as long as they were substantially in harmony with its deeper objects. Still he did not deem them sacred, and when circumstances demanded, favored their dissolution, and the organization of new parties. He was one of the few politicians in American history who acted on the conviction that the man who served his state best, best served his party. Having no sympathy with anarchy in politics, he gave full value to the importance of the organization, but did not exalt it into an object of adoration. Above it, he placed loyalty to the Constitution and the fathers of the country. He was neither mugwump nor partisan.

There are two classes of men, materialists and visionaries. The materialist is a slave to the fact. He is so intent on the earth that he seldom enjoys a glimpse of star or constellation. Still he is a student of methods and results, a worshipper of success, and hence he is generally in the ascendancy. The visionary is a slave to his ideal, he looks at the world as it should be and not as it is. While he gazes at the sunset and the evening star he falls in the pit at his feet. He resembles the mariner of Heine:

“A wonderful lovely maiden,
Sits high in her glory there,
Her robe with gems is laden,
And she combeth her golden hair,
And as she combs it,
The gold comb glistens,
The while she is singing a song,
That hath a mystical sound and a wonderful
melody,
The boatman when once she has bound him,
Is lost in wild mad love,
He sees not the black rocks around him,
He sees but the beauty above.”

The real leaders in the world's history have been idealists of high practical wisdom. They have been the captains, not the subjects of their ideal. The petty politician rules for the day. The men who dominate the ages give substance to shadow, make the dream of one day the reality of another, crystallize the yearnings of humanity into statute and decision.

The world is used to the omnipresent politician. The visionary, the undaunted reformer, is not an infrequent participant in the domain of affairs. The political idealist, with the judgment of the one and the inspiration of the other, is so rare that he confounds by his presence. The combination astounds the generation unaccustomed to such a phenomenon. The man of high endowments is stupidly expected to be wanting in worldliness, and the practical representative of the people in the vision. The solution of all political problems depends on political sagacity illumined with altruism. The political idealist consummates the alliance of vision with method.

Lincoln was neither idealist nor politician. With the idealist he was faithful to the vision, with the politician he studied the way to success. He was not lost in mere adoration of the ideal; was not content until it became a reality. He blended the enthusiasm of the visionary with the wisdom of the politician. He was the ideal politician.

Lincoln was the prophet politician of his time, blending the righteousness of the Hebraic seer with political sagacity. He faced failure imperiously. He was never finally vanquished. He looked beyond temporary triumph to ultimate consequences. Despite setback, disaster and every obstacle, he had abounding faith in the abiding triumph of justice.

He knew the shortcomings of human nature, the painful, sluggish progress of moral evolution. He weighed men as they were and not as he wished them to be. Hence, he was patient with their failings. He made ample allowance for the heavy hand of habit, for ancestral, religious, political, social and industrial environment. That men were largely the children of their time was to him an ever present truth. Coöperation not antagonism was his method of achievement. He would not force progress and he recognized the sway of the grim law of necessity. He measured the labored march of public sentiment. He waited the slow processes of time; was no believer in magical reforms or quack political remedies. He did not squander his energies in the wonderland of dreams. He is the wisest politician in American history, consummate in his strategy for the general welfare, the supreme friend and champion of democracy and humanity.



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