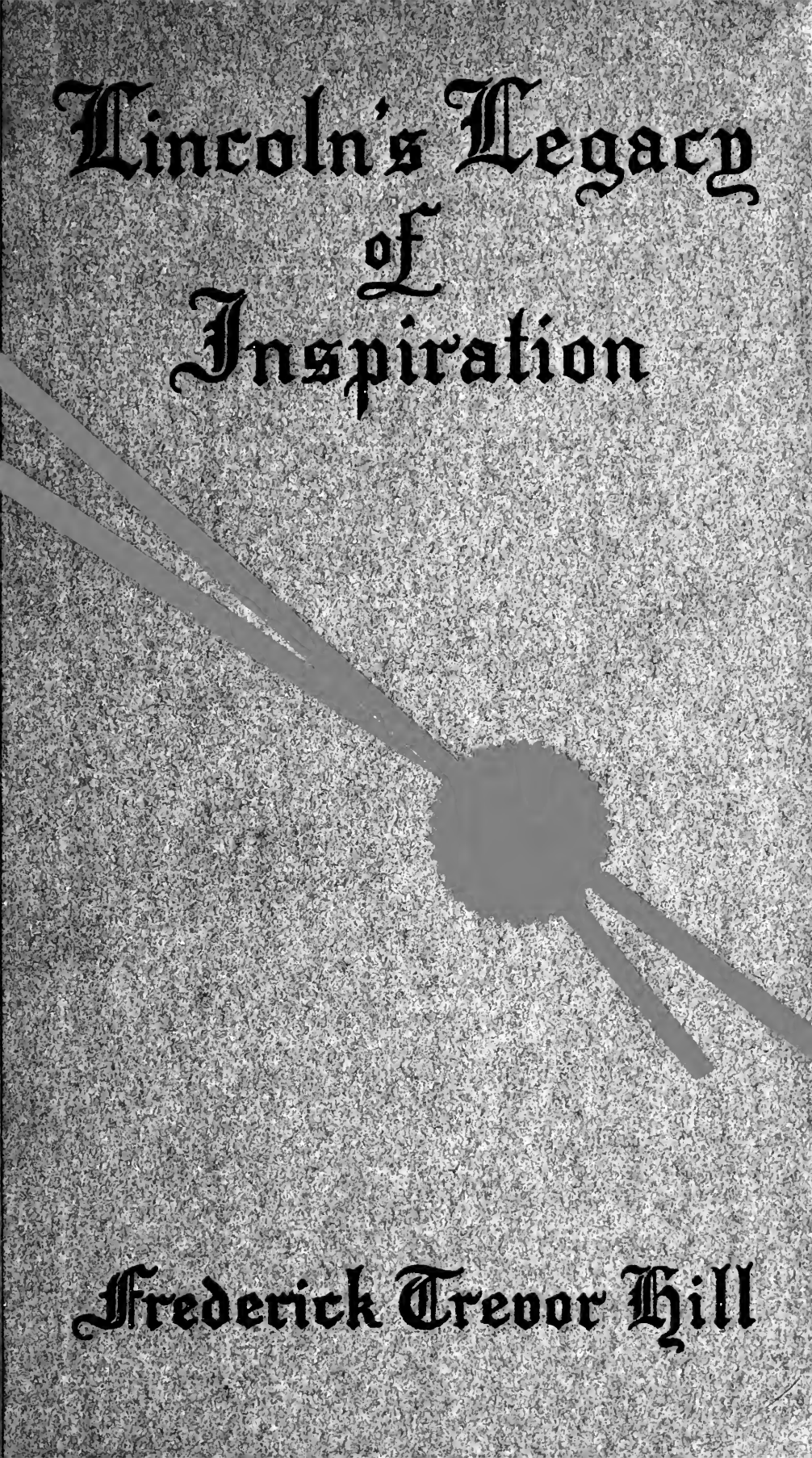
Lincoln's Legacy of Inspiration



Frederick Trevor Hill

Lincoln's
Legacy of Inspiration

BOOKS BY
THE SAME AUTHOR

On the Trail of Washington

Lincoln the Lawyer

The Story of a Street

Decisive Battles of the Law

The Accomplice

The Web

The Minority

The Care of Estates

The Case and Exceptions

"The Boy Lincoln"

BY EASTMAN JOHNSON

From a Pastel in the Possession of Berea College

Lincoln's Legacy of Inspiration

By

FREDERICK TREVOR HILL
Author of
"Lincoln the Lawyer," Etc.

FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
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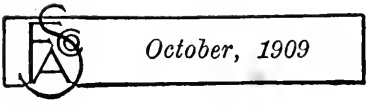

PREFATORY NOTE

These papers were originally printed in the New York *Times,* February 1st to 7th, 1909, and formed the basis of a prize competition among the school children of New York and vicinity, in honor of the hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth. By the terms of the contest each competitor was required to write a composition grounded exclusively on these essays which aroused unusual interest from the moment of their appearance and attracted increasing attention with every issue.

Fully ten thousand compositions based upon them were submitted to the *Times* by the students in the public and private schools in New York City alone, and it is estimated that no less than twenty-five thousand were written while the original studies herein presented were widely read by the general public throughout the country.

In Philadelphia a similar contest was held under the auspices of the *Ledger,* and there five thousand compositions were actually submitted by the students, and probably double that number were written.

—The Publishers.

To
the memory of
my
Father and Mother

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Lincoln's Legacy of Inspiration.

First

FOR THE DISHEARTENED IN LIFE'S HANDICAP

FROM the standpoint of history a century is but a yesterday, and a hundred years have not quite passed since Abraham Lincoln was born. Yet already tradition, eulogy, and romance are busy with his memory, weaving the mantle of greatness about him in such fashion that all the rugged outline of his very human personality may soon be shrouded from our view and the man himself translated to the realm of heroes whose development is a mystery and whose achievements are the despair of all ordinary mortals.

There is very little incentive in the career of any man whose success is inexplicable. Marvelously endowed individuals may excite our admiration or our wonder, but they do not afford much inspiration for the rank and file of struggling humanity.

But Lincoln was neither a heaven-born genius nor the miraculous product of chance. His lot was cast not among the favored few, but among men of common mold, and his life was lived, in no small measure, for the benefit and encouragement of his fellow-countrymen of average ability and ordinary calibre.

There is nothing obscure about his development. All his achievements can be readily understood. They were the direct results of a mental and moral discipline and training to which any manly-minded man may subject himself; not with the same political results, it is true, but with lasting benefit to himself and corresponding advantage to the community of which he may be a member.

The *results* in Lincoln's case are for history and the historian; the *processes* by which he arrived at those results are for the individual—for the by-and-large of American citizens.

Few Americans of this day and generation begin life with the forlorn outlook which greeted Lincoln at his birth. It is well-nigh impossible to exaggerate the adverse conditions which surrounded him. The cabin where he first saw the light was not much more than a woodman's shack, with a flooring of hard earth, devoid of most of the comforts and many of the decencies of life. The land about it was practically an unreclaimed wilderness; the whole countryside was lonely to the point of desolation; each day was a dreary struggle for food. From almost every aspect poverty was his portion. It was not degrading poverty, because it was not dependent, but it was the sort that weakens self-respect and affords no prospect of escape.

But material poverty was not his most

discouraging inheritance. His mother undoubtedly did her best to kindle a spark of ambition in her son, but she was an uneducated, delicate, and even sickly house-drudge, who died while he was still a child, leaving him prone to the suspicion that he had an inherited tendency to consumption. His father was an illiterate, shiftless farmer and carpenter, without skill or training at either calling, who regarded education as a waste of time, and would not permit the boy to attend school except at rare intervals. Indeed, the only effort he made to instruct his son was a half-hearted attempt to teach him carpentry, which was soon abandoned when he found that he could hire him out to other farmers in need of an extra hand.

Uninspiring as his home influence was, that of the neighborhood was even more so. There was practically nothing in his surroundings in Kentucky, or at Gentryville, Indiana, where he lived after his mother's death, to touch the imagination of a growing boy or quicken his ambition.

The country was sparsely settled and the life was not really living—it was an animal-like existence. Surely no American ever had better reason to complain of his chance in life. It was not a fair chance. It was practically no chance at all. But Lincoln was searching for opportunities, not excuses, and he found what he was seeking.

This was not the result of luck or favor or any consciousness of dawning powers. He was no inspired dreamer, who, in the midst of hard realities, saw a vision of coming greatness. He lived, not in the future, but one day at a time, and neither during this nor at any other period of his life did Lincoln ever hurry. He had common sense enough to realize that his chance of advancement lay in education, and, instead of fretting over the disadvantages under which he labored, he endeavored to overcome them. Thus, while he performed the dull, routine tasks about his father's house and farm he acquired the habit of thinking of others rather than

of himself, until the neighbors gradually came to recognize that he was one of the few persons in the community who could be confidently relied upon for every sort of friendly office and kindness, from roofing a barn to rocking a baby.

This was a very modest distinction, but it was quite as rare then as it is to-day, and though what he did was done without thought of a return, it brought its own reward. People took an interest in this unostentatious, unselfish boy, and they loaned him their books with such freedom that he soon secured all that were available within a radius of many miles. It was no anointed youth, however, who pored over those volumes by the light of his father's fire, but a very practical young man, who kept his ambitions well within bounds and was satisfied to progress step by step. Once he accidentally injured one of the borrowed books, and when the not too generous lender demanded compensation, he worked out the damages at twenty-five cents a day in no

saint-like spirit, but as a matter of justice, and this—one of the few well-authenticated stories of his early life—affords a clear glimpse of the man in the making.

Those who picture Lincoln as a precocious youth of angelic disposition do not understand his character at all. He was no more fond of hard work than other boys of his age, and he amused himself whenever he had the chance. But he did not waste his time. Dull as Gentryville, Indiana, was, it had one red-letter day on its calendar, and that was the meeting of the Circuit Court at Boonville, fifteen miles away. Thither Lincoln trudged to listen with rapt attention to the harangues of the backwoods lawyers, and watch with keen interest the drama of life as it was portrayed on that mimic stage, and there he doubtless received the first impulse to fit himself for the profession of the law.

But this dream made him neither discontented nor restless. The idea of abandoning his home duties never crossed

his mind. Unquestionably he could have bettered his chances at that period had he followed his dawning ambitions instead of continuing to help his father amid discouraging surroundings and difficulties. Yet he remained at home and gave his family the benefit of his services until he was twenty-one, up to which time he had earned practically nothing for himself.

But from nothing Lincoln was slowly but surely making something, and that something was character. From deprivation and want he was evolving helpfulness and unselfishness; from lack of opportunities he was developing modesty and resourcefulness; from sorrow and neglect he was acquiring sympathy; from solitude and simplicity he was learning the value of truth. For despondency and discontent he was fashioning humor; for lack of book learning he was providing a thorough knowledge of men; for luck and favor he was substituting courage.

was not enchanted ground. The seeds that were sowed there are within the reach of all. Abraham Lincoln is an inspiring product of the soil. He is a prophecy for those who believe in their native land.

Second

FOR THE UNTALENTED MAJORITY

IT has been truly said of Lincoln that "he never finished his education" and that to the close of his life he was "a learner, an inquirer, a searcher after knowledge—never afraid of asking questions—never too dignified to admit that he did not know."

The whole of Lincoln's schooling amounted to less than a year in all, and the little instruction he received from the five schoolmasters, each of whom taught him for a few weeks at long intervals during his boyhood, was extremely elementary. He may, therefore, fairly be said to have educated himself, and of this education came a man who divined all the underlying motives of the human heart, who "with sincerity deceived the deceitful," and who passed through the fiercest

of political controversies without leaving one word of offense for even the bitterest of his foes.

His reading was directed by chance rather than by selection, and to what extent he was influenced by the books which he eagerly borrowed is an open question. Certainly the well-known list of those that first fell into his hands comprises a strange assortment—"Æsop's Fables," and the "Revised Statutes of Indiana," "Pilgrim's Progress," and Weems's preposterous "Life of Washington," "Robinson Crusoe," the Bible, and a history of the United States. These and other volumes he read at every opportunity; sometimes while walking to and from his work; sometimes in the woods and fields while resting from the ax and plow, and often in his home at nights. Here, too, he practiced writing, and worked out sums on the wooden fire shovel in default of a slate, making the best of things and carefully husbanding his slim resources.

It was no brilliant student who thus de-

voted himself to acquiring the rudiments of education, but a patient, painstaking and somewhat plodding boy, for Lincoln's mind matured very slowly. Indeed, he did not show any signs of promise until he was about eighteen, and even in the prime of life his intellectual processes were far from quick. His mind, he remarked, was like a piece of steel—very hard to scratch, but almost impossible to free of any mark once made upon it. Those who have had the benefit of good instruction and understand proper methods of study can scarcely conceive the difficulties under which such a boy would labor in acquiring knowledge without assistance. A severer discipline can hardly be imagined.

His slowness and lack of guidance had, however, the advantage of making Lincoln thorough. He never was sure that he knew anything unless he understood it perfectly. We have his own statement that to comprehend the meaning of the word "demonstrate" he worked until he

had mastered the six books of Euclid, and this was long after his boyhood days. Indeed, there never was a man more familiar with the pains and woes of mental drudgery than Lincoln, and it required real courage to keep him at his task, for he was not fond of study for its own sake. Neither was he naturally thorough or methodical. On the contrary he was inclined to disorderly habits and slipshod methods, some of which he never outgrew, and at first he attempted to clip corners and find short cuts to learning quite as often and as hopefully as other boys have done. Indeed, it was only through repeated failure that he learned that it was impossible for him to acquire anything except at the price of good hard work. Even when he began to study law he had a fleeting hope that his knack of speech-making would relieve him from the drudgery of the profession, only to confess, before many years had passed, that any one who relied on such an exemption was "a failure in advance."

Americans are said to admire smartness, sharpness, and showy traits of mind, but these qualities were all conspicuously lacking in Lincoln. He could, upon occasion, make a bright reply or a neat retort, but as a rule he required time and careful preparation to appear at an advantage, and he was often painfully slow in making up his mind. Perfectly aware of these limitations, he concentrated all his efforts upon discovering the real issue or point in any subject and mastering that to the exclusion of details, and of this training came one of the most pitiless analyzers of facts, one of the soundest logicians, and one of the keenest trailers of truth that the world has ever known. This was not, however, solely or even largely, the result of his application to books. He had neither the tastes nor the opportunities of a book-worm. He preferred the company of his fellow men, and from them he learned far more than he did from any printed page. He was not, however, what is generally known as

a student of human nature. Probably it never occurred to him to dissect and examine critically the minds and characters of his acquaintances and friends. Nevertheless, he was a close and accurate observer, and by mixing freely with all sorts and conditions of men he acquired a remarkable knowledge of humanity. In the discussions at the country store at Salem, and at other local forums, he discovered that the man of moderate attainments, who was truthful and sincere, often had his mental superiors at a decided disadvantage, and early in his career he schooled himself against exaggeration and overstatement of every kind.

To present facts clearly, concisely and effectively, without taking undue advantage of them, is no mean accomplishment. It requires not only ability and courage, but tact and character, and in Lincoln's hands it became both a shield of defense and a weapon of attack. He neither deceived himself nor allowed others to deceive him, and he honestly and fairly

looked on all sides of every question before making up his mind. This not only rendered him sure of his own ground and tolerant of the opinions of others, but gave him a knowledge of his adversaries' resources which was invaluable in time of need.

As a result, we have his own statement that in all his experience as a lawyer he was never once surprised by the strength of an opponent's case, and frequently found it much weaker than he feared. In like manner, during the contest over slavery, he so thoroughly mastered the arguments of those who differed with him that he was often able to turn them to his own advantage, forcing his great rival Douglas to confess that he had given him more trouble than all the Abolitionists together.

It is surprising how few people do their own thinking. Most men try to learn what the majority think and adopt its opinions. Some attempt to be original by searching out the popular view

and taking exactly the opposite. But Lincoln did not feel compelled to think as others thought, nor did he try to attract attention to himself by airing "queer" opinions. He endeavored to discover the truth about everything and to think accordingly, and to this end he cultivated sincerity; he brought himself into close contact and sympathy with his fellow men; he was honest in thought as well as in action; he made no claims to superior wisdom; he respected the motives of those whose conclusions he could not accept. He was as fair to others as to himself, seeking only the right as God gave him to see the right.

It was these qualities of the heart rather than of the brain that started Lincoln on his distinguished career. He was neither an intellectual giant nor a learned man. From his success all his fellow countrymen of modest abilities may take courage and incentive.

Third

FOR THOSE WHO GROPE IN THE DUST OF DEFEAT

LINCOLN'S development is not infrequently described as though it were the progressive triumph of a man—something more than mortal—who, though acquainted with poverty and misfortune in his childhood, took advantage of his first opportunity in life, and whose career thereafter steadily spelled success. This man of fixed purpose and indomitable will undoubtedly makes a stirring appeal as a hero, but he has nothing in common with those who, after repeated attempts to "find themselves," discover failure staring them in the face. As a matter of fact, however, the whole of Lincoln's early manhood is a record of failure from a material point of view, and few men have ever had less to

show for their first years of effort than he had at the age of twenty-four.

As a field laborer he was far from a success, for he took no interest in farming and never cared to work at it a day longer than was necessary to put himself in funds. Moreover, his employers looked decidedly askance at the "hired man" who read as he followed the plow, even if his furrows did run true.

As a clerk in Offutt's country store he did little better, and beyond the fact that he served the customers conscientiously with full weights and measures, he did nothing to prove himself indispensable. Neither his heart nor his mind was in his work, and he watched the business "wink out" with no perceptible regret.

Then he sought glory at the cannon's mouth in the farcical "Black Hawk war," where he never even saw an Indian, and where the "bloody encounters with the mosquitoes" and the "fierce charges on the wild onions" were the most glorious episodes of the campaign! Then, some-

what as a forlorn hope, he turned to political life, presenting himself as a candidate for the Legislature, only to meet with defeat and to find himself at the end of several profitless months utterly destitute of resources.

This was not a very promising record for a man of twenty-three. He had, it is true, steadily cherished a more or less vague idea of becoming a lawyer, but he had not pursued it systematically, and he finally drifted back into the grocery business, this time as part proprietor of a store bought on credit without much prospect of making the venture pay. Indeed, the manner in which he and his associate Berry conducted this enterprise almost insured its failure, for the senior member of the firm idled away his days in dissolute living, while the junior member studied law, and between them their slender stock of merchandise disappeared, Berry drinking and Lincoln eating it up.

There is a story, which has at least the authenticity of being in character, that

affords an excellent illustration of Lincoln's attitude toward his business. According to this tale a customer once disturbed Lincoln at his reading by entering the store and requesting five cents' worth of crackers. Lincoln laid aside his book and, mechanically complying with the demand, awaited payment; but the customer changed his mind, remarking that he thought he would take a glass of cider instead, if it was the same price. Lincoln swept the crackers back into a barrel and produced the cider, which the man promptly drank, and then started for the door. At this point the store-keeping student of law, with his hand reaching for his Blackstone, roused himself sufficiently to remind the customer that he had not paid.

"Why, I gave you five cents' worth of crackers, didn't I?" demanded the purchaser. "Yes," admitted Lincoln, "but you didn't pay for them." "Well, I didn't get them, did I?" was the retort, and the man who was one day to become

a master of logic resumed his book with a vague feeling that there was something not quite right with the transaction, but just what it was he had not time to puzzle out. Such was Lincoln, the merchant, and his career in that capacity soon came to an inglorious close.

By this time he was four and twenty, and he had not only not succeeded, but had given no evidence of stability and no indication whatever of aptitude for any line of work. Those who have fretted over the waste of time spent upon uncongenial tasks can realize the discouragement which confronted him at this crisis of his affairs, for he had not only failed to fit himself for the bar, but had completely bankrupted himself.

For the penniless man bankruptcy is said to have no terrors. But it was not so with Lincoln. It provided him with as sore a business temptation as ever confronted a man on the threshold of life, and subjected his sense of honor to a thoroughly practical test.

Eulogy has robbed Lincoln's honesty of nearly all its human quality. He has been presented so often in the rôle of the perfect man, with even a touch of divinity added, that all real analogy between his experiences and those of the modern business world has practically vanished. And yet it was a man of ordinary clay, with every reason for wishing to make his way in the world, who saw the ruin of all his hopes in the failure of Berry & Lincoln's store, for he and his partner had given promissory notes for the purchase price of the business in which they had invested, and when Berry died all the holders of these notes looked to Lincoln for payment. This would have been bad enough if the claimants had been the persons to whom he and his associate had originally obligated themselves, but those people had long since disposed of the notes for a fraction of their face value.

Men who bought paper of this description in the early days of Illinois usually sold it again at the first opportunity or

traded it for something else, and thus it passed from hand to hand until some speculator, who had acquired it for nothing, or next to nothing, appeared and demanded the uttermost farthing. Naturally this dubious business encouraged the evasion of such debts, and public opinion countenanced repudiation under the circumstances, so there would have been few to criticise Lincoln had he avoided payment and there were not many who saw much merit in what he did.

From a worldly point of view, repudiation was the only course to adopt, unless he was prepared to mortgage his earnings and handicap if not defeat his ambitions. It was easy to argue that the business had never been worth anything, and that the original owners having voluntarily sold Berry & Lincoln's notes for a song, had received their full due and that those who had paid little or nothing for them ought not to be allowed to profit by a transaction which, if not usurious, was not much more respectable. There was

every incentive for Lincoln to adopt this view. But to him a promise was a promise, and as a matter of self-respect, and not at all as a heroic act of virtue, he refused to compromise with his conscience and declined to deceive himself with "law honesty."

It was no saint who thus met the demands of his creditors and hampered himself for fourteen years while he discharged what he called his "National debt." Not a saint at all—but a man who knew that "you cannot cheat at solitaire and think you've won the game."

Lincoln did not spring fully armed into the contest in which he made history. For many a year before he worked his way into the profession of the law, he had a part with those who despair of ever finding their place in the world and are tempted to dishonoring expedients.

His message to his eagerly striving countrymen of the present generation is that it is "better to make a life than a living."

Fourth

FOR THOSE WHO STRIVE FOR IDEALS IN THEIR WORK

LINCOLN did not awake to find himself famous in the ranks of his chosen profession of the law. His uncouth appearance was not in his favor, and he had many other defects that militated against his success. In all the neat and methodical habits which characterize the precise attorney he was woefully deficient. He hated the drudgery and the technicalities of his calling. He thoroughly despised the tricks of his trade. Nevertheless, he indignantly repudiated the idea that honesty was not compatible with practical service at the bar. "*Let no young man choosing the law for his profession yield for one moment to that popular belief,*" he declared. "*If you do not believe that you can be*

an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other occupation rather than one in the choosing of which you do in advance confess yourself to be a knave."

This was not the advice of a tyro or an idealist, but of an experienced practitioner, who had demonstrated the truth of his assertion that *"as a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of proving himself a good man,"* if he cares to make the most of it.

But though he respected and honored his profession, Lincoln had no reverence for law merely because it was law. Again and again during his long training in the courts he refused to invoke statutes at the expense of justice, even in the interest of his clients. He practiced law—he did not practice on law.

To the insolvent debtor who desired him to devise a new way of paying old debts he turned a deaf ear; to the rapacious creditor who sought his assistance in securing his pound of flesh he gave the

free advice that he had better try his hand at making money some other way; to a jury in a case where two young men were attempting to get rid of their honest obligation by claiming to be a few days under age he made a passionate plea that they should not help the delinquents to take advantage of the law and place a stain of dishonor upon themselves which they would never afterward be able to remove; to the Judge who forbade him to abandon a client in the midst of a case after he had discovered that the man had been guilty of fraud, he sent back this message, "*Tell the Judge that my hands are dirty and that I've gone away to wash them.*"

Lincoln was certainly a poor business man if the criterion of success be the making of money. For this he cared little or nothing. "*Wealth,*" he observed, "*is merely a superfluity of things we don't need.*" He had no skill in making up his charges—no knack of keeping his clients in the courts. Indeed, his opinions

on this subject were exceedingly objectionable to greedier members of the profession. "*Discourage litigation,*" was his advice to lawyers. "*Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often the real loser—in fees, expenses and waste of time. Never stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who does this. A moral tone ought to be infused into the profession which should drive such men out of it.*" Lincoln may have been, and undoubtedly was, utterly lacking in all the essentials of commercial genius, but in this instance he was merely ahead of his time. The methods he advocated sixty years ago are those of the most successful practitioners of to-day.

It was neither brilliancy nor learning that made Lincoln an effective lawyer. He was not only not a profound student of the law, he was not, in any scholarly sense, a student at all. He schooled himself in the great fundamental principles

of the common law of England and applied them with such clarity that even the dullest layman could not fail to comprehend the point. His mind was orderly, though his habits were not, and knowing that the issue in most controversies lies in very narrow compass, he avoided the error of the mediocre advocate, who is easily diverted by details, and pressed steadily and directly to the heart of his case, disregarding all the academic pros and cons and reducing the problem to its simplest form.

Absolutely sincere himself, he found little difficulty in persuading others, and his logical mind marshaled facts in such orderly sequence that a child could follow him through the most complicated cause. In a word, Lincoln relied on the truth, knew how to tell it, and was not afraid to do so, and his statement of facts thus had the force of argument. The average practitioner has neither the courage nor the skill to accomplish this, and his omissions and perversions naturally reflect on

his honesty or sincerity. This is largely the secret of Lincoln's success in the courts, and it defines his limitations. To be effective he had to believe in the cause he espoused, and he would not willingly undertake a case of whose merits he himself was not convinced. *"You speak to the jury,"* he once entreated his associate counsel; *"if I say a word they will see from my face that the man is guilty and convict him."*

There were many at the Illinois bar who were more widely read lawyers than Lincoln, many who had more eloquence at their command, far better presence, and no less experience. There were also many "limbs of the law" better versed in the refinements of pleading and the quibbles and technicalities of practice than he was. Probably all such petty tricksters could have caught him tripping in their nets, and some of them did. But it is for every practitioner at the bar to decide for himself what manner of lawyer he shall be. He may join the ranks of the sly and

shifty gentry who work by indirection; he may fit himself for the rôle of the legal bravo who can be hired to prosecute or defend any cause at a price; he may herd with the legal defeaters of the law; he may specialize in any one of a thousand like activities,—or he may follow the trail which Abraham Lincoln blazed.

During all his three and twenty years of active practice Lincoln never found it necessary to sacrifice his conscience to a code; he never surrendered his private principles for personal gain; his services were constantly in demand, but they were never for sale; he served hundreds of clients, but was owned by none; his ideas of justice and honor were not regulated by the latest decisions; he recognized something higher than the judgment of a court of last resort. Yet he was neither an impractical dreamer nor a god. For almost a quarter of a century he supported himself and his family from his earnings as a lawyer, and yet throughout this long experience he practiced his profession unde-

ceived by its sophistries and unswerved by its manifold temptations, believing always in its highest possibilities.

There is something radically wrong with ideals which cannot be upheld in the workshops of the world. Sentimental ideas are often mistaken for ideals, but men of character quickly distinguish between the real and the sham, and sound ideals do not suffer at their hands.

Lincoln tested the ideals of his calling and proved them to be practical. That alone entitles him to the thanks of every honest member of the bar. He is the support and inspiration of all who desire to make the honorable profession of the law worthy of its name.

Fifth

FOR THOSE WHO MAKE THE LONELY FIGHT FOR PRINCIPLES

THE interest and importance of Lincoln's career as President have naturally created the impression that his life was largely devoted to politics and that he was an extraordinarily successful politician. The truth is, however, that he spent comparatively little of his time in the political arena prior to the civil war, and his record there was mainly a series of disappointments and defeats. He served four consecutive terms in the Illinois Legislature during his early years, and one term in Congress, but that was his entire experience as an officeholder. The explanation of this is apparent upon the surface. He was not regarded as a "practical" politician or a generally available candidate.

Party rule and discipline had not been effected in Illinois when he first entered the political field. The nominations for office were not made by conventions, and any man who chose to present himself as a candidate could do so by the simple expedient of announcing that fact and stating his individual opinions concerning the questions of the day. The "machine" and "the boss" as they now exist were practically unknown. Nevertheless there were even then partisan cliques and leaders who made their influence felt, and Lincoln had not been long in office before he asserted his independence of them and braved the displeasure of the public.

In his twenty-eighth year the Illinois Legislature passed a series of resolutions condemning the formation of Abolitionist societies, upholding the "sacred" right of property in slaves, and declaring against abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia. This was entirely in accordance with the prevailing sentiment in the State at the time, and any young leg-

islator who opposed it did so at his peril. Of this Lincoln was fully aware, and with every reason for wishing to avoid injuring his political future, he might well have been content to cast an inconspicuous negative vote. A prudent politician, conscientiously opposed to the resolutions, would undoubtedly have adopted this course, but Lincoln proceeded to demonstrate that he was neither a prudent nor a "practical" politician by not only voting against the measure but also attempting to induce his associates to subscribe to a written protest against the action of the majority. It was a very cautious and inoffensive document which he prepared, but it was sufficiently alarming to be almost unanimously rejected. Indeed, only one other man had the temerity to put his name to the paper, but despite this, its sponsor had it spread in full upon the records.

In this action Lincoln's whole political career is plainly foreshadowed. Where principles were at stake he had no pru-

dence and knew no fear. Balzac says that the wiliest politician is he who, swimming in the river of events, keeps his head above the surface and, floating with the current, appears to guide its course. From this viewpoint Lincoln has no standing as a politician at all, for he never permitted himself to be carried with the tide of popular opinion unless it tended in the direction of his goal.

During the war with Mexico, when the whole country was aflame with military ardor and flushed with the brilliant achievements of our arms, he rose in Congress and denounced the war as utterly unjustifiable. Worse politics than this can scarcely be imagined, for criticism of one's country in time of war is popularly regarded not only as unpatriotic, but positively traitorous, and he who attempts it has little knowledge of human nature if he hopes for even a respectful hearing. Lincoln certainly had no illusions concerning the effect of his attitude, but firmly and rightly believing that the in-

vasion of Mexico was an attempt to extend the boundaries of slavery, he refused to be silenced by the roar of the conquering cannon or the enthusiastic cheers. To the slogan, "Our country, right or wrong!" he preferred "Our country when right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put right." But this, to the practical politician, was displaying, not the courage, but "the foolhardiness of his opinions," and there was much wagging of wise heads when he was retired to private life, from which he himself never expected to emerge.

Those who suppose that Lincoln was not ambitious but little know the man. He had a natural instinct for leadership, and desired to earn and achieve political promotion. No man ever campaigned more keenly or carefully than he. But he was not greedy for office. He was not vain. He did not think his personal success more important than the triumph of the principles for which he contended, and these qualities often

proved insurmountable obstacles to his advancement. Thus, in 1855, when, after seven years' absence from politics, he re-entered the field to contest for the United States Senatorship, he allowed his devotion to principles to ruin his chances, for, against the violent protest of his friends, he withdrew in favor of an anti-slavery Democrat when he saw that such action would insure the success of his cause.

It is no wonder that there were those who regarded him as an ineffective candidate. To the office hunter, who is always more interested in his own advancement than in the furtherance of any cause, he must have seemed quite as futile as any of the disinterested reformers of the present day, for whose efforts both "the man on horseback" and "the man in the street" alike have an indulgent smile. Nevertheless, this politician who would not think as others thought did not disappear from view, while those who echoed popular opinion and did what they were

told were soon forgotten. The people liked his courage, and he was finally selected as their champion against Douglas in the great contest for the Illinois Senatorship which preceded the Civil War.

It was a forlorn hope which was thus intrusted to Lincoln's charge, for his opponent was one of the most powerful and popular leaders of the Democracy, and that party was in control. Under such circumstances the ordinary candidate would have been extremely careful to speak no word which could possibly offend, and otherwise curry favor with the voters. But Lincoln's genius for "bad politics" asserted itself at the very outset, for in his famous "house-divided-against-itself" speech, he declared that the Union could not continue to exist half slave and half free. Most men knew in their hearts that this was true, but for a candidate to prophesy the dissolution of the Union was, at that crisis, almost courting defeat.

But Lincoln was undisturbed either by

the dismay of his friends or the elation of his foes. He knew that he was telling the truth, and that sooner or later the truth would prevail. Indeed, the fight had not much more than begun before he was guilty of far greater rashness, for he determined to question Douglas and force him to define his position on the issues of the day. Mostly earnestly his advisers warned him that his ingenious opponent would certainly answer in such fashion as to win the people of Illinois and insure the defeat of the Republican ticket. But Lincoln was a leader who refused to be led, and, knowing that what satisfied the people of Illinois would offend the slavery men elsewhere, he deliberately sacrificed his own chances of election by drawing admissions from his adversary which almost defeated him for the Senate, and which so offended the South that two years later she split the Democracy to atoms rather than accept him as her candidate for the Presidency.

The immediate result, however, was a defeat for the anti-slavery champion, and a man of different calibre might easily have become discouraged and imbittered by his repeated failures and rebuffs. But Lincoln did not care to achieve success at the expense of his cause, and after the most heart-breaking of his disappointments he was able to write: *"I am glad I made the late race, and though I now sink out of view, I believe I have made some marks which will tell for the cause of civil liberty long after I am gone."*

It was this spirit that in the end made his record a story of failures that succeeded, and his example heartens those who, with high purpose, strive for principles "in the dust of defeat."

Sixth

FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS AND PRIVATE CITIZENS

IT was with no feeling of elation or confidence that Lincoln found himself President-elect. He was not permitted to enjoy even a moment of his well-earned success. The period that intervened between his election and his inauguration witnessed a spectacle which had no parallel in the history of the country, and which it is to be hoped may remain unique. A great political party had triumphed at the polls, but at the first threats of dissolving the Union its supporters not only tendered back the fruits of victory, but sought peace from their opponents at any price, and it is no wonder that the representatives of the South turned from them with distrust and disgust. Every form of weak-kneed com-

promise, from sentimental sop to abject surrender, had its nervous advocate, and Lincoln, watching the pitiful exhibition, might well have felt himself betrayed in the house of his friends. Yet he displayed no personal resentment and uttered no complaints. Indeed, he sympathized with the anxiety which was disturbing the judgment of public men and appreciated the feeling of panic which wracked the general community. Foolish as were many of the measures urged to insure the national salvation, he neither despised their sponsors nor suspected their motives. Distrustful of his own abilities, he put himself in the place of those who felt that the world was out of joint, and, conscious of no mental superiority, weighed all their hopes and misgivings.

But Lincoln, though "modest to the point of timidity," was not timid. In the midst of wild rumors, nerve-shaking possibilities, distracting advice and a babel of confusion; with the Government fairly

tottering and little help in sight, he found refuge and support in no virtues or talents which are denied the ordinary man, but in that calmness and courage which every one who is born into the world may acquire if he will.

To the swarm of the distracted who buzzed about him, some urging him to adopt their policies, others to anticipate his own, and still others to send a message of reassurance and good will to the disaffected States, he listened patiently, but gave no sign. Schooled to solve his own problems and do his own thinking, he did not feel helpless when confronted by new questions, and refused to allow himself to be diverted by considering complications which had not yet occurred. From his earliest youth he had lived one day at a time, and he saw no occasion to reverse the habits of a life. Sure of the mandate that he had received from those who had elected him and fixed in his purpose neither to betray nor misuse it, he reduced the problem to its simplest form,

as if for presentation to a jury of his peers, and faced the issue unafraid.

Out of this stress and storm and of this modest but unterrified deliberation there came his first Inaugural address—a masterpiece of pleading to whose findings of fact no exception could be taken, and whose conclusions of law were never overruled. Conscious of his own inexperience and diffident of his own powers, he then surrounded himself by counselors whose training and ability had won the confidence of the nation, and to them he applied the simple tests which had long served him to gauge the characters and know the hearts of men. Without guile and with the sincere desire that the country should benefit by the services of these men, he allowed them full scope in the performance of their several duties, even permitting encroachments on the dignity of his own office, and laying aside his personal feelings for the furtherance of the trust committed to his charge.

It was no complaisant weakling, how-

ever, who thus effaced himself, but a man whose daily training in the work-a-day world had brought him into touch with all sorts and conditions of men—men whose business it was to persuade or coerce others to their way of thinking, and who employed every device from legitimate argument to brutal terrorizing to accomplish their ends. His constant practice in the courts had thoroughly familiarized him with the bulldozers and the "roarers" of his profession, and long before he encountered them in his Cabinet he had met the prototypes of Stanton and Seward and Chase. A President of different temper or other training would doubtless have quarreled with those masterful men or been himself torn apart by them in their struggles for supremacy, but Lincoln handled them with a sure touch and made them work together for the nation. Thus when Stanton attempted to browbeat him at the very outset of his career, he stood unmoved by his gusty outbursts and employed his fanati-

cal egotism to the fullest possible advantage. When Chase played for the Presidency even as he sat at the Cabinet table, thinking that his masked moves would escape the attention of the country, "mast-fed" lawyer, he was skillfully checked and delicately manœuvred into a resignation; and when Seward, whose temporary mania of grandeur once took the form of imagining himself a dictator clothed with power to avert the civil perils by instigating a foreign war, he was not only tactfully disillusioned, but his reputation was protected by the magnanimous silence of the man he had endeavored to supplant.

But while he was thus taking the measure of his associates, Lincoln was slowly but surely mastering the innumerable duties of his office, meeting its responsibilities as they developed, and familiarizing himself with his mighty powers. Ingersoll has said that "it is easy for the weak to be gentle; most people can bear adversity; but if you wish to know what a man

really is, give him power. That is the supreme test." Lincoln was not afraid to use his power, but he never abused it. Though invested, as President, with almost supreme authority, he never forgot its source; he never ceased to be one of the people, and the exercise of his prerogatives, instead of making him arrogant and careless of the rights of others, only added to his burden of care.

To relieve the constant strain of that burden he relied on humor, and his opponents called him a trifler; to simplify momentous questions he sought homely parallels, and the world concluded that he lacked capacity to grasp affairs of state; to humanize official action he employed droll anecdotes and illustrations, and the solemn and the pompous proclaimed him a buffoon. Absolutely free of affectation himself, he scandalized and embarrassed those whose dignity was only surface deep, but they who fancied themselves privileged to indulge in undue liberties at his expense did not make the error twice.

Slow in action, calm in danger, sincere in thought, kindly in feeling, wise in counsel, this devoted servant of the State guided the nation to safety and then found rest from the labors that had worn and saddened him for five long, stormy years.

Political passions and prejudices often afford strange reading in the light of history's verdict. Americans who are taught to believe that their public men, whom they themselves elect to office, become lost to honor and dead to shame almost from the moment they are clothed with power, can learn a lesson by remembering that many of those who sought to guide popular opinion in the early days of the Republic denounced Washington as a traitor, and that volumes of contemporaneous libel could be collected to prove that Lincoln was something worse.

Certainly there never was a human being more maligned, more ridiculed or more unsparingly accused and condemned

than Abraham Lincoln. Ingenuity exhausted itself in efforts to insult him; partisan malice and personal spite, both North and South, shamelessly contended to sting him with abuse; vilification strove to pillory him at every turn. But no savage word ever escaped his lips. The iron did not enter into his soul. He sought neither vindication nor revenge. Through the miasma of hatred and distrust he saw the dawning of his hopes. Before he died "he heard the hisses turn to cheers."

Lincoln was a great Executive, but he was a greater man. He left his country the better for his having been in it. That —his greatest achievement—is not beyond the power of the humblest in the land, and every American who strives to make his part of the country—no matter how small that part may be—the better for his presence, crowns Lincoln's courage and shares his glory.

Seventh

FOR MEN OF COMMON MOLD

IN seeking to interpret the careers of famous men, it is usually possible, and often not difficult, to trace out some dominating influence or discover some determining factor in their lives which reveals the secret of their success. The result, however, is rarely of any practical benefit to humanity. The circumstances that give the impulse to such men or serve to mold them are not, as a rule, within the experience of the ordinary individual. They are exceptional, extraordinary, or hopelessly unique. The man who awaits some marvelous crisis in his life or expects some intervention of Providence, such as favored this or that historic character, deceives himself with false hopes. All the chances are against a

repetition of the conditions which produce any particular hero.

But with Lincoln the case is very different. It is not possible to place a finger on any one fact in his history and declare with certainty that that was the inciting cause of his success, or to demonstrate that any special chain of events made him what he was. He was subjected to no great inspiring influence; no wonderful experience determined his life. His career was not a climacteric awakening—it was a natural development.

If this be true, it practically eliminates the distinction between Lincoln the man and Lincoln the President, and disposes of the claim that his achievements as the head of the nation were due to the sudden enlargement of extraordinary latent powers. To some this offers the only rational explanation of his statesmanship. Despite the fact that he was over fifty years of age when he became President, and that his record was, up to that time, largely due to qualities which are part of

the common heritage of all his countrymen, many of his eulogists cannot believe that these same qualities served to effect his historic results. No man, they contend, whose equipment was really on a plane with his fellows could possibly have accomplished what he did. Masters of men, it is asserted, are not molded from ordinary clay, and it is incredible that the great logician, resourceful diplomatist, and guiding spirit of the Civil War lacked the intellectual endowments of a genius.

Nevertheless, if Lincoln's achievements be carefully examined, they will, in the final analysis, be found to rest upon moral qualities rather than mental attributes, and those moral qualities are all plainly discernible in the life training which fitted him for his great task. To assume that he suddenly developed brilliancy and revealed superhuman endowments at the call of high office is to ignore the man in the making and put a needless tax upon credulity. What was there in his services

to the State that demands such a sacrifice of probability? The magnitude of his results must not be permitted to exaggerate the means by which he effected them. The preservation of the Union and the suppression of slavery were not accomplished by an intellectual *tour de force,* and the great crises of the period were not met by masterly strokes of genius. It was Lincoln's daily example of resolution, fortitude and patience that prevailed during the life-and-death struggle of the nation. It was the forbearance of the hour—the tact of the moment that molded the event.

During his whole life, prior to the Presidency, he relied on the influence of simple virtues and their all-conquering power, and his handling of public questions, great and small, during his official career, displays the same traits of mind and character. The country lawyer whose sense of justice restrained his rapacious clients was the same man who, against his personal inclination and the

heaviest of moral pressures, resisted every effort of the Abolitionists to deprive the South of her property without due process of law, and it was not until every legal expedient had been exhausted that he consented, as military commander, to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. The writer who produced the masterpiece of Gettysburg was not a literary genius, but one whose lips spoke what his heart suggested, and whose human sympathy and genuine humility took that immortal form. In like manner all the episodes of his Administration may be examined without disclosing anything which he accomplished by virtue of gifts of which the ordinary mortal need despair.

What were the forces by which he effected what brainier men could not achieve? He was unselfish.—Is that an impossible virtue? He was simple and modest.—Is talent required for that? He was sympathetic and considerate of others.—No college or school teaches that. He was sincere in thought and

action.—No dramatic crisis brought this about. He was honest, cared little for money and much for honor.—Dare any one admit that this is beyond him? He was deliberate in judgment and long suffering in patience.—Those are not intellectual achievements. He was temperate in word and deed.—That is a matter of self-control.

His triumph was the perfecting of qualities which all men may command. Were every citizen of this broad land to develop the best that lies within him, Lincoln would be a type and not an example.

Of course, if some great, striking event transformed Lincoln from a man of common mold into a god, the story of his life has merely a dramatic or picturesque interest for ordinary mortals. But nothing of the sort occurred. The events which shaped him were the everyday happenings of the dull, trivial round—the irksome details of routine.

Those who fret because they seem to

be wasting time over insignificant tasks, or despair of gaining anything from them, or are discouraged because they are not progressing fast enough, or are not receiving what they regard as "a fair chance in life," have something to learn from the pages of Lincoln's life. It was a wise as well as a subtle philosopher who declared that "the time best spent is the time we waste."

Doubtless Lincoln thought he was wasting time as a farmhand in the fields; as a clerk in Offutt's store; as the unsuccessful proprietor of a grocery; and at the end of his term in Congress it is well known that he regarded the years he had devoted to politics as time thrown away. Yet the years spent in the open air gave him the constitution of iron without which his great work could never have been accomplished; his experience as a clerk earned him the tribute rather than the nickname of "Honest Abe"; his incursion into the business world tested and tempered his honor, and the knowledge

gained of local politics contributed essentially to his career. There was not an experience in his entire life which may fairly be said to have proved a waste of time—there was scarcely anything which entered into or even touched it which he did not sooner or later turn to some account.

During his career as President there were times when a highly cultured man with little or no real knowledge of the people would surely have brought disaster upon himself; again and again he utilized homely trifles of daily living which had sunk into his being and with which he had never consciously charged his mind. All his failures and disappointments bore rich harvests. No career ever more clearly demonstrated the value of "the little things that are not worth while," or better revealed the undreamed of possibilities that lie within the humblest experience.

Lincoln contributed some wonderful pages to history, but other men have done

that and the world, as a whole, has not greatly benefited. He won a place among the mightiest rulers of the earth, but others have done that whose names have become mere memory-tests, or whose deeds are chiefly recorded on blood-stained battlefields. He did much to preserve the Union and abolish slavery, but generals and soldiers and a vast army of simple citizens supported him in that work, and are entitled to share in the glory.

It is neither Lincoln the President—nor Lincoln the Master of Men—nor Lincoln the Saviour of the State, who is winning the hearts of more and more Americans each year. All that history could tell of the *President* was told many years ago. It is Lincoln the *man* who is inspiring his fellows to-day—the man within touch of all the lowly of heart. This is he who, of all Americans, is "leaving his impress upon eternity."