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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

SPEECH

OF

HON. LOUIS W. FAIRFIELD

OF INDIANA

DELIVERED BEFORE THE LINCOLN CLUB
BROOKLYN, N. Y., FEBRUARY 12, 1921

(Printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD
February 13, 1922)

WASHINGTON
1922

50118—22282

Louis W. Fairfield


UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

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Abraham Lincoln was born 20 years after the adoption of the Constitution. He was born in the heart of the Continent, far removed from the centers of civilization as they had developed in this new country. Poverty was his birthright. Frugality was a necessity. The refinements of society were unknown in the circle into which he was born. Thus far removed he came up out of the vastness and silence of a midcontinental area. The physical circumstances that gathered around his early life gave to a nature peculiarly sensitive, deeply imaginative, and severely logical strange and apparently contradictory elements which the rough school of experience was destined to beat into a figure at once massive, symmetrical, and universal. How he came to be what he was, how the revelation of what he was, became the possession of the common man and women; how that knowledge gave him power through all the formative years of his life, preparing for the fateful days from Sumter to Appomattox, constitutes the theme of my address to-night.

The study of great men is always profitable. They differ from all other men only in that they comprehend all the qualities of the common man but have those qualities in such measure that every common man feels akin to greatness. Emerson has said, "All men are great. Like splendid temples they send their spires high, but the difference between great men and other men is that great men touch all other men at their highest." The elements of human history are circumstances, principles, and personalities. The roots of the present lie deep buried in the past. The discovery of America and all the changes that it produced are intimately connected as causes in the life of the barefoot boy who grew to manhood in the heart of a continent, safe hidden from the influences of the schools, that he might realize the thought of the infinite in the issues of his life. Some one has said that the discovery of America is the greatest event in all secular history and that next to the resurrection of the Christ from the dead is the greatest event in all human history. The resurrection of the Christ gave the world a new hope. The discovery of America gave the world a new chance. The new chance wedded to the new hope gave us the Republic. It is my purpose to-night to determine by

induction, so far as the material is at hand, the character and quality of this man that in the crisis of crises in the life of the Republic acted with almost infinite wisdom. This man applied inexorable logic to every problem. His mind ever asked the question as to the reason and the rightness of every human interest, but at the same time he exhibited the innocence and humility of a child, the tenderness and graciousness of a woman, even to those who maligned him.

He was born in Kentucky, the State of Boone and Clay and Davy Crockett; the State of romance and tragedy. The atmosphere in which the portals of life opened were filled with the courage, the self-denial, the martyrdom of those who crossed over in the early days to redeem the wilderness and to plant the civilization of the West. His birthplace in after years produced a profound impression upon his thought and feeling. He was born in Hardin County, Ky., in 1809. He spent but seven years of his life in Kentucky. There are no details of that life.

His father seemed hopelessly unable to prosper. To those who can not succeed here, there is always the allurement of another place where the securing of riches is easy and the problems of life simplified. So Thomas Lincoln heard of the wonderful opportunities in Indiana, that had just come into the Union, and in 1816 loaded all his possessions into a flat boat and floated down the river to the new Eldorado. His essential wealth consisted of three barrels of whisky.

On the way down the boat capsized and the barrels spilled into the river. By dint of much effort it was rescued. A landing was at last effected, and on the clay hills that skirt the valley of the Ohio Thomas Lincoln chose to make his home. It was a country in which at best the soil gives but meager returns, and his lack of judgment is clearly discerned in the character of the choice that he made. At this time Abe was 7 years of age. There in the woods Thomas Lincoln built a cabin of rough unhewn logs, inclosed on but three sides, with a dirt floor, pegs driven in the side of the wall by which to ascend to the loft above. Crude, cold, uncomfortable, with his wife and two children he spent the first year in Indiana here. Later he built a more comfortable house of hewn logs. Two years afterwards his mother died. Some 20 years ago it was my privilege to stand on the spot where that cabin was erected. To me it seemed as if the woods and fields were holy ground. I walked down the hillside across the little valley and climbed the hill to the spot where Abraham Lincoln's mother is buried. Ever there was with me the barefoot boy with breaking heart, who in utter loneliness and anguish of spirit saw the mother of his childhood lowered in the rude box and hidden forever from his sight. Unshod, meagerly clothed, a shiftless father, before him the hard and frugal life of the pioneer. No schools, no church, no social life. Little promise of greatness here. It is, perhaps, not fully realized that all the formative years of Mr. Lincoln's life were lived in southern Indiana on a 40-acre farm, for which his father was never able to pay.

Mr. Lincoln would have little to say of himself, the life of his parents, or the history of the family before they moved to Indiana. When in the race for the Presidency it became neces-

sary to have a campaign biography, Mr. Lincoln doubted the wisdom or the necessity of even that. He said to J. L. Scripps, of the Chicago Tribune: "Why, Scripps, it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of me or my early life. It can all be condensed in a single sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's Elegy, 'The short and simple annals of the poor.' That is my life, and that is all you or anyone else can make out of it." Mr. Lincoln was ever painfully impressed with the extreme poverty of his early surroundings and the utter absence of all romance and heroic elements.

"Amid the miserable surroundings of a home in the wilderness Nancy Hanks, the mother of Lincoln, passed across the dark river. Though of lowly birth, the victim of poverty and hard usage, she takes a place in history as the mother of a son who liberated a race of men. At her side stands another mother whose son performed a similar service for all mankind eighteen hundred years before.

"After the death of their mother little Abe and his sister Sarah began a dreary life—indeed, one more cheerless and less inviting seldom falls to the lot of any child. In a log cabin without a floor, scantily protected from the severities of the weather, deprived of the comfort of a mother's love, they passed through a winter the most dismal either one ever experienced. Within a few months, and before the close of the winter, David Elkin, an itinerant preacher whom Mrs. Lincoln had known in Kentucky, happened into the settlement, and in response to the invitation from the family and friends, delivered a funeral sermon over her grave. No one is able now to remember the language of Parson Elkin's discourse, but it is recalled that he commemorated the virtues and good phases of character, and passed in silence the few shortcomings and frailties of the poor woman sleeping under the winter's snow. She had done her work in this world. Stoop-shouldered, thin-breasted, sad—at times miserable—groping through the perplexities of life, without prospect of any betterment in her condition, she passed from earth, little dreaming of the grand future that lay in store for the ragged, hapless little boy who stood at her bedside in the last days of her life."

Fortunately for the boy it was not long until Thomas Lincoln again married a most worthy woman. She took a deep interest in the boy, and made it possible for him to attend school. He attended school at three brief intervals; at the age of 10, when he was about 14, and again when he was 17. The last school required a walk of four miles. At Crawford's school, when he was about 14, a new feature was introduced. It was instruction in manners. One scholar was required to go outside and reenter the room as a lady or gentleman would enter a drawing room or a parlor. Another scholar would receive the first party and escort him or her about the room making polite introductions to each person in the room. It may be that the suggestions received by this backwoods school-teacher, who, no doubt, had acquired the forms of polite society, had more to do with the way in which Mr. Lincoln was able to move when he became prominent in the State of Illinois than is generally supposed.

He had a retentive memory, a sensitive nature on matters that had to do with his getting on in the world. He was not

indifferent. The sharp contrast between what was thought as proper form in polite society and the crude though hearty social life of the backwoodsman no doubt made a deep impression upon the boy.

It is said that while attending school at Crawford's, when he was in his fourteenth year, Mr. Lincoln wrote a dissertation in which he strove to show the wholesome effects of a temperate life and the horrors of war, subjects in which his interest never lagged.

At 17 he was 6 feet 4 inches in height, and weighed about 160 pounds. His hands and feet were large, arms and legs being long and in striking contrast with his slender trunk and small head. His skin was shriveled and yellow. He was barefooted most of the time. He wore buckskin trousers, linsey-woolsey shirt, and a cap made of the skin of a squirrel or coon. His breeches were baggy and short, exposing his shin bone, sharp, blue, and narrow. Even at that early day Lincoln was a patient reader of a Louisville newspaper which someone at Gentryville kindly furnished him. The books he read were the Bible, Aesops Fables, Robinson Crusoe, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, a history of the United States, and Weem's Life of Washington. He was not able to own these books. They were borrowed. He never owned an arithmetic. He made his own. On the leaf of this book, beneath the table, of how many pints there were in a bushel was found the following: "Abraham Lincoln, his hand and pen. He will be good, but God knows when"—a touch of that humor so well known in later years.

The foundation of whatever education he had was laid in Indiana and the town of Salem, Ill. In both places he gave evidence of the characteristics that markedly distinguished him from all his associates. He was not peculiar. He was not eccentric. He was, however, unique, original, indefinable. Even at 14 years of age he had a remarkable store of information. Two volumes he kept constantly at hand and read them again and again and again, the Bible and Aesops Fables. The aptness of his quotations reveal even to the casual student of his life how incarnate must have been the literature of the Bible. Even during the time of his Indiana life, from 7 years of age until he was 21 there are no incidents, striking or unusual. The life was one from within. His retentive memory, his power of concentration, his love of truth, his delight in intellectual processes, his ideals, and the self-urgency within him for their realization were the agencies, the inner hidden powers, that could not be counted or weighed, but which nevertheless brought him to the stature of manhood intellectually as well as physically in that 14 years of Indiana life. He lived two lives between the ages of 7 and 21, the outer, rugged, self-denying, poverty stricken, humble, almost menial life of the unsuccessful backwoodsman.

But there were two of him, and that inner life had its roots in the fineness of his nature, in the bigness of his intellect, in the generosity of his heart, and in his unconquerable will. After all what better vision of life than that which comes through the prophets of old. They reveal the weakness, the littleness, the sinfulness, the tragic helplessness in certain phases of human life. The prophet recognized in the Bible as

the spokesman of God is ever on the side of the oppressed as against the oppressor, on the side of the weak as against the strong, on the side of liberty as against tyranny, on the side of right as against wrong, on the side of hope as against despair, on the side of God as against Godlessness. Can you not understand that a boy of 14, feeling that self-urgency, which in itself is life, and drinking deep from the rich lore of Biblical literature, would be lifted into a higher altitude, even to the thought of the Infinite? He was familiar with the Sermon on the Mount, the constitution of the race. The life of the Nazarene gave him hope, the Republic gave him a chance, and there in the wilderness after 2,000 years the hope that had come into the heart of the world for its redemption, and the new chance that had come to the world by the discovery of America blended in the life of the boy of destiny. After all may it not be that in God's own good time it was meant that out from the womb of this continent, begotten of the eternal promise enunciated through the ages by the prophets, and realized in the life of the Christ that there should come one to preserve to the world a government "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal"?

From infancy to 7 years of age in Kentucky. From 7 to 21 in Indiana. Before reaching his majority for two or three years he felt restless under the restraining influence of his father, who had no sympathy for his aspirations for an education, and no ability to determine a more prosperous career for himself. Lincoln is now 21 years of age. Little training has he received in the schools, but his mind has been richly stored from the treasure of our English literature, the English Bible. He read the statutes of Indiana. His imagination is stirred with the thought of becoming a lawyer. Already he has been accustomed to practice public speaking from the stumps in the forest with the trees as auditors. In his imagination he is addressing countless crowds. "There is in him tears and consuming fire like drops and lightning in summer clouds." That is the inner Lincoln that goes to Illinois with his father. The outer Lincoln is 6 feet 4, walking barefoot beside an ox team, driving a creaking wagon over the rough hills, and through the mire, and fording streams toward a new home and a new destiny, hidden alike from him and those who traveled with him.

I shall not speak of his trips down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans, nor his service in the Black Hawk War. Nor dwell in recounting his feats of physical power that enabled him to be a leader in the sports of the pioneer days, as well as the intellectual leader of those with whom he associated.

The three periods of his life are marked by the dates 1809 to 1816, when he lived in Kentucky; 1816 to 1830 were spent in Indiana. In the spring of 1830 he moved with his father to Illinois. Two years later he became a candidate for the legislature and was defeated, the only time he suffered defeat at the hands of the people. In common with others who aspired to the position, he issued a circular to the people of Sangamon County, stating his political principles which were a national bank, a liberal system of internal improvements, and a high protective tariff. This description is given of him as he appeared on the occasion of his first stump speech:

He wore a mixed jean coat, claw-hammered style, short in the sleeves and bobtailed—in fact, it was so short in the tail he could not sit on

it—flax and tow linen pantaloons, and a straw hat. He wore pot-metal boots.

The occasion was a public sale at Pottsville, 11 miles west of Springfield. After the sale was over and speechmaking had begun, a general fight ensued. Lincoln seeing one of his friends about to be overcome, interposed to prevent it. He came down from the rude platform from which he was about to speak, seized the bully by the neck and the seat of the trousers, and threw him a distance of "12 feet." He now returned to the platform, threw aside his hat, and opened his campaign. Said he:

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 lady's dance. I am in favor of national banks; I am in favor of internal improvements; and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same.

In the circular which he had issued he had closed with this statement:

I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular friends to recommend me. If elected, the people will have conferred a favor upon me for which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. If the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined.

The recital of these incidents reveals the characteristics that are clearly discerned throughout Lincoln's career—ambition to be recognized; courage to face difficulties, both physical and political, and yet tinged with that vein of sadness which sometimes resulted in despondence when he adds, "I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined." He was defeated. His defeat did not sour him nor dampen his hopes. Up to that time he had earned literally by the sweat of his brow whatever of money he had received. Labor gave little opportunity for study and reflection. His experiences in politics had given him brief respite from the dull, stupifying effects of excessive physical labor. He now wanted lighter work. He wanted to meet the celebrities who came to the store and tavern. He wanted to discuss politics, horse races, cockfights, and narrate to listening loafers his striking and significant stories. In the community where Lincoln lived the storekeeper was the center of power and influence. He took the only newspaper; had the only collection of books; usually owned about half of the town, and was the social and political leader of the community.

Lincoln aspired to be that. He had drunken of the exciting wine of politics and it had weaned him from the field of physical labor. He bought a store in partnership with a man by the name of Berry. In a short time they absorbed another new Salem grocery and then another from a man by the name of Rutledge. Not a cent of money passed in this transaction. Berry gave his note to James Herndon, Lincoln gave his note to Rowan Herndon, while Lincoln & Berry as a firm executed their obligation to Green and to Radford and Rutledge. Lincoln was absolutely unfit for a storekeeper. He read Shakespear and Burns and talked politics while his partner paid most of his attention to the spigot and the barrel. In the spring of 1833 they knew that the firm was failing and were ready to

retire. Two brothers named Trent came along to whom they sold the business on the most liberal terms then prevalent, but before the Trent's notes became due they in turn had failed and fled. Berry died soon after. Lincoln was under the necessity of either meeting the unhonored obligations of the ill-fated partnership or avoid the payment by dividing the responsibility and pleading the failure of the business. He assumed all of the liabilities and set himself to the full payment of every dollar, which was strictly in keeping with his fine sense of honesty and justice. His law partner relates that Lincoln was a long time meeting these claims. In 1848 he sent from Washington parts of his salary as Congressman to be applied upon the unpaid remnant of the Berry & Lincoln indebtedness. In time he extinguished it all, even to the last penny. He determined now to read law, indeed had been reading while in the store. He had to borrow his books, of course; had to walk 11 miles to Springfield, and walk back again to return them, and walking backward and forward he sometimes mastered as much as 40 pages of Blackstone along the road. That any man should undertake to become a lawyer under such adverse circumstances—without money, without education such as the schools could give, without books, with no means of subsistence except by day labor—excited the disgust of many of the good people of Salem. An old farmer who had called him at that time to do farm work was surprised to find him one day sitting barefooted on the top of a woodpile attentively reading a book. This was an unusual thing for farm hands in that day to do, and the farmer asked him what he was reading. "I am not reading," he said, "I am studying." "Studying what?" the farmer inquired. "Law, sir," was the emphatic response. It was nearly too much for the farmer, and as he looked at him sitting there proud as Cicero, said "Great God Almighty" and passed on. Soon he was able to draw deeds, contracts, and other legal papers. Some friends at this time encouraged him to become deputy surveyor. The incumbent was a Democrat. Lincoln was a Whig. The messenger that took the news to him found him splitting rails. When appraised that he could have the appointment he said, "If I can be perfectly free in my political action I will take the office, but if my sentiments or even the expression of them should be abridged in any way I would not have it or any other office." Hampered by poverty, yet he had the courage to deal with public office in such a way as to make us know that he was made of unalloyed material. We can understand how he could say to his friends, after Douglass had defeated him, "do not give up after 1 or 100 defeats." He was not only not discouraged, but he had that quality which, above all else, is essential to greatness, he was not discourageable. He was made deputy surveyor. He was made postmaster in 1833, carried the post office around in his hat. Between the revenues derived from the post office and his income from land surveying Lincoln was gettting along well enough.

Soon, however, the prospect was darkened. Suit was brought against him and a judgment obtained on one of the notes given in the store debt. All his personal effects were levied upon and sold, his horse and surveying instruments going with the rest. A friend, however, bought in the property and restored it to

Lincoln. There was that quality in him which bound men to him. He was not only grateful for what came to him but ever earnest and anxious to help, to help alike those whom he knew and the stranger who might come across his path. He made the race for the legislature again in 1834, and was successful. He had now emerged from utter obscurity, had extended the sphere of his influence from the county to the State. He did not have enough money to dress himself decently and pay the fare to the capital of the State, and had to borrow $200 from a friend. He got it and paid it back as promised, of course.

When elected to the legislature for the first time Mr. Lincoln was only 25 years of age. At this time occurred one of the most tragic experiences of his life—the death of his first beloved, Ann Rutledge. The limitation of this address will not permit a detailed setting of the peculiarly sad and distressing circumstances that gather around this event. Miss Rutledge was a singularly attractive and beautiful girl. She had been engaged to one named McNeal, who had returned to the East with the promise of coming back again and claiming her. A train of unfortunate circumstances, including his sickness and the loss of letters in the mail, led her friends to believe and urge that she had been abandoned. She was unwilling to believe it, but as the letters grew less ardent she finally yielded to the conviction that he had ceased to love her. At this critical time Lincoln appeared on the scene. No doubt she was made more attractive to him by that vein of melancholy that had been induced by her experiences. For even then he was subject to fits of depression though not so marked as in the later years. He pressed his suit ardently and was aided by his neighbors who wished for his success. Finally she told him that she would write to McNeal and ask him to release her from her promise. The answer to that letter never came. In a half-hearted way she turned to Lincoln and accepted his proposal. Now that they were engaged he told her frankly what she already knew that he was poverty stricken and that they must wait until he had finished his studies before they could hope to marry. She consented and told one of her brothers, "As soon as his studies are completed we are to be married." But the ghost of another love would often rise unbidden before her, and in the early fall she took to her bed in a swift decline. Absolute quiet was demanded and visitors were shut out from the home. But she peristently called for Lincoln. At last the family sent for him. The door was closed, and what was said in those last hallowed and sacred hours no one knows save Him who holds us in the hollow of His hand. In a few days she died. The effect on Lincoln's mind was terrible to contemplate. He walked for days near the verge and only at last by the importunities of friends and their watchful care he was saved from going into the abyss. To one friend he complained that the thought that the snows and rains should fall on her grave filled him with indescribable grief. So alarming did his condition become that after consultation his friends sent him to the house of a kind friend who lived in a secluded spot hidden between the hills a mile south of town.

Here he remained for some weeks under watchful care and was finally brought back to a realization of his condition. The

shock of an experience like that puts a new stamp on a man that all the years can not efface.

There was another courtship. This lady informed her sister that she thought "Mr. Lincoln was deficient in those little links which make up the chain of a woman's happiness." In a letter to Lincoln's lawyer, Mr. Banks, after Lincoln's death, she gave an illustration of what she had in mind: "A company were riding into the country. Mr. Lincoln was riding with this lady. They had a branch to cross. All the other gentlemen were very officious in seeing that their partners got safely over. We were behind. He rode in and never looked back to see how I got across. When I rode up behind him I remarked, 'You are a nice fellow. I suppose you did not care whether my neck was broken or not.' He replied in a laughing manner that he knew I was plenty smart to take care of myself." As a reference to this courtship Mr. Lincoln in a letter to Mrs. O. H. Browning closed with this: "Others have been made fools of by girls; but this can never with truth be said of me. I most emphatically in this instance made a fool of myself. I have now come to the conclusion never again to think of marrying, and this is the reason: I could never be satisfied with anyone who would be blockhead enough to have me."

Mr. Lincoln was elected to the legislature again in 1836, 1838, and 1840, and rapidly became a striking figure in the State. He aspired to be the De Witt Clinton of Illinois; but never had any money sense. A system of internal improvements were outlined by the Whig Party, which had been suddenly elevated to power. Extravagant appropriations were made, and the State of Illinois was fast moving toward bankruptcy, but as the Democrats, under the leadership of Douglas, had aligned themselves with internal improvements the future of Lincoln was not adversely affected. He did not care to be returned to the legislature again, but was ambitious to enter a larger field. Already his ability as a platform orator was recognized from one end of the State to the other. How thoroughly he had prepared and with what deep feeling he treasured the institutions of the Republic is evidenced in all his public speeches. On January 27, 1837, he made an address before the Young Men's Lyceum at Springfield. He had come into the State in 1830. He had studied surveying and made himself proficient in it. He had been twice elected to the legislature and had taken an active part in its proceedings. He had been studying law and been admitted to the bar. He was thought worthy to address the most pretentious literary body in that part of the State. It is his first public address which in its entirety has come down to us. The subject itself is significant of what was uppermost in mind and heart. The theme of that address was "The perpetuation of our political institutions." I quote a few significant statements: "We find ourselves 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."

He then pointed out the essential danger. He insists that there can never be essential danger from without us. "As a na-

tion of free men we must live through all time or die by suicide. How shall we fortify against it? The answer is simple: Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well-wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution never to violate in the least particular the laws of the country and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of seventy-six did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and laws let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor; let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample on the blood of his father and to tear the charter of his own and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws 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."

At that time our political institutions had been preserved for 50 years and he pertinently asks why we may not continue for fifty times as long. Indeed, so clearly is it expressed in the following sentence: "There are now and will hereafter be many causes, dangerous in their tendency, which have not existed heretofore, and which are not too insignificant to merit attention." He might have appropriately said that up to the time at which he speaks the Government had many props to support it. Through that period it was thought to be an experiment. After 50 years he understood that people considered it a successful one. For the first 50 years all those who had staked their all upon the success of the experiment had their destiny inseparably connected with it. "They wanted to show the world that a people could govern themselves. They succeeded. Thousands have won their deathless names in making it so." He argues that this field of glory has been reaped and that as new reapers arise they, too, will seek a field. It is to deny what the history of the world tells us is true to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us. And when they do, they will as naturally seek the gratification of their ruling passion as others have done before them. The question, then, is, Can that gratification be found in supporting and maintaining an edifice that has been erected by others? Most certainly it can not. Many great and good men sufficiently qualified for any task they should undertake may ever be found whose ambitions would aspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial or a presidential chair, but such belong not to the family of the lion or the tribe of the eagle. What, think you these places would satisfy an Alexander, a Cæsar, or a Napoleon? Never! Towering genius 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. Is it unreasonable, then, to expect that some man possessed of the loftiest genius, coupled with ambition sufficient to push it to its utmost stretch, will at some time spring up among us? And when such a one does, it will require the people to be united with each other, attached to the Government and laws, and generally intelligent to successfully frustrate his designs. Distinction will be his paramount object, and although he would as willingly—perhaps more so—acquire it by doing good as harm, yet that opportunity being past and nothing left to be done in the way of building up, he would set boldly to the task of pulling down.

For the first 50 years the scenes of the revolution were fresh in the minds and hearts of the people. In every village and in the countryside there were the heroes of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill, of Long Island, New Jersey, Brandywine, Princeton, Trenton, Saratoga, Valley Forge, and Yorktown. That prop, he argued, was decaying through the ravages of time.

The passion of experience and suffering has helped us, but can do so no more. "It will in future be reason—cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all materials for our future support and defense. Let these materials be molded into general intelligence, sound morality, and in particular a reverence for the Constitution and the law. Upon these let the proud fabric of freedom rest as the rock of its basis and, as truly as has been said of the only greater institution, 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"

Lincoln had now become a figure—and a potent one—in the intellectual and legal circles of Springfield, which had now become the capital of the State. Speed's store was the meeting place for loafers, loungers, lawyers, and politicians. One evening the political discussion got warm. Douglas was leading on the Democratic side. He was subtle, fiery, and impetuous. No vulnerable spot seemed to have escaped him. At last with great vehemence he sprang up and abruptly made a challenge to those who differed from him to discuss the matter with him, remarking that this store was no place to talk politics. The challenge was accepted. The debate took place in the Presbyterian church. One evening was given to each man. There were four Democrats and four Whigs. Lincoln occupied the last evening, so that it was more than a week before his turn came. By that time the audience had become somewhat tired of the subject. Mr. Lincoln showed how sensitive he was to the apparent want of interest in his personal presentation of the argument. In introducing himself he makes the following statement: "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 those evenings there was a much fuller attendance than now, without any reason for its being so except the greater interest the community feels in the speakers who addressed them then 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 me mortification than in

the hope of being interested in anything I am able to say. This circumstance casts a damp upon my spirits which, I am sure, I shall be unable to overcome during the evening. But enough of preface." However, his argument was so cogent that it was printed in pamphlet form and widely distributed by the Whigs as a political document. He was arguing against the Subtreasury idea and for the idea of a bank. It is the irony of fate that while Douglas's ideas should have prevailed at the time and for many years thereafter, yet to-day the Subtreasury scheme is a thing of the past, and the Federal Reserve bank, a national institution, conforming in spirit and organiztion to what Lincoln advocated in 1839, has become the permanent fiscal agent of the Government.

The year of 1840 finds Mr. Lincoln 32 years of age and still unmarried. The world is familiar with his courtship of Mary Todd, daughter of Gen. Levi Todd, in whose veins coursed the blood of a long and distinguished ancestral line that could be traced back in the genealogical chart to the sixth century. The course of his wooing ran smoothly and soon he was engaged. Soon a new and disturbing element loomed up ahead in their paths. The brilliant little giant of Illinois appeared as a rival. Miss Todd was not indifferent to his attentions. Douglas was unremitting in his attentions to the lady, promenading the streets, arm in arm with her, frequently passing Lincoln, and in every way making plain his intentions of becoming his rival. Lincoln was not insensible to the situation. He wrote a letter in which he stated to her that he had thought the matter over very carefully and had come to the conclusion that he did not love her enough to warrant her marrying him and asked his friend Speed to deliver the letter. Upon his declining to do so, he threatened to intrust it to some other person's hands. Speed said to him, "Words are forgotten, misunderstood, unnoticed in a private conversation, but once you put your words in writing they stand a living and eternal monument against you." The unfortunate letter was then thrown into the fire. Said his friend to him, "If you have the courage of manhood go see Mary yourself. Tell her, if you do not love her, the facts, and that you will not marry her. Be careful not to say too much and then leave at your earliest opportunity." He buttoned up his coat and with a determined look started out to perform his duty. Speed waited his return. Ten o'clock came, 11 o'clock, no Lincoln yet. Shortly after 11 o'clock he came in. "Well, old fellow, did you do as I told you and as you promised?" "Yes, I did," responded Lincoln thoughtfully. "And when I told Mary I did not love her, she burst into tears and almost sprung from her chair and wringing her hands as in agony said something about the deceiver being himself deceived," then he stopped. "What else did you say?" inquired Speed. "To tell you the truth, Speed, it was too much for me, I found the tears trickling down my own cheeks, I caught her in my arms and kissed her." "And that is how you broke the engagement" sneered Speed. "You not only acted the fool, but your conduct was tantamount to a renewal of the engagement and in decency you can not back down now." "Well," drawled Lincoln, "if I am in again, so be it. It is done and I shall abide by it."

January 1, of 1841, was fixed as the day for the marriage. The day came. Every preparation for the ceremony had been

made, the hour arrived, no groom appeared, an hour passed, another hour passed. Lincoln could not be found. The bride in grief disappeared to her room. The wedding supper was left untouched, the guests quietly and wonderingly withdrew. The darkness of night settled over the Edwards mansion. What were the thoughts and feelings of Mary Todd through that fateful night can never be known. Searching all night long the friends of Lincoln found him at daybreak. He was restless, gloomy, miserable, despondent, an object of pity. The report went out that he was insane. Three weeks afterwards, in a letter to his partner, he revealed how he felt. "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 earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better, as it appears to me. * * * I fear I shall be unable to attend to any business here, and a change of scene might help me. If I could be myself I would rather remain at home with Judge Logan. I can write no more."

During all this time the legislature to which he had been elected was in special session. For a time he was unable to attend. Toward the close, however, he was present, but took no active part in its proceedings. After adjournment his warm friend, Speed, persuaded Lincoln to go with him to Kentucky, where they remained for several months in the quiet and seclusion of a large plantation. While there Lincoln wrote some lines to the Sangamon Journal on the gloomy subject of suicide. Many years later his biographer consulted the files of that paper, but found that the lines had been cut out, possibly at the suggestion of Lincoln when he became a prominent figure in politics. He and Speed exchanged many letters concerning the subject of marriage. In one of those letters he reveals what explains his strange and contradictory course in his love affair with Miss Todd. He says, "I have no doubt it is the peculiar misfortune of both you and me to dream dreams of Elysium far exceeding all that anything earthly can be realized. Far short of your dreams as you may be, no woman could do more to realize them than that same black-eyed Fannie." In another letter to the same friend, written July 4, he writes:

"I must gain confidence in my own ability to keep my resolves when they are made. In that ability I once prided myself as the one chief gem of my character. That gem I lost; how and where you know too well. I have not regained it, and until I do I can not trust myself in any matter of much importance. I believe now that had you understood my case at the time as well as I understood your's afterwards, by the aid you would have given me I should have sailed through clear; but that does not now afford me sufficient confidence to begin that or the like of that again. I always was superstitious. I believe God made me one of the instruments of bringing Fannie and you together, which union I have no doubt he had foreordained. Whatever he desires he will do for me yet. 'Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord' is my text just now." So deeply did Lincoln think and feel upon this most vital question of human life that on October 5, 1842, he wrote to Speed as follows: "You have now been the husband of a

lovely woman nearly eight months. But I want to ask you a close question. Are you in feeling, as well as judgment, glad you are married as you are? Please answer quickly, as I am impatient to know."

Lincoln entered the practice of law with renewed vigor after the enforced rest. He troubled no more over the matter of his engagement with Mary Todd. Mutual friends, however, contrived to bring them together again. They were reconciled, and on the evening of November 4, 1842, Abraham Lincoln, as pale and trembling as if being driven to slaughter, was at last married to Mary Todd.

The most recent political change of nationwide importance is the granting of equal suffrage to the womanhood of this country. In 1836 when running for candidate to the legislature Lincoln made a political announcement to the editor of the Journal: "Many voters ask the candidates to show their hands. Agreed; here is mine. I go for all sharing the privileges of 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." Thus in 1836 he had declared for woman suffrage.

Early in 1842 he entered into the Washingtonian movement intended to suppress intemperance. At the request of the society he delivered an address on Washington's Birthday in the Presbyterian church.

That address was a masterly arraignment of the evils of intemperance. Speaking of certain Christians who object to associating with drunkards even in the hope of reforming them, he said: "If they (the Christians) believe, as they profess, that Omnipotence condescended to take on Himself the form of sinful man, and as such die an ignominious death, surely they will not refuse submission to the infinitely lesser condescension for the temporal and perhaps eternal salvation of a large, erring, and unfortunate class of their fellow creatures. Nor is the condescension very great. In my judgment such of us as have never fallen victims have been spared more from the absence of appetite than from any mental or moral superiority over those who have. Indeed, I believe, if we take habitual drunkards as a class, their heads and their hearts will bear an advantageous comparison with those of any other class." It seems incredible to us that there could have been any misunderstanding of the purpose and spirit of his address, and yet many professing Christians thought he suggested a reflection on the sincerity of their belief and had not yet come to a full realization of the church's responsibility for the redemption of those who had apparently hopelessly fallen.

The latter part of the statement in which he ascribes commendable qualities of heart and mind to the drunkards fell on unsympathetic ears. The period of denunciation was still on, but the period of restoration was hastened by the Washingtonian society, to whose success Lincoln gave the full measure of every ability of mind and heart that he possessed. As if forecasting the final triumph of the temperance cause, he contrasted it with the cause of political freedom. In this same address he says: "Of our political revolution of seventy-six we are all justly proud. It has given us a degree of political freedom far exceeding that of any other nation of the earth. In it the

world has found a solution of the long-mooted problem as to the capability of man to govern himself. In it was the germ which has vegetated and still is to grow and expand into the universal liberty of mankind. But with all these glorious results—past, present, and to come—it had its evils, too. It breathed forth famine, swam in blood, and rode in fire, and long, long after the orphan's cry and the widow's wail continued to break the sad silence that ensued. These were the price, the inevitable price, paid for the blessings it brought.

"Turn, now, to the temperance revolution. In it we shall find a stronger bondage broken, a viler slavery manumitted, a greater tyrant deposed; in it more of want supplied, more disease healed, more sorrow assuaged. By it no orphans starving, no widows weeping. By it none wounded in feeling, none injured in interest; even the dram maker and dram seller will have glided into other occupations so gradually as never to have felt the change, and will stand ready to join all others in the universal song of gladness. And what a noble ally this to the cause of political freedom; with such an aid its march can not fail to be on and on till every son of earth shall drink in rich fruition the sorrow-quenching draughts of perfect liberty. Happy day when—all appetites controlled, all poisons subdued, all matter subjected—mind, all-conquering mind, shall live and move, the monarch of the world. Glorious consummation! Hail, fall of fury! Reign of reason, all hail!"

Lincoln by this time had taken a strong position against slavery, for woman suffrage, and against the saloon. His marriage in no way diminished his interest in politics. He tried for the nomination for Congress in 1842 and was defeated. He tried again in 1844 and was again defeated. The district was Whig. The single-term idea was in vogue. Hardin, who had been elected in 1842, had to yield to Baker in 1844, who in turn yielded to Lincoln in 1846. In Mr. Lincoln's nomination he announced that he would not be a candidate for a second term. Subsequently some of his friends urged that he stand for renomination. To them he replied, "I would very much like to remain in Congress, but if there is anyone else seeking the position I can not in honor stand against him."

He entered Congress in December, 1847. The Mexican War was on. The Whigs had opposed the declaration of war. Lincoln introduced the spot resolutions calling upon President Polk in a series of interrogations to state specifically the spot in the territory of the United States where American citizens had been murdered by the Mexicans. He failed to draw the President out. Later a resolution was introduced and added to the supply bill proposed by George Ashmun, of Massachusetts. Referring to this vote in a letter to a friend, he said:

> That vote affirms 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 as I did. Would you have voted what you felt and knew to be a lie? You know you would not. Would you have gone out of the House, skulked the vote? I expect not. If you had skulked the vote you would have had to skulk many more before the close of the session. The Richards resolution makes the drawn question of the justice of the war, so that no man can be silent if he would. You are compelled to speak, and your only alternative is to tell the truth or tell a lie.

He made two other speeches during the session. One an argument on internal improvements; the other an arraignment

of Gen. Cass, the Democratic candidate for President. This last speech was a masterpiece of political oratory. Calm, cool, discriminating, with searching analysis of the whole career of Gen. Cass, and striving to take off all the efforts of the Democratic Party to make him appear a military hero.

At the close of the session in 1848 he made a trip through New England, speaking before Whigs, and made a deep impression upon the political leadership of that part of the country. However, he had estranged himself from a large part of his constituents by his course in connection with the Mexican War, and it is doubted whether he could have been reelected if he had been nominated. His former law partner, Mr. Logan, who received the nomination, was overwhelmingly defeated. Mr. Lincoln thought seriously of retiring from politics. He was still a poor man. He tried to be appointed land commissioner of Illinois, but there were other applicants from his own district. He was willing to espouse their cause, but stated frankly that he did not believe any one of them could secure the appointment. While this correspondence was going on, a shrewd politician from the city of Chicago came on to Washington, organized his forces, and secured the appointment. However, on his return in the spring of 1849 the Whig leadership in Washington felt anxious to recognize him in some appointment. They suggested that he might receive the appointment as governor or secretary of Oregon. He was a national figure, so far as party leaders were concerned. It was urged by his friends in Illinois that he might go to Oregon and on its admittance to the Union could become the first Senator from that State. He concluded to return to Washington. He traveled overland by stage.

An amusing incident is told by two men who boarded the stage at Terre Haute, Ind., in the early morning hours. Mr. Lincoln was the sole occupant of the stage. He was lying on the rear seat, with his feet projecting up one side and his head on the other side, and apparently fast asleep. One of them slapped him on the back and said, "Have you chartered the whole stage?" "Most certainly not, gentlemen," he replied, and at once took the front seat, surrendering to them the place of honor and comfort. The two men were Thomas H. Nelson, who was appointed by Mr. Lincoln as minister to Chile, and the other was Judge Hammond, who afterwards became governor of Indiana. Mr. Nelson says, "We took him in at a glance. A queer and lone figure he was. Dressed in a well-worn and ill-fitted suit of bombazine, without vest or cravat, and a 25-cent palm hat on the back of his head. In repose his features seemed dull and expressionless. We perpetrated several jokes upon him. He took them all with the utmost innocence and good humor and joined in the laugh, though at his own expense. We invited him to eat dinner with us and he approached the table as if he considered it a great honor. He sat with about half his person on a small chair and held his hat under his arm during the meal. The conversation drifted into a discussion of the comet that was then agitating the scientists of the world. The stranger seemed deeply interested. We amazed him with words of learned length and thundering sound. He asked me strange and unusual questions, and finally wanted to know what would be the upshot of the whole affair. I told him that I differed from most scientists, and thought

that the earth would follow the darned thing off, to which he seemed amazed and profoundly impressed. On reaching Indianapolis we went to the Browning House immediately and lost sight of the stranger. We went to our rooms and hastily made our toilets. I returned to the lobby of the hotel and was much surprised to find our traveling companion the center of a group of the most eminent lawyers of the State. I asked Mr. Browning, the proprietor of the hotel, who the man might be. He replied, "It is Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois." I went immediately to my room; we packed our grips, went down by another stairway and entrance, and sought another hotel. Many years afterwards, when he had been elected President and was on his way east, I was appointed one of the committee to accompany him from Indianapolis. I was late to the hotel where he had stopped for dinner. I walked into the dining room. It was crowded, but I did not see Mr. Lincoln. On turning a corner a long arm reached out and took me by the shoulder, and said, 'I wonder if the earth will follow the darn thing off.'"

He was offered the governorship of Oregon, but on his return home his wife objected, and that settled the question. Mr. Lincoln now entered vigorously into the practice of law, but took every opportunity that came to him to make public speeches. From 1849 to 1858, when he ran against Douglas for Senator, he was recognized as a leading lawyer in the State and often practiced in adjacent States. The Missouri compromise seemed to have settled the slavery question for the Union. The Kansas-Nebraska bill of Douglas threw the subject wide open. The gulf current of human events was leading on toward the fateful days between Sumter and Appomattox. His debate with Douglas, his second inaugural address, and his Gettysburg address show the highest qualities of statesmanship and are the common heritage of the people. Mr. Lincoln was one of five men who determined the particular setting of the form of government under which we live.

Washington, the father of his country, the calm, dispassionate, determining factor in the adoption of the Constitution; Hamilton, the conservative, practical statesman "who smote the rock of public credit and abundant streams of revenue gushed forth"; Marshall, the interpreter of the Constitution along lines of nationalism; Webster, by his eloquence, by his learning, by the cogency of his arguments, convinced the North at least that the Union is one and inseparable under the Constitution; at last comes Lincoln, the savior of the Republic. Thus far two figures have arisen as universal types in the history of the Republic. They are Washington and Lincoln. Great as each was, it is to the moral sublimity of their character that must be ascribed the strange and ever-increasing power with which the citizens of the Republic honor, revere, and love them.

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