ISAAC ARNOLD

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Arnold I.

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Содержание

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Modern history furnishes no life more eventful and important, terminated by a death so dramatic, as that of the Martyr President. Poetry and painting, sculpture and eloquence, have all sought to illustrate his career, but the grand epic poem of his life has yet to be written. We are too near him in point of time, fully to comprehend and appreciate his greatness and the vast influence he is to exert upon the world. The storms which marked his tempestuous political career have not yet entirely subsided, and the shock of his fearfully tragic death is still felt; but as the dust and smoke of war pass away, and the mists of prejudice which filled the air during the great conflict clear up, his character will stand out in bolder relief and more perfect outline.

The ablest and most sincere apostle of liberty the world has ever seen was Abraham Lincoln. He was a Christian statesman, with faith in God and man. The two men, whose pre-eminence in American history the world will ever recognize, are Washington and Lincoln. The Republic which the first founded and the latter saved, has already crowned them as models for her children.

Abraham Lincoln was born, February 12th, 1809, in Hardin County, in the Slave State of Kentucky.[1]

His father Thomas and his grandfather Abraham were born in Rockingham County, Virginia. His ancestors were from Pennsylvania, and were Friends or Quakers. The grandfather after whom he was named, went early to Kentucky, and was murdered by the Indians, while at work upon his farm. The early and fearful conflicts in the dense forests of Kentucky, between the settlers and the Indians, gave to a portion of that beautiful State the name of the "*dark and bloody ground*." The subject of this sketch was the son, the grandson, and the great grandson of a pioneer. His ancestors had settled on the border, first in Pennsylvania, then in Virginia, and from thence to Kentucky. His grandfather had four sons and two daughters. Thomas the youngest son was the father of Abraham, and his life was a struggle with poverty, a hard-working man with very limited education. He could barely sign his name. In the twenty-eighth year of his age he married Nancy Hanks, a native of Virginia, she was one of those plain, dignified matrons, possessing a strong physical organization, and great common sense, with deep religious feeling, and the utmost devotion to her family and children, such as are not unusual in the early settlements of our country. Reared on the frontier, where life was a struggle, she could use the rifle and the implements of agriculture as well as the distaff and spinning-wheel. She was one of those strong, self-reliant characters, yet gentle in manners, often found in the humbler walks of life, fitted as well to command the respect, as the love of all to whom she was known. Abraham had a brother older, and a sister younger than himself, but both died many years before he reached distinction.

In 1816, when he was only eight years old, the family removed to Spenser County, Indiana. The first tool the boy of the backwoods learns to use is the ax. This, young Lincoln, strong and athletic beyond his years, had learned to handle with some effect, even at that early age, and he began from this period to be of important service to his parents in cutting their way to, and building up, a home in the forests.

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[1] When the compiler of the Annals of Congress asked Mr. Lincoln to furnish him with data from which to compile a sketch of his life, the following brief, characteristic statement was given. It contrasts very strikingly with the voluminous biographies furnished by some small great men who have been in Congress: —"Born, February 12th, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky."Education defective."Profession, a Lawyer."Have been a Captain of Volunteers in Black Hawk War."Postmaster at a very small office."Four times a member of the Illinois Legislature, and was a member of the Lower House of Congress."Yours, &c.,"A. Lincoln."

A feat with the rifle soon after this period shows that he was not unaccustomed to its use: seeing a flock of wild turkeys approaching, the lad seized his father's rifle and succeeded in shooting one through a crack of his father's cabin.

In the autumn of 1818 his mother died. Her death was to her family, and especially her favorite son Abraham, an irreparable loss. Although she died when in his tenth year, she had already deeply impressed upon him those elements of character which were the foundation of his greatness; perfect truthfulness, inflexible honesty, love of justice and respect for age, and reverence for God. He ever spoke of her with the most touching affection. "All that I am, or hope to be," said he, "I owe to my angel mother."

It was his mother who taught him to read and write; from her he learned to read the Bible, and this book he read and re-read in youth, because he had little else to read, and later in life because he believed it was the word of God, and the best guide of human conduct. It was very rare to find, even among clergymen, any so familiar with it as he, and few could so readily and accurately quote its text.

There is something very affecting in the incident that this boy – whom his mother had found time amidst her weary toil and the hard struggle of her rude life, to teach to write legibly, should find the first occasion of putting his knowledge of the pen to practical use, was in writing a letter to a traveling preacher, imploring him to come and perform religious services over his mother's grave. The preacher, a Mr. Elkin, came, though not immediately, traveling many miles on horseback through the wild forests; and some months after her death the family and neighbors gathered around the tree beneath which they had laid her, to perform the simple, solemn funeral rites. Hymns were sung, prayers said, and an address pronounced over her grave. The impression made upon young Lincoln by his mother was as lasting as life. Love of truth, reverence for religion, perfect integrity, were ever associated in his mind with the tenderest love and respect for her. His father subsequently married Mrs. Sally Johnson, of Kentucky, a widow with three children.

In March, 1830, the family removed to Illinois, and settled in Macon County, near Decatur. Here he assisted his father to build a log-cabin; clear, fence, and plant, a few acres of land; and then, being now twenty-one years of age, he asked permission to seek his own fortune. He began by going out to work by the month, breaking up the prairie, splitting and chopping cord wood, and any thing he could find to do. His father not long afterward removed to Coles County, Illinois, where he lived until 1851, dying at the age of seventy-three. He lived to see his son Abraham one of the most distinguished men in the State, and received from him many memorials of his affection and kindness. His son often sent money to his father and other members of his family, and always treated them, however poor and illiterate, with the kindest consideration.

It is clear from his own declarations that he early cherished an ambition, probably under the inspiration of his mother, to rise to a higher position. He had in all less than one year's attendance at school, but his mother having taught him to read and write, with an industry, application, and perseverance untiring, he applied himself to all the means of improvement within his reach. Fortunately, providentially, the Bible has been everywhere and always present in every cabin and home in the land. The influence of this book formed his character; he was able to obtain in addition to the Bible, Æsop's Fables, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Weems' Life of Washington, and Burns' Poems. These constituted nearly all he read before he reached the age of nineteen. Living on the frontier, mingling with the rude, hard-working, honest, and virtuous backwoodsmen, he became expert in the use of every implement of agriculture and woodcraft, and as an ax-man he had no superior.

His days were spent in hard manual labor, and his evenings in study; he grew up free from idleness, and contracted no stain of intemperance, profanity, or vice; he drank no intoxicating liquors, nor did he use tobacco in any form.

There is a tradition that while residing at New Salem, Mr. Lincoln entertained a boy's fancy for a prairie beauty named Ann Rutledge. Mr. Irving, in his life of Washington, says: "Before he (Washington) was fifteen years of age, he had conceived a passion for some unknown beauty, so

serious as to disturb his otherwise well-regulated mind, and to make him really unhappy." Some romance has been published in regard to this early attachment of Lincoln, and gossip and imagination have converted a simple, boyish fancy, such as few reach manhood without having passed through, into a "grand passion." It has been produced in a form altogether too dramatic and highly-colored for the truth. The idea that this fancy had any permanent influence upon his life and character is purely imaginary. No man was ever a more devoted and affectionate husband and father than he.

In the spring of 1832 Lincoln volunteered as a private in a company of soldiers raised by the Governor of Illinois, for what is known as the Black Hawk War. He was elected captain of the company, and served during the campaign, but had no opportunity of meeting the enemy.

Soon after his return he was nominated for the State Legislature, and in the precinct in which he resided, out of 284 votes received all but seven. It was while a resident of New Salem that he became a practical surveyor.

Up to this period the life of Lincoln had been one of labor, hardship, and struggle: his shelter had been the log-cabin; his food, the "*corn dodger and common doings*,"[2] the game of the forests and the prairie, and the products of the farm; his dress, the Kentucky jean and buckskin of the frontier; the tools with which he labored, the ax, the hoe, and the plow. He had made two trips to New Orleans; these and his soldiering in the Black Hawk War showed his fondness for adventure.

Thus far he had been a backwoodsman, a rail-splitter, a flatboatman, a clerk, a captain of volunteers, a surveyor. In 1834 he was elected to the Legislature of Illinois, receiving the highest vote of any one on the ticket. He was re-elected in 1836 (the term being for two years). At this session he met, as a fellow-member, Stephen A. Douglas, then representing Morgan County.

He remained a member of the Legislature for eight years, and then declined being again a candidate.

He was admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court of Illinois in the autumn of 1836, and his name first appears on the roll of attorneys in 1837.

In April of this year he removed to Springfield, and soon after entered into partnership with his friend, John T. Stewart. As a lawyer he early manifested, in a wonderful degree, the power of simplifying and making clear to the common understanding the most difficult and abstruse questions.

The circuit practice – "riding the circuit" it was called – as conducted in Illinois thirty years ago, was admirably adapted to educate, develop, and discipline all there was in a man of intellect and character. Few books could be obtained upon the circuit, and no large libraries for consultation could be found anywhere. A mere case lawyer was a helpless child in the hands of the intellectual giants produced by these circuit-court contests, where novel questions were constantly arising, and must be immediately settled upon principle and analogy.[3]

A few elementary books, such as Blackstone's and Kent's Commentaries, Chitty's Pleadings, and Starkie's Evidence, could sometimes be found, or an odd volume would be carried along with the scanty wardrobe of the attorney in his saddle-bags. These were studied until the text was as familiar as the alphabet. By such aid as these afforded, and the application of principles, were all the complex questions which arose settled. Thirty years ago it was the practice of the leading members of the bar to follow the judge from county to county. The court-houses were rude log buildings, with slab benches for seats, and the roughest pine tables. In these, when courts were in session, Lincoln could be always found, dressed in Kentucky jean, and always surrounded by a circle of admiring friends – always personally popular with the judges, the lawyers, the jury, and the spectators. His wit and humor, his power of illustration by apt comparison and anecdote, his power to ridicule by ludicrous stories and illustrations, were inexhaustible.

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[2] The settlers have an expression, "Corn dodger and common doin's," as contradistinguished from "Wheat bread and chickin fixin's."

[3] Vide "History of Abraham Lincoln and the Overthrow of Slavery," p. 76.

He always aided by his advice and counsel the young members of the bar. No embarrassed tyro in the profession ever sought his assistance in vain, and it was not unusual for him, if his adversary was young and inexperienced, kindly to point out to him formal errors in his pleadings and practice. His manner of conducting jury trials was very effective.

He was familiar, frequently colloquial: at the summer terms of the courts, he would often take off his coat, and leaning carelessly on the rail of the jury box, would single out and address a leading juryman, in a conversational way, and with his invariable candor and fairness would proceed to reason the case. When he was satisfied that he had secured the favorable judgment of the juryman so addressed, he would turn to another, and address him in the same manner, until he was convinced the jury were with him. There were times when aroused by injustice, fraud, or some great wrong or falsehood, when his denunciation was so crushing that the object of it was driven from the court-room.

There was a latent power in him which when aroused was literally overwhelming. This power was sometimes exhibited in political debate, and there were occasions when it utterly paralyzed his opponent. His replies to Douglas, at Springfield and Peoria, in 1858, were illustrations of this power. His examination and cross-examination of witnesses were very happy and effective. He always treated those who were disposed to be truthful with respect.

Mr. Lincoln's professional bearing was so high, he was so courteous and fair that no man ever questioned his truthfulness or his honor. No one who watched him for half an hour in court in an important case ever doubted his ability. He understood human nature well; and read the character of party, jury, witnesses, and attorneys, and knew how to address and influence them. Probably as a jury lawyer, on the right side, he has never had his superior.

Such was Mr. Lincoln at the bar, a fair, honest, able lawyer, on the right side irresistible, on the wrong comparatively weak.

MR. LINCOLN FROM HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE ILLINOIS LEGISLATURE TO HIS ELECTION TO CONGRESS

A friend and associate of Mr. Lincoln, speaking of him, as he was in 1840, says: "They mistake greatly who regard him as an uneducated man. In the physical sciences he was remarkably well read. In scientific mechanics, and all inventions and labor-saving machinery, he was thoroughly informed. He was one of the best practical surveyors in the State. He understood the general principles of botany, geology, and astronomy, and had a great treasury of practical useful knowledge."

He continued to acquire knowledge and to grow intellectually until his death, and became one of the most intelligent and best-informed men in public life.

Early in life he became an anti-slavery man, as well from the impulses of his heart as the convictions of his reason. He always had an intense hatred of oppression in every form, and an honest, earnest faith in the common people, and his sympathies were ever with the oppressed. The most conspicuous traits of his character were love of justice and love of truth. It is false, very arrogant, and to those who knew Lincoln in his earlier years, it is very amusing, for any man or set of men to assume to himself or themselves the credit of having inspired him with hatred of slavery. No man was less influenced by others in coming to his conclusions than he; and this was especially true in regard to questions involving right and justice. His own heart, his own observation, his own clear intellect led him to become an anti-slavery man. Long before he plead the cause of the slave before the American people, he said to a friend,[4] "It is strange that while our courts decide that a man does not lose his title to his property by its being stolen, but he may reclaim it whenever he can find it, yet if he himself is stolen he instantly loses his right to himself!"

In November, 1842, he was married to Miss Mary Todd, daughter of the Hon. Robert S. Todd, of Kentucky. The mother of Mrs. Lincoln died when she was young. She had sisters living at Springfield, Illinois. Visiting them, she made the acquaintance and won the heart of Mr. Lincoln. They had four children, Robert, Edward (who died in infancy), William, and Thomas. Robert and Thomas survive. William, a beautiful and promising boy, died at Washington, during his father's presidency. Mr. Lincoln was a most fond, tender, and affectionate husband and father. No man was ever more faithful and true in his domestic relations.

[4] Hon. Jos. Gillespie.

LINCOLN IN CONGRESS

On the 6th of December, 1847, Mr. Lincoln took his seat in Congress. Mr. Douglas, who had already run a brilliant career in the lower House of Congress, at this same session took his seat in the Senate. Mr. Lincoln distinguished himself by able speeches upon the Mexican War, upon Internal Improvements, and by one of the most effective campaign speeches of that Congress in favor of the election of General Taylor to the Presidency. He proposed a bill for the abolition of slavery at the National capital. He declined a re-election, and was succeeded by his friend, the eloquent E. D. Baker, who was killed at Ball's Bluff.

In 1852, he lead the electoral ticket of Illinois in favor of General Scott for President. Franklin Pierce was elected, and Mr. Lincoln remained quietly engaged in his professional pursuits until the repeal of the Missouri Compromise in 1854. This event was the beginning of the end of slavery. "It thoroughly roused the people of the Free States to a realization of the progress and encroachments of the slave power, and the necessity of preserving 'the jewel of freedom.'" From that hour the conflict went on between freedom and slavery, first by the ballot, and all the agencies by which public opinion is influenced, and then the slave-holders, seeing that their supremacy was departing, sought by arms to overthrow the government which they could no longer control.

Mr. Lincoln, while a strong opponent of slavery, had up to this time rested in the hope that by peaceful agencies it was in the course of ultimate extinction. But now seeing the vast strides it was making, he became convinced its progress must be arrested or that it would dominate over the republic, and Slavery would become "lawful in all the States." From this time he gave himself with solemn earnestness to the cause of liberty and his country. He forgot himself in his great cause. He did not seek place, if the great cause could be better advanced by the promotion of another; hence his promotion of the election of Trumbull to the United States Senate.

This unselfish devotion to principle was a great source of his power. Placing himself at the head of those who opposed the extension of, and who believed in the moral wrong of slavery, he entered upon his great mission with a singleness of purpose, an eloquence and power, which made him as the advocate of freedom, the most effective and influential speaker who ever addressed the American people.

He brought to the tremendous struggle between freedom and slavery physical strength and endurance almost superhuman. Notwithstanding his modesty and the absence of all self-assertion, when we review the conflict from 1854 to 1865, when the struggle closed by the adoption of the constitutional amendment abolishing and prohibiting slavery forever throughout the republic, it is clear that Lincoln's speeches and writings did more to accomplish this result than any other agency.

Following the repeal of the Missouri Compromise came the Kansas struggle, and the organization of a great party to resist the encroachments and aggressions of slavery. The people instinctively found the leader of such a party in Lincoln.

Looking over the whole ground, with the sagacity which marked his far-seeing mind, he saw that the basis upon which to build were the grand principles of the Declaration of Independence. This foundation was broad enough to include old-fashioned Democrats who sympathized with Jefferson in his hatred of slavery; Whigs who had learned their love of liberty from the utterances of the Adamses and Channings, and the earlier speeches of Webster; and anti-slavery men, who recognized Chase and Sumner as their leaders.

He now addressed himself to the work of consolidating out of all these elements a party, the distinctive characteristics of which should be the full recognition of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and hostility to the extension of Slavery. This was the party which in 1856 gave John C. Fremont 114 electoral votes for President, and in 1860, elected Lincoln to the executive chair.

THE LINCOLN AND DOUGLAS DEBATE

In the midsummer of 1858, Senator Douglas, whose term approached its close, came home to canvass for re-election. It was in the midst of the Kansas struggle, and although he had broken with the administration of Buchanan, because he resisted the admission of Kansas into the Union, under the fraudulent Lecompton Constitution, and insisted that the people of that State, should enjoy the right by a fair vote, of deciding upon the character of their Constitution,[5] yet the people of Illinois did not forget that he was chiefly responsible for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and that he had indorsed the Dred Scott decision. On the 17th of June, 1858, the Republican State Convention of Illinois met and by acclamation nominated Mr. Lincoln for the Senate. He was unquestionably more indebted to Douglas for his greatness than to any other person.

In 1856 Lincoln said, "Twenty years ago Judge Douglas and I first became acquainted; we were both young then, he a trifle younger than I. Even then we were both ambitious, I perhaps quite as much as he. With me the race of ambition has proved a flat failure; with him it has been one of splendid success. His name fills the nation, and it is not unknown in foreign lands. I affect no contempt for the high eminence he has reached; so reached that the oppressed of my species might have shared with me in the elevation, I would rather stand on that eminence than wear the richest crown that ever pressed a monarch's brow."

Ten years had not gone by, before the modest Lincoln, then so humbly expressing this noble sentiment, and to whom at that moment "The race of ambition seemed a flat failure;" ten years had not passed, ere he had reached an eminence on which his name filled, not a nation only, but the world; and he had indeed so reached it, that the oppressed did share with him in the elevation; and so far had he passed his then great rival, that the name of Douglas will be carried down to posterity, chiefly because of its association as a competitor with Lincoln.

But in many particulars Douglas was not an unworthy competitor. The contest between these two champions was perhaps the most remarkable in American history. They were the acknowledged leaders, each of his party. Douglas had been a prominent candidate for the presidency, was well known and personally popular, not only in the West, but throughout the Union. Both were men of great and marked individuality of character. The immediate prize was the Senatorship of the great State of Illinois, and, in the future, the presidency. The result would largely influence the struggle for freedom in Kansas, and the question of slavery throughout the Union. The canvass attracted the attention of the people everywhere, and the speeches were reported and published, not only in the leading papers in the State, but reporters were sent from most of the large cities, to report the incidents of the debates, and describe the conflict.

Douglas was at this time unquestionably the leading debater in the United States Senate. For years he had been accustomed to meet the great leaders of the nation in Congress, and he had rarely been discomfited. He had contended with Jefferson Davis, and Toombs, and Hunter, and with Chase, and Sumner, and Seward; and his friends claimed that he was the equal, if not the superior, of the ablest. He was fertile in resources, severe in denunciation, familiar with political history, and had participated so many years in Congressional debate, that he handled with readiness and facility all the weapons of political controversy. Of indomitable physical and moral courage, he was certainly among the most formidable men in the nation on the stump. In Illinois, where he had hosts of friends and enthusiastic followers, he possessed a power over the masses unequaled by any other man, a most striking exhibition of which was exhibited in this canvass, in which he held to himself the whole Democratic party of the State. The administration of Buchanan, with all its patronage wielded by the wily and unscrupulous Slidell, and running a separate ticket, was able to detach only 5,000 out

[5] That they "should be perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way."

of 126,000 votes from him. There was something exciting, something which stirred the blood, in the boldness with which he threw himself into the conflict, and dealt his blows right and left against the Republican party on one side, and the administration of Buchanan, which sought his defeat, on the other.

Two men presenting more striking contrasts, physically, intellectually, and morally, could not anywhere be found. Douglas was a short, sturdy, resolute man, with large head and chest, and short legs; his ability had gained for him the appellation of "The little giant of Illinois."

Lincoln was of the Kentucky type of men, very tall, long-limbed, angular, awkward in gait and attitude, physically a real giant, large-featured, his eyes deep-set under heavy eyebrows, his forehead high and retreating, with heavy, dark hair.

Their style of speaking, like every thing about them, was in striking contrast. Douglas, skilled by a thousand conflicts in all the strategy of a face to face encounter, stepped upon the platform and faced the thousands of friends and foes around him with an air of conscious power. There was an air of indomitable pluck, sometimes something approaching impudence in his manner, when he looked out on the immense throngs which surged and struggled before him. Lincoln was modest, but always self-possessed, with no self-consciousness, his whole mind evidently absorbed in his great theme, always candid, truthful, cool, logical, accurate; at times, inspired by his subject, rising to great dignity and wonderful power. The impression made by Douglas, upon a stranger who saw him for the first time on the platform, would be – "that is a bold, audacious, ready debater, an ugly opponent." Of Lincoln – "There is a candid, truthful, sincere man, who, whether right or wrong, believes he is right." Lincoln argued the side of freedom, with the most thorough conviction that on its triumph depended the fate of the Republic. An idea of the impression made by Lincoln in these discussions may be inferred from a remark made by a plain old Quaker, who, at the close of the Ottawa debate, said: "Friend, doubtless God *Almighty might* have made an honester man than Abe Lincoln, but doubtless he never did." It is curious that the cause of freedom was plead by a Kentuckian, and that of slavery by a native of Vermont. Forgetful of the ancestral hatred of slavery to which he had been born, Douglas had, by marriage, become a slave-holder. Lincoln had one great advantage over his antagonist – he was always good-humored; while Douglas sometimes lost his temper, Lincoln never lost his.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.