HORATIO ALGER

THE BACKWOODS BOY

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Содержание

Horatio Alger Jr.
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PREFACE

I venture to say that among our public men there is not one whose life can be studied with more interest and profit by American youth than that of Abraham Lincoln. It is not alone that, born in an humble cabin, he reached the highest position accessible to an American, but especially because in every position which he was called upon to fill, he did his duty as he understood it, and freely sacrificed personal ease and comfort in the service of the humblest. I have prepared the story of Lincoln's boyhood and manhood as a companion volume to the life of Garfield, which I published two years since, under the title, "From Canal Boy to President." The cordial welcome which this received has encouraged me to persevere in my plan of furnishing readers, young and old, with readable lives of the greatest and best men in our history. I can hardly hope at this late day to have contributed many new facts, or found much new material. I have

been able, however, through the kindness of friends, to include some anecdotes not hitherto published. But for the most part I have relied upon the well-known and valuable lives of Lincoln by Dr. Holland and Ward H. Lamon. I also acknowledge, with pleasure, my indebtedness to "Six Months in the White House," by F. B. Carpenter; Henry J. Raymond's "History of Lincoln's Administration," and the "Life of Lincoln," by D. W. Bartlett. I commend, with confidence, either or all of these works to those of my readers who may desire a more thorough and exhaustive life of "The Backwoods Boy."

Horatio Alger, Jr.

New York, *July 4, 1883*.

CHAPTER I
THE LOG-CABIN

Three children stood in front of a rough log-cabin in a small clearing won from the surrounding forest. The country round about was wild and desolate. Not far away was a vast expanse of forest, including oaks, beeches, walnuts and the usual variety of forest trees.

We are in Indiana, and the patch of land on which the humble log-cabin stood is between the forks of Big Pigeon and Little Pigeon Creeks, a mile and a half east of Gentryville, a small village not then in existence.

The oldest of the three children was Nancy Lincoln, about twelve years old. Leaning against the cabin in a careless attitude was a tall, spindling boy, thin-faced, and preternaturally grave, with a swarthy complexion. He was barefoot and ragged; the legs of his pantaloons, which were much too short, revealing the lower part of his long legs; for in his boyhood, as in after days, he ran chiefly to legs.

Who in the wildest flight of a daring imagination would venture to predict that this awkward, sad-faced, ragged boy would forty years later sit in the chair of Washington, and become one of the rulers of the earth? I know of nothing more wonderful in the Arabian Nights than this.

The second boy was a cousin of the other two children – Dennis Hanks, who, after the death of his parents, had come to live in the Lincoln household.

The sun was near its setting. It seemed already to have set, for it was hidden by the forest trees behind which it had disappeared.

"Abe," said the girl, addressing her brother, "do you think father will be home to-night?"

"I reckon," answered Abe laconically, shifting from one foot to the other.

"I hope so," said Dennis. "It's lonesome stayin' here by ourselves."

"There some one comin' with father," said Nancy slowly. "We're goin' to have a new mother. I hope we'll like her."

"It'll seem good to have a woman in the house," said Dennis. "It seems lonesome-like where they're all men."

"I reckon you mean yourself and me," said Abe smiling.

The boy's grave, thin face brightened up as he said this in a humorous tone.

"Then I ought to be considered a woman if you two are goin' to set up as men," said Nancy. "But Dennis is right. It'll be good for us if she's the right sort. Some step-mothers ain't."

"I reckon you're right," said Abe again.

"I'm afraid she won't like the house," said Nancy. "It ain't as good as it might be, though it's better than the 'camp' we used to live in."

As she spoke her eyes turned toward an even more primitive

dwelling forty yards away. It was known as "a half-faced camp," and was merely a cabin enclosed on three sides and open on the fourth; built not of logs, but of poles. It was fourteen feet square, and without a floor. Here it was that the elder Lincoln lived with his family when first he settled down in the Indiana wilderness after his removal from Kentucky. The present dwelling was an improvement on the first, but how far it was from being comfortable may be judged from a description.

It was indeed a cabin, while the other had been only a camp, but it had neither floor, door, nor window. There was a doorway for an entrance, but there was nothing to keep out intruders. There was small temptation, however, for the professional burglar. The possessions of the Lincolns were altogether beneath the notice of even the poorest tramp. A few three-legged stools served for chairs. In one corner of the cabin was an extemporized bedstead made of poles stuck in the cracks of the logs, while the other end rested in the crotch of a forked stick sunk in the earthen floor. A bag of leaves covered with skins and old petticoats rested on some boards laid over the poles. Here had slept the elder Lincoln and his wife, while Abe laid himself down in the loft above. A hewed puncheon supported by four legs served for a table. A few dishes of pewter and tin completed the list of furniture.

This was the home to which Thomas Lincoln was bringing his new wife. She was a widow from Elizabethtown in Kentucky, where he had formerly lived. She was an old flame of Mr.

Lincoln, but had rejected him, being able, as she thought, to do better. But when within a few years he became a widower and she a widow, the suit was renewed and the answer was favorable.

Even now the married pair are on their way home.

Mrs. Johnston considered herself a poor widow, but she was much better off than the man she had just married. She was the owner of a bureau that cost forty dollars; this alone being a value far greater than her new husband's entire stock of furniture. Other articles, too, she had, including a table, a set of chairs, a large clothes chest, cooking utensils, knives, forks, bedding, and other articles.

"Look, Abe!" said Nancy in sudden excitement, pointing to an approaching vehicle.

Abe followed the direction of his sister's finger, and he opened his eyes in astonishment. A large four-horse team was in sight – a strange and unusual spectacle in that wilderness. The children could not have been more excited if Barnum's grand procession of circus chariots had filed into view – a vision of Oriental splendor.

"There's father!" exclaimed Abe, distinguishing with a boy's keen vision the well-known figure of his father sitting beside the driver.

"Father and Uncle Ralph," corrected Nancy.

"And the team's full of furniture. Can it be comin' here?"

"I reckon your new mother's aboard," said Dennis.

This remark made the children thoughtful, because it recalled

their own sad-faced and gentle mother who had faded from life a year before and gone uncomplainingly to her rest. Then, besides, the prospect of a step-mother is apt to be disquieting when nothing is known of her disposition or character.

"Is all that furniture comin' here?" soliloquized Nancy wonderingly.

"I reckon so," answered Abe.

When the team came nearer another exciting discovery was made. There were others aboard the wagon besides their father, their new mother, and their uncle Ralph Krame, who was the owner of the team. There were two girls and a boy, children of Mrs. Lincoln by her former marriage. They were not far from the same age as the three children who were awaiting their arrival, but they were much better dressed. It was clear that the log-cabin would no longer be lonely. It would be full and running over. The six children and their parents were to be crowded into it.

"That is my house, Sally," said Thomas Lincoln, pointing out the cabin in the woods to his new wife.

"That!" she exclaimed in dismay, for her new husband had led her to expect that he was tolerably well-to-do, not with any intention to deceive, but mainly because they had different standards of comfort.

We can imagine that the heart of the new wife must have sunk within her as from the wagon she caught the first sight of her future home. She had not been accustomed to luxury, but her old home was luxurious compared with this.

She relapsed into silence, and did not choose to make her husband uncomfortable by revealing the true state of her feelings. She seems to have been a capable woman, and probably made up her mind upon the instant to make "the best of it." Besides, she had already caught sight of the children.

"And those are Nancy and Abe?" she said.

"Yes," answered Thomas Lincoln. "That's Abe with the long legs, and the other boy is his cousin Dennis."

The new Mrs. Lincoln regarded with womanly compassion the three neglected children, and in her heart she resolved to make their lot more desirable. Perhaps the children read her face aright, for, as they scanned her kindly face, all fear of the new step-mother disappeared, and they responded shyly, but cordially, to her greeting.

CHAPTER II
THE NEW MOTHER

When the new Mrs. Lincoln entered the humble log-cabin which was to be her future home, it may well be imagined that her heart sank within her at the primitive accommodations, or rather, lack of accommodations.

"How do you like it?" asked Thomas Lincoln, who was much more easily satisfied than his wife.

"Not at all at present. There are no doors or windows. There is not even a plank floor."

"We have got along without them," said her husband.

"We can't get along without them any longer. You are a carpenter, and can easily provide them. I will put in my furniture, and after awhile we will have things more comfortable."

"I don't think we need the bureau. You say it cost forty dollars. You had better sell it. It is sinful extravagance to have so much money in furniture."

"I can't consent to that," said Mrs. Lincoln decidedly. "I have nothing that is too good for us. I will see that you and the children live more comfortably in future."

Abe and Nancy looked on with interest while the bureau and the other possessions of their new mother were taken from the wagon by their father and their uncle Ralph. They began to think

they were going to live in city style. In particular they admired the bureau which had cost forty dollars. Why, their cabin had not cost that. They felt something like the country minister of sixty years since, to whom his parishioners presented a carpet for the "fore room." When it was spread on the floor, he gazed at it admiringly and ejaculated, "What, all this and heaven too! This is too much!"

Mrs. Lincoln was quite in earnest, and set her husband to work the next day at the improvements she had specified. When after a time they were completed; when the earthen floor was succeeded by one of boards; when two windows had been set in the sides of the cabin, and a door closed up the entrance; when the primitive bed and bedstead had been superseded by the newcomer's comfortable bedstead and bedding, and the three-legged stools had been removed to give place to chairs, the three children were very happy.

And indeed it was a happy day for Thomas Lincoln and his young family when his second wife took charge of his household. She was kind-hearted and energetic, and though she had three children of her own, she was never found wanting in care or affection for her husband's children. She took a special interest in young Abe. She read him better than his father, and saw that there was that in him which it would pay to develop.

To begin with, she rigged him out in new clothes. His ragged condition had excited her sympathy, and she rightly judged that neat attire helps a boy's or girl's self-respect. I have no doubt that

Abe, though he never had a weakness for fine clothes, surveyed himself complacently when for the first time he saw himself respectably dressed.

This is the description of Abe's step-mother given many years after by Mrs. Chapman, the daughter of Dennis Hanks:

"His wife, my grandmother, is a very tall woman, straight as an Indian; fair complexion, and was, when I first remember her, very handsome, sprightly, talkative, and proud; wore her hair curled till gray; is kind-hearted and very charitable, and also very industrious."

It may be mentioned here that this good lady lived long enough to see the neglected boy whom she so kindly took in hand elected to the highest place in the gift of his countrymen.

It was not long before Mrs. Lincoln began to broach her plans for the benefit of her step-son.

"Abe," she said one day, "have you ever been to school?"

"Yes, ma'am. I went to school a little while in Kentucky."

"You didn't learn much, I suppose?"

"Not much; I can read and write a little."

"That's a good beginning. In this country, Abe, you will never amount to much unless you get an education. Would you like to go to school?"

"Yes," answered the boy earnestly.

"I will speak to your father about it. Is there any school near here?"

"Yes, Mr. Dorsey keeps school about a mile and a half from

here, near the Little Pigeon Creek meeting-house."

"You and Nancy and Dennis must go there." Mrs. Lincoln broached the subject to her husband.

"Abe ought to go to school, Thomas," she said, "and so ought the other children."

"I don't know as I can spare him," said his father. "I need his help in the shop and on the farm."

"He can find time out of school hours. The boy must have an education."

"I agree to that, wife. It shall be as you say."

In Mr. Dorsey's school Abe's studies were elementary. His time was given to reading, writing, and ciphering. The school-house was about as primitive as the Lincoln cabin before the improvements were made on it. It was built of unhewn logs, and holes stuffed with greased paper supplied the place of windows. It was low-studded, being barely six feet high. The scholars studied in classes, and Abe's ambition was excited, so that he soon came to be looked upon as one of the foremost scholars.

A year or two later, in the same humble school-house, a new teacher named Andrew Crawford wielded the ferule. He was, it may be inferred, a better scholar than Mr. Dorsey, and was able to carry his pupils further.

Abe was now in his fifteenth year, and was growing at an alarming rate. He was already nearly six feet in height, and must have presented a singular appearance in the rustic garb in which he presented himself at this temple of learning. I quote Mr.

Lamon's description of his physical appearance and dress:

"He was growing at a tremendous rate, and two years later attained his full height of six feet four inches. He was long, wiry, and strong; while his big feet and hands and the length of his legs and arms were out of all proportion to his small trunk and head. His complexion was very swarthy, and Mrs. Gentry says that his skin was shrivelled and yellow even then. He wore low shoes, buckskin breeches, linsey-wolsey shirt, and a cap made of the skin of an opposum or a coon. The breeches clung close to his thighs and legs, but failed by a large space to meet the tops of his shoes. Twelve inches remained uncovered and exposed that much of 'shin-bone – sharp, blue, and narrow.' 'He would always come to school thus, good-humoredly and laughing,' says his old friend, Nat Grigsby. 'He was always in good health, never was sick, had an excellent constitution, and took care of it.' "

It impresses us rather curiously to learn that the new teacher Crawford undertook to teach "manners" to the rough brood that was under his charge. It was certainly a desirable accomplishment, but the teaching must have been attended with some difficulties.

For the amusement of my young readers I will try to describe one of these lessons. Mr. Crawford wished the boys to learn how to enter a room and pay their respects to the assembled company.

"Abe, it is your turn," he says.

Abe Lincoln, understanding what is meant, rose from his seat, and retires from the room. A moment later a knock is heard at

the door. A scholar, specially deputed to do so – we will suppose Nat Grigsby – advances to the door and opens it.

Before him stands Abe – tall, awkward, with the lower part of his limbs exposed.

Nat bows, and, taking him by the arm, leads him from bench to bench, presenting him to his fellow-pupils, as though he were a guest going the rounds in a drawing-room. Abe, who was never without a sense of fun, no doubt stole timorous glances askance at his rustic garb as he strode here and there, bowing politely to the boys and girls whom he knew so well. Yet it is possible that this exercise may have made it less awkward for him in later days to attend to his social duties when events brought him prominently before the country.

So far from laughing at Master Crawford's instruction in manners, I am disposed to think very favorably of it. He must on the whole have been a sensible man, and no doubt had a considerable influence over the rough boys who submitted willingly to what possibly struck them as ludicrous.

I doubt, however, with all his pains, whether he succeeded in making Abe Lincoln graceful or courtly. On the whole, he was rather unpromising material; being long, lank, and awkward. Yet this tall, gawky boy was laying the foundation of a noble manhood. He was making the most of his slender advantages, not dreaming what greatness the Future had in store for him.

CHAPTER III
ABE AND HIS FAMILY

My young readers may naturally feel some curiosity as to the Lincoln family and their previous history.

The grandfather of Abraham was one of the pioneer settlers of Kentucky. About the year 1780 he removed from Rockingham County, Virginia, to what was then an unsettled wilderness. His death was tragical. Four years later, while at work in the field, at some distance from his cabin, he was shot down by a prowling Indian. How his widow managed, with the care of five helpless children, we do not accurately know, but God helps the struggling, and she reared them all till they reached man's and woman's estate. Thomas Lincoln, born in 1778, was the third child, and the future President was his son. He was a good-natured, popular man, but inefficient and unsuccessful, and whatever there was great in his eminent son did not come from him.

Nancy Hanks, Abe's own mother, was born in Virginia, and was probably related to some family emigrating from that State. Dr. Holland says of her: "Mrs. Lincoln, the mother, was evidently a woman out of place among these primitive surroundings. She was five feet five inches high, a slender, pale, sad, and sensitive woman, with much in her nature that was truly heroic, and much

that shrank from the rude life around her. A great man never drew his infant life from a purer or more womanly bosom than her own." Though she died young, she had taught her children to read, and so laid the foundation of their education.

When Thomas Lincoln had made up his mind to move from Kentucky, he sold his humble home, or rather bartered it for ten barrels of whisky and twenty dollars in money. It must not be inferred that he was an intemperate man – this would not be true – but money was scarce in those days, and it was common to barter, taking pay in commodities which were marketable. This was before the days of temperance societies; whisky was generally drunk, even by ministers, and there was little risk in accepting it.

So Thomas Lincoln, leaving home by himself to find a new residence for his family, built a flat-boat, and launched it on the Rolling Fork, a creek emptying into the Ohio River. He reached the river in safety, but then came a disaster. His flat-boat was upset, and two-thirds of his whisky, and many of his housekeeping and farm utensils were lost. He did the best he could, however. With friendly assistance he saved all he was able, and proceeding on his journey, carried his goods about eighteen miles into Spencer County, Indiana, the place where we find him at the commencement of our narrative. He returned to Kentucky for his family, and brought them with him to the new home in the wilderness. Seven days, we are told, were consumed on the journey, though the distance could not have been very great. We

can easily imagine what privations and weariness of body this journey involved. People of to-day don't know what "moving" is. They should have lived in the year 1816, and made a toilsome seven days' march through the wilderness to understand what it meant then.

Nor were their trials and privations over when the moving was accomplished. I am tempted to quote here from Mr. Ward H. Lamon's interesting life of Lincoln, an account of life in the new Indiana home, contained in a letter from Mr. David Turnham, a school-fellow of Abe:

"When my father came here in the Spring of 1819, he settled in Spencer County, within one mile of Thomas Lincoln, then a widower. The chance for schooling was poor; but, such as it was, Abraham and myself attended the same schools.

"We first had to go seven miles to mill; and then it was a hand-mill that would grind from ten to fifteen bushels of corn in a day. There was but little wheat grown at that time; and when we did have wheat, we had to grind it on the mill described, and use it without bolting, as there were no bolts in the country. In the course of two or three years, a man by the name of Huffman built a mill on Anderson River, about twelve miles distant. Abe and I had to do the milling on horseback, frequently going twice to get one grist. Then they began building horse-mills of a little better quality than the hand-mills.

"The country was very rough, especially in the low lands, so thick with brush that a man could scarcely get through on

foot. These places were called Roughs. The country abounded in game, such as bears, deer, turkeys, and the smaller game.

"At that time there were a great many deer-licks; and Abe and myself would go to these licks sometimes, and watch of nights to kill deer, though Abe was not so fond of a gun as I was. There were ten or twelve of these licks in a small prairie on the creek, lying between Mr. Lincoln's and Mr. Wood's. This gave it the name of Prairie Track of Pigeon Creek."

I have already said that Thomas Lincoln was a carpenter. He did not, however, understand his trade very well, and, though he was employed in small jobs, there is no evidence that he was ever employed to build a house, or was considered competent to do so. In fact, he derived but a small income from his trade, and probably looked upon himself rather as a farmer than a mechanic. It was a piece of good fortune for himself and his children, that, shiftless and unambitious as he was, he should have won a wife so much more capable and energetic than himself. He was much shorter than his son Abe, being an inch or two under six feet. In some respects they were alike, however, for Thomas Lincoln had a gift for telling stories, and would sit about at "stores," or under trees, and amuse his neighbors with an inexhaustible fund of anecdotes. Of education he had little or none. He could write his name, having learned this much from his first wife, Abe's mother, but he never had the ambition or perseverance to go farther up the hill of learning. We are told, however, that he was in favor of his children's obtaining an

education, though it was probably the mother and step-mother to whom Abe and his sister were especially indebted for such advantages as they enjoyed. I may say, however, that the most valuable part of Abraham Lincoln's education was not derived from books. He was a close and keen observer of men and things, and few men excelled him in insight into human nature, and the motives, the weaknesses, and the subterfuges of men. Yet with all this knowledge of the bad as well as the good that was in men, he was always a kindly and sympathetic judge and critic.

I suppose all boys at some time or other in their early years have a narrow escape. My young readers may be interested to know how near we came to losing our future President. It was when Abe was seven years old, and before he removed to Indiana.

He was accustomed to go on numerous tramps with his cousin, Dennis Hanks, who sought to initiate him into the mysteries of fishing. On one occasion he attempted to "coon" across Knot Creek, by swinging over on a sycamore tree. But he lost his hold and tumbled into the deep water. He would have drowned but for the exertions of his boy companion, who had great difficulty in saving him. The readers of Garfield's Life will remember how he also came near death by drowning, when considerably older than Abe was at this juncture. But God looks after the lives of His chosen instruments, and saves them for His work.

There is no doubt that Abe found plenty to do outside of school. In fact, that did not take up much of his time, for we are told that, adding together all the time he spent in attendance, the

aggregate would not exceed a year.

As to the sort of work he did, his father found work for him on the land which he had under cultivation. Then the "chores" which boys in such households are always called upon to do, in his case exacted more time on account of the lack of average accommodations. For instance, the water had to be brought from a spring a mile away, and Abe and his sister were employed to fetch it. There was no water to be had nearer, except what was collected in holes in the ground after a rain, and this was necessarily unfit for drinking, or, indeed, any other purpose unless strained. But Abe is not to be pitied for the hardships of his lot. That is the way strong men are made.

CHAPTER IV
ABE'S SCHOOLING

"Spell *defied*!"

This question was put a class in spelling by the master.

The first pupil in the straggling line of backwoods boys and girls who stood up in class, answered with some hesitation: "D-e-f-i-d-e, defied."

The master frowned.

"Next!" he called sharply.

The next improved upon the effort of the first speller, and in a confident tone answered.

"D-e-f-y-d-e."

"Wrong again! The next may try it," said the teacher.

"D-e-f-y-d!" said the third scholar.

"Worse and worse! You are entitled to a medal!" said Crawford, sarcastically. "Next!"

"D-e-f-y-e-d!" was the next attempt.

"Really, you do me great credit," said the teacher, a frown gathering on his brow. "You can't spell an easy word of two syllables. It is shameful. I'll keep the whole class in all the rest of the day, if necessary, till the word is spelled correctly."

It now became the turn of a young girl named Roby, who was a favorite with Abe. She was a pretty girl, but, nevertheless,

the terrible word puzzled her. In her perplexity she chanced to turn toward the seat at the window occupied by her long-legged friend, Abe.

Abe was perhaps the best speller in school. A word like defied was easy enough to him, and he wanted to help the girl through.

As Miss Roby looked at him she saw a smile upon his face, as he significantly touched his *eye* with his finger. The girl took the hint, and spelled the word correctly.

"Right at last!" said Master Crawford, whose back was turned, and who had not seen Abe's dumb show. "It's lucky for you all that one of the class knew how to spell, or I would have kept my word, and kept you all in."

Though Master Crawford's school had a department of manners, there was no department of English composition. Abe took this up on his own account, according to his schoolmate Nat Grigsby, and probably the teacher consented to examine his essays, though he did not require them of his other pupils. Considering the kindness of heart which he afterward exhibited on many occasions, my readers will not be surprised to hear that his first composition was against cruelty to animals. This is said to have been called forth by the conduct of some of his fellow-pupils in catching terrapins and putting coals of fire on their backs.

After a time Master Crawford's school was discontinued, and some two or three years later Abe attended another, kept by a Mr. Swaney. It gives us an idea of the boy's earnest desire to

obtain an education, when we learn that he had to walk four and a half miles to it from his father's house, and this walk had to be repeated, of course, in the afternoon. How many of my young readers would care sufficiently for an education to walk nine miles a day, to and from school?

We are told that the new school-house was no more impressive, architecturally, than the first, already described. In fact, it was very similar, though it had two chimneys instead of one. The course of instruction does not seem to have been any higher than at Mr. Crawford's school. The department of "manners" was omitted, though it is doubtful whether many of the pupils could have appeared to advantage in a city ball-room.

Probably Abe did not attend Mr. Swaney's school many weeks, and this, we are told, was the end of his school attendance anywhere. He had, however, in that short time imbibed a love of learning, which is to be credited rather to his own tastes than to the influence of his teachers, and carried on by himself the studies of which he had learned something in the humble backwoods school. We are told that he was already the equal of his teachers in learning, which probably was not saying much. Nevertheless he did not regard his education as finished. He had his books, and kept on studying at home, or wherever he was employed. In the hard work which fell to his lot he did not take much interest. He knew that it was necessary, but he did not enjoy it. He preferred to labor with his brain rather than with his hands, and often seemed so listless and preoccupied that he got

the reputation of being "awful lazy."

This is what his neighbor, Romine, says of him: "He worked for me; was always reading and thinking; used to get mad at him. I say, Abe was awful lazy; he would laugh, and talk, and crack jokes and tell stories all the time; didn't love work, but did dearly love his pay. He worked for me frequently, a few days only at a time… Lincoln said to me one day, that his father taught him to work, but never learned him to love it."

All the information we can obtain about this early time is interesting, for it was then that Abe was laying the foundation of his future eminence. His mind and character were slowly developing, and shaping themselves for the future.

From Mr. Lamon's Life I quote a paragraph which will throw light upon his habits and tastes at the age of seventeen:

"Abe loved to lie under a shade-tree, or up in the loft of the cabin, and read, cipher, and scribble. At night he sat by the chimney 'jamb,' and ciphered by the light of the fire, on the wooden fire-shovel. When the shovel was fairly covered, he would shave it off with Tom Lincoln's drawing-knife, and begin again. In the day-time he used boards for the same purpose, out of doors, and went through the shaving process everlastingly. His step-mother repeats often that 'he read every book he could lay his hands on.' She says, 'Abe read diligently. He read every book he could lay his hands on, and when he came across a passage that struck him, he would write it down on boards if he had no paper, and keep it there until he did get paper. Then he would

rewrite it, look at it, repeat it. He had a copy-book, a kind of scrap-book, in which he put down all things, and thus preserved them.' "

I am tempted also to quote a reminiscence of John Hanks, who lived with the Lincolns from the time Abe was fourteen to the time he became eighteen years of age: "When Lincoln – Abe – and I returned to the house from work, he would go to the cupboard, snatch a piece of corn-bread, take down a book, sit down on a chair, cock his legs up as high as his head, and read. He and I worked barefooted, grubbed it, ploughed, mowed, and cradled together; ploughed corn, gathered it, and shucked corn. Abraham read constantly when he had opportunity."

It may well be supposed, however, that the books upon which Abe could lay hands were few in number. There were no libraries, either public or private, in the neighborhood, and he was obliged to read what he could get rather than those which he would have chosen, had he been able to select from a large collection. Still, it is a matter of interest to know what books he actually did read at this formative period. Some of them certainly were worth reading, such as "Æsop's Fables," "Robinson Crusoe," "Pilgrim's Progress," a History of the United States, and Weem's "Life of Washington." The last book Abe borrowed from a neighbor, old Josiah Crawford, (I follow the statement of Mr. Lamon, rather than of Dr. Holland, who says it was Master Crawford, his teacher). When not reading it, he laid it away in a part of the cabin where he thought it would be free from harm, but it so

happened that just behind the shelf on which he placed it was a great crack between the logs of the wall. One night a storm came up suddenly, the rain beat in through the crevice, and soaked the borrowed book through and through. The book was almost utterly spoiled. Abe felt very uneasy, for a book was valuable in his eyes, as well as in the eyes of its owner.

He took the damaged volume and trudged over to Mr. Crawford's in some perplexity and mortification.

"Well, Abe, what brings you over so early?" said Mr. Crawford.

"I've got some bad news for you," answered Abe, with lengthened face.

"Bad news! What is it?"

"You know the book you lent me – the 'Life of Washington'?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, the rain last night spoiled it," and Abe showed the book, wet to a pulp inside, at the same time explaining how it had been injured.

"It's too bad, I vum! You'd ought to pay for it, Abe. You must have been dreadful careless."

"I'd pay for it if I had any money, Mr. Crawford."

"If you've got no money, you can work it out," said Crawford.

"I'll do whatever you think right."

So it was arranged that Abe should work three days for Crawford, "pulling fodder," the value of his labor being rated at twenty-five cents a day. As the book had cost seventy-five cents

this would be regarded as satisfactory. So Abe worked his three days, and discharged the debt. Mr. Lamon is disposed to find fault with Crawford for exacting this penalty, but it appears to me only equitable, and I am glad to think that Abe was willing to act honorably in the matter.

CHAPTER V
ABE AND HIS NEIGHBORS

If Abe's knowledge had increased in proportion to the increase in his stature, he would have been unusually learned at the age of seventeen, for he stood at that time nearly six feet four inches in his stockings, and, boy as he was, was taller than any man in the vicinity.

I must not omit to state that he had a remarkable memory, and this was of great service to him in his early efforts at oratory. Mr. Lamon tells us that:

"He frequently amused his young companions by repeating to them long passages from the books he had been reading. On Monday mornings he would mount a stump and deliver, with a wonderful approach to exactness, the sermon he had heard the day before. His taste for public speaking appeared to be natural and irresistible."

Let me describe one of the scenes in which Abe often took part.

Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln have gone to church, for it is Sunday morning. The children are excused on account of the distance, and are left at home to fill up the time as they may.

"Come in," said Abe, appearing at the door of the cabin, "I'm going to preach."

With more willingness, perhaps, than if the services were to be conducted by a grown-up minister, the other young people in the family enter and sit down in decorous style, while Abe pulls down the Bible, reads a passage, and gives out a hymn. This is sung with more earnestness than musical taste, and then the young preacher begins his sermon.

I am sure we should all like to have been present, and should have listened with interest while the gaunt, awkward boy, gesticulating with his long arms, delivered a homily not original with himself, but no doubt marked by some of his peculiarities.

We are told that this young audience, the girls probably, were sometimes affected to tears. One might have been tempted to predict that the boy would develop into a preacher when he grew to man's estate. But Abe did not confine himself to "preaching." He was just as fond of other kinds of public speaking. Sometimes in the harvest field he mounted a stump and began to talk on political subjects.

More than once Thomas Lincoln, going out to the field, found work at a standstill, and a little group collected at one point, Abe being the central figure.

"What's all this?" he would ask angrily.

"It's Abe," one of the hands would answer. "He's givin' us a rousin' speech on politics."

"I'll rouse him!" said the incensed father. "Only let me get at him!"

So he would push his way into the crowd unseen by Abe, and

would suddenly seize his son by the collar and drag him from his extemporized rostrum.

"Now go to work!" he would exclaim in irritation. "You can't make your living by talking."

Abe, with a comical smile, would close his speech, to resume it on some more auspicious occasion.

I have already said that Thomas Lincoln was a carpenter, though a poor one. Abe sometimes worked with him in the shop, but had no idea of learning the trade. He preferred to work in the field, and, as he could not fill up his time on the four acres his father cultivated, he hired out to any one of the neighbors who required his services.

No prediction could have surprised his employers more than that the tall, awkward youth, who had grown out of his clothes, would hereafter hold in his hands the destinies of the country, and guide it triumphantly to the end of a protracted and bloody struggle.

The career of Lincoln is a striking illustration of the often-repeated saying that "Truth is stranger than fiction."

While there is room for suspicion that Abe was not fond of physical labor, he is said to have worked very satisfactorily for those who employed him. He had no troublesome pride, but was willing to do anything that was asked, and pleased the women especially by never objecting when called upon "to make a fire, carry water, or nurse a baby."

I am tempted to quote from Mr. Lamon's interesting volume

an account furnished him by Mrs. Elizabeth Crawford of the people among whom Abe lived and some of their peculiarities. It throws light upon the homely side of the future President's character and speech:

"You wish me to tell you how the people used to go to meeting – how far they went. At that time we thought it nothing to go eight or ten miles. The old ladies did not stop for the want of a shawl, or cloak, or riding-dress, or two horses in the winter-time; but they would put on their husbands' old overcoats, and wrap up their little ones, and take one or two of them on their beasts, and their husbands would walk, and they would go to church, and stay in the neighborhood until the next day, and then go home. The old men would start out of their fields from their work, or out of the woods from hunting, with their guns on their shoulders, and go to church. Some of them dressed in deer-skin pants and moccasins, hunting-shirts, with a rope or leather strap around them. They would come in laughing, shake hands all around, sit down and talk about the game they had killed, or some other work they had done, and smoke their pipes together with the old ladies. If in warm weather, they would kindle up a little fire out in the meeting-house yard to light their pipes.

"If in winter-time, they would hold church in some of the neighbors' houses. At such times they were always treated with the utmost of kindness; a bottle of whisky, a pitcher of water, sugar, and glass were set out, or a basket of apples or turnips, or some pies and cakes. Apples were scarce them times. Sometimes

potatoes were used for a treat. (I must tell you that the first treat I ever received in old Mr. Linkhern's house – that was our President's father's house – was a plate of potatoes, washed and pared very nicely, and handed 'round. It was something new to me, for I had never seen a raw potato eaten before. I looked to see how they made use of them. They took off a potato, and ate them like apples).

"Thus they spent the time till time for preaching to commence, then they would all take their seats; the preacher would take his stand, draw his coat, open his shirt-collar, and commence service by singing and prayer; take his text and preach till the sweat would roll off in great drops. Shaking hands and singing then ended the service. The people seemed to enjoy religion more in them days than they do now. They were glad to see each other, and enjoyed themselves better than they do now."

Such is the testimony of an old lady, who, like old people generally, is prone to praise the past at the expense of the present.

The ladies in Abe's early days wore "corn-field bonnets, scoop-shaped, flaring in front, and long, though narrow behind." They were as fond of dancing as our city ladies, but did not find an elaborate toilet so essential. It was not uncommon for both sexes to discard shoes and dance barefooted. I have no doubt they enjoyed themselves as well, if not better, in this absence of restraint, than their more polished sisters who are to be found in city drawing-rooms to-day.

Brought up in such an unconventional atmosphere, it is not

surprising that Abraham Lincoln never set much value upon form and ceremony, and sometimes shocked his more conventional political associates.

Mr. John B. Alley, a member of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation during the war of the Rebellion, described to me on one occasion how much shocked Senator Sumner was when, on calling upon the President, in company with Lord Lyons, the English Minister, they found him sitting at ease in true Western style, with his heels resting on the table.

"How are you, Sumner?" was the President's greeting. "Take a seat, Lord Lyons."

And all the while the good President did not seem to be aware that he was acting in a manner unbecoming the dignity of a great ruler. Yet he might have been aware of it, and secretly enjoyed the annoyance of his distinguished guests. I am not prepared to recommend my young readers to imitate Lincoln in this respect, but I wish them to understand how he was affected by his early acquaintances and surroundings. We shall all agree that there are many things more important than polished manners and personal dignity, and we shall find hereafter that Abraham Lincoln, in spite of his homely manners, was a Providential man, who served his country in her hour of need, as probably no other could have done.

CHAPTER VI
A RIVER TRIP

Thus passed the early years of Abraham Lincoln. He was approaching manhood, well prepared physically to undertake its responsibilities, but with a very slender stock of knowledge. He had, however, acquired a taste for learning, and was a close, careful, and shrewd observer. He had also the ability to speak fluently in rough-and-ready style on any subject of which he knew anything. Of the world he had seen very little, but his knowledge in that direction was to be extended by a trip down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, which he took at the age of nineteen.

Early in 1828 he chanced to be in the employ of Mr. Gentry, the founder of Gentryville, a village which had sprung up since Thomas Lincoln had lived in the neighborhood.

One morning Allen Gentry said to Lincoln:

"Abe, how would you like to go to New Orleans with me?"

"Are you going?" asked Abe eagerly.

"Yes, I am almost sure of going. I have spoken to father about letting me go on a trading trip down the river, and I should like to have you go with me."

"I'll go," said Abe promptly, "if you'll give me the chance."

"There is no one I would like better to have with me,"

answered Allen, “and I can’t go alone.”

He had good reason for preferring Abe to any of his other friends, not only that young Lincoln was very strong and capable, but because he had then, as in after years, a pleasant humor, which showed itself in stories which he had pat for any occasion. Though homely enough, they were never destitute of point, and were brimming over with shrewd fun.

To a backwoods boy the proposed trip was as fascinating – perhaps more so, notwithstanding the hard work involved – as a European trip nowadays. There was constant variety; there was a varying panorama of meadows and villages, as they floated down the rapid current to the mouth of the great river.

Mr. Gentry favored his son’s plan, and preparations were speedily made.

The craft on which the two young men embarked was a flat-boat, roughly made. It was loaded with a cargo of bacon and other produce, such as it was thought would sell readily down South. Abe was the leader of the expedition, and the business was under his care, inexperienced as he was. He was ready to take the responsibility then as in after years, when he piloted the ship of State with its valuable cargo over rougher waters.

My young readers may be interested to know that he was paid eight dollars per month, eating and sleeping on board, and that he was furnished with free return passage on a steamboat.

The custom was to stop at all important points and seek an opportunity to trade. During the night the boat was tied up to the

shore, and the two young men slept on board in the little cabin.

Generally, there was no risk of robbery or hostile attack; but one night, a few miles below Baton Rouge, the two young men were startled by hearing footsteps on board.

"What's that?" inquired Allen, starting.

"We must have visitors," replied Abe quietly.

"Then they are not the right kind. They must be thieves."

"I reckon so. Let us get up and give them a reception."

Rising as quietly as possible, Abe and Allen Gentry looked out and saw that the invading force consisted of seven stalwart negroes. They were of the same class, only bolder, as the chicken thieves, who visit their neighbors' hen-roosts.

"They are after our bacon," said Abe. "We must try to save our bacon if we can," he added, with a humorous smile.

Now, it requires some courage to get up in the dead of night and confront a gang of thieves, especially when they are seven to two, but the two young men were courageous, and they had no idea of submitting tamely to robbery.

"Bring the guns, Abe!" exclaimed Allen in a loud tone, intending to be heard by the marauders. "Bring the guns; shoot them!"

Lincoln had no gun, but he had a huge bludgeon, and he sprang upon them, belaboring them with all the strength of his sinewy arm. No wonder they were terrified as they surveyed the commanding stature of the stripling and felt his terrible blows. Seven to two as they were, they found discretion the better part

of valor, and fled, some jumping into the water.

But Allen and Abe were not satisfied with this victory. They felt that they must give their guilty visitors a lesson. So they chased them far back into the country, and, on returning, thought it best to cut loose and float down the river, lest they should have another call from their unwelcome visitors, possibly reinforced by others of the same stripe. These seven negroes little dreamed that the intrepid young man who so belabored them was destined under the providence of God to be the champion and deliverer of their race from the bondage under which they groaned. I may add that Abe himself would perhaps have been even more surprised could this have been revealed to him, as, bludgeon in hand, he chased the flying negroes over the meadows.

The time consumed in this river trip was about three months. The result was satisfactory to his employer, and showed that his confidence in his young neighbor was not misplaced. On his return, young Lincoln worked as before, wherever opportunity offered, and probably, being under age, turned in his earnings to the common fund. But the time was coming when the family were to find a new home. Born in Kentucky, Abe had spent rather more than half his life in Indiana, but a new State – the one which now claims him as her most distinguished son – was soon to receive him. In the spring of 1830, Thomas Lincoln pulled up stakes and moved to Illinois. But his immediate family was smaller now than when he left Kentucky. Abe's sister had married early, and survived her marriage but about

a year. However, there were the step-children, and the families of Dennis Hanks and Levi Hall, so that the company numbered thirteen in all. Fifteen days' journey brought them to a point ten miles west of Decatur, where a small house was erected on the north bank of the north fork of the Sangamon River. Abe and his cousin John broke up fifteen acres of land and split rails enough to serve as a fence. This was the first time, so far as we know, that young Lincoln justified the appellation, which clung to him in after years, of *rail-splitter*.

But young Lincoln was now nearing the age of twenty-one. Largely because of his affection for his step-mother, to whom he was always ready to acknowledge his obligations, he had remained about home much longer than many sons, who forget filial duty under the impulse of ambition or enterprise. So his twenty-first birthday found him still a member of the home household. Then, naturally enough, he felt that it was time to set up for himself. So in March or April he left home, but he seemed to have formed no definite plans – none at least likely to carry him far away from home. He was a candidate for labor, and took whatever offered, but the proceeds went into his own pocket.

One of the "jobs" which he undertook was splitting rails for a man named Kirkpatrick. I quote from Dr. Holland in reference to this period:

"A man who used to work with Abraham occasionally during his first year in Illinois, says that at that time he was the roughest-looking person he ever saw. He was tall, angular, and ungainly,

and wore trousers made of flax and tow, cut tight at the ankle, and out at both knees. He was known to be very poor, but he was a welcome guest in every house in the neighborhood. This informant speaks of splitting rails with Abraham, and reveals some interesting facts concerning wages. Money was a commodity never reckoned upon. Abraham split rails to get clothing, and he made a bargain with Mrs. Nancy Miller to split four hundred rails for every yard of brown jeans, dyed with white walnut bark, that would be necessary to make him a pair of trousers. In those days he used to walk four, six, and seven miles to his work."

My young readers will be interested in a story which relates to this time. Abe was working for a Mr. Brown, "raising a crap," when a traveler stopped at the house and inquired if he could obtain accommodations for the night, there being no tavern near.

"Well," said Mr. Brown, "we can feed your crittur and give you somethin' to eat, but we can't lodge you unless you can sleep on the same bed with the hired man."

The man, who was sprucely dressed, hesitated, and inquired:

"Who is he?"

"Well," said Mr. Brown, "you can come and see him."

So the man followed the farmer to the back of the house, where young Lincoln lay extended at full length on the ground in the shade.

"There he is," said Brown.

"Well, I think he'll do," said the stranger, and he stayed and

slept with Abe, whom he then no doubt looked down upon as his "social" inferior. Could he have looked forward with prophetic ken, he would have felt honored by such chance association with a man destined to be President of the United States.

I am sorry that some doubts are thrown upon this story, but I have ventured to tell it, for the vivid contrast between the position which young Lincoln undoubtedly occupied at that time and that which in after years he so adequately filled.

CHAPTER VII
LINCOLN AS A CLERK

Young Lincoln's successful trip to New Orleans led to his engagement for a similar trip in the early part of 1831. With him were associated John Hanks and John Johnston. Their employer was a Mr. Denton Offutt, of Lexington, Kentucky, and a part of the cargo consisted of a drove of hogs. Each of the three was to be paid at the rate of fifty cents per day, and the round sum of sixty dollars divided between them. Abe considered this very good pay, and was very glad to make the engagement. The three young men not only managed the boat, but built it, and this retarded the expedition. We read with some interest that while they were boarding themselves at Sangamontown, while building the boat, Abe officiated as cook to the entire satisfaction of his associates.

"At New Orleans," says John Hanks, "we saw negroes chained, maltreated, whipped, and scourged. Lincoln saw it; his heart bled, he said nothing much, was silent from feeling, was sad, looked bad, felt bad, was thoughtful and abstracted. I can say, knowing it, that it was on this trip that he formed his opinions of slavery. It run its iron in him then and there, – May, 1831. I have heard him say so often and often."

One day, soon after his return from his second river trip, Abe received a visit from a muscular, powerfully-built man, who

accosted him thus: “You are Abe Lincoln, I reckon?”

“Yes,” said Abe; “you are right there.”

“I’ve heard you can wrestle some,” continued the stranger.

“A little,” answered young Lincoln, modestly.

“I’ve come to wrestle with you to see who’s the best man. My name’s Daniel Needham.”

The stranger announced his name with evident pride, and young Lincoln recognized it as that of a man who had a high reputation as an amateur pugilist.

“I’m glad to know you,” said Lincoln, “and I don’t mind accepting your challenge.”

Abe valued his popularity among the boys, and, though he did not feel sure of the result, he felt that it would not do to back out. He would lose his reputation, which was considerable.

“Where shall it be?” asked Needham.

“Just where and when you like,” answered Abe, promptly.

So the meeting was fixed in the “greenwood” at Wabash Point, and there it was that the two met in friendly rivalry.

Though Daniel Needham was older and more firmly knit, Lincoln was sinewy and strong, and his superior height, and long arms and legs gave him a great advantage – sufficient to compensate for his youth and spareness.

The result was that Abe achieved victory in short order. He threw his older opponent twice with so much ease that Needham rose to his feet very much mortified as well as astonished.

“Lincoln,” said he, making the confession reluctantly, “you

have thrown me twice, but you can't whip me."

"Are you satisfied that I can throw you?" asked Abe. "If you are not, and must be convinced through a thrashing, I will do that too for your sake."

"I reckon we'll put it off," said Needham, finding his young rival more willing than he had expected. He had hoped that, though not shrinking from a friendly wrestling contest, Abe might hesitate to meet him in a more serious encounter.

I have told this story partly because I know my young readers would be interested in it, partly to give an idea of the strength and athletic power of the hero of my story.

But wrestling contests would not earn a living for young Lincoln. He was in search of employment, and found it. As one thing leads to another, the same man who had sent him to New Orleans in charge of a flat-boat, opened a store at New Salem, and needing a clerk, bethought himself of young Lincoln. Abe unpacked the goods upon their arrival, and worked energetically to put them in order. With a new store-book, serving as a ledger, and a pen behind his ear, he made his début as a "first clerk" of the leading mercantile establishment in the town. In the readiness with which he turned from one thing to another, Abe might well be taken for a typical Yankee, though born in Kentucky.

We are now to look upon the future President in a new capacity. As a clerk he proved honest and efficient, and my readers will be interested in some illustrations of the former trait which I find in Dr. Holland's interesting volume.

One day a woman came into the store and purchased sundry articles. They footed up two dollars and six and a quarter cents, or the young clerk thought they did. We do not hear nowadays of six and a quarter cents, but this was a coin borrowed from the Spanish currency, and was well known in my own boyhood.

The bill was paid, and the woman was entirely satisfied. But the young store-keeper, not feeling quite sure as to the accuracy of his calculation, added up the items once more. To his dismay he found that the sum total should have been but two dollars.

"I've made her pay six and a quarter cents too much," said Abe, disturbed.

It was a trifle, and many clerks would have dismissed it as such. But Abe was too conscientious for that.

"The money must be paid back," he decided.

This would have been easy enough had the woman lived "just round the corner," but, as the young man knew, she lived between two and three miles away. This, however, did not alter the matter. It was night, but he closed and locked the store, and walked to the residence of his customer. Arrived there, he explained the matter, paid over the six and a quarter cents, and returned satisfied. If I were a capitalist, I would be willing to lend money to such a young man without security.

Here is another illustration of young Lincoln's strict honesty:

A woman entered the store and asked for half a pound of tea.

The young clerk weighed it out, and handed it to her in a parcel. This was the last sale of the day.

The next morning, when commencing his duties, Abe discovered a four-ounce weight on the scales. It flashed upon him at once that he had used this in the sale of the night previous, and so, of course, given his customer short weight. I am afraid that there are many country merchants who would not have been much worried by this discovery. Not so the young clerk in whom we are interested. He weighed out the balance of the half pound, shut up store, and carried it to the defrauded customer. I think my young readers will begin to see that the name so often given, in later times, to President Lincoln, of "Honest Old Abe," was well deserved. A man who begins by strict honesty in his youth is not likely to change as he grows older, and mercantile honesty is some guarantee of political honesty.

There is another incident for which I am also indebted to Dr. Holland:

The young clerk was waiting upon two or three ladies, when a noted bully entered the store, and began to talk in a manner offensive not only to the ladies, but to any person of refinement.

Young Lincoln leaned over the counter, and said quietly, "Don't you see that ladies are present?"

"What is that to me?" demanded the bully.

"Out of respect for them, will you stop your rough talk?"

"I will talk as I please, and I should like to see the man that will stop me," answered the bully, arrogantly. "If you think you are the better man, we'll try it on the spot."

Lincoln began to see that the man meant to force a quarrel

upon him, and he did not shrink from it.

"If you will wait till the ladies retire," he said quietly, "I will give you any satisfaction you wish."

The ladies had by this time completed their purchases, and were glad to leave the store.

No sooner had they left than the bully broke out into a storm of abuses and insults. The young clerk listened with the quiet patience habitual to him, and finally observed: "Well, if you must be whipped, I suppose I may as well whip you as any other man."

"That's what I'm after," answered the bully.

"Come outdoors, then," said Lincoln.

Abe, when they were fairly outside, thought there was no need of further delay. He grappled with the bully, threw him upon the ground with ease, and, holding him there, rubbed some "smart-weed" in his face and eyes till he bellowed for mercy.

"Do you give up?" asked Abe, in no way excited.

"Yes, yes!"

Upon this, Lincoln went for some water, washed his victim's face, and did what he could to alleviate his sufferings. It is safe to say that the fellow never wanted another dose of the same medicine. It will further interest my young readers to learn that, so far from feeling a grudge against Lincoln, the bully became his fast friend, and behaved henceforth in a more creditable manner.

CHAPTER VIII
IN THE BLACK HAWK CAMPAIGN

Though the young clerk proved faithful and efficient, his whole time was not taken up by his duties in Offutt's store. Knowing well the defects of his education, it occurred to him that he could use profitably some of his leisure by employing it in study. He knew little or nothing of English grammar, and this was likely to interfere with him if called upon to act in any public capacity where he would be required to make speeches.

"I have a notion to study English grammar," he said to Mr. Graham, the schoolmaster.

"That is the best thing you can do, if you expect to enter political life," said the teacher in reply.

"Where do you think I can find a grammar?" asked Lincoln.

It must be remembered that educational books, and indeed books of any kind, were scarce in those days.

"I think you will find one at Vaner's."

"I will go at once and see," said Lincoln.

He set out at once, though Vaner's was six miles distant, but such a walk did not trouble the young man at all. I am sure it will strike some of my young readers who dislike grammar, as odd that he should be willing to take so long a walk with such an object in view; but they too might do the same if they were as

earnestly bent upon self-improvement as our hero. It is enough to say that he succeeded in obtaining the coveted book, and began at once to study it. Sometimes he was able to go out of doors and lie under a shade-tree; at other times he stretched his long, ungainly form on the counter and pored intently over the little book. I don't know whether the obscure little text-book is still in existence; if it were, it would be a valuable memorial of this transition period in the young man's mental growth.

The time came for a change in young Lincoln's mode of life. Mr. Offutt's business declined, and the store was closed. He was once more out of employment. Now it happened about this time that the peace of this region was disturbed by a series of Indian difficulties. Black Hawk, a chief of the Sacs, was the instigator and Indian leader. He was a man of commanding presence and superior abilities. In defiance of a warning given him by General Atkinson, commanding the United States troops at Rock Island, he left his reservation, and announced his intention of ascending the Rock River to the territory of the Winnebagoes. The force under General Atkinson being small, he issued a call for volunteers. One company was raised in New Salem and the vicinity, and Lincoln enlisted. Though without military experience, he was elected to the post of Captain by a large majority of the company, and accepted, This was a tribute to his popularity among his friends and neighbors.

Though the Black Hawk campaign was in no way remarkable, and involved very little fighting, it is noteworthy, as Dr. Holland

remarks, that two men afterward Presidents of the United States were engaged in it. These were Zachary Taylor and Abraham Lincoln. I do not propose to enter into a detailed account of this campaign and of Lincoln's part in it; I prefer to quote Mr. Lincoln's own account of it, years afterward, when a member of the House of Representatives at Washington. It was during the political campaign when General Cass was the Democratic candidate, and was intended to ridicule the claims of his friends, that he had rendered distinguished military service to the republic.

"By the way, Mr. Speaker," said Mr. Lincoln, "do you know I am a military hero? Yes, sir, in the days of the Black Hawk war, I fought, bled, and came away. Speaking of General Cass' career reminds me of my own. I was not at Sillman's Defeat, but I was about as near it as Cass to Hull's surrender; and, like him, I saw the place soon afterward. It is quite certain I did not break my sword, for I had none to break; but I bent my musket pretty badly on one occasion. If General Cass went in advance of me in picking whortleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges upon the wild onions. If he saw any live, fighting Indian, it was more than I did; but I had a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes, and although I never fainted from loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry."

When Mr. Lincoln himself became a candidate for the Presidency, an attempt was made to make capital for him out of this military episode, but fortunately he possessed more

substantial claims than this.

Though there was little fighting to be done, there was an occasion that tested the young Captain's courage and resolution. As the incident is characteristic of Lincoln, and shows his love of justice and humanity, I will transcribe, as better than any paraphrase of my own, the account given by Mr. Lamon in his Life of Lincoln:

"One day, during these many marches and counter-marches, an old Indian found his way into the camp, weary, hungry, and helpless. He professed to be a friend of the whites; and, although it was an exceedingly perilous experiment for one of his color, he ventured to throw himself upon the mercy of the soldiers. But the men first murmured, and then broke out into fierce cries for his blood.

" 'We have come out to fight the Indians,' said they, 'and by G – we intend to do it!'

"The poor Indian, now in the extremity of his distress and trouble, did what he ought to have done before: he threw down before his assailants a soiled and crumpled paper which he implored them to read before his life was taken. It was a letter of character and safe conduct from Gen. Cass, pronouncing him a faithful man, who had done good service in the cause for which this army was enlisted. But it was too late; the men refused to read it, or thought it a forgery, and were rushing with fury upon the defenceless old savage, when Capt. Lincoln bounded between them and their appointed victim.

" 'Men,' said he, and his voice for a moment stilled the agitation around him, '*this must not be done; he must not be shot and killed by us*."

" 'But,' said some of them, 'the Indian is a spy.'

"Lincoln knew that his own life was now in only less danger than that of the poor creature that cowered behind him. During the whole of this scene Capt. Lincoln seemed to rise to an unusual height of stature. The towering form, the passion and resolution in his face, the physical power and terrible will exhibited in every motion of his body, every gesture of his arm, produced an effect upon the furious mob as unexpected perhaps to him as to any one else. They paused, listened, fell back, and then sullenly obeyed what seemed to be the voice of reason as well as authority. But there were still some murmurs of disappointed rage and half-suppressed exclamations, which looked toward vengeance of some kind. At length one of the men, a little bolder than the rest, but evidently feeling that he spoke for the whole, cried out:

" 'This is cowardly on your part, Lincoln!'

"Whereupon the tall Captain's figure stretched a few inches higher again. He looked down upon these varlets who would have murdered a defenceless old Indian and now quailed before his single hand, with lofty contempt. The oldest of his acquaintances, even Bill Green, who saw him grapple Jack Armstrong and defy the bullies at his back, never saw him so much aroused before.

" 'If any man thinks I am a coward, let him test it,' said he.

" 'Lincoln,' responded a new voice, 'you are stronger and heavier than we are.'

" 'This you can guard against; choose your weapons,' returned the rigid Captain.

"Whatever may be said of Mr. Lincoln's choice of means for the preservation of military discipline, it was certainly very effectual in this case. There was no more disaffection in his camp, and the word 'coward' was never coupled with his name again. Mr. Lincoln understood his men better than those who would be disposed to criticise his conduct. He has often declared himself that his life and character were both at stake, and would probably have been lost had he not at that supremely critical moment forgotten the officer and asserted the man. To have ordered the offenders under arrest would have created a powerful mutiny; to have tried and punished them would have been impossible. They could scarcely be called soldiers; they were merely armed citizens, with a nominal military organization. They were but recently enlisted, and their term of service was about to expire. Had he preferred charges against them, and offered to submit their differences to a court of any sort, it would have been regarded as an act of personal pusillanimity, and his efficiency would have been gone forever."

Then, as afterward, Lincoln proved to be the man for the emergency. This humble captain of volunteers was selected by Providence to guide and direct his countrymen in the greatest and most bloody civil contest that was ever waged, and at all times

of doubt, danger, and perplexity he manifested the same calm courage, the same firm resolution, and the same humanity, which made him at the age of twenty-three the intrepid champion of a friendless old Indian.

CHAPTER IX
IN THE LEGISLATURE

My young readers will have noticed how extremely slender thus far had been the educational advantages of young Lincoln. Of the thousands of men who have risen to eminence in this country from similar poverty, few have had so little to help them. In England the path of promotion is more difficult, and I doubt whether any one circumstanced as Abraham Lincoln was could ever have reached a commanding position. It will be interesting in this connection to read the statement made by John Bright at his recent installation as Lord Rector of Glasgow University. It will show what a difference there is between limited advantages in England and in America:

"I am an entire stranger to University life in the University sense," says Mr. Bright. "I may be said to be a man who never had the advantages of education. I had the teaching of some French – as Englishmen teach French, and I had the advantages of a year's instruction in Latin by a most admirable tutor – a countryman of yours from the University of Edinburgh. But there was not much Greek – not so much that any trace of it is left. There was nothing in the shape of mathematics or science. Looking at education as you take it, I am a person who had the misfortune to have had almost none of it in my youth. You will not, therefore, be

surprised if I feel a certain humiliation in seeming to teach you anything, and if I feel a strong sense of envy – but not a blamable envy – that I never possessed the advantages which are placed within your reach. But if I had no education such as colleges and universities give, if my school-life ended at the precise time when your university career begins; if I am unknown to literature and to science and to arts, I ask myself what is it that has brought me within the range of your sympathies – brought me to this distinguished position? I suppose it must be because you have some sympathy with my labors. You believe that I have been in some sort a political teacher; that I have taken some pains and perhaps have been of some service in the legislation and government of our country."

Had Lincoln possessed one-half the educational equipment of John Bright when he entered upon political life he would have felt much better satisfied.

Abraham Lincoln on his return from the Black Hawk campaign was twenty-three years old. Though he was about as poor as he had always been, he was rich in the good opinion of his friends and neighbors. This is evinced by an application then made to him to allow himself to run for the Legislature. He consented, though surprised at the request, and polled a vote considerably in advance of other candidates of the same party. In New Salem he polled an almost unanimous vote, men voting for him without regard to party lines. Still, he was defeated. A brief speech which he made during the canvass has been preserved,

and, as it is characteristic, I quote it:

"Gentlemen and Fellow-citizens: I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the Legislature. My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I am in favor of a national bank. I am in favor of the internal improvement system and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same."

It will be seen that Mr. Lincoln had cast in his lot with the Whig party – the party of whom Henry Clay was at that time the most distinguished representative, and for whom the young man had a strong admiration.

The great problem of how he was to make his living had not yet been solved by young Lincoln. Dr. Holland is our authority for the statement that he seriously took into consideration the project of learning the blacksmith's trade. An opportunity, however, offered for him to buy out a stock of goods owned by a man of Radford, in connection with a man named Berry. This supplied him employment for a time, but not of a profitable nature, for his partner proved a hindrance rather than a help, and failure ensued. Lincoln was involved in debt, and it was six years before he freed himself from his obligations. About this time he received his first political appointment – that of postmaster – from the administration of General Jackson. It brought in very little revenue, but gave him a privilege which he valued of

reading all the newspapers which came to the office. The office seemed to have been conducted in free and easy style. When the young postmaster had occasion to go out he closed the office and carried off the mail matter in his hat.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.