

Abraham Lincoln

[The following narrative of the life of Abraham Lincoln, ably written by Martin Phillip Rindlaub, Sr., who knew Lincoln and well remembers the storms of public opinion that were breaking in America during the days when the name of Lincoln became indelibly written into the history of this nation, is so replete in its setting, furnished from Mr. Rindlaub's memoirs, that it almost makes an old story new. In reprinting the story from the Kiwanis Magazine, we feel that it will serve an added purpose of furnishing many of the new citizens of America, who are readers of the United American, a delightful close-up of this great American whose life and simple philosophy of human Equality, Justice and Liberty have become the beacon lights to the spiritual harbor of American citizenship. The author of the story was a newspaper reporter at the Lincoln-Douglas debate at Freeport, Illinois, in 1858 and at the Wigwam Convention in Chicago in 1860. Mr. Rindlaub, Sr., who lives at Platteville, Wisconsin, had been the publisher and editor of "The Grant County Witness" at Platteville, from 1867 till 1903. —The Editor.]

IN PREPARING this article I have intentionally passed over the early life of Abraham Lincoln, including his biography and that of his ancestors. Nor shall I give anything in any way of a eulogy, but shall rather confine myself to his political history, giving facts and incidents with which I was personally conversant. I shall also allude to some of the causes which lead up to the War of the Rebellion, and the part taken by the two principal parties which existed at that time; and particularly the part taken by Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas in that memorable discussion which occurred during the United States Senatorial canvass of 1858.

The two names that stand out as great beacon lights in the history of our country are those of Washington and Lincoln. Washington created the Republic, and rose by statecraft to the highest position in the gift of the people. Lincoln saved the Union and lifted the cause of liberty higher than ever before. Washington was born and reared amid the blighting influence of slavery and grew up with the idea that it was a divine institution. Lincoln was born in Kentucky, which was then a slave state, but his parents moved to Illinois when he was only six years old. His parents were humble but honorable people, and they early instilled into their son that all men were born free and equal before the law, and that slavery was a terrible evil which must sooner or later be eradicated.

It is an inspiration to turn to a character and a career that loom up more and more as the years go by. In the large sense of example and influence Lincoln still lives and will always live. The story of what he said and did is an inspiration to every citizen of this Re-

public who studies it. He guided this country through its worst storm to a safe harbor, and never once lost his temper or calm balance of judgment. His mighty character has grown in the esteem of mankind by the searching analysis it has attracted for more than sixty years. There is no career just like it—in the humility of its beginning, and its comparatively sudden development in problems of vast concern not only to this country but to all humanity.

Never before in the history of the world was there a leader of men so entirely and so consistently his natural self. He was homely and ungainly and he recognized and spoke jokingly about it. He was ambitious and frankly admitted it. He was so modest, so honest, and so "easy" that not a few men set him down as absolutely simple-minded. But after he was tested and tried it was found that he was unqualifiedly a "Master of Men." Douglas, to whom he put the question, at Freeport, that saved the United States, came to know him as his master, and held his hat for him while he took the oath of office as President. Fremont, the "soldier statesman," whom Lincoln made and unmade, learned the same lesson. So did Seward, who went into the Cabinet prepared and expecting to take the reins of government. So did Chase, the indispensable man, who resigned once too often, and who, thanks to Lincoln's magnanimity, administered to him the second oath of office. Even Stanton, that imperturbable Titan of the Cabinet, who had been in the habit of referring to Lincoln as the "original gorilla" and who prophesied that Jeff Davis would be in the White House within six months, and who believed himself called into the cabinet for the express purpose of holding up the hands of the impotent Lincoln—even Stanton learned this lesson; and when Lincoln drew his last breath Stanton said: "There lies the most perfect ruler of men that the world has ever seen."

The statement is sometimes made that Lincoln sprang suddenly before the world and manifested his genius in guiding us through one of the most gigantic internecine struggles in history. But a careful study of his life will reveal the fact that he had prepared himself, by many years of study, for the active duties before him. At twenty-one, he was performing the duties of County Surveyor, at the age of twenty-five he was elected to the State Legislature, and at about the same time he began to study law. While he was in the legislature he made a speech that at once placed him among the great orators of the State. It was here, also, that he first met Stephen A. Douglas, who afterward became United States Senator, and was one of the candidates running against him for the Presidency when Lincoln was elected the first time.

It is told of President Lincoln that once, when he had an important ques-

tion to decide, he called his Cabinet together, and forcibly expressed his views, and the conclusion he had reached.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Secretary of State?" he asked of Mr. Seward.

The Secretary set forth views diametrically opposite to those of his chief. All the other members of the Cabinet agreed with Mr. Seward.

"Well," said Lincoln, slowly, "let us put the matter to a vote. All in favor of my views will say aye."

"Aye," announced Mr. Lincoln gravely. No one else spoke.

"All opposed will say nay."

All the members of the Cabinet voted no.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Lincoln, "there is one ays; and there are six nays." He paused; and then with a twinkle of his eye, he said "The ayes have it."

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It is very hard in this day to realize the state of affairs that existed, for a number of years before the war, between the people of the North and the South. Anti-slavery sentiment predominated in the North and while there were many abolitionists they were regarded as disturbers and cranks. I was born and reared at Gettysburg, within ten miles of the Maryland border, and I know that a northern man was always looked upon with suspicion by the people of the South, and it was not safe for an opponent of slavery to give utterance to his sentiments south of Mason and Dixon's line. Particularly was this the case in the Houses of Congress at Washington. The members were about equally divided on the slavery question. The fiery southern element did not hesitate to utter their disunion sentiments, and the members of both parties usually went armed so as to be prepared for any emergency. It was during those days that in the Senate chamber Senator Sumner was beaten into insensibility by his fellow Senator Brooks; and it will be remembered that Brooks' friends presented him with a gold-headed cane to show their appreciation of his brutal act! It was also during this time that one of the Wisconsin representatives, John F. Potter, was challenged by Roger A. Pryor, because of some irritating anti-slavery remarks. Notwithstanding Mr. Potter was opposed to the code he promptly accepted the challenge, and having the choice of weapons, chose bowie knives. But Pryor declined on the ground that the bowie knife was not a civilized weapon, and Mr. Potter soon found that he had become a hero, and that the people of the entire country were in ecstasies over his bravery. It was also about this time that Representative Burlingame, after he had denounced the assault committed by Brooks upon Senator Sumner, was challenged. Burlingame accepted, and named rifles as the weapons to be used, and Navy Island, just above Niagara Falls, as the place of meeting. Brooks declined, al-

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