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PLASTERING, BRICK AND CONCRETE WORK

1809—The Lincoln Centenary—1909 The Boyhood of Lincoln

His Insatiable Craving to
Know Things—He Even
Read While He Ate—Sim-
plicity and Democracy

By James A. Edgerton

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IN a one room log shanty with an earthen floor and lighted only by a glared paper window Abraham Lincoln was born. He died in a theater by the hand of an actor. As a bald statement of the method of his arrival and departure that is not very promising. But what of it? It is not the manner of a soul's entering the world or leaving it that tells the story, but its conduct while here. Jesus of Nazareth was born in a stable among the cattle and was executed as a criminal, but there was so much radiance in his life that it has reflected a glory over both manger and cross. In like manner Lincoln has made a log cabin entrance and a theater exit honorable. After all, it is the man that counts and not the accidents that surround him. Many writers profess to believe that with a less humble birth and rearing Lincoln would have remained unknown. I do not believe it. Despite his ephemeral surroundings he would have been a great, a loving and a mighty soul who would have left his impress for good. He was not so pious as to be dependent on mere happen-



"When noon came he'd set under a tree an' read an' eat."

ings outside of himself. Nobody that knows anything of the fact that Lincoln arose from humble beginnings to a place among the unforgotten ones is an infinite encouragement to all other boys who are similarly born, but it is they who need the example more than he needed the hardships. The simple lesson is that the soul should arrive through any kind of circumstances whatsoever. It is not the beginning, but the end of the road, that counts. The best account of Lincoln's boyhood I have ever seen was contained in an interview with old Dennis Hanks which was published in one of the magazines a year or two ago. Dennis Hanks, who did not amount to much in any other way, was Lincoln's cousin and boyhood friend. But he did have eyes, a memory and a tongue. By the use of the three he has left a graphic picture of his playmate and is worthy of note for the picture's sake if for no other reason. Little Abe, it seems, was just a plain, long legged American boy who wanted to know every time in playing pranks, reading every book he could get his hands on and asking questions. Did you ever see a boy like that? It seems to me I have seen several thousand. It is hardly possible that they will all be presidents, but they are starting right. Did you ever reflect that it is this very fact of Lincoln's being so like everybody else and yet so different that has endeared him to the heart of the world? He has revealed to us how divine and noble and beautiful this common life can be made. To walk along the way we walk, amid the dust, vexations and annoyances, to meet the hardships and temptations we meet, to be cast down and sad and discouraged like as we are and yet to go through it all with honesty, with truth, with strength and with good nature—that is not so difficult or wonderful, and yet that is the very way Lincoln went. The most apparent things about him, even in his boyhood, were his thoroughness, his fidelity to truth and his mental honesty. If he did not

he had one. An' as like as not Abe 'n' eat his supper that, takin' anything she'd give him that he could gnaw at an' read at the same time. I've seen many a feller come in an' look at him. Abe not knowin' anybody was round, an' sneak out in like a cat an' eat. Well, I'll be darned! It didn't seem natural, nobow, to see a feller read like that."

Lincoln's insatiable craving to know things did not manifest itself alone in a desire to read. Every stranger that came to the house would be questioned by the youngster until the elder Lincoln interfered. He was as persistent a questioner as Li Hung Chang. When Robert Owen's colony was started at New Harmony, Ind., young Abraham almost worried himself sick because he heard there was a host of books along and he wanted to break into this paradise of knowledge. Books were not plentiful in Indiana in those days, and the future president was known to walk for miles or work for days for the poor privilege of buying or borrowing one. That was the poverty the boy felt most.

One more quotation from the garulous Dennis and we leave him. It is about the Lincoln stories: "Abe says I, when did you get so blamed many lies? An' he'd always say: 'Denny, when a story farms you a good lesson it ain't no lie. God tells truth in parables. They're easier for common folks to understand an' recollect.' His stories was like that."

Most writers on Lincoln insist on describing his dress, dwelling on the fact that his trousers did not meet his shoes, that his coat was too small, that he had a coat, and generally making his hardships as ridiculous as a rath-er lively imagination will permit. This is scarcely fair. Lincoln dressed freely as well as those with whom he associated. Indeed, the lively Dennis says that he had more pride than the other children and therefore indulged the unusual luxury of white shirts for Sunday. Awkward he perhaps was, but that he was the lost sometimes pictured was farthest from the truth. Indeed, he was regarded as the brightest and most ambitious boy in the neighborhood.

Compared with city standards or even with modern standards anywhere Lincoln was badly dressed, was poor, lacked educational advantages and was surrounded by an inferior environment. It is not just to compare by such standards. His boyhood occurred nearly a century ago on the frontier. In his day, to be educated, to be well trained, to follow, and to stand by him in every emergency. He had only himself to look out for, and with a good lead horse in a race for life had a fresh reward. Therefore, with well trained steeds, who became wonderfully proficient in ascending danger and even game. The fact that his own narrowness and the undue stress he placed on outer things. What do the Lincoln clothes amount to anyway? They were the most superficial part of the man and are important only in the eyes of the most superficial people. Why are they so important to those of us who are not presidents? Lincoln himself was too big to be conscious of them.

But little removed from this is the continual, reiterated, everlasting reference to his great height. What if he was tall? There have been other tall men in history whose longitudinal measurements little or nothing is said. Why keep it so in the foreground with Lincoln? Why make it so prominent that it obscures infinitely more important things? Does his stature in history depend on the length of his bones? Are we to measure his soul with a footrule? Are his bodily dimensions to be regarded as his character? Are his inner glory and beauty always to be veiled behind a homely exterior? There have been other ugly men in history concerning whose lack of personal pulchritude not one hundredth part as much has been said. Why not talk more of the inner Lincoln and his mission of mercy rather than spend so much time on his outer mask and the accidents that surrounded him?

The most noteworthy thing about Lincoln the boy were not the length of his trousers and the shortness of his purse. They were his love of justice, his love of knowledge, his love of truth. These were shown in a thousand ways. They were the things that reveal him. With all due respect to everybody, I am infinitely tired of all the nonsensical rubbish that is foisted on the world in the name of Lincoln to the obscuration of his greater and better self.

When a Roman emperor won a war he was given a triumph. Lincoln likewise had a triumph, but the processions were in black and were accompanied by dirges, tears and the tolling of bells. Yet no tribute ever won so great, just as no victory ever won so momentous. It was not a section that gained the day, but self government and the rights of man. It was not one race that was made free, but in the end all races and all nations.

Lincoln symbolizes all of this to us, and more. He stands for great events, but is greater in himself than these events. The things a man does are not his greatness, but are in-cluded by them. We are all bigger than our destinies, just as a creator is bigger than his creation. Lincoln means to us broken chains and the ending of hell. He is also a human expression of mercy and truth, strength and meekness, democracy and Americanism. In the form of a man he epitomized the path from a log cabin to the White House, from the deepest obscurity to the most luminous fame.

CAMPAGNING ON THE PLAINS

BY BUFFALO BILL
FROM TRUE TALES OF THE PLAINS

I HAVE been many times asked if the solitude of the plains was not burdensome and oppressive to a man who was traveling along some of the vast expanses of the west, where for hundreds of miles there was no one to see but himself, his horse, the boundless level of prairie grass, the blue sky above, with its sun by day and its stars by night. At first the question seemed strange, but I soon understood how a man who has lived all his life in daily touch with broad-ways might go mad with isolation in a single day in a region where he could see and hear absolutely nothing but the wonderful panorama of nature and its voices. There was a multitude of things around him to arouse interest, which to the plainsman meant safety or danger, life or death, but which would mean to such a man, indeed, no more than so many blades of grass. This silent excitement of the solitary ride over the broad prairie, where the city man would see nothing but dull monotony, was something more excitingly degree than anything I had seen in a town, and I had seen half street scenes. I have watched street riots, I have witnessed royal pageants, and I have seen men lynched. These things stir the blood, but they all seem pale to what I have felt when out alone on a scout.

Consequently the scout on duty was compelled to invent ruses of his own to assist him in emergency. And when some extremely dangerous mission had to be undertaken the scout often puzzled the commander by refusing aid in the shape of a squad or any chosen number of soldiers to accompany him. But actually it was part of discretion to do so, as going alone with one or two chosen comrades whom you knew to be true blue was a precaution that favored your own safety, as every scout naturally picked the very best mounts and rode one and had what is called a "lead horse." Well trained, to follow and stand by him in every emergency. He had only himself to look out for, and with a good lead horse in a race for life had a fresh reward. Therefore, with well trained steeds, who became wonderfully proficient in ascending danger and even game. The fact that his own narrowness and the undue stress he placed on outer things. What do the Lincoln clothes amount to anyway? They were the most superficial part of the man and are important only in the eyes of the most superficial people. Why are they so important to those of us who are not presidents? Lincoln himself was too big to be conscious of them.

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The struggle with them into confusion, large bands of Indians. When it was too dangerous to travel in daytime and your object could be best accomplished in the night. His value as a "striker" can be best explained by the following incident: On one occasion we slept during the day in a well wooded box canyon, near a little stream of water, with plenty of grass for the horses to browse on, and at the same time we were hidden from view. Toward evening, when we thought it convenient to continue our scout, just as we were about to emerge from our hiding place a large band of Indians assembled down the canyon to camp for the night. Mounted as they were, it was useless for us to attempt flight, so, moving farther back in the woods, we remained concealed until they had settled down. There was no way to get out except a dash through the Indian village. We dared not stay till daylight, as they

him and appealed to him to pull himself together, but he was just in the humor to resent it. In consequence I had to take the law into my own hands and shake him up in lively style, first taking the precaution of slipping his revolver and placing it out of his reach. As he did not respond to my efforts on the horse, I simply dismounted, pulled him from the horse and used him in what one would think a rather rude and rough manner. In fact, I had to make a punch bag and foot-ball out of him, much to the astonishment of some of the young troops who came up and were going to avenge my apparent discourtesy to their officer, though some of the older men explained its necessity. Eventually I got the lieutenant on his feet, and while our horses were being taken care of an old sergeant and myself hustled him along on a little foot race until we got his blood in circulation, and so, overcoming the danger, we eventually arrived safely at the fort.

On another occasion when out with General Eugene A. Carr, with whom I consulted and who, by the way, was one of the best posted and equipped Indian fighters and frontiersmen on the roster of the army, we both concluded that on account of the peculiar blizzard condition of the weather a blizzard would be the next thing in order. So we resolved to strike camp early, as we were then in a bleak country



In the blinding blizzard.

and over fifty miles from wood and water. This wood and water were in lower country, where there was only one gap which would furnish descent into the valley, and that had to be reached by careful attention to direction.

Starting early and getting the point of the wind, we had not gone far before old Boreas began his revels. General Carr, of course, gave orders to the commanding officers of companies in regard to preventing the men and the men and to quit them in case of any of them succumbing to the cold. I shall never remember that trip, for it was necessary for me to go by the wind and not flinch from it, for the blinding blizzard we would all soon be lost. The direction brought the wind against my left ear, and, as the storm soon became so blinding that even a black horse could not be seen ten feet from the picket ropes, I had my left cheek and ear against the storm front. I dared not dismount, as I did many of the others, General Carr himself walking nearly all the distance, leading his horse. I had stuffed my ear with a piece of saddle blanket, but notwithstanding that the eardrum was frozen, and for a time it gave me intense pain and suffering, and up to the present day it has quite affected my hearing on that side. But by this pertinacity we reached the gap, and when I had made the point successfully and the descent down into the canyon became assured there were never 1,500 men who let out such yells and screams of joy.

On another occasion I had a very trying experience when General Penrose's command had been sent to reconnoiter the surrounding country by General Sheridan and were known to have been somewhere in a blizzard. Not hearing from them for several days, we knew they were against it, but as all trails were covered and obliterated by the drifting snow it was a serious problem to find them. General Carr of course, consulted with me in the matter, and he relates the incident in detail in "Carr's Campaigns" of my success in finding the men. In this instance, knowing in what direction they had gone, I had to travel fifteen miles to find a ridge that they would cross and that the storm would blow the snow away from and leave bare the ridge for five miles or more. I found the trail of their horses and wagons where they had crossed and by the hoof tracks located the direction in which they had gone. I succeeded in reaching them, moved in a terrible condition, for everything had been eaten up to such an extent that the horses and mules had eaten the manes and tails of each other. Naturally the next day, relief was sent, and the commands became reunited.

In the case of the lieutenant, I arrived