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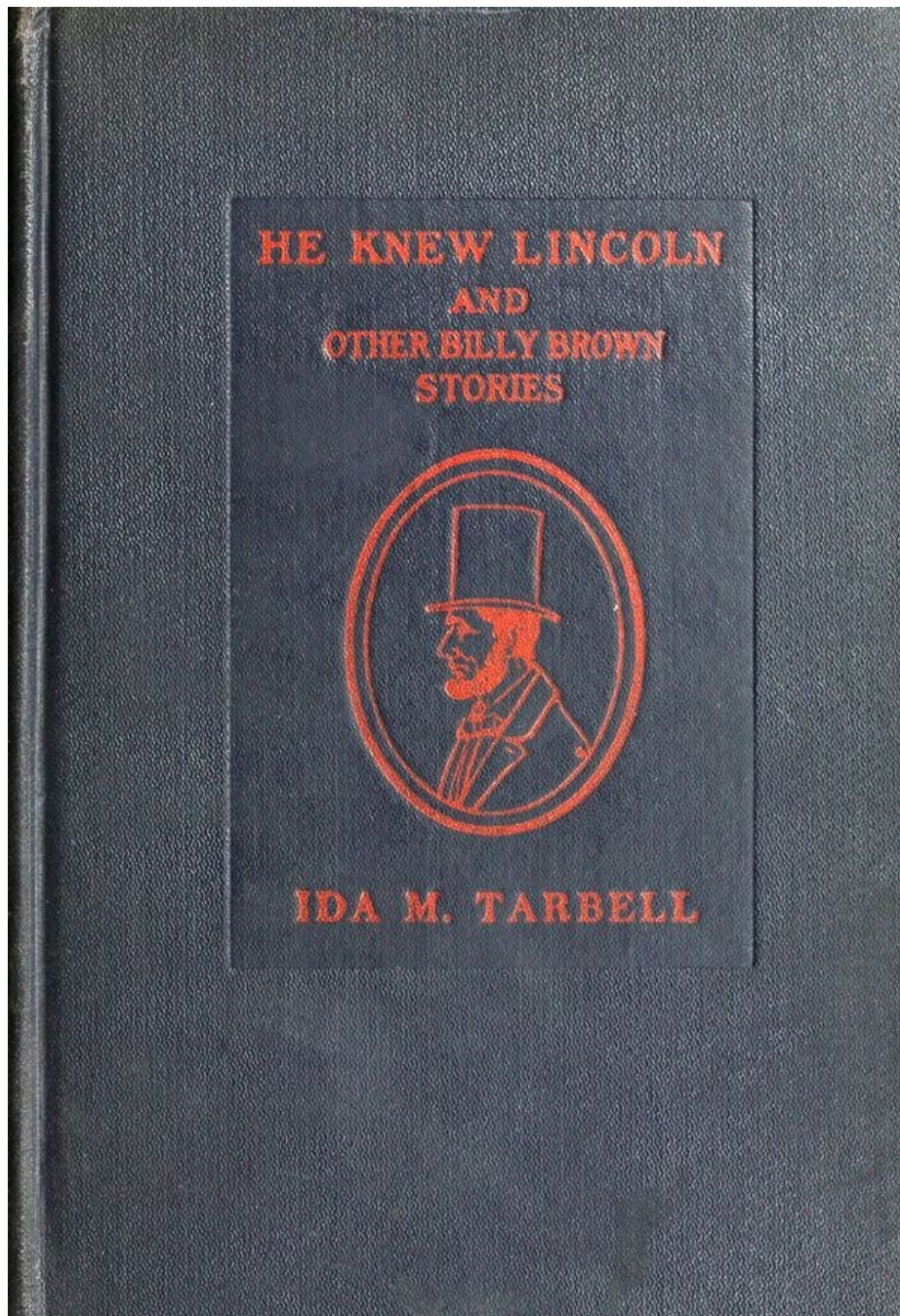
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HE KNEW LINCOLN  
AND OTHER BILLY BROWN STORIES

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# HE KNEW LINCOLN AND OTHER BILLY BROWN STORIES

BY  
IDA M. TARBELL  
AUTHOR OF "LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN"

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## INTRODUCTION

[VII]

More than one clue must be unravelled to reach an understanding of Abraham Lincoln. Among them there surely must be reckoned his capacity for companionship. None more catholic in his selections ever lived. All men were his fellows. He went unerringly and unconsciously for the most part, to the meeting place that awaited him in each man's nature. There might be a wall, often there was; but he knew, no one better, that there is always a secret door in human walls. Sooner or later he discovered it, put his finger on its spring, passed through and settled into the place behind that was his.

His life was rich in companionships with unlikely people, often people who began by contempt or semi-contempt of him. There was the town bully of his youth, whom he soundly thrashed for trying a foul in a wrestling match, and who rose from the dust to proclaim Lincoln the best man who ever broke into camp; thirty years later there was his own Secretary of State, with his self-complacent assumption of the President's unfitness for leadership and of his own call to direct the nation, put gently but firmly in his place and soon frankly and nobly declaring, "He's the best of us all."

[VIII]

He had many pass-keys—wrath, magnanimity, shrewdness, patience, clarity of judgment, humor, resolve; and in the end, one or the other or all together opened every closed door, and he sat down at home with men of the most divergent view and experience: the bully, the scholarly, the cunning, the pious, the ambitious, the selfish, the great, the weak, the boy, the man.

[IX]

Particularly was Lincoln at home with men like the Billy Brown of these pages, men whose native grain had not been obscured by polish and oil. There were many of them in his time in Illinois, plying their trades or professions more or less busily, but never allowing industry to interfere with opportunities for companionship. They were men of shrewdness, humor, usually modest, not over-weighted with ambition. Their appetite for talk, for politics, for reports on human exhibits of all sorts, never dulled. Their love of companionship outstripped even their naturally intolerant partisanship.

These men, unconsciously for the most part, resisted the social veneering that, beginning in Illinois in Lincoln's day, rapidly overlaid the state. In his first contact with Springfield in the '30's he remarked the "flourishing about in carriages," the separation of people into groups according to money, antecedents, social etiquette. He never allowed convention, address, ceremony, however foreign to him, to interfere with his human relations—he went over or around them. But, natural man that he was, he found a special freedom with those in whom the essence of human nature remained unmixed and uncorked.

[X]

The original of Billy Brown was such a man. He was still keeping his drug store in Springfield in the '90's when the writer made studies there for a "Life of Lincoln." She passed many an hour in Lincoln's chair, while Billy, tipped back in something less precious, talked. There were Billy Browns in other towns—Bloomington, Princeton, Quincy, Chicago. Their memory of Mr. Lincoln was among the most precious and satisfying things in their lives. When business was dull or the day rainy and consequently there were few or no interruptions, the talk you started by questions soon became a soliloquy. Head against the wall, feet on desk, eyes far away, voice softened, they re-lived the old friendship. Their memories were tender, reverent but singularly devoid of the thing that we call hero-worship. Mr. Lincoln remained too real to them, too interesting and companionable.

[XI]

The sense of intimacy with him which they treasured, their conviction that he recognized them as his friends, had little or no trace of familiarity. He was always "Mr. Lincoln" to them, never "Abe," nor would they tolerate the use of that word. I never saw my Springfield Billy Brown so angrily indignant as in talking of a townsman who affected the name. True, he and Billy were rivals in reminiscence, but that was not the basis of his resentment. "He never called Mr. Lincoln that to his face" was Billy's complaint. That is, the use of the name gave a false color to the recollections and only truth was tolerable where Mr. Lincoln was concerned.

[XII]

If Mr. Lincoln's fellowship with the Billy Browns of Illinois was based on his love of sheer human nature, he found in them, too, something very precious to him, and that was a humor that answered his own. The spring from which his humor flowed was strong with native salts and so was theirs. It was naked but clean, devoid of evil insinuation. It was always out-with-it—strong, pungent words; strong, pungent facts. The humor was not in words or facts, it was in what they pointed—the illumination they gave of life and men. Lincoln's humor was part of his passion for reality, truthfulness, freedom. The Billy Browns answered him and gave him more of a particular kind of salt he craved, in a life in many ways starved, starved for love and hope and gaiety, for all of which he had great natural capacity.

[XIII]

The youthfulness of their spirit endeared them to him. They were usually some fifteen or twenty years his junior; but in feeling the difference was greater. Lincoln early looked on himself and spoke of himself as an old man. It was not years—it was burdens, defeats, the failure to find a satisfying purpose in life. He was old, and he craved youth. These men had it. They were

perennial children. Youth seemed to warm him, and he sought it wherever it was to be found—in children, boys, young men. They in turn instinctively came to him. A succession of youth in all its forms follows him through his goings and comings in the streets of Springfield, along the route of the old Eighth Circuit of Illinois, through the streets of Washington, into the White House.

[XIV]

His own children stirred the deepest passion his unsatisfied heart ever knew. Tad, whose stuttering tongue and restless, valiant spirit brought out all Mr. Lincoln’s tenderness, sat beside him every free evening, going over the pictures and text of the shoals of books which publishers send to a President; he helping the boy’s stumbling tongue to frame his comments—a perfection of fellowship between them. When the nights were not free—and that was often, for there were long conferences running into the small hours, the lad slept beside him on the floor of the conference room. And when it was over, he gathered him up in his arms and himself put him to bed, consoled in the harrowing muddle of affairs by the perfect love between them.

[XV]

One can never be too thankful that he had John Hay, then a youth in his early twenties—and such a youth! The joy and fun and understanding between them as it crops out in Hay’s letters is a streak of pure sunshine across the almost soddenly tragic life of the White House in the Civil War.

This capacity for companionship which so linked men of all types to Lincoln in his lifetime and so held them to him in death is one clue to his final success in bringing out of the struggle over slavery in this country certain solid and definite results—results that have enlarged the boundaries of human freedom and given a convincing demonstration of the need and the preciousness of more and more unionism if we are to secure our final better world. He could not have done what he did had he been less understanding of men and their limitations as well as of their powers, less experienced in passing behind human walls, finding what there was there and using it, not asking of a man what he could not give, not forcing on him what he could not receive.

[XVI]

Who can estimate what it was to the nation to have as a leader through the Civil War a man “born with a pass-key to hearts.”

IDA M. TARBELL.

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## HE KNEW LINCOLN

[1]

“He has the pass-key to hearts, to him the response of the prying of hands on the knobs.”

[2]

—Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Answerer.”

“Did I know Lincoln? Well, I should say. See that chair there? Take it, set down. That’s right. Comfortable, ain’t it? Well, sir, Abraham Lincoln has set in that chair hours, him and Little

[3]

'Doug,' and Logan and Judge Davis, all of 'em, all the big men in this State, set in that chair. See them marks? Whittlin'. Judge Logan did it, all-firedest man to whittle. Always cuttin' away at something. I just got that chair new, paid six dollars for it, and I be blamed if I didn't come in this store and find him slashin' right into that arm. I picked up a stick and said: 'Here, Judge, s'posin' you cut this.' He just looked at me and then flounced out, mad as a wet hen. Mr. Lincoln was here, and you ought to heard him tee-hee. He was always here. [Come and set by the stove by the hour and tell stories and talk and argue.](#) I'd ruther heard the debates them men had around this old stove than heard Webster and Clay and Calhoun and the whole United States Senate. There wa'n't never a United States Senate that could beat just what I've heard right here in this room with Lincoln settin' in that very chair where you are this minute.

[4]



["Come and set by the stove by the hour and tell stories and talk and argue"](#)

"He traded here. I've got his accounts now. See here, 'quinine, quinine, quinine.' Greatest hand to buy quinine you ever see. Give it to his constituents. Oh, he knew how to be popular, Mr. Lincoln did. Cutest man in politics. I wa'n't a Whig. I was then and I am now a Democrat, a real old-fashioned Jackson Democrat, and my blood just would rise up sometimes hearin' him discuss. He was a dangerous man—a durned dangerous man to have agin you. He'd make you think a thing when you knew it wa'n't so, and cute! Why, he'd just slide in when you wa'n't expectin' it and do some unexpected thing that u'd make you laugh, and then he'd get your vote. You'd vote for him because you liked him—just because you liked him and because he was so all-fired smart, and do it when you knew he was wrong and it was agin the interest of the country.

[5]

"Tell stories? Nobody ever could beat him at that, and how he'd enjoy 'em, just slap his hands on his knees and jump up and turn around and then set down, laughin' to kill. Greatest man to git new yarns that ever lived, always askin', 'Heard any new stories, Billy?' And if I had I'd trot 'em out, and how he'd laugh. Often and often when I've told him something new and he'd kin' a forgit how it went, he'd come in and say, 'Billy, how about that story you'se tellin' me?' and then I'd tell it all over.

[6]

"He was away a lot, you know, ridin' the circuit along with some right smart lawyers. They had great doin's. Nuthin' to do evenings but to set around the tavern stove tellin' stories. That was enough when Lincoln was there. They was all lost without him. Old Judge Davis was boss of that lot, and he never would settle down till Lincoln got around. I've heard 'em laugh lots of times how the Judge would fuss around and keep askin', 'Where's Mr. Lincoln, why don't Mr. Lincoln come? Somebody go and find Lincoln,' and when Lincoln came he would just settle back and get him started to yarning, and there they'd set half the night.

[7]

"When he got home he'd come right in here first time he was downtown and tell me every blamed yarn he'd heard. Whole crowd would get in here sometimes and talk over the trip, and I tell you it was something to hear 'em laugh. You could tell how Lincoln kept things stirred up. He was so blamed quick. Ever hear Judge Weldon tell that story about what Lincoln said one day up to Bloomington when they was takin' up a subscription to buy Jim Wheeler a new pair of pants? No? Well, perhaps I oughten to tell it to you, ma says it ain't nice. It makes me mad to hear people objectin' to Mr. Lincoln's stories. Mebbe he did say words you wouldn't expect to hear at

a church supper, but he never put no meanin' into 'em that wouldn't 'a' been fit for the minister to put into a sermon, and that's a blamed sight more'n you can say of a lot of stories I've heard some of the people tell who stick up their noses at Mr. Lincoln's yarns.

[8]

"Yes, sir, he used to keep things purty well stirred up on that circuit. That time I was a speakin' of he made Judge Davis real mad; it happened right in court and everybody got to gigglin' fit to kill. The Judge knew 'twas something Lincoln had said and he began to sputter.

"I am not going to stand this any longer, Mr. Lincoln, you're always disturbin' this court with your tomfoolery. I'm goin' to fine you. The clerk will fine Mr. Lincoln five dollars for disorderly conduct.' The boys said Lincoln never said a word; he just set lookin' down with his hand over his mouth, tryin' not to laugh. About a minute later the Judge, who was always on pins and needles till he knew all the fun that was goin' on, called up Weldon and whispered to him, 'What was that Lincoln said?' Weldon told him, and I'll be blamed if the Judge didn't giggle right out loud there in court. The joke was on him then, and he knew it, and soon as he got his face straight he said, dignified like, 'The clerk may remit Mr. Lincoln's fine.'

[9]

"Yes, he was a mighty cute story-teller, but he knew what he was about tellin' 'em. I tell you he got more arguments out of stories than he did out of law books, and the queer part was you couldn't answer 'em—they just made you see it and you couldn't get around it. I'm a Democrat, but I'll be blamed if I didn't have to vote for Mr. Lincoln as President, couldn't help it, and it was all on account of that snake story of his'n illustratin' the takin' of slavery into Kansas and Nebraska. Remember it? I heard him tell it in a speech once.

[10]

"If I saw a pizen snake crawlin' in the road,' he says, 'I'd kill it with the first thing I could grab; but if I found it in bed with my children, I'd be mighty careful how I touched it fear I'd make it bite the children. If I found it in bed with somebody else's children I'd let them take care of it; but if I found somebody puttin' a whole batch of young snakes into an empty bed where mine or anybody's children was going to sleep pretty soon, I'd stop him from doin' it if I had to fight him.' Perhaps he didn't say 'fight him,' but somehow I always tell that story that way because I know I would and so would he or you or anybody. That was what it was all about when you come down to it. They was tryin' to put a batch of snakes into an empty bed that folks was goin' to sleep in.

[11]

"Before I heard that story I'd heard Lincoln say a hundred times, settin' right there in that chair, where you are, 'Boys, we've got to stop slavery or it's goin' to spread all over this country,' but, somehow, I didn't see it before. Them snakes finished me. Then I knew he'd got it right and I'd got to vote for him. Pretty tough, though, for me to go back on Little 'Doug.' You see he was our great man, so we thought. Been to the United States Senate and knew all the big bugs all over the country. Sort o' looked and talked great. Wan't no comparison between him and Lincoln in looks and talk. Of course, we all knew he wa'n't honest, like Lincoln, but blamed if I didn't think in them days Lincoln was too all-fired honest—kind of innocent honest. He couldn't stand it nohow to have things said that wan't so. He just felt plumb bad about lies. I remember once bein' in court over to Decatur when Mr. Lincoln was tryin' a case. There was a fellow agin him that didn't have no prejudices against lyin' in a lawsuit, and he was tellin' how Lincoln had said this an' that, tryin' to mix up the jury. It was snowin' bad outside, and Mr. Lincoln had wet his feet and he was tryin' to dry 'em at the stove. He had pulled off one shoe and was settin' there holdin' up his great big foot, his forehead all puckered up, listenin' to that ornery lawyer's lies. All at onct he jumped up and hopped right out into the middle of the court-room.

[12]

"Now, Judge,' he says, 'that ain't fair. I didn't say no sich thing, and he knows I didn't. I ain't goin' to have this jury all fuddled up.'

"You never see anything so funny in a court-room as that big fellow standin' there in one stockin' foot, a shoe in his hand, talking so earnest. No, sir, he couldn't stand a lie.

[13]

"Think he was a big man, then?' Nope—never did. Just as I said, we all thought Douglas was *our* big man. You know I felt kind of sorry for Lincoln when they began to talk about him for President. It seemed almost as if somebody was makin' fun of him. He didn't look like a president. I never had seen one, but we had pictures of 'em, all of 'em from George Washington down, and they looked somehow as if they were different kind of timber from us. Leastwise that's always the way it struck me. Now Mr. Lincoln he was just like your own folks—no trouble to talk to him, no siree. Somehow you just settled down comfortable to visitin' the minute he come in. I couldn't imagine George Washington or Thomas Jefferson settin' here in that chair you're in tee-heein' over some blamed yarn of mine. None of us around town took much stock in his bein' elected at first—that is, none of the men, the women was different. They always believed in him, and used to say, 'You mark my word, Mr. Lincoln will be president. He's just made for it, he's good, he's the best man ever lived and he ought to be president.' I didn't see no logic in that then, but I dunno but there was some after all.

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"It seems all right now though. I reckon I learned somethin' watchin' him be President—learned a lot—not that it made any difference in *him*. Funniest thing to see him goin' around in this town—not a mite changed—and the whole United States a watchin' him and the biggest men in the country runnin' after him and reporters hangin' around to talk to him and fellers makin' his pictures in ile and every other way. That didn't make no difference to him—only he didn't like bein' so busy he couldn't come in here much. He had a room over there in the Court House—room on that corner there. I never looked up that it wa'n't chuck full of people wantin' him. This old town was full of people all the time—delegations and committees and politicians and newspaper men. Only time I ever see [Horace Greeley, he came in here to buy quinine](#). Mr. Lincoln sent him. Think of that, Horace Greeley buyin' quinine of *me*.

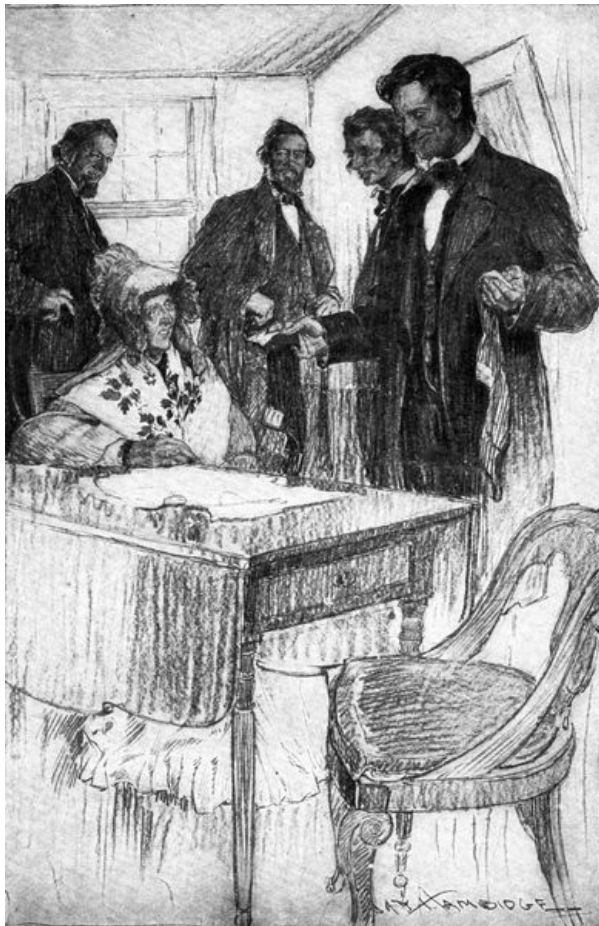
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*"Horace Greeley, he came in here to buy quinine"*

"No end of other great men around. He saw 'em all. Sometimes I used to step over and watch him—didn't bother him a mite to see a big man—not a mite. He'd jest shake hands and talk as easy and natural as if 'twas me—and he didn't do no struttin' either. Some of the fellers who come to see him looked as if *they* was goin' to be president, but Mr. Lincoln didn't put on any airs. No, sir, and he didn't cut any of his old friends either. Tickled to death to see 'em every time, and they all come—blamed if every old man and woman in Sangamon County didn't trot up here to see him. They'd all knowed him when he was keepin' store down to New Salem and swingin' a chain—surveyed lots of their towns for 'em—he had—and then he'd electioneered all over that county, too, so they just come in droves to bid him good-by. I was over there one day when old Aunt Sally Lowdy came in the door. Aunt Sally lived down near New Salem, and I expect she'd mended Mr. Lincoln's pants many a time; for all them old women down there just doted on him and took care of him as if he was their own boy. Well, Aunt Sally stood lookin' kind a scared seein' so many strangers and not knowin' precisely what to do, when Mr. Lincoln spied her. Quick as a wink he said, 'Excuse me, gentlemen,' and he just rushed over to that old woman and shook hands with both of his'n and says, 'Now, Aunt Sally, this is real kind of you to come and see me. How are you and how's Jake?' (Jake was her boy.) 'Come right over here,' and he led her over, as if she was the biggest lady in Illinois, and says, 'Gentlemen, this is a good old friend of mine. She can make the best flapjacks you ever tasted, and she's baked 'em for me many a time.' Aunt Sally was jest as pink as a rosy, she was so tickled. And she says, 'Abe'—all the old folks in Sangamon called him Abe. They knowed him as a boy, but don't you believe anybody ever did up here. No, sir, we said Mr. Lincoln. He was like one of us, but he wa'n't no man to be over familiar with. 'Abe,' says Aunt Sally, 'I had to come and say good-by. They say down our way they're goin' to kill you if they get you down to Washington, but I don't believe it. I just tell 'em you're too smart to let 'em git ahead of you that way. I thought I'd come and bring you a present, knit 'em myself,' and I'll be blamed if that old lady didn't pull out a great big pair of yarn socks and hand 'em to Mr. Lincoln.

"Well, sir, it was the funniest thing to see Mr. Lincoln's face pucker up and his eyes twinkle and twinkle. He took them socks and held 'em up by the toes, one in each hand. They was the longest socks I ever see. 'The lady got my latitude and longitude 'bout right, didn't she, gentlemen?' he says, and then he laid 'em down and he took Aunt Sally's hand and he says tender-like, '[Aunt Sally, you couldn't a done nothin' which would have pleased me better.](#)' I'll take 'em to Washington and wear 'em, and think of you when I do it.' And I declare he said it so first thing I knew I was almost blubberin', and I wan't the only one nuther, and I bet he did wear 'em in Washington. I can jest see him pullin' off his shoe and showin' them socks to Sumner or Seward or some other big bug that was botherin' him when he wanted to switch off on another subject and tellin' 'em the story about Aunt Sally and her flapjacks.



***"Aunt Sally, you couldn't a done nuthin' which would have pleased me better"***

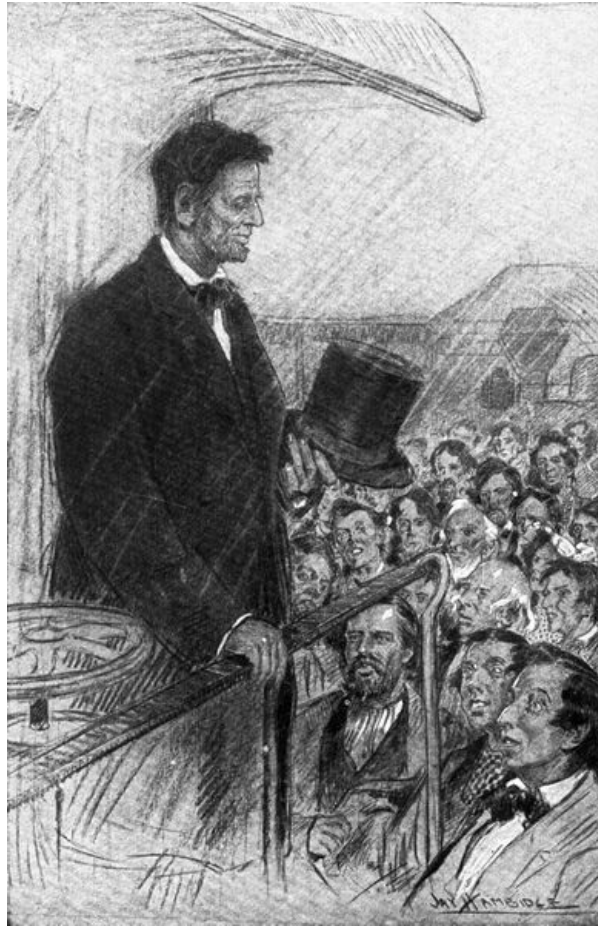
"Was there much talk about his bein' killed?' Well, there's an awful lot of fools in this world and when they don't git what they want they're always for killin' somebody. Mr. Lincoln never let on, but I reckon his mail was pretty lively readin' sometimes. He got pictures of galleys and pistols and other things and lots of threats, so they said. I don't think that worried him much. He was more bothered seein' old Buchanan givin' the game away. 'I wish I could have got down there before the horse was stole,' I heard him say onct in here, talkin' to some men. 'But I reckon I can find the tracks when I do git there.' It was his cabinet bothered him most, I always thought. He didn't know the men he'd got to take well enough. Didn't know how far he could count on 'em. He and Judge Gillespie and one or two others was in here one day sittin' by the stove talkin', and he says, 'Judge, I wisht I could take all you boys down to Washington with me, Democrats and all, and make a cabinet out of you. I'd know where every man would fit and we could git right down to work. Now, I've got to learn my men before I can do much.' 'Do you mean, Mr. Lincoln, you'd take a Democrat like Logan?' says the Judge, sort of shocked. 'Yes, sir, I would; I know Logan. He's agin me now and that's all right, but if we have trouble you can count on Logan to do the right thing by the country, and that's the kind of men I want—they as will do the right thing by the country. Tain't a question of Lincoln, or Democrat or Republican, Judge; it's a question of the country.'

"Of course he seemed pretty cheerful always. He wan't no man to show out all he felt. Lots of them little stuck-up chaps that came out here to talk to him said, solemn as owls, 'He don't realize the gravity of the situation.' Them's their words, 'gravity of the situation.' Think of that, Mr. Lincoln not realizing. They ought to heard him talk to us the night he went away. I'll never forgit that speech—nor any man who heard it. I can see him now just how he looked, standin' there on the end of his car. He'd been shakin' hands with the crowd in the depot, laughin' and talkin', just like himself, but when he got onto that car he seemed suddint to be all changed. You never seen a face so sad in all the world. I tell you he had woe in his heart that minute, woe. He knew he was leavin' us for good, nuthin' else could explain the way he looked and what he said. He knew he never was comin' back alive. It was rainin' hard, but when we saw him standin' there bare headed, his great big eyes lookin' at us so lovin' and mournful, every man of us took off his hat, just as if he'd been in church. You never heard him make a speech, of course? You missed a lot. Curious voice. You could hear it away off—kind of shrill, but went right to your heart—and that night it sounded sadder than anything I ever heard. You know I always hear it to this day, nights when the wind howls around the house. Ma says it makes her nervous to hear me talk about him such nights, but I can't help it; just have to let out.

"He stood a minute lookin' at us, and then he began to talk. There ain't a man in this town that heard him that ever forgot what he said, but I don't believe there's a man that ever said it over out loud—he couldn't, without cryin'. [He just talked to us that time out of his heart.](#) Somehow we felt all of a suddint how we loved him and how he loved us. We hadn't taken any stock in all that talk about his bein' killed, but when he said he was goin' away not knowin' where or whether ever he would return I just got cold all over. I begun to see that minute and everybody did. The women all fell to sobbin' and a kind of groan went up, and when he asked us to pray for him I



don't believe that there was a man in that crowd, whether he ever went to church in his life, that didn't want to drop right down on his marrow bones and ask the Lord to take care of Abraham Lincoln and bring him back to us, where he belonged.



*["He just talked to us that time out of his heart"](#)*

“Ever see him again?” Yes, onct down in Washington, summer of ‘64. Things was lookin’ purty blue that summer. Didn’t seem to be anybody who thought he’d git reelected. Greeley was abusin’ him in *The Tribune* for not makin’ peace, and you know there was about half the North that always let Greeley do their thinkin’ fer ‘em. The war wan’t comin’ on at all—seemed as if they never would do nuthin’. Grant was hangin’ on to Petersburg like a dog to a root, but it didn’t seem to do no good. Same with Sherman, who was tryin’ to take Atlanta. The country was just petered out with the everlastin’ taxes an’ fightin’ an’ dyin’. It wa’n’t human nature to be patient any longer, and they just spit it out on Mr. Lincoln, and then, right on top of all the grumblin’ and abusin’, he up and made another draft. Course he was right, but I tell you nobody but a brave man would ‘a’ done such a thing at that minute; but he did it. It was hard on us out here. I tell you there wa’n’t many houses in this country where there wa’n’t mournin’ goin’ on. It didn’t seem as if we *could* stand any more blood lettin.’ Some of the boys round the State went down to see him about it. They came back lookin’ pretty sheepish. Joe Medill, up to Chicago, told me about it onct. He said, ‘We just told Mr. Lincoln we couldn’t stand another draft. We was through sendin’ men down to Petersburg to be killed in trenches. He didn’t say nuthin’; just stood still, lookin’ down till we’d all talked ourselves out; and then, after a while, he lifted up his head, and looked around at us, slow-like; and I tell you, Billy, I never knew till that minute that Abraham Lincoln could get mad clean through. He was just white he was that mad. “Boys,” he says, “you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. [You’re actin’ like a lot of cowards. You’ve helped make this war, and you’ve got to help fight it.](#) You go home and raise them men and don’t you dare come down here again blubberin’ about what I tell you to do. I won’t stan’ it.” We was so scared we never said a word. We just took our hats and went out like a lot of school-boys. Talk about Abraham Lincoln bein’ easy! When it didn’t matter mebbe he was easy, but when it did you couldn’t stir him any more’n you could a mountain.’

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***"You're actin' like a lot of cowards. You've helped make this war, and you've got to help fight it"***

"Well, I kept hearin' about the trouble he was havin' with everybody, and I just made up my mind I'd go down and see him and swap yarns and tell him how we was all countin' on his gettin' home. Thought maybe it would cheer him up to know we set such store on his comin' home if they didn't want him for president. So I jest picked up and went right off. Ma was real good about my goin'. She says, 'I shouldn't wonder if 'twould do him good, William. And don't you ask him no questions about the war nor about politics. You just talk home to him and tell him some of them foolish stories of yourn.'

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"Well, I had a brother in Washington, clerk in a department—awful set up 'cause he had an office—and when I got down there I told him I'd come to visit Mr. Lincoln. He says, 'William, be you a fool? Folks don't visit the President of the United States without an invitation, and he's too busy to see anybody but the very biggest people in this administration. Why, he don't even see me,' he says. Well, it made me huffy to hear him talk. 'Isaac,' I says, 'I don't wonder Mr. Lincoln don't see you. But it's different with me. Him and me is friends.'

"'Well' he says, 'you've got to have cards anyway.' 'Cards,' I says, 'what for? What kind?' 'Why,' he says, 'visitin' cards—with your name on.' 'Well,' I says, 'it's come to a pretty pass, if an old friend like me can't see Mr. Lincoln without sendin' him a piece of pasteboard. I'd be ashamed to do such a thing, Isaac Brown. Do you suppose he's forgotten me? Needs to see my name printed out to know who I am? You can't make me believe any such thing,' and I walked right out of the room, and that night I footed it up to the Soldiers' Home where Mr. Lincoln was livin' then, right among the sick soldiers in their tents.

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"There was lots of people settin' around in a little room, waitin' fer him, but there wan't anybody there I knowed, and I was feelin' a little funny when a door opened and out came little John Nicolay. He came from down this way, so I just went up and says, 'How'd you do, John; where's Mr. Lincoln?' Well, John didn't seem over glad to see me.

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"'Have you an appintment with Mr. Lincoln?' he says.

"'No, sir,' I says; 'I ain't, and it ain't necessary. Mebbe it's all right and fittin' for them as wants post-offices to have appintments, but I reckon Mr. Lincoln's old friends don't need 'em, so you just trot along, Johnnie, and tell him Billy Brown's here and see what he says.' Well, he kind a flushed up and set his lips together, but he knowed me, and so he went off. In about two minutes the door popped open and out came Mr. Lincoln, his face all lit up. He saw me first thing, and he laid holt of me and just shook my hands fit to kill. 'Billy,' he says, 'now I am glad to see you. Come right in. You're goin' to stay to supper with Mary and me.'

"'Didn't I know it? Think bein' president would change him—not a mite. Well, he had a right smart lot of people to see, but soon as he was through we went out on the back stoop and set down and talked and talked. He asked me about pretty nigh everybody in Springfield. I just let loose and told him about the weddin's and births and the funerals and the buildin', and I guess there wan't a yarn I'd heard in the three years and a half he'd been away that I didn't spin for him. Laugh—you ought to a heard him laugh—just did my heart good, for I could see what they'd

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been doin' to him. Always was a thin man, but, Lordy, he was thinner'n ever now, and his face was kind a drawn and gray—enough to make you cry.



***"We went out on the back stoop and sat down and talked and talked"***

"Well, we had supper and then talked some more, and about ten o'clock I started downtown. Wanted me to stay all night, but I says to myself, 'Billy, don't you overdo it. You've cheered him up, and you better light out and let him remember it when he's tired.' So I said, 'Nope, Mr. Lincoln, can't, goin' back to Springfield to-morrow. Ma don't like to have me away and my boy ain't no great shakes keepin' store.' 'Billy,' he says, 'what did you come down here for?' 'I come to see you, Mr. Lincoln.' 'But you ain't asked me for anything, Billy. What is it? Out with it. Want a post-office?' he said, gigglin', for he knowed I didn't. 'No, Mr. Lincoln, just wanted to see *you*—felt kind a lonesome—been so long since I'd seen you, and I was afraid I'd forgit some of them yarns if I didn't unload soon.'

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"Well, sir, you ought to seen his face as he looked at me.

"'Billy Brown,' he says, slow-like, 'do you mean to tell me you came all the way from Springfield, Illinois, just to have a *visit* with *me*, that you don't want an office for anybody, nor a pardon for anybody, that you ain't got no complaints in your pocket, nor any advice up your sleeve?'

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"'Yes, sir,' I says, 'that's about it, and I'll be durned if I wouldn't go to *Europe* to see you, if I couldn't do it no other way, Mr. Lincoln.'

"Well, sir, I never was so astonished in my life. He just grabbed my hand and shook it nearly off, and the tears just poured down his face, and he says, 'Billy, you never'll know what good you've done me. I'm homesick, Billy, just plumb homesick, and it seems as if this war never would be over. Many a night I can see the boys a-dyin' on the fields and can hear their mothers cryin' for 'em at home, and I can't help 'em, Billy. I have to send them down there. We've got to save the Union, Billy, we've got to.'

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"'Course we have, Mr. Lincoln,' I says, cheerful as I could, 'course we have. Don't you worry. It's most over. You're goin' to be reëlected, and you and old Grant's goin' to finish this war mighty quick then. Just keep a stiff upper lip, Mr. Lincoln, and don't forget them yarns I told you.' And I started out. But seems as if he couldn't let me go. 'Wait a minute, Billy,' he says, 'till I get my hat and I'll walk a piece with you.' It was one of them still sweet-smellin' summer nights with no end of stars and you ain't no idee how pretty 'twas walkin' down the road. There was white tents showin' through the trees and every little way a tall soldier standin' stock still, a gun at his side. Made me feel mighty curious and solemn. By-and-by we come out of the trees to a sightly place where you could look all over Washington—see the Potomac and clean into Virginia. There was a bench there and we set down and after a while Mr. Lincoln he begun to talk. Well, sir, you or nobody ever heard anything like it. Blamed if he didn't tell me the whole thing—all about the war and the generals and Seward and Sumner and Congress and Greeley and the whole blamed lot. He just opened up his heart if I do say it. Seemed as if he'd come to a p'int where he must let out. I dunno how long we set there—must have been nigh morning, fer the stars begun to go out

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before he got up to go. 'Good-by, Billy,' he says, 'you're the first person I ever unloaded onto, and I hope you won't think I'm a baby,' and then we shook hands again, and I walked down to town and next day I come home.

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"Tell you what he said? Nope, I can't. Can't talk about it somehow. Fact is, I never told anybody about what he said that night. Tried to tell ma onct, but she cried, so I give it up.

"Yes, that's the last time I seen him—last time alive.

"Wa'n't long after that things began to look better. War began to move right smart, and, soon as it did, there wa'n't no use talkin' about anybody else for President. I see that plain enough, and, just as I told him, he was reëlected, and him an' Grant finished up the war in a hurry. I tell you it was a great day out here when we heard Lee had surrendered. 'Twas just like gettin' converted to have the war over. Somehow the only thing I could think of was how glad Mr. Lincoln would be. Me and ma reckoned he'd come right out and make us a visit and get rested, and we began right off to make plans about the reception we'd give him—brass band—parade—speeches—fireworks—everything. Seems as if I couldn't think about anything else. I was comin' down to open the store one mornin', and all the way down I was plannin' how I'd decorate the windows and how I'd tie a flag on that old chair, when I see Hiram Jones comin' toward me. He looked so old and all bent over I didn't know what had happened. 'Hiram,' I says, 'what's the matter? Be you sick?'

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"'Billy,' he says, and he couldn't hardly say it, 'Billy, they've killed Mr. Lincoln.'

"Well, I just turned cold all over, and then I flared up. 'Hiram Jones,' I says, 'you're lyin,' you're crazy. How dare you tell me that? It ain't so.'

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"'Don't Billy,' he says, 'don't go on so. I ain't lyin'. It's so. He'll never come back, Billy. He's dead!' And he fell to sobbin' out loud right there in the street, and somehow I knew it was true.

"I come on down and opened the door. People must have paregoric and castor ile and liniment, no matter who dies; but I didn't put up the shades. I just sat here and thought and thought and groaned and groaned. It seemed that day as if the country was plumb ruined and I didn't care much. All I could think of was *him*. He wan't goin' to come back. He wouldn't never sit here in that chair again. He was dead.

"For days and days 'twas awful here. Waitin' and waitin'. Seemed as if that funeral never would end. I couldn't bear to think of him bein' dragged around the country and havin' all that fuss made over him. He always hated fussin' so. Still, I s'pose I'd been mad if they hadn't done it. Seemed awful, though. I kind a felt that he belonged to us now, that they ought to bring him back and let us have him now they'd killed him.

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"Of course they got here at last, and I must say it was pretty grand. All sorts of big bugs, Senators and Congressmen, and officers in grand uniforms and music and flags and crape. They certainly didn't spare no pains givin' him a funeral. Only we didn't want 'em. We wanted to bury him ourselves, but they wouldn't let us. I went over onct where they'd laid him out for folks to see. I reckon I won't tell you about that. I ain't never goin' to get that out of my mind. I wisht a million times I'd never seen him lyin' there black and changed—that I could only see him as he looked sayin' 'good-by' to me up to the Soldiers' Home in Washington that night.

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"Ma and me didn't go to the cemetery with 'em. I couldn't stan' it. Didn't seem right to have sich goin's on here at home where he belonged, for a man like him. But we go up often now, ma and me does, and talk about him. Blamed if it don't seem sometimes as if he was right there—might step out any minute and say 'Hello, Billy, any new stories?'

"Yes. I knowed Abraham Lincoln; knowed him well; and I tell you there wan't never a better man made. Leastwise I don't want to know a better one. He just suited *me*—Abraham Lincoln did."

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## BACK IN '58

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## BACK THERE IN '58

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Hear 'em? Hear the Lincoln and Douglas debates? Well, I should say I did. Heard every one of 'em. Yes, sir, for about two months back there in '58, I didn't do a thing but travel around Illinois listenin' to them two men argue out slavery; and when I wa'n't listenin' to 'em or travelin' around after 'em, I was pretty sure to be settin' on a fence discussin'. Fur my part I never did understand how the crops was got in that fall; seemed to me about all the men in the state was settin' around whittlin' and discussin'.

Made Lincoln? Yes, I reckon you might say they did. There's no denyin' that's when the country outside begun to take notice of him. But don't you make no mistake, them debates wa'n't the beginnin' of Abraham Lincoln's work on slavery. He'd been at it for about four years before they come off, sweatin' his brains night and day. The hardest piece of thinkin' I ever see a man do. Anybody that wants to hear about him back there needn't expect stories. He wa'n't tellin' stories

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them days. No, sir, he was thinkin'.

Curious about him. There he was, more'n forty-five years old, clean out of politics and settled down to practice law. Looked as if he wouldn't do much of anything the rest of his life but jog around the circuit, when all of a suddint Douglas sprung his Kansas-Nebraska bill. You remember what that bill was, don't you?—let Kansas and Nebraska in as territories and the same time repealed the Missouri Compromise keeping slavery out of that part of the country, let the people have it or not, just as they wanted. You ain't no idee how that bill stirred up Mr. Lincoln. I'll never forgit how he took its passin'. 'Twas long back in the spring of '54. Lot of 'em was settin' in here tellin' stories and Mr. Lincoln was right in the middle of one when in bounced Billy Herndon—he was Lincoln's law partner, you know. His eyes was blazin' and he calls out, "They've upset the Missouri Compromise. The Kansas-Nebraska bill is passed."

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For a minute everybody was still as death—everybody but me. "Hoorah!" I calls out, "you can bet on Little Dug every time," for I was a Democrat and, barrin' George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, I thought Douglas was the biggest man God ever made. Didn't know no more what that bill meant than that old Tom-cat in the window.

"Hoorah!" I says, and then I happened to look at Mr. Lincoln.

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He was all in a heap, his head dropped down on his breast, and there he set and never spoke, and then after a long time he got up and went out. Never finished that story, never said "Good-by, boys," like he always did, never took notice of nuthin', just went out, his face gray and stern, and his eyes not seein' at all.

Well, sir, you could 'a' knocked me over with a feather. I never seen him take anything that way before. He was a good loser. You see how 'twas with me, Kansas-Nebraska wa'n't nuthin' but politics, and my man had beat.

I told Ma about it when I got home. "It ain't like him to be mad because Douglas has beat," I says, "I don't understand it," and Ma says, "I reckon that's just it, William, you don't understand it." Ma was awful touchy when anybody seemed to criticise Mr. Lincoln.

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I s'pose you're too young to recollect what a fuss that bill stirred up, ain't you? Must 'a' heard your Pa talk about it, though. Whole North got to rowin' about it. Out here in Illinois lots of Democrats left the party on account of it, and when Douglas came back that summer they hooted him off a platform up to Chicago. You couldn't stop Douglas that way. That just stirred up his blood.

Far's I was concerned I couldn't see anything the matter with what he'd done. It seemed all right to me them days to let the folks that moved into Kansas and Nebraska do as Douglas had fixed it for 'em, have slaves or not, just as they was a mind to. And I tell you, when Douglas came around here and talked about "popular sovereignty," and rolled out his big sentences about the sacred right of self-government, and said that if the white people in Nebraska was good enough to govern themselves, they was good enough to govern niggers, I felt dead sure there wa'n't no other side to it.

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What bothered me was the way Mr. Lincoln kept on takin' it. He got so he wa'n't the same, 'peared to be in a brown study all the time. Come in here and set by the stove with the boys and not talk at all. Didn't seem to relish my yarns either like he used to. He started in campaigning again, right away, and the boys said he wouldn't promise to go any place where they didn't let him speak against the Kansas-Nebraska bill. I heard him down here that fall—his first big speech. I hadn't never had any idee what was in Abraham Lincoln before. He wa'n't the same man at all. Serious—you wouldn't believe it, seemed to feel plumb bad about repealin' the Missouri Compromise, said 'twas wrong, just as wrong as 'twould be to repeal the law against bringing in slaves from Africa. I must say I hadn't thought of that before.

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I remember some of the things he said about Douglas' idee of popular sovereignty, just as well as if 'twas yesterday. "When the white man governs himself," he said, "that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs another, that is more than self-government, that is despotism." "If the negro is a man, then my ancient faith teaches me that all men are created equal." "No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent."

And he just lit into slavery that day. "I hate it," he said. "I hate it because it is a monstrous injustice." Yes, sir, them's the very words he used way back there in '54. "I hate it because it makes the enemies of free institutions call us hypocrites, I hate it because it makes men criticise the Declaration of Independence, and say there ain't no right principle but self-interest." More'n one old abolitionist who heard that speech said that they hadn't no idee how bad slavery was or how wicked the Kansas-Nebraska bill was 'til then.

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As time went on, seemed as if he got more serious every day. Everybody got to noticin' how hard he was takin' it. I remember how Judge Dickey was in here one day and he says to me, "Billy, Mr. Lincoln is all used up over this Kansas-Nebraska business. If he don't stop worryin' so, he'll be sick. Why, t'other night up to Bloomington, four of us was sleepin' in the same room and Lincoln talked us all to sleep, and what do you think? I waked up about daylight and there he was settin' on the side of the bed with nuthin' on but his shirt, and when he see my eyes was open he sings out, 'I tell you, Judge, this country can't last much longer half-slave and half-free.' Bin thinkin' all night far's I know."

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Now, sir, that was much as three years before Mr. Lincoln said them self-same words in a speech right in this town. Seems to me I can hear him now singin' it out shrill and far-soundin'. "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure

permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all the one thing or all the other.” Them’s his very words. It made me cold when I heard ‘em. If we wa’n’t goin’ to git on half-slave and half-free like we’d always done, what was goin’ to happen?

He hitched on another idee to this one about our becomin’ all slave or all free, which bothered me considerable—that was, that Douglas and Buchanan and the rest of the big Democrats was in a conspiracy to spread slavery all over the Union. He’d been sayin’ right along that they didn’t mind slavery spreadin’, but now he came out flat-footed and said the things they’d been doin’ in Congress and in the Supreme Court for a few years back showed that they was tryin’ to legalize slavery in all the states, north and south, old and new. He said that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and Judge Taney’s decision that Congress couldn’t keep slaves out of a territory—and the way Pierce and Buchanan had worked, fitted together like timbers for a house. “If you see a lot of timbers,” he says, “all gotten out at different times and different places by Stephen, Franklin, Roger and James”—them was the names of Douglas, Pierce, Taney and Buchanan, you know—“and you find they fit into a frame for a house, you can’t help believing them men have been workin’ on the same plan.”

I tell you that speech riled his party. They said he oughtn’t said it, if he did think it. It was too radical. They talked to him so much, tryin’ to tone him down and to keep him from doin’ it ag’in, that he flared up one day in here and he says, “Boys, if I had to take a pen and scratch out every speech I ever made except one, this speech you don’t like’s the one I’d leave.” And he says it with his head up, lookin’ as proud as if he was a Senator.

Well, somehow, as time went on, just watchin’ Mr. Lincoln so dead in earnest begun to make me feel queer. And I got serious. Never’d been so but twict before in my life—once at a revival and next time when I thought I wasn’t goin’ to git Ma. But I joined the church and Ma and me got married, and after that there didn’t seem to be anything left to worry about.

And then this comes along, and I’ll be blamed if it didn’t git so I couldn’t hear enough of it. Night after night, when they was in here discussin’, every minute I wa’n’t puttin’ up something, I was listenin’ to ‘em.

And then I took to runnin’ around to hear the speeches. I was up to Bloomington in ‘56 the time Lincoln went over to the Republicans. The old Whigs down here had been considerable worried for fear he would quit ‘em, and I must say it worried. I never’d had any use for a man who left his party. Couldn’t understand it. Seemed to me then that ‘twa’n’t no better than gittin’ a divorce from your wife. I’ve changed my views since about several things. Had to jump the party myself two or three times, and I’ve seen women— Well, all I’ve got to say is, that I ain’t judgin’ the man that gits a divorce from ‘em.

As I was sayin’, I was up to Bloomington that night. Nobody that didn’t hear that speech ever knows what Abraham Lincoln could do. Lots of ‘em will tell you he was homely. Seems to me sometimes that’s about all some folks around here has to tell about Abraham Lincoln. “Yes, I knowed him,” they say. “He was the homeliest man in Sangamon County.” Well, now, don’t you make no mistake. The folks that don’t tell you nuthin’ but that never knowed Mr. Lincoln. Mebbe they’d seen him, but they never knowed him. He wa’n’t homely. There’s no denyin’ he was long and lean, and he didn’t always stand straight and he wasn’t pertikeler about his clothes, but that night up to Bloomington in ten minutes after he struck that platform, I tell you he was the handsomest man I ever see.

He knew what he was doin’ that night. He knew he was cuttin’ loose. He knew them old Whigs was goin’ to have it in for him for doin’ it, and he meant to show ‘em he didn’t care a red cent what they thought. He knew there was a lot of fools in that new party he was joinin’—the kind that’s always takin’ up with every new thing comes along to git something to orate about. He saw clear as day that if they got started right that night, he’d got to fire ‘em up; and so he threw back his shoulders and lit in.

Good Lord! I never see anything like it. In ten minutes he was about eight feet tall; his face was white, his eyes was blazin’ fire, and he was thunderin’, “Kansas shall be free!” “Ballots, not bullets!” “We won’t go out of the Union and you sha’n’t!” Generally when he was speakin’, he was cool and quiet and things all fit together, and when you come away you was calm—but your head was workin’; but that time up to Bloomington he was like—what’s that the Bible calls it? —“avengin’ fire”—yes, sir, that’s it, he was like “avengin’ fire.” I never knew exactly what did happen there. All I recollect is that at the beginnin’ of that speech I was settin’ in the back of the room, and when I come to I was hangin’ on to the front of the platform. I recollect I looked up and seen Jo Medill standin’ on the reporter’s table lookin’ foolish-like and heard him say: “Good Lord, boys, I ain’t took a note!”

Fact was he’d stampeded that audience, reporters and all. I’ve always thought that speech made the Republican party in Illinois. It melted ‘em together. ‘Twa’n’t arguments they needed just then, it was meltin’ together of what they’d heard.

Well, he went right on speakin’ after that, must ‘a’ made forty or fifty speeches all over the State, for Fremont, and he got no end of invitations from Indiana and Iowa and Kansas and all around to come over and speak. Old Billy Herndon used to come in here and brag about it. You’d thought ‘twas him was gittin’ ‘em. Always seemed to think he owned Lincoln anyway.

By the time the Republicans wanted a man for United States Senate Lincoln was first choice, easy enough, and the first thing anybody knew if he didn’t up and challenge Douglas, who the Democrats was runnin’, to seven debates—seven joint debates, they called ‘em. You could ‘a’

knocked me over with a feather when I heard that. I couldn't think of anybody I knew challengin' Mr. Douglas. It seemed impertinent, him bein' what I thought him. But I was glad they was goin' to thresh it out. You see I was feelin' mighty uncertain in my mind by this time. Somehow I couldn't seem to git around the p'int I'd been hearin' Mr. Lincoln make so much. However, I didn't have no idee but what Mr. Douglas would show clear enough where he was wrong. So when I heard about the debates, I says to Ma, "Johnnie can take care of the store, I'm goin' to hear 'em."

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You ain't no idee how people was stirred up by the news. Seemed as if everybody in the State felt about as I did. Most everybody was pretty sober about it, too. There ain't no denyin' that there was a lot of Democrats just like me. What Mr. Lincoln had been sayin' for four years back had struck in and they was worried. Still I reckon the most of the Republicans was a blamed sight more uneasy than we was. They'd got so used to seein' Douglas git everything he went after, that they thought he'd be sure to lick Lincoln now. I heard 'em talkin' about it among themselves every now and then and sayin', "I wisht Lincoln hadn't done it. He ain't had experience like Douglas. Why, Douglas's been debatin' fer twelve years in the United States Senate with the biggest men in the country, and he's always come out ahead. Lincoln ain't got a show."

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You needn't think Mr. Lincoln didn't know how they was talkin'. He never made no mistake about himself, Mr. Lincoln didn't. He knew he wa'n't a big gun like Douglas. I could see he was blue as a whetstone sometimes, thinkin' of the difference between 'em. "What's ag'in us in this campaign, boys," I heard him say one day, "is me. There ain't no use denyin' that Douglas has always been a big success and I've always been a flat failure. Everybody expects him to be President and always has and is actin' accordin'. Nobody's ever expected anything from me. I tell you we've got to run this campaign on principle. There ain't nuthin' in your candidate." And he looked so cast down I felt plum sorry for him.

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But you needn't think by that that he was shirkin' it—no, sir, not a mite. Spite of all his blues, he'd set his teeth for a fight. One day over to the Chenery House I recollect standin' with two or three Republicans when Mr. Lincoln come along and stopped to shake hands with a chap from up to Danville. "How's things lookin' up your way, Judge?" he says.

"Well, Mr. Lincoln," the Judge says, "we're feelin' mighty anxious about this debate of yours with Douglas," and the way he said it I could 'a' kicked him.

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Mr. Lincoln looked at him mighty sober for a minute. "Judge," he says, "didn't you ever see two men gittin' ready for a fight? Ain't you seen one of 'em swell up his muscle and pat it and brag how he's goin' to knock the stuffin' out of the other, and that other man clinchin' his fist and settin' his teeth and savin' his wind. Well, sir, the other is goin' to win the fight or die tryin'," and with that he turns and goes off.

Didn't I know that's the way he felt. I hadn't been watchin' him sweatin' his brains on that darned question for four years without knowin'. I tell you nobody that didn't see him often them days, and didn't care enough about him to feel bad when he felt bad, can ever understand what Abraham Lincoln went through before his debates with Douglas. He worked his head day and night tryin' to git that slavery question figured out so nobody could stump him. Greatest man to think things out so nobody could git around him I ever see. Hadn't any patience with what wa'n't clear. What worried him most, I can see now, was makin' the rest of us understand it like he did.

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Well, as I was sayin', it seemed as if all Illinois turned out to hear 'em speak. A country fair wa'n't nuthin' to the crowds. There wa'n't any too many railroads in Illinois in '58, and they didn't select the places fur the debates accordin' to connections. I reckon I traveled about all the ways there be gettin' to the places: foot, horseback, canal-boat, stage, side-wheeler, just got around any way that come handy; et and slept the same. Up to Quincy I recollect I put up on the bluff, and over to Charlestown me and seven of the boys had two beds. Nobody seemed to mind. We was all too took up with the speeches, seemed as if the more you heard the more you wanted to hear. I tell you they don't have no such speeches nowadays. There ain't two men in the United States today could git the crowds them two men had or hold 'em if they got 'em.

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I sort of expected some new line of argument from Douglas when they started out, but 'twa'n't long before we all saw he wa'n't goin' to talk about anything but popular sovereignty—that is, if he could help himself. As it turned out he didn't git his way. Mr. Lincoln had made up his mind that the Judge had got to say whether he thought slavery was right or wrong. Accordin' to him, that was the issue of the campaign. He argued that Douglas' notion of popular sovereignty was all right if slavery was as good as freedom, but that if it wa'n't, his arguments wa'n't worth a rush. He said the difference between him and the Judge was that one thought slavery was wrong and ought to be kept where it was till it died out of itself, and the other thought it was right and ought to be spread all over the country.

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It made Little Dug awful mad to face that line of argument. He said such talk proved Lincoln was an abolitionist, and as for his bein' in a conspiracy to spread slavery it was a lie, "an infamous lie." Well, I always did think conspiracy was a pretty strong word for Lincoln to use. Strictly speakin', I reckon 'twa'n't one, but all the same it didn't look right. Douglas couldn't deny that when he got the Missouri Compromise repealed he let slavery into territory that the government had set aside to be free. He couldn't deny that Judge Taney had decided that Congress couldn't prevent people takin' slaves into this territory. There was some other things which fitted in with these which Douglas couldn't deny.

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Mr. Lincoln argued from what they'd done that there wa'n't any reason why they shouldn't go on and apply the same legislation to all the other free parts of the country, said he believed they

would in time if they thought it would pay better.

The more I heard 'em argue the more I felt Lincoln was right. Suppose, I says to myself, that they take it into their heads to open Illinois? What's to stop 'em? If slaves can be took into Nebraska by the divine right of self-government, what's to prevent the divine right of self-government lettin' 'em in here? Of course, there was an old law settin' aside the Northwest to freedom, but if the Missouri Compromise could be repealed, why couldn't that? Then, again, what's to prevent the Supreme Court decidin' that Congress couldn't keep slaves out of a state just as it had decided that Congress couldn't keep 'em out of a territory. The more I thought of it the more I see there wa'n't anything to prevent men like Douglas and Buchanan tryin' some day to apply the same line of argument to Illinois or Pennsylvania or New York or any other free state that they was usin' now.

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I wa'n't goin' to stand for that. I don't pretend I ever felt like Mr. Lincoln did about niggers. No, sir, I was a Democrat, and I wanted the South let alone. I didn't want to hear no abolition talk. But I was dead agin' havin' any more slaves than we could help, and what's more I wa'n't myself willin' to live in a state where they was. I'd seen enough for that. Back in the '40's, when I first started up this store, I used to go to New Orleans for my goods and, bein' young, of course I had to see the sights. A man don't go to a slave market many times without gittin' to feel that as far as he is concerned he don't want nuthin' to do with buyin' and sellin' humans, black or white. Ma, too, she was dead set agin' it, and she'd said many a time when I was talkin', "William, if Mr. Douglas don't really care whether we git to be all slave or not, you oughten to vote for him," and I'd always said I wouldn't. Still I couldn't believe at first but what he did care. By the time the debates was half through I seen it clear enough, though. He didn't care a red cent—said he didn't. There was lots of others seen it same as me. I heard more'n one old Democrat say, "Douglas don't care. Lincoln's got it right, we've got to keep slavery back now or it's going to spread all over the country."

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You never would believe how I felt when I seen that, for that meant goin' back on Little Dug, leavin' the party and votin' for a Black Republican, as we used to call 'em. I tell you when I begun to see where I was goin' there wa'n't many nights I didn't lie awake tryin' to figure out how I could git around it. 'Twa'n't long, though, before I got over feelin' bad. Fact was every time I heard Mr. Lincoln—I used to go to all the speeches between debates, and there must have been twenty or thirty of them—he made it clearer. 'Twas amazin' how every time he always had some new way of puttin' it. Seemed as if his head was so full he couldn't say the same thing twice alike.

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One thing that made it easier was that I begun to see that Douglas wa'n't thinkin' much of anything but gittin elected and that Lincoln wa'n't thinkin' about that at all. He was dead set on makin' us understand. Lots of people seen that the first thing. I recollect how up to Quincy that funny fellow, what do you call him? "Nasby-Petroleum V. Nasby." Young chap then. Well, he'd come out there for some paper. Wanted to write Lincoln up. It was in the evening after the debate and Mr. Lincoln was settin' up in his room, at the hotel with his boots off and his feet on a chair—lettin' 'em breathe, he said. Had his coat and vest off. Nuthin' on to speak of but his pants and one suspender—settin' there restin' and gassin' with the boys when, as I started to say, Mr. Nasby come up. They had a long talk and I walked down street with him when he left.

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"That Lincoln of yourn is a great man," he says after a spell. "He ain't botherin' about the Senate—not a mite. He's tryin' to make the people of Illinois understand the danger there is in slavery spreadin' all over the country. He's a big man, the biggest man I've seen in a long time."

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Well, that sounded good to me, for that was just about what I'd figured out by that time, that Lincoln was a big man, a bigger man than Stephen A. Douglas. Didn't seem possible to me it could be so, but the more I went over it in my mind the more certain I felt about it. Yes, sir, I'd figured it out at last what bein' big was, that it was bein' right thinkin' things out straight and then hangin' on to 'em because they was right. That was bein' big and that was Abraham Lincoln all through—the whole of him.

That wa'n't Douglas at all. He didn't care whether he thought right or not, if he got what he was after. There wa'n't no real truth in him. See what he did in the very first debate up to Ottawa. He started out up there by callin' Lincoln an abolitionist and sayin' he wanted a nigger wife, and to prove it read a lot of abolition resolutions which, he said Lincoln had helped git up as far back as '54. The very next day after that debate, the *Chicago Tribune* came out and showed that Mr. Lincoln hadn't ever had anything to do with the resolutions Douglas had read. Yes, sir, them resolutions had come from some measely abolition meetin' where Mr. Lincoln had never been. Douglas had been tryin' to play a trick on us. I tell you when that news got out you could 'a' heard a pin drop among Illinois Democrats. It seemed as if he couldn't realize how serious we was feelin' or he wouldn't try a trick like that.

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Then he was always draggin' in things which didn't have no bearin' on the case, and takin' up Lincoln's time makin' him answer 'em. One was a-tellin' how Lincoln had voted against givin' money to carry on the Mexican War. Now, I know that wa'n't so, and more'n that it didn't have anything to do with the question. It made me feel plumb bad to have him goin' on that way.

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And that's the way he kept it up. Always digressin', never takin' up a p'int till Lincoln had drove him into a corner, always insistin' Lincoln wanted a nigger wife. Why, he made so much of that fool lie that there was a lot of people got to thinkin' mebbe that's what Lincoln's idees did mean. There's a man livin' here in this town now that's got a little book Lincoln made for him to show around and to prove he didn't mean nuthin' of the kind.

Fact was, Douglas never meant to argue it out fair and square. He meant to dodge, to mix us up

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and keep our minds off Kansas-Nebraska and old Judge Taney, and all the things Lincoln made so much of. I recollect Lincoln said one day that the way Douglas acted reminded him of a cuttle-fish throwin' out a black ink to color up the water so he could git away from something that was chasin' him.

Of course what made Douglas seem worse was Lincoln bein' so fair and so dead in earnest. Sometimes it seemed as if he was givin' the whole case away, he was so honest with Douglas. But he knew what he was doin' every time. Lincoln was the kind that breaks to win. And serious, why he wouldn't take time to tell a story. I recollect sayin' to him one day, "Mr. Lincoln, why don't you make us laugh sometimes?" "This ain't no time for stories, Billy," he says, "it's too serious."

Felt bad because he wa'n't elected? Nope. Didn't expect him to be. Somehow I'd got to feelin' by the time election come that it didn't make no real difference whether he went to the Senate or not. His goin' there wa'n't goin' to settle the question. What was goin' to settle it was gettin' more people to feel as he did about it. If he got beat tryin' to make people understand, it was worth a sight more to the country than his gettin' elected dodgin' the truth. I didn't figure that out alone, though, it was Mr. Lincoln helped me to see that.

You see, after I'd made up my mind I'd vote the Republican ticket, one day when I was walkin' down the street with him here in town and there wa'n't nobody around I told him. He looks at me sharp-like and then he says, mighty solemn: "Billy, are you sure you know what you're doin'?" What's the reason you're leavin' the party? 'Cause you want to see me git in?"

"No, sir," I says, "that ain't it at all. I'm a Democrat. Besides, I hate like all possessed to go back on Little Doug, you know what store I've always set by him. The reason I'm votin' for you, Mr. Lincoln, is because you've got it right and nobody can git around it. Douglas is wrong. There ain't nuthin' else to do but vote for your side, much as I hate to."

Well, sir, you never seen how he straightened up and how his eyes lit up like I'd seen 'em do when he was speakin'.

"Billy," he says, "I'd ruther hear you say that than anything anybody could say. That's what I've been tryin' to do—to make people see it as I do. I believe I've got it figured out right, Billy. I've been at it night and day for four years, and I can't find no mistake in my line of argument. What I want is to make people understand."

"What bothers me, Mr. Lincoln," I says, "is that I don't believe you'll git elected, even if you are right," and then, sir, he throws back his head and just laffs right out loud. "Don't worry, Billy, about that," he says, "that don't make no difference. I ain't sayin' I don't want to go to the United States Senate—I do! Always have. When I quit politics in '49 and made up my mind I wa'n't goin' to have another chanct to go to Congress or be anybody, I was miserable. But that's all over. What's important now in this country is makin' people feel that slavery is wrong, that the South is bent on spreadin' it and that we've got to stop 'em. Slavery is wrong, Billy, if it ain't wrong nuthin' is. We've got to fight against its spreadin', and it's goin' to be a durable struggle. It don't make no difference who gits office or who don't. All that's important is keepin' on fightin'. Don't you worry if I ain't elected. The fight's goin' on."

Well, I thought that over a lot, and it was queer how calm I came to feel—calm and sure, just as you be about God and all that. And when he was defeated I didn't seem to mind—any more'n he did. There wa'n't hardly anybody could understand why he took it so easy, and he had to go around consolin' 'em an' stiffenin' 'em up and tellin' 'em as he had me, how it was a durable struggle—that's the word he always used—"durable." Always seemed to me it was exactly the word for it—something that wa'n't going to wear out.

Ever see Douglas after that? Yes, onct. One day after election he come in here, and after talkin' around a spell he says suddint:

"Billy, you supported Mr. Lincoln, didn't you?" And he looked me straight in the eye, kind, but meanin' to know from me. Well, you bet I'd liked to have lied, but that ain't the kind of a thing a man lies about.

"Yes, Mr. Douglas," I says, "I did, I had to. He had it right."

Well, sir, you never see the way he smiled at me. "That's right, Billy," he says, "I understand," and then he grips my hand and turns on his heel and goes off with his head down.

Seemed to me I couldn't stand it. You see I'd always loved Little Dug, and I'd been proud of him. Lordy, sometimes when he'd come back from Washington in them old days and come in here, all dressed up and lookin' so handsome and great, and come up and put his arm around me and ask about Ma and Johnnie and how business was, I'll be blamed if I didn't git red as a girl, I was so pleased. I'd hurrahd for him and voted for him for years, and here I had gone back on him. It just made me sick.

I couldn't stand it to stay in the store, so I put on my hat and went home and told Ma. "I almost wisht I hadn't done it," I says, groanin'.

"William," Ma says, "you know well enough you couldn't have done nuthin' else. I don't understand these things none too well. 'Tain't a woman's business; but you done what you thought was right and you ain't no call to worry about doin' what you think is right." That's the way Ma always talks. You ought to know Ma.

Still there ain't no use denyin' it. I don't ever think about the last time I seen Little Dug without feelin' bad. I never could be hard on him like some was for that Kansas-Nebraska bill. You see, fact was he thought he was doin' a fine thing when he got up that bill. He seen the South wa'n't

satisfied, and he thought he'd fix up something to please 'em and keep 'em still a while—a kind of Daniel Webster he was tryin' to be, makin' a new compromise.

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Douglas got so busy tryin' to please the South he clean lost sight of what the people was thinkin' back home. I reckon he wan't countin' on us thinkin' at all—just took it for granted we'd believe what he told us, like we'd always done. Surprisin' how long you can fool people with the talk they was brought up on. Seems sometimes as if they hated to break in a new set of ideas as bad as they do new boots. I reckon that was what Douglas was countin' on back there in '58. But he got it wrong that time. He hadn't reckoned on what Abraham Lincoln had been doin'. Before he got through them debates, Douglas suspected it in my judgment. He knew that even if he did git to the Senate, Lincoln was the one that had come out ahead.

Queer how every day after that election, it showed up more and more that Lincoln was ahead. Seemed sometimes that as if everybody in the whole North was bent on hearin' him speak. Why, they sent for him to come to New York and Boston, and all the big men East got to writin' to him, and the first thing I knowed the boys was talkin' about his bein' President.

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Well, I thought that was goin' a leetle far. Just as I told you t'other day, it seemed to me almost as if somebody was pokin' fun at him. He didn't seem to me to look like a President. Queer how long it takes a man to find out that there ain't anything in the world so important as honest thinkin' and actin', and that when you've found a man that never lets up 'til he sees clear and right, and then hangs on to what he sees like a dog to a root, you can't make a mistake in tyin' to him. You can trust him anywhere. Queer how long we are all taken in by high-soundin' talk and fashionable ways and fine promises. But don't you make no mistake, they ain't no show in the long run with honest thinkin'.

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## FATHER ABRAHAM

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Kind-hearted? Mr. Lincoln *kind-hearted*?

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I don't believe a man ever lived who'd rather seen everybody happy and peaceable than Abraham Lincoln. He never could stand it to have people sufferin' or not gettin' what they wanted. Time and time again I've seen him go taggin' up street here in this town after some youngster that was blubberin' because he couldn't have what wa'n't good for him. Seemed as if he couldn't rest till that child was smilin' again. You can go all over Springfield and talk to the people who was boys and girls when he lived here and every blamed one will tell you something he did for 'em. Everybody's friend, that's what *he* was. Jest as natural for him to be that way as 'twas for him to eat or drink.

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Yes, I suppose bein' like that *did* make the war harder on him. But he had horse sense as well as a big heart, Mr. Lincoln had. He knew you couldn't have war without somebody gettin' hurt. He *expected* sufferin', but he knew 'twas his business not to have any more than was necessary and to take care of what come. And them was two things that wa'n't done like they ought to 'a' been. That was what worried him.

Seemed as if hardly anybody at the start had any idea of how important 'twas to take good care of the boys and keep 'em from gettin' sick or if they did get sick to cure 'em. I remember Leonard Swett was in here one day 'long back in '61 and he says; "Billy, Mr. Lincoln knows more about how the soldiers in the Army of the Potomac cook flapjacks than you do about puttin' up quinine. There ain't a blamed thing they do in that army that he ain't interested in. I went down to camp with him one day and I never see an old hunter in the woods quicker to spot a rabbit's track than he was every little kink about the housekeepin'. When we got back to town he just sat and talked and talked about the way the soldiers was livin', seemed to know all about 'em everyways: where they was short of shoes, where the rations were poor, where they had camp-fever worst; told me how hardtack was made, what a good thing quinine and onions are to have handy,—best cure for diarrhea, sore feet, homesickness, everything. I never heard anything like it."

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Seemed to bother Swett a little that Mr. Lincoln took so much interest in all them little things, but I said: "Don't you worry, Mr. Swett, Mr. Lincoln's got the right idee. An army that don't have its belly and feet taken care of ain't goin' to do much fightin', and Mr. Lincoln's got sense enough to know it. He knows diarrhea's a blamed sight more dangerous to the Army of the Potomac than Stonewall Jackson. Trouble so far has been, in *my* judgment, that the people that ought to have been seein' to what the soldiers was eatin' and drinkin' and whether their beds was dry and their bowels movin', was spendin' their time polishin' their buttons and shinin' their boots for parade."

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"What I don't see," says Swett, "is how he learned all the things he knows. They ain't the kind of things you'd naturally think a president of the United States would be interestin' himself in."

There 'twas,—same old fool notion that a president ought to sit inside somewhere and think about the Constitution. I used to be that way—always saw a president lookin' like that old picture of Thomas Jefferson up there settin' beside a parlor table holdin' a roll of parchment in his hand, and Leonard Swett was like me a little in spite of his bein' educated.

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Learned it! Think of Leonard Swett askin' that with all *his* chances of bein' with Mr. Lincoln! Learned it just as he had everything by bein' so dead interested. He'd learned it if he hadn't been president at all, if he'd just been loafin' around Washington doin' nuthin'. Greatest hand to take

notice of things. I tell you he'd made a great war correspondent. Things he'd 'a' seen! And the way he'd 'a' told 'em! I can just see him now pumpin' everybody that had been to the front. Great man to make you talk, Mr. Lincoln was. I've heard him say himself that most of the education he had he'd got from people who thought they was learnin' from him.

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I reckon he learned a lot more from soldiers about how the armies was bein' taken care of than he did from generals. My brother Isaac, who had a place down there addin' up figgers or something used to tell me of seein' Mr. Lincoln stoppin' 'em on the street and out around the White House and talkin' to 'em. Isaac said 'twa'n't becomin' in the President of the United States to be so familiar with common soldiers, he ought to keep among the generals and members of the administration. Isaac always reckoned *himself* a member of the administration.

"More than that," says Isaac, "it ain't dignified for a president to be always runnin' out after things himself instead of sendin' somebody. He's always goin' over to the telegraph office with messages, and settin' down by the operators talkin' and readin' dispatches and waitin' for answers. One day he came right up to my office to ask me to look up the record of Johnnie Banks, old Aunt Sally Banks' boy, that was goin' to be shot for desertion. Seemed to think I'd be interested because he came from Illinois—came right up there instead of sendin' for me to go to the White House like he ought to, and when I took what I found over to him and he found out Johnnie wa'n't but eighteen, he put on his hat and went over himself to the telegraph office, took me along, and sent a message that I saw, sayin', '*I don't want anybody as young as eighteen to be shot.*' And that night he went back and sent another message askin' if they'd received the first—wasn't satisfied till he knew it couldn't happen. There wa'n't any reason why he should spend his time that way. He ought to give orders and let other folks see they're carried out. That's what I'd do if I was president."

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That riled me. "I reckon there ain't any need to worry about *that*, Isaac," I says. "You won't never be president. Mr. Lincoln's got too many folks around him now that don't do nuthin' but give orders. That's one reason he has to do his own executin'."

But 'twas just like him to go and do it himself. So interested he *had* to see to it. I've heard different ones tell time and time again that whenever he'd pardoned a soldier he couldn't rest till he'd get word back that 'twas all right. Did you ever hear about that Vermont boy in McClellan's army, sentenced to be shot along at the start for sleepin' on his post. 'Twas when they was camped over in Virginia right near Washington. Mr. Lincoln didn't know about it till late and when he heard the story he telegraphed down not to do it. Then he telegraphed askin' if they'd got his orders and when he didn't get an answer what does he do but get in his carriage and drive himself ten miles to camp to see that they didn't do it. Now that's what I call bein' a real president. *That's* executin'.

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Well, as I was sayin', *he* understood the importance of a lot of things them young officers and some of the old ones didn't see at all, and he knew where to get the truth about 'em—went right to the soldiers for it. They was just like the folks he was used to, and Mr. Lincoln was the greatest hand for folks—just plain common folks—you ever see. He liked 'em, never forgot 'em, just natural nice to 'em.

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It used to rile old Judge Davis a lot when they was travelin' the circuit, the way Mr. Lincoln never made no difference between lawyers and common folks. I heard Judge Logan tellin' in here one day about their all bein' in the tavern up to Bloomington one day. In those times there was just one big table for everybody. The lawyers and big bugs always set at one end and the teamsters and farmers at the other. Mr. Lincoln used to like to get down among the workin' folks and get the news. Reckon he got kinda tired hearin' discussin' goin' on all the time. Liked to hear about the crops and politics and folks he knew.

This time he was down among 'em, and Judge Davis, who always wanted Lincoln right under his nose, calls out: "Come up here, Mr. Lincoln; here's where you belong." And Mr. Lincoln, he looked kinda funny at the Judge and he says:

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"Got anything better to eat up there, Judge?" And everybody tee-heed.

Feelin' as he did about folks I could see how it would go ag'in the grain for the boys in the army to have a harder time than was necessary. He'd argue that they was doin' the fightin' and ought to have the care. He'd feel a good deal worse about their bein' neglected than he would about the things he knew beforehand he had to stand, like woundin' and killin'. And 'twas just that way so I found out the time I was down to Washington visitin' him.

I told you, didn't I, how I went up to the Soldiers' Home and how we walked out that night and sat and talked till almost mornin'? 'Twas a clear night with lots of stars and Washington looked mighty pretty lyin' there still and white. Mr. Lincoln pointed out the Capitol and the White House and Arlington and the Long Bridge, showin' me the lay of the land.

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"And it's nuthin' but one big hospital, Billy," he said after a while. "You wouldn't think, would you, lookin' down on it so peaceful and quiet, that there's 50,000 sick and wounded soldiers there? Only Almighty God knows how many of 'em are dyin' this minute; only Almighty God knows how many are sufferin' so they're prayin' to die. They are comin' to us every day now—have been ever since the Wilderness, 50,000 here and 150,000 scattered over the country. There's a crawlin' line of sick and wounded all the way from here to Petersburg to-night. There's a line, from Georgia to Chattanooga—Sherman's men. You can't put your finger on a spot in the whole North that ain't got a crippled or fever-struck soldier in it. There were days in May, just after the Wilderness, when Mary and I used to drive the carriage along lines of ambulances which stretched from the docks to the hospitals, one, two miles. It was a thing to tear your heart

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out to see them. They brought them from the field just as they picked them up, with horrible, gaping, undressed wounds, blood and dust and powder caked over them—eaten by flies and mosquitoes. They'd been piled like cord wood on flat cars and transports. Sometimes they didn't get a drink until they were distributed here. Often when it was cold they had no blanket, when it was hot they had no shade. That was nearly four months ago, and still they come. Night after night as I drive up here from the White House I pass twenty, thirty, forty ambulances in a row distributin' the wounded and sick from Grant's army. [100]

"Think what it means! It means that boys like you and me were, not so long ago, have stood up and shot each other down—have trampled over each other and have left each other wounded and bleeding on the ground, in the rain or the heat, nobody to give 'em a drink or to say a kind word. Nothing but darkness and blood and groans and torture. Sometimes I can't believe it's true. Boys from Illinois where I live, shootin' boys from Kentucky where I was born! It's only when I see them comin' in I realize it—boat load after boat load, wagon load after wagon load. It seemed sometimes after Bull Run and Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville if they didn't stop unloadin' 'em I'd go plumb crazy. But still they come, and only God knows when they'll stop. They say hell's like war, Billy. If 'tis,—I'm glad I ain't Satan." [101]

Of course I tried to cheer him up. I'd been around visitin' the Illinois boys in the hospitals that day and I just lit in and told him how comfortable I'd found 'em and how chipper most of them seemed. "You'd think 'twas fun to be in the hospital to see some of 'em, Mr. Lincoln," I said. "What do you suppose old Tom Blodgett was doin'? Settin' up darnin' his socks. Yes, sir, insisted on doin' it himself. Said them socks had fit all the way from Washington to Richmond. They'd stood by him and he was goin' to stand by them. Goin' to dress their wounds as good as the doctor had his. Never saw anything so funny as that big feller propped up there tryin' to darn like he'd seen his mother do and all the time makin' fun. All the boys around were laffin' at him—called him the sock doctor. [102]

"And things were so clean and white and pretty and the women were runnin' around just like home."

"God bless 'em," he said. "I don't know what we'd 'a' done if it hadn't been for the way the women have taken hold. Come down here willin' to do anything; women that never saw a cut finger before, will stand over a wound so terrible men will faint at the sight of it. I've known of women spendin' whole nights on a battlefield huntin' for somebody they'd lost and stoppin' as they went to give water and take messages. I've known 'em to work steady for three days and nights without a wink of sleep down at the front after a battle, takin' care of the wounded. Here in Washington you can't stop 'em as long as they can see a thing to be done. At home they're supportin' the families and workin' day and night to help us. They give their husbands and their boys and then themselves. God bless the women, Billy. We can't save the Union without 'em. [103]

"It makes a difference to the boys in a hospital havin' 'em. People don't realize how young this army is. Half the wounded here in Washington to-day are *children*—not twenty yet—lots of 'em under eighteen. Children who never went to sleep in their lives before they went into the army without kissin' their mothers good-night. You take such a boy as that and let him lie in camp a few months gettin' more and more tired of it and he gets homesick—plain homesick—he wants his mother. Perhaps he don't know what's the matter and he wouldn't admit it if he did. First thing you know he's in the hospital with camp fever, or he gets wounded. I tell you a woman looks good to him. [104]

"It's a queer thing to say, Billy, but I get real comfort out of the hospitals. When you know what the wounded have been through—how they have laid on the battlefields for hours and hours uncared for, how they've suffered bein' hauled up here, there ain't nuthin' consoles you like knowin' that their wounds have been dressed and that they are clean and fed, and looked after. Then they are so thankful to be here—to have some one to see to 'em. I remember one day a boy who had been all shot up but was gettin' better sayin' to me: 'Mr. Lincoln, I can't sleep nights thinkin' how comfortable I am.' It's so good to find 'em realizin' that everybody cares—the whole country. People come and read to 'em and write letters for 'em and bring 'em things. Why, they have real good times at some of the places. Down to Armory Square Bliss has got a melodeon and they have concerts sometimes, and there are flags up and flowers in the windows. I got some flower seeds last summer for Bliss to plant outside, but they turned out to be lettuce and onions. The boys ate 'em and you ought to heard 'em laugh about my flowers. I tell you it makes me happy when I go around and find the poor fellows smilin' up at me and sayin': 'You're takin' good care of us, Mr. Lincoln,' and maybe crack a joke. [105]

"They take it all so natural, trampin' and fightin' and dyin'. It's a wonderful army—wonderful! You couldn't believe that boys that back home didn't ever have a serious thought in their heads could ever be so dead set as they be about an idee. Think of it! A million men are lookin' up at these stars to-night, a million men ready to die for the Union to-morrow if it's got to be done to save it! I tell you, it shows what's in 'em. They're all the same, young or old—the Union's got to be saved! Of course you'd expect it more of the old ones, and we've got some old ones, older than the law allows, too. 'Tain't only the youngsters who have lied themselves into the service. Only today a Congressman was in tellin' me about one of his constituents, said he was over sixty-five and white-haired when he first enlisted. They refused him of course, and I'll be blamed if the old fellow didn't dye his hair black and change his name, and when they asked him his age, said: 'Rising thirty-five,' and he's been fightin' good for two years and now they'd found him out. The Congressman asked me what he ought to do. I told him if 'twas me I'd keep him in hair dye." [106]

We was still a while and then Mr. Lincoln began talkin', more to himself than to me.

"A million men, a mighty host—and one word of mine would bring the million sleeping boys to their feet—send them without a word to their guns—they would fall in rank—regiment on regiment, brigade on brigade, corps on corps, a word more and they would march steady, quiet, a million men in step straight ahead, over fields, through forests, across rivers. Nothing could stop them—cannons might tear holes in their ranks, and they would fill them up, a half million might be bled out of them, and a word of mine would bring a half million more to fill their place. Oh, God, my God," he groaned, under his breath, "what am I that Thou shouldst ask this of me! What am I that Thou shouldst trust me so!"

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Well, I just dropped my head in my hands—seemed as if I oughten to look at him—and the next thing I knew Mr. Lincoln's arm was over my shoulder and he was saying in that smilin' kind of voice he had: "Don't mind me, Billy. The Lord generally knows what He's about and He can get rid of me quick enough if He sees I ain't doin' the job—quicker than the Copperheads can."

Just like him to change so. Didn't want anybody to feel bad. But I never forgot that, and many a time in my sleep I've heard Abraham Lincoln's voice crying out: "Oh, God, my God, what am I that Thou shouldst ask this of me!" and I've groaned to think how often through them four awful years he must have lifted up his face with that look on it and asked the Lord what in the world he was doing that thing for.

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"After all, Billy," he went on, "it's surprisin' what a happy army it is. In spite of bein' so dead in earnest and havin' so much trouble of one kind and another, seems sometimes as if you couldn't put 'em anywhere that they wouldn't scare up some fun. Greatest chaps to sing on the march, to cut up capers and play tricks you ever saw. I reckon the army's a little like me, it couldn't do its job if it didn't get a good laugh now and then—sort o' clears up the air when things are lookin' blue. Anyhow the boys are always gettin' themselves into trouble by their pranks. Jokin' fills the guard-house as often as drunkenness or laziness. That and their bein' so sassy. A lot of 'em think they know just as much as the officers do, and I reckon they're right pretty often. It takes some time to learn that it ain't good for the service for them to be speakin' their minds too free. At the start they did it pretty often—do now sometimes. Why, only just this week Stanton told me about a sergeant, who one day when the commanding officer was relieving his mind by swearing at his men, stepped right out of the ranks and reproved him and said he was breaking the law of God. Well, they clapped him in the guard-house and now they want to punish him harder—say he ain't penitent—keeps disturbin' the guard-house by prayin' at the top of his voice for that officer. I told Stanton we better not interfere, that there wasn't nothing in the regulations against a man's prayin' for his officers.

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"Yes, it's a funny army. There don't seem to be but one thing that discourages it, and that's not fightin'. Keep 'em still in camp where you'd think they'd be comfortable and they go to pieces every time. It's when they're lyin' still we have the worst camp fever and the most deserters. Keep 'em on the move, let 'em think they're goin' to have a fight and they perk up right off.

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"We can't fail with men like that. Make all the mistakes we can, they'll make up for 'em. The hope of this war is in the common soldiers, not in the generals—not in the War Department, not in me. It's in the boys. Sometimes it seems to me that nobody sees it quite right. It's in war as it is in life—a whole raft of men work day and night and sweat and die to get in the crops and mine the ore and build the towns and sail the seas. They make the wealth but they get mighty little of it. We ain't got our values of men's work figured out right yet—the value of the man that gives orders and of the man that takes 'em. I hear people talkin' as if the history of a battle was what the generals did. I can't help thinkin' that the history of this war is in the knapsack of the common soldier. He's makin' that history just like the farmers are makin' the wealth. We fellows at the top are only usin' what they make.

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"At any rate that's the way I see it, and I've tried hard ever since I've been down here to do all I could for the boys. I know lots of officers think I peek around camp too much, think 'tain't good for discipline. But I've always felt I ought to know how they was livin' and there didn't seem to be no other sure way of findin' out. Officers ain't always good housekeepers, and I kinda felt I'd got to keep my eye on the cupboard.

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"I reckon Stanton thinks I've interfered too much, but there's been more'n enough trouble to go around in this war, and the only hope was helpin' where you could. But 'tain't much one can do. I can no more help every soldier that comes to me in trouble than I can dip all the water out of the Potomac with a teaspoon.

"Then there's that pardoning business. Every now and then I have to fix it up with Stanton or some officer for pardoning so many boys. I suppose it's pretty hard for them not to have all their rules lived up to. They've worked out a lot of laws to govern this army, and I s'pose it's natural enough for 'em to think the most important thing in the world is havin' 'em obeyed. They've got it fixed so the boys do everything accordin' to regulations. They won't even let 'em die of something that ain't on the list—got to die accordin' to the regulations. But by jingo, Billy, I ain't goin' to have boys shot accordin' to no dumb regulations! I ain't goin' to have a butcher's day every Friday in the army if I can help it. It's so what they say about me, that I'm always lookin' for an excuse to pardon somebody. I do it every time I can find a reason. When they're young and when they're green or when they've been worked on by Copperheads or when they've got disgusted lyin' still and come to think we ain't doin' our job—when I see that I ain't goin' to have 'em shot. And then there's my leg cases. I've got a drawerful. They make Holt maddest—says he ain't any use for cowards. Well, generally speakin' I ain't, but I ain't sure what I'd do if I was standin' in front of a gun, and more'n that as I told Holt if Almighty God gives a man a cowardly pair of legs

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how can he help their running away with him?

“You can’t make me believe it’s good policy to shoot these soldiers, anyhow. Seems to me one thing we’ve never taken into account as we ought to is that this is a *volunteer* army. These men came down here to put an end to this rebellion and not to get trained as soldiers. They just dropped the work they was doin’ right where it was—never stopped to fix up things to be away long. Why, we’ve got a little minister at the head of one company that was preachin’ when he heard the news of Bull Run. He shut up his Bible, told the congregation what had happened, and said: ‘Brethren, I reckon it’s time for us to adjourn this meetin’ and go home and drill,’ and they did it, and now they’re down with Grant. When the war’s over that man will go back and finish that sermon.

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“That’s the way with most of ‘em. You can’t treat such an army like you would one that had been brought up to soljerin’ as a business. They’ll take discipline enough to fight, but they don’t take any stock in it as a means of earnin’ a livin’.

“More’n that they’ve got their own ideas about politics and military tactics and mighty clear ideas about all of us that are runnin’ things. You can’t fool ‘em on an officer. They know when one ain’t fit to command, and time and time again they’ve pestered a coward or a braggart or a bully out of the service. An officer who does his job best he can, even if he ain’t very smart, just honest and faithful, they’ll stand by and help. If he’s a big one, a real big man, they can’t do enough for him. Take the way they feel about Thomas, the store they set by him. I met a boy on crutches out by the White House the other day and asked him where he got wounded. He told me about the place they held. ‘Pretty hot, wasn’t it?’ I said. ‘Yes, but Old Pap put us there and he wouldn’t ‘a’ done it if he hadn’t known we could ‘a’ held it.’ No more question ‘Old Pap’ than they would God Almighty. But if it had been some generals they’d skedaddled.

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“They ain’t never made any mistake about *me* just because I’m president. A while after Bull Run I met a boy out on the street here on crutches, thin and white, and I stopped to ask him about how he got hurt. Well, Billy, he looked at me hard as nails, and he says: ‘Be you Abe Lincoln?’ And I said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Well,’ he says, ‘all I’ve got to say is you don’t know your job. I enlisted glad enough to do my part and I’ve done it, but you ain’t done yourn. You promised to feed me, and I marched three days at the beginning of these troubles without anything to eat but hardtack and two chunks of salt pork—no bread, no coffee—and what I did get wasn’t regular. They got us up one mornin’ and marched us ten miles without breakfast. Do you call that providin’ for an army? And they sent us down to fight the Rebs at Bull Run, and when we was doin’ our best and holdin’ ‘em—I tell you, holdin’ ‘em—they told us to fall back. I swore I wouldn’t—I hadn’t come down there for that. They made me—rode me down. I got struck—struck in the back. Struck in the back and they left me there—never came for me, never gave me a drink and I dyin’ of thirst. I crawled five miles for water, and I’d be dead and rottin’ in Virginia to-day if a teamster hadn’t picked me up and brought me to this town and found an old darkey to take care of me. You ain’t doin’ your job, Abe Lincoln; you won’t win this war until you learn to take care of the soldiers.’

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“I couldn’t say a thing. It was true. It’s been true all the time. It’s true to-day. We ain’t takin’ care of the soldiers like we ought.

“You don’t suppose such men are goin’ to accept the best lot of regulations ever made without askin’ questions? Not a bit of it. They know when things are right and when they’re not. When they see a man who they know is nothing but a boy or one they know’s bein’ eat up with homesickness or one whose term is out, and ought to be let go, throwing everything over and desertin’, it don’t make them any better soldiers to have us shoot him. Makes ‘em worse in my judgment, makes ‘em think we don’t understand. Anyhow, discipline or no discipline, I ain’t goin’ to have any more of it than I can help. It ain’t good common sense.

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“You can’t run *this* army altogether as if ‘twas a machine. It ain’t. It’s a *people’s* army. It offered itself. It has come down here to fight this thing out—just as it would go to the polls. It is greater than its generals, greater than the administration. We are created to care for it and lead it. It is not created for us. Every day the war has lasted I’ve felt this army growin’ in power and determination. I’ve felt its hand on me, guiding, compelling, threatening, upholding me, felt its distrust and its trust, its blame and its love. I’ve felt its patience and its sympathy. The greatest comfort I get is when sometimes I feel as if mebbe the army understood what I was tryin’ to do whether Greeley did or not. They understood because it’s *their* war. Why, we might fail, every one of us, and this war would go on. The army would find its leaders like they say the old Roman armies sometimes did and would finish the fight.

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“I tell you, Billy, there ain’t nuthin’ that’s ever happened in the world so far as I know that gives one such faith in the people as this army and the way it acts. There’s been times, I ain’t denyin’, when I didn’t know but the war was goin’ to be too much for us, times when I thought that mebbe a republic like this couldn’t stand such a strain. It’s the kind of government we’ve got that’s bein’ tested in this war, government by the people, and it’s the People’s Army that makes me certain it can’t be upset.”

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I tell you it done me good to see him settin’ up straight there talkin’ so proud and confident, and as I was watchin’ him there popped into my head some words from a song I’d heard the soldiers sing:

We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more—  
From Mississippi’s winding stream and from New England’s shore.

You have called us and we’re coming. By Richmond’s bloody tide

To lay us down, for Freedom's sake, our brothers' bones beside;

Six hundred thousand loyal men and true have gone before—  
We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more.

That was it. That was what he was, the Father of the Army, Father Abraham, and somehow the soldiers had found it out. Curious how a lot of people who never see a man in their lives will come to understand him exact.

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## IN LINCOLN'S CHAIR

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“Yes, sir; he was what I call a *godly* man. Fact is, I never knew anybody I felt so sure would walk straight into Heaven, everybody welcomin' him, nobody fussin' or fumin' about his bein' let in as Abraham Lincoln.”

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Billy was tilted back in a worn high-back Windsor, I seated properly in his famous “Lincoln's chair,” a seat too revered for anybody to stand on two legs. It was a snowy blusterly day and the talk had run on uninterruptedly from the weather to the campaign. (The year was 1896, and Billy, being a gold Democrat, was gloomy over politics.) We had finally arrived, as we always did when we met, at “when Mr. Lincoln was alive,” and Billy had been dwelling lovingly on his great friend's gentleness, goodness, honesty.

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“You know I never knew anybody,” he went on, “who seemed to me more interested in God, more curious about Him, more anxious to find out what He was drivin' at in the world, than Mr. Lincoln. I reckon he was allus that way. There ain't any doubt that from the time he was a little shaver he grabbed on to everything that came his way—wouldn't let it go 'til he had it worked out, fixed in his mind so he understood it, and could tell it the way he saw it. Same about religion as everything else. Of course he didn't get no religious teachin' like youngsters have nowadays—Sunday schools and church regular every Sunday—lessons all worked out, and all kinds of books to explain 'em. Still I ain't sure but what they give so many helps now, the Bible don't get much show.

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“It wa'n't so when Mr. Lincoln was a boy. No, sir. Bible was the whole thing, and there ain't any doubt he knew it pretty near by heart, knew it well before he ever could read, for Lincoln had a good mother, that's sure, the kind that wanted more than anything else in the world to have her boy grow up to be a good man, and she did all she knew how to teach him right.

“I remember hearin' him say once how she used to tell him Bible stories, teach him verses—always quotin' 'em. I can see him now sprawlin' on the floor in front of the fire listenin' to Nancy Hanks tellin' him about Moses and Jacob and Noah and all those old fellows, tellin' him about Jesus and his dyin' on the cross. I tell you that took hold of a little shaver, livin' like he did, remote and not havin' many books or places to go. Filled you chuck full of wonder and mystery, made you lie awake nights, and sometimes swelled you all up, wantin' to be good.

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“Must have come mighty hard on him havin' her die. Think of a little codger like him seein' his mother lyin' dead in that shack of theirs, seein' Tom Lincoln holdin' his head and wonderin' what he'd do now. Poor little tad! He must have crept up and looked at her, and gone out and throwed himself on the ground and cried himself out. Hard thing for a boy of nine to lose his mother, specially in such a place as they lived in.

“I don't see how he could get much comfort out of what they taught about her dyin', sayin' it was God's will, and hintin' that if you'd been what you ought to be it wouldn't have happened, never told a man that if he let a woman work herself to death it was his doin's she died—not God's will at all—God's will she should live and be happy and make him happy.

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“But I must say Mr. Lincoln had luck in the step-mother he got. If there ever was a good woman, it was Sarah Johnston, and she certain did her duty by Tom Lincoln's children. 'Twa'n't so easy either, poor as he was, the kind that never really got a hold on anything. Sarah Johnston did her part—teachin' Mr. Lincoln just as his own mother would, and just as anxious as she'd been to have him grow up a good man. I tell you she was proud of him when he got to be President. I remember seein' her back in '62 or '3 on the farm Mr. Lincoln gave her, little ways out of Charleston. One of the last things Mr. Lincoln did before he went to Washington was to go down there and see his step-mother. He knew better than anybody what she'd done for him.

“Yes, sir, the best religious teachin' Mr. Lincoln ever got was from Tom Lincoln's two wives. It was the kind that went deep and stuck, because he saw 'em livin' it every day, practicin' it on him and his sister and his father and the neighbors. Whatever else he might have seen and learnt, when he was a boy he knew what his two mothers thought religion meant, and he never got away from that.

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“Of course he had other teachin', principally what he got from the preachers that came around, now and then. Ramblin' lot they was, men all het up over the sins of the world, and bent on doin' their part towards headin' off people from hell-fire. They traveled around alone, sometimes on horseback, sometimes afoot—poor as Job, not too much to wear or to eat, never thinkin' of themselves, only about savin' souls; and it was natural that bein' alone so much, seein' so much misery and so much wickedness, for there was lots that was bad in that part of the world in them

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times—natural enough meditatin’ as they did that they preached pretty strong doctrine. Didn’t have a chance often at a congregation, and felt they must scare it to repentance if they couldn’t do no other way. They’d work up people ’til they got ’em to shoutin’ for mercy.

“I don’t suppose they ever had anybody that listened better to ’em than Mr. Lincoln. I can just see him watchin’ ’em and tryin’ to understand what they meant. He was curious, rolled things over, kept at ’em and no amount of excitement they stirred up would ever have upset him. No, he wa’n’t that kind.

“But he remembered what they said, and the way they said it. Used to get the youngsters together and try it on them. I heard him talkin’ in here one day about the early preachin’ and I remember his sayin’: ‘I got to be quite a preacher myself in those days. You know how those old fellows felt they hadn’t done their duty if they didn’t get everybody in the church weepin’ for their sins. We never set much store by a preacher that didn’t draw tears and groans. Pretty strong doctrine, mostly hell-fire. There was a time when I preached myself to the children every week we didn’t have a minister. I didn’t think much of my sermon if I didn’t make ’em cry. I reckon there was more oratory than religion in what I had to say.’

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“I reckon he was right about that, allus tryin’ to see if he could do what other folks did, sort of measurin’ himself.

“Yes, sir, so far as preachin’ was concerned it was a God of wrath that Abraham Lincoln was brought up on, and there ain’t any denyin’ that he had to go through a lot that carried out that idea. A boy can’t grow up in a backwoods settlement like Gentryville, Indiana, without seein’ a lot that’s puzzlin’, sort of scares you and makes you miserable. Things was harsh and things was skimpy. There wa’n’t so much to eat. Sometimes there was fever and ague and rheumatiz and milk sick. Woman died from too much work. No medicine—no care, like his mother did. I expect there wa’n’t any human crime or sorrow he didn’t know about, didn’t wonder about. Thing couldn’t be so terrible he would keep away from it. Why I heard him tell once how a boy he knew went crazy, never got over it, used to sing to himself all night long, and Mr. Lincoln said that he couldn’t keep away, but used to slip out nights and listen to that poor idiot croonin’ to himself. He was like that, interested in strange things he didn’t understand, in signs and dreams and mysteries.

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“Still things have to be worse than they generally are anywhere to keep a boy down-hearted right along—specially a boy like Mr. Lincoln, with an investigatin’ turn of mind like his, so many new things comin’ along to surprise you. Why it was almost like Robinson Crusoe out there—wild land, havin’ to make everything for yourself—hunt your meat and grow your cotton, mighty excitin’ life for a boy—lots to do—lots of fun, too, winter and summer. Somehow when you grow up in the country you can’t make out that God ain’t kind, if he is severe. I reckon that was the way Mr. Lincoln sized it up early; world might be a vale of tears, like they taught, but he saw it was mighty interestin’ too, and a good deal of fun to be got along with the tears.

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“Trouble was later to keep things balanced. The older he grew, the more he read, and he begun to run up against a kind of thinkin’ along about the time he was twenty-one or twenty-two that was a good deal different from that he’d been used to, books that made out the Bible wa’n’t so, that even said there wa’n’t any God. We all took a turn at readin’ Tom Paine and Voltaire out here, and there was another book—somebody’s ‘Ruins’—I forget the name.”

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“Volney?”

“Yes, that’s it. Volney’s Ruins.”

“Do you know I think that book took an awful grip on Mr. Lincoln. I reckon it was the first time he had ever realized how long the world’s been runnin’; how many lots of men have lived and settled countries and built cities and how time and time again they’ve all been wiped out. Mr. Lincoln couldn’t get over that. I’ve heard him talk about how old the world was time and time again, how nothing lasted—men—cities—nations. One set on top of another—men comin’ along just as interested and busy as we are, in doin’ things, and then little by little all they done passin’ away.

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“He was always speculatin’ about that kind of thing. I remember in ’48 when he came back from Congress he stopped to see Niagara Falls. Well, sir, when he got home he couldn’t talk about anything else for days, seemed to knock politics clean out of his mind. He’d sit there that fall in that chair you’re in and talk and talk about it. Talk just like it’s printed in those books his secretary got up. I never cared myself for all those articles they wrote. Wrong, am I? Mebbe so, but there wa’n’t enough of Mr. Lincoln in ’em to suit me. I wanted to know what he said about everything in his own words. But I tell you when I saw the books with the things he had said and wrote all brought together nice and neat, and one after another, I just took to that. I’ve got ’em here in my desk, often read ’em and lots of it sounds just as natural, almost hear him sayin’ it, just as if he was settin’ here by the stove.

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“Now what he tells about Niagara in the book is like that—just as if he was here. I can hear him sayin’: ‘Why, Billy, when Columbus first landed here, when Christ suffered on the Cross, when Moses crossed dry-shod through the Red Sea, even when Adam was first made, Niagara was roarin’ away. He’d talk in here just as it is printed there; how the big beasts whose bones they’ve found in mounds must have seen the falls, how it’s older than them and older than the first race of men. They’re all dead and gone, not even bones of many of ’em left, and yet there’s Niagara boomin’ away fresh as ever.

“He used to prove by the way the water had worn away the rocks that the world was at least

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fourteen thousand years old. A long spell, but folks tell me it ain't nothin' to what is bein' estimated now.

"Makes men seem pretty small, don't it? God seems to wipe 'em out as careless like as if He were cleanin' a slate. How could He care and do that? It made such a mite of a man, no better'n a fly. That's what bothered Mr. Lincoln. I know how he felt. That's the way it hit me when I first began to understand all the stars were worlds like ours. What I couldn't see and can't now is how we can be so blame sure ours is the only world with men on. And if they're others and they're wiped out regular like we are, well it knocked me all of a heap at first, 'peared to me mighty unlikely that God knew anything about *me*.

"I expect Mr. Lincoln felt something like that when he studied how old the world was and how one set of ruins was piled on top of another. [141]

"Then there was another thing. Lots of those old cities and old nations wa'n't Christian at all, and yet accordin' to the ruins it looked as if the people was just as happy, knew just as much, had just as good laws as any Christian nation now; some of them a blamed sight better. Now how was a boy like Lincoln going to handle a problem like that? Well I guess for a time he handled it like the man who wrote about the Ruins. Never seemed queer to me he should have written a free-thinkin' book after that kind of readin'. I reckon he had to write something to get his head clear. Allus had to have things clear.

"You know that story of course about that book. First time I ever heard it was back in 1846 when him and Elder Cartwright was runnin' for Congress. You know about Cartwright? Well, sir, he made his campaign against Lincoln in '46, not on politics at all—made it on chargin' him with bein' an infidel because he wa'n't a church member and because he said Mr. Lincoln had written a free thought book when he was a boy. He kept it up until along in the fall Mr. Lincoln shut him up good. He'd gone down to where Cartwright lived to make a political speech and some of us went along. Cartwright was runnin' a revival, and long in the evening before startin' home we went in and set in the back of the church. When it came time to ask sinners to come forward, the elder got pretty excited. 'Where be you goin'?' he shouted. 'To Hell if you don't repent and come to this altar.' At last he began to call on Mr. Lincoln to come forward. Well, you know nobody likes to be called out like that right in meetin'. Mr. Lincoln didn't budge, just set there. The elder he kept it up. Finally he shouted, 'If Mr. Lincoln ain't goin' to repent and go to Heaven, where is he goin'?' Intimatin', I suppose, that he was headed for Hell. 'Where be you goin', Mr. Lincoln?' he shouted. [142]

"Well, sir, at that Mr. Lincoln rose up and said quiet like: [143]

"'I'm goin' to Congress.'

"For a minute you could have heard a pin drop and then—well, I just snorted—couldn't help it. Ma was awful ashamed when I told her, said I oughtin' to done it—right in meetin', but I couldn't help it—just set there and shook and shook. The elder didn't make any more observations to Mr. Lincoln that trip.

"Goin' home I said, 'Mr. Lincoln, you just served the elder right, shut him up, and I guess you're right; you be goin' to Congress.' [144]

"'Well, Billy,' he said, smilin' and lookin' serious. 'I've made up my mind that Brother Cartwright ain't goin' to make the religion of Jesus Christ a political issue in this District if I can help it.'

"Some of the elder's friends pretended to think Mr. Lincoln was mockin' at the Christian religion when he answered back like that. Not a bit. He was protectin' it accordin' to my way of thinkin'.

"I reckon I understand him a little because I'm more or less that way myself—can't help seein' things funny. I've done a lot of things Ma says people misunderstand. A while back comin' home from New York I did somethin' I expect some people would have called mockin' at religion; Mr. Lincoln wouldn't.

"You see I'd been down to buy drugs and comin' home I was readin' the Bible in the mornin' in my seat in the sleepin' car. Allus read a chapter every mornin', Ma got me in the way of it, and I like it—does me good—keeps me from burstin' out at somebody when I get mad, that is, it does for the most part. [145]

"Well, as I was sayin', I was readin' my chapter, and I reckon mebbe I was readin' out loud when I looked up and see the porter lookin' at me and kinda snickerin'.

"'See here, boy,' I says, 'you smilin' at the Bible. Well, you set down there. Set down,' I says. I'm a pretty stout man as you can see, weigh 200, and I reckon I can throw most men my size. Why, I've wrestled with Mr. Lincoln, yes, sir, wrestled with Abraham Lincoln, right out there in the alley. You see, I ain't used to bein' disobeyed, and that nigger knew it, and he just dropped.

"'Boy,' I says, 'I'm goin' to read you a chapter out of this Bible, and you're goin' to listen.' And I did it. 'Now,' I says, 'down with you on your knees, we're goin' to have prayers,' Well, sir, you never seen such a scared darky. Down he went, and down I went, and I prayed out loud for that porter's soul and before I was through he was sayin' 'Amen.' [146]

"Of course the passengers began to take notice, and about the time I was done along came the conductor, and he lit into me and said he wa'n't goin' to have any such performances in his car.

"Well, you can better guess that gave me a text. He'd a man in that car fillin' himself up with

liquor half the night, just plain drunk and disorderly. 'I ain't heard you makin' any loud objections to the drinkin' goin' on in this car,' I says. 'If that don't disturb the peace, prayin' won't.' And two or three passengers just chimed right in and said, 'That's so. Do us all good if we had more prayin' and less drinkin'.' Fact was, I was quite popular the rest of the trip. [147]

"Now I reckon some would a been shocked by what I done. Ma said when I told her. 'Now you know, William, it wasn't that porter's soul you was interested in half as much as gettin' a little fun out of him.' Well, mebbe so. I won't deny there was some mischief in it. But it wouldn't have shocked Mr. Lincoln. He'd understood. Seems a pity I can't tell him about that. He'd enjoyed it.

"Well, to go back to Cartwright and the free thought book he said Lincoln wrote when he was a boy. The elder didn't pretend he'd seen the book; said the reason he hadn't was that it was never printed, only written, and that not many people ever did see it because Sam Hill, the storekeeper down to New Salem, thinkin' it might hurt Lincoln had snatched it away and thrown it into the stove and burnt it up. Now what do you think of that? [148]

"Well, Cartwright didn't get elected—got beaten—beaten bad and nobody around here ever talked about that book when Mr. Lincoln was runnin' for President that I heard of. It was after he was dead that somebody raked up that story again and printed it. It never made much difference to me. I allus thought it likely he did write something along the lines he'd been readin' after. But sakes alive, you ought to seen the fur fly out here. All the church people riz right up and proved it wa'n't so; and those that didn't profess lit in and proved it was so. They got all the old inhabitants of Sangamon County who knew Mr. Lincoln to writin' letters. Lot of them published in the papers.

"One of the most interestin' accordin' to my way of thinkin' was a letter that came out from Mentor Graham, Lincoln's old school-master. I don't remember it exact, but near as I can recall he said Lincoln asked him one day when he was livin' at his house going to school what he thought about the anger of the Lord, and then he went on to say that he had written something along that line and wished Mr. Graham would read it. Well, sir, Mr. Graham wrote in that letter that this thing Lincoln wrote proved God was too good to destroy the people He'd made, and that all the misery Adam brought on us by his sin had been wiped out by the atonement of Christ. Now mind that was an honest man writin' that letter, a man who'd been Lincoln's friend from the start. To be sure it was some time after the event—pretty near 40 years and I must say I always suspicion a man's remembering anything very exact after 40 years. But one thing is sure, Mentor Graham knew Lincoln in those days, and that's more than most of them that was arguin' this thing did. [149]

"Always seemed to me about as reliable testimony as anybody offered. I contended that most likely Lincoln did write just what Mentor Graham said he did, and that the brethren thought it was dangerous doctrine to make out God was that good, and so they called him an infidel. Nothin' riled those old fellows religiously like tryin' to make out God didn't damn everybody that didn't believe according to the way they read the Scriptures. Seemed to hate to think about Mr. Lincoln's God. I almost felt sometimes as if they'd rather a man would say there wa'n't no God than to make him out a God of Mercy. [150]

"But sakes' alive, Mentor Graham's letter didn't settle it. The boys used to get to rowin' about it in here sometimes around the stove until I could hardly keep track of my perscriptions. The funniest thing you ever heard was one night when they were at it and an old fellow who used to live in New Salem dropped in, so they put it up to him; said he lived in New Salem in '33; said he knew Lincoln. Wanted to know if he ever heard of his writin' a book that Sam Hill burned up in the stove in his store. The old fellow listened all through without sayin' a word, and when they was finished he said, solemn like, 'Couldn't have happened. Wa'n't no stove. Sam Hill never had one.' [151]

"Well, sir, you ought to seen their jaws drop. Just set starin' at him and I thought I'd die a laffin' to see 'em collapse. I wish Mr. Lincoln could have heard that old fellow, 'Wa'n't no stove.' How he'd enjoyed that—'Wa'n't no stove.'

"But for all that I never regarded that witness over high. Of course Sam Hill must have had a stove otherwise there wouldn't have been a place for folks to set around. [152]

"It ain't important to my mind what was in that book. What's important is that Abraham Lincoln was wrestlin' in those days to find out the truth, wa'n't content like I was to settle down smotherin' any reservations that I might a had. He never did that, grappled hard with everything touchin' religion that came up, no matter which side it was. He never shirked the church if he wa'n't a member, went regular, used to go to revivals and camp meetings too in those days when he was readin' the 'Ruins.' Most of the boys who didn't profess went to camp meetings for deviltry—hang around on the edges—playin' tricks—teasin' the girls—sometimes gettin' into regular fights. Mr. Lincoln never joined into any horse play like that. He took it solemn. I reckon he wouldn't ever hesitated a minute to go forward and ask prayers if he'd really believed that was the way for him to find God. He knew it wa'n't. The God he was searchin' for wa'n't the kind they was preachin'. He was tryin' to find one that he could reconcile with what he was findin' out about the world—its ruins—its misery. Clear as day to me that that was what he was after from the start—some kind of plan in things, that he could agree to. [153]

"He certainly did have a lot to discourage him—worst was when he lost his sweetheart. I've allus figured it out that if Ann Rutledge had lived and married him he'd been a different man—leastwise he'd been happier. He might have even got converted and joined the church, like I did after I courted Ma. A good woman sort of carries a man along when he loves her. It's a mighty [154]

sight easier to believe in the goodness of the Lord and the happiness of man when you're in love like I've allus been, and like he was with that girl.

"There was no doubt she was a fine girl—no doubt he loved her. When she died he was all broke up for days. I've heard his old friends tell how he give up workin' and readin'—wandered off into the fields talkin' to himself. Seemed as if he couldn't bear to think of her covered over with snow—beaten on by rain—wastin' away—eaten by worms. I tell you he was the kind that saw it all as it was. That's the hard part of bein' so honest you see things just as they are—don't pretend things are different—just as they are. He couldn't get over it. I believe it's the Lord's mercy he didn't kill himself those days. Everybody thought he was goin' crazy, but I rather think myself he was wrestlin' with himself, tryin' to make himself live. Men like him want to die pretty often. I reckon he must have cried out many a night like Job did, 'What is mine end that I should prolong my life? My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than life. I loathe it. I would not live alway.'

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"He pulled out, of course, but he never got over havin' spells of terrible gloom. I expect there was always a good many nights up to the end when he wondered if life was worth keepin'. Black moods took him and he'd go days not hardly speakin' to people—come in here—set by the stove—not sayin' a word—get up—go out—hardly noticin' you. Boys understood, used to say 'Mr. Lincoln's got the blues.'

"Curious how quick things changed with him. He'd be settin' here, laffin' and jokin', tellin' stories and somebody'd drop some little thing, nobody else would think about, and suddent his eyes would go sad and his face broodin' and he'd stop talkin' or like as not get up and go out. I don't mean to say this happened often. Of course that wa'n't so; as I've told you no end of times, he was the best company that ever was—the fullest of stories and jokes, and nobody could talk serious like him. You could listen forever when he'd get to arguin', but spite of all that you knew somehow he was a lonely man who had to fight hard to keep up his feelin' that life was worth goin' on with. Gave you queer feelin' about him—you knew he was different from the others, and it kept you from bein' over-familiar.

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"There was a man in here the other day I hadn't seen for years—used to be a conductor between here and Chicago—knew him well. It tickled him to death to have me set him in that chair you're in—looked it all over, said it seemed as if he could just see Mr. Lincoln settin' there. Well, he got to talkin' about all the big bugs that used to travel with him, Little Dug, Judge Davis, Logan, Swett, Welden, and all the rest; and he said something about Mr. Lincoln that shows how he struck ordinary people. He said Lincoln was the most folksy of any of them, but that there was something about him that made everybody stand a little in awe of him. You could get near him in a sort of neighborly way, as though you had always known him, but there was something tremendous between you and him all the time.

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"This man said he had eaten with him many times at the railroad eatin' houses. Everybody tried to get near Lincoln when he was eatin', because he was such good company, but they looked at him with a kind of wonder, couldn't exactly make him out. Sometimes there was a dreadful loneliness in his look, and the boys used to wonder what he was thinkin' about. Whatever it was, he was thinkin' all alone. No one was afraid of him, but there was something about him that made plain folks feel toward him a good deal as a child feels toward his father, because you know every child looks upon his father as a wonderful man.

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"There ain't any doubt but there was a good many years after Mr. Lincoln got started and everybody in the state held him high, when he was a disappointed man and when he brooded a good deal over the way life was goin'. Trouble was he hadn't got a grip yet on anything that satisfied him. He hadn't made a go of politics, had quit it. Of course he had plenty of law practice, but, Lord a mighty, you take a town like this was along in the '40's and '50's, when Mr. Lincoln was practicin' here, and get right down to what was really happenin', and it was enuff to make a broodin' man like him sick, and want to quit. He had to handle it all, a lawyer does, men fightin' over a dollar, gettin' rich on cheatin', stingy with their wives, breakin' up families, quarrelin' over wills, neglectin' the old folks and yet standin' high in the church, regular at prayer meetin', and teachin' in Sunday School. There was a lot of steady meanness like that all around, and it made him feel bad.

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"And then there was dreadful things happened every now and then, men takin' up with girls when they had good wives of their own. There's more than one poor child lyin' over there in the graveyard because some onery old scoundrel got the better of her, and there's more than one good man been put to shame in this town because some woman who was no better than she ought to be run him down. Lord, it makes you sick, and then every now and then right out of a clear sky there'd be a murder somewhere in the country. Nobody would talk of anything else for days. People who hardly ever opened their mouths would find their tongues and tell the durnedest things.

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"It was so all the time Mr. Lincoln was practicin' out here. And it made him pretty miserable sometimes, I reckon, to see so much meanness around. I never knew a man who liked people better'n Mr. Lincoln did—seemed as if he felt the world ought to be happy, and that it could be if people would only do the right thing. You've heard people tellin' how he'd refuse a case often if he didn't think it ought to be brought. Well, sir, that's true. I've heard him argue time and again with the boys about the duty of lawyers to discourage lawsuits. 'It's our business to be peacemakers,' he used to tell 'em, 'not to stir up quarrels for the sake of makin' a little money.' I remember somebody tellin' how they heard him lecturin' a man who'd brought him a case, and pointed out that by some sort of a legal trick, he could get \$600. Made Lincoln mad all through. 'I

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won't take your case,' he said, 'but I'll give you some free advice. You're a husky young man. Go to work and *earn* your \$600.'

"I've always figured it out that he was a sight more contented after he got his grip on the slavery question. You know how he felt about slavery; thought it was wrong, and when he began to see there was a chance to fight it in a way that would count, he felt different towards his life, saw it did mean something, began to feel he was some real use. I reckon he began to believe God had a place for him—that he was put into the world for a good and sufficient reason. Now as I see Mr. Lincoln, that was all he ever needed to reconcile him to things. As he began to see more and more that he had his argument sound, and that it was takin' hold in the country, that men was listenin' to him and sayin' he had it right, why more and more he was something like happy. He made up his mind that the time had come when God meant to say to slavery, 'Thus far and no farther,' and he was ready to put in his best licks to help Him.

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"He wrestled with that question till he drove it clean out of politics right down onto bed rock of right and wrong, and there he stood; slavery was wrong, and accordin' to his way of lookin' at it, people who pretended to regulate their lives on religion ought to be agin it. Allus troubled him a lot and sometimes made him pretty bitter that so many folks that stood high as Christians was for slavery. I remember Newt Bateman tellin' how Lincoln came in his office one day after his nomination—Newt was State School Superintendent, and he and Mr. Lincoln was always great friends,—well, he said Mr. Lincoln came in with a report of a canvass of how people in Springfield were goin' to vote, and he said:

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"Let's see how the ministers in this town are goin' to vote,' and he went through the list pickin' 'em out and settin' 'em down, and, would you believe it now, he found that out of 23 ministers 20 were against him. He was dreadfully upset, and talked a long time about it. Newt said he pulled a New Testament out of his pocket.

"What I don't understand,' he said, 'is how anybody can think this book stands for slavery. Human bondage can't live a minute in its light, and yet here's all these men who consider themselves called to make the teachin' of this book clear votin' against me. I don't understand it.

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"They know Douglas don't care whether slavery's voted up or down, but they ought to know that God cares and humanity cares and they know I care. They ain't been readin' their Bibles right.

"Seems to me sometimes as if God had borne with this thing until the very teachers of religion had come to defend it out of the Bible. But they'll find the day will come when His wrath will upset it. I believe the cup of iniquity is full, and that before we get through God will make the country suffer for toleratin' a thing that is so contrary to what He teaches in this Book.'

"As I see it, that idee grew in him. You know how he hated war. Seemed as if he couldn't stand it sometimes, but there ain't no doubt that more and more he looked at it as God's doin'—His way of punishin' men for their sin in allowin' slavery. He said that more'n once to the country. Remember what he wrote in his call for a fast-day in the spring of '63? No? Well, I've got it here—just let me read it to you."

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Billy rose, and after lingering long enough at the window to remark that the "storm wa'n't lettin' up any," went to a scratched and worn desk, a companion piece to "Mr. Lincoln's chair," and took from the drawer where he kept his precious relics a bundle of faded yellow newspapers and selected a copy of the New York *Tribune* of March 31, 1863.

"Now you listen," said Billy, "and see if I ain't right that his idee when he talked to Newt had takin' hold of him deep." So Billy read sonorously the sentences which seemed to him to demonstrate his point:

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"Insomuch as we know that by His divine law nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people.'

"Isn't that just what he said to Newt Bateman," Billy stopped long enough to remark.

"We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

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"It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.'

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"The longer the war went on, the more and more sure he was that God was workin' out something, and hard as it was for him, the more and more reconciled he got to God's Government. Seems to me that's clear from what he said in his last Inaugural. You remember:

"The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must

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needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.' Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away, yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"I like to say that just like he said it. Seems kinda like music. He was that way sometimes, swung into sort of talk and made your heart stop to listen; it was so sweet and solemn-like.

"Makes me ache though to think what he had to go through to come out where he could talk so sure and calm about things; for certain as he was that God had a purpose in it all, he wa'n't so sure always that he was proceedin' along the lines the Almighty approved of. He never got over that struggle long as he was President, always askin' himself whether he was on God's side. Puzzled him bad that both sides thought God was with 'em. He pointed out more than once how the rebel soldiers was prayin' for victory just as earnest as ours—how the rebel people got the same kind of help out of prayer that the Union people did. And both couldn't be right.

"There isn't any doubt he often tested out whether God agreed with his argument or not, by the way things swung. It was that way about the Emancipation Proclamation. You know how he thought about that for months, and for the most part kept it to himself. He didn't want to do it that way, was dead set on the North buying the slaves instead of takin' 'em. But he had the Emancipation Proclamation ready, and he'd told God he'd let it loose if He'd give us the victory. Sounds queer, mebbe, but that's what he did. He told the Cabinet so, and they've told about it. A little mite superstitious, some would say. But Mr. Lincoln was a little superstitious, interested in things like signs and dreams—specially dreams, seemed to feel they might be tryin' to give him a hint. He's told me many a time about dreams he'd had, used to have same dream over and over, never got tired studyin' what it meant. You remember that happened in the war. He'd used to dream he saw a curious lookin' boat runnin' full speed toward a shore he couldn't make out clear, had that dream before nearly all the big battles—had it the night before they killed him, and told the Cabinet about it—thought it meant there'd be good news from Sherman.

"He got powerful discouraged sometimes, for it did seem the first three years of the war as if the Almighty wa'n't sympathizin' over much with the North. You remember how I told you once of havin' a long talk with him at night that time I went down to Washington to see him. Things was bad, awful bad. Country just plumb worn out with the war. People was beginnin' to turn against it. Couldn't stand the blood lettin', the sufferin', and the awful wickedness of it. There was a lot of that feelin' in '64. People willin' to give up anything—let the South go—let her keep her slaves—do anything to put an end to the killin'. I tell you a man has to keep his eyes ahead in war—keep tellin' himself over and over what's it all about. Mr. Lincoln had to. They were talkin' peace to him, riotin' about the drafts, stirrin' up more kinds of trouble for him than he ever knew there was, I reckon. And he felt it—felt it bad; and that night it seemed to do him good to talk it out. You see I come from home, and I didn't have no connection with things down there, and 'twas natural he'd open up to me as he couldn't to them on the ground; and he did.

"I've studied a lot, Billy,' he said, 'whether this is God's side of this war. I've tried my best to figure it out straight, and I can't see anything but that He must be for us. But look how things is goin'.

"One thing sure all I can do is to follow what I think's right. Whatever shall appear to be God's will, I'll do. There's quite a number of people who seem to think they know what God wants me to do. They come down every now and then and tell me so. I must say as I've told some of them that it's more'n likely if God is goin' to reveal His will on a point connected with my duty He'd naturally reveal it to me. They don't all lay it up against me when I talk that way. Take the Quakers. They're good people, and they've been in a bad fix for they don't believe in slavery, and they don't believe in war, and yet it seems to have come to the point that out of this war started to save free government, we're going to get rid of slavery. But they can't accept that way. Still they don't lay it up against me that I do, and they pray regular for me.

"We've been wrong, North and South, about slavery. No use to blame it all on the South. We've been in it too, from the start. If both sides had been willin' to give in a little, we might a worked it out, that is if we'd all been willin' to admit the thing was wrong, and take our share of the burden in puttin' an end to it. It's because we wouldn't or mebbe couldn't that war has come.

"It's for our sins, Billy, this war is. We've brought it on ourselves. And God ain't goin' to stop it because we ask Him to. We've got to fulfill the law. We broke the law, and God wouldn't be God as I see Him if He didn't stand by His own laws and make us take all that's comin' to us. I can't think we won't win the war. Seems to me that must be God's way, but if we don't, and the Union is broken and slavery goes on, well, all it means accordin' to my way of seein' things is that the laws ain't satisfied yet, that we ain't done our part. There'll be more trouble until the reason of trouble ends.

"But I don't lay it up against God, Billy. What it seems to me He's tryin' to do is to get men to see that there can't be any peace or happiness in this world so long as they ain't fair to one another. You can't have a happy world unless you've got a just world, and slavery ain't just. It's got to go. I don't know when. It's always seemed to me a pretty durable struggle—did back in '58, but I didn't see anything so bad then as we've come to. Even if I'd known I couldn't have done different, Billy. Even if we don't win this war and the Confederates set up a country with slavery in it, that ain't going to end it for me. I'll have to go on fightin' slavery. I know God means I should.

“It takes God a long time to work out His will with men like us, Billy, bad men, stupid men, selfish men. But even if we’re beat, there’s a gain. There are more men who see clear now how hard it is for people to rule themselves, more people determined government by the people shan’t perish from the earth, more people willin’ to admit that you can’t have peace when you’ve got a thing like slavery goin’ on. That’s something, that’s goin’ to help when the next struggle comes.

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“You mustn’t think I’m givin’ in, Billy. I ain’t, but look how things are goin’. What if we lose the election, and you must admit it looks now as if we would, what if we lose and a Copperhead Government makes peace—gives the South her slaves—lets the “erring sisters” set up for themselves. I’ve got to think about that, Billy.

“Seems to me I can’t bear the idea all this blood-lettin’ should end that way, for I know lasting peace ain’t in that set of circumstances. That means trouble, more trouble, mebbe war again until we obey the law of God, and let our brother man go free.’

“And he just dropped his head and groaned, seemed as if I could hear him prayin’, ‘Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!’

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“Think he prayed? Think Abraham Lincoln prayed?” Billy’s eyes were stern, and his voice full of reproachful surprise.

“I *know* he did. You wouldn’t ask that question if you could have heard him that night he left here for Washington sayin’ good-by to us in the rain, tellin’ us that without God’s help he could not succeed in what he was goin’ into—that with it, he could not fail; tellin’ us he was turnin’ us over to God, and askin’ us to remember him in our prayers. Why, a man can’t talk like that that don’t pray, leastwise an honest man like Abraham Lincoln.

“And he couldn’t have stood it without God, sufferin’ as he did, abused as he was, defeated again and again, and yet always hangin’ on, always believin’. Don’t you *see* from what I’ve been tellin’ you that Abraham Lincoln all through the war was seekin’ to work with God, strugglin’ to find out His purpose, and make it prevail on earth. A man can’t do that unless he gets close to God, talks with Him.

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“How do you suppose a man—just a common man, like Abraham Lincoln, could ever have risen up to say anything like he did in ‘65 in his Inaugural if he hadn’t known God:

“‘With malice toward none, with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan—to do which may achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.’

“That ain’t ordinary human nature—particularly when it’s fightin’ a war—that’s God’s nature. If that ain’t what Christ had in mind, then I don’t read the Bible right.

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“Yes, sir, he *prayed*—that’s what carried him on—and, God heard him and helped him. Fact is I never knew a man I felt so sure God approved of as Abraham Lincoln.”

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### Transcriber’s Notes:

Illustrations have been moved to follow the text that they illustrate, so the page number of the illustration may not match the page number in the List of Illustrations.

Contents page references refer to the first page of content, not the story’s title page.

Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

Archaic and variable spelling has been preserved.

Variations in hyphenation and compound words have been preserved.

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