

Abraham Lincoln

James Baldwin

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TO THE SCHOOLBOYS OF AMERICA

This book is dedicated to you. It is the story of a hero greater than any of the heroes of fairy tale or romance. For while these latter were for the most part ideal and imaginary, the man of whom I shall tell you was a real person who lived a true life and did truly noble things.

Concerning no other American has so much been written. Of books about Lincoln there are already scores, even hundreds. Why, then, should I presume to write another? Why, when it is plainly impossible to relate any new facts regarding our hero, should I venture to add this volume to the multitude of existing biographies?

My answer and apology is this: While I cannot tell anything that has not already been told, yet I may be able to repeat some well-known facts in a manner particularly agreeable and understandable to boys and girls, thus producing a book adapted to school reading, free from wearisome details as well as from political bias or sectional prejudice. Then, again, it is my aim in this book to trace, as briefly as may be, the progress of our government from the time of its organization to the end of the great civil war; and more particularly to make plain the causes and motives which brought about the tremendous crisis in which Abraham Lincoln bore so conspicuous a part. For to you, the schoolboys of America, the political history that centers around the life of our hero should have more than a passing interest. Although the chief issues then at stake have ceased to exist, yet the lessons of that history remain as beacon lights to guide and warn you, the future rulers and law-makers of our country. Other issues may arise, other jealousies may cause discord, other mistaken theories may threaten the peace of the nation, —the salvation of this great republic will depend upon your unselfish patriotism. It is with the hope that this book may help to inspire you with such patriotism that I dedicate it to you.

JAMES BALDWIN.

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PRELUDE

THE Fourth of July in America is a time of national rejoicing. It is also a time of national remembrance. On that day we are reminded, in one way or another, that we are Americans, and that we have a country to which we should be loyal and true. We are reminded, also, that this is the land of freedom and that it was made so by the toils and sufferings of brave and wise men who lived and died amid scenes and circumstances to which we are strangers. It is fitting that we should think of all these things on the Fourth of July, for that day is the birthday of our nation.

There was once a time, however, when the people living in America could not boast that they had a country of their own; for they were ruled by the king and parliament of Great Britain who made laws for their government without asking their consent. The American colonists, as the people were then called, could not say that this was a land of freedom; for they were made to pay taxes to the king, and were denied many of the rights which free men hold dear. Then the 4th of July came and went without more notice than any other day: no flags were raised, no great guns were fired, no glad bells were rung; for the nation had not yet been born.

But at length there came a day when the people would no longer be deprived of their rights. Then certain wise and brave men declared: "The king of England is a tyrant, and he is unfit to rule this land. The people shall make their own laws and choose their own rulers, for this is their right. These states, in which we live, are and ought to be free and independent."

The day on which that declaration was made was the 4th of July, 1776; and since that time, as the years go by, it is remembered with great rejoicing as the day when the American nation had its beginning. But real independence was not won merely by a declaration. There followed a long war with England—the war of the Revolution which lasted till the British

king and parliament were forced to say that the country might be free. In this way the people won the right to be their own rulers and to make their own laws; in this way they gained for themselves and for us the freedom which all men so dearly prize.

* * *

It must not be thought that when our nation began its life it was rich and great as it now is. It was small and weak. Its possessions did not reach from ocean to ocean, as they do now, but only from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River. There were but thirteen states, and they were thinly settled. Nearly all the people lived in that part of the country which is east of the Alleghany Mountains, and the different sections had but little to do with one another. The largest and richest of the states was Virginia, which claimed the land westward as far as to the Mississippi.

The broad region between the Alleghanies and the Mississippi was, for the most part, an unknown land. It was covered for hundreds of miles by a dense, wild forest, where savage beasts lurked and warlike Indians roamed. There was no way of getting into it except by pushing through the tangled woods, or by floating in small boats down the Ohio River, or by coasting along the shores of the Great Lakes which bordered it on the north. The only roads were the water courses or the winding paths made through the forests and prairies by wild deer and wandering herds of bisons.

Here and there, on the bank of some river, hidden far away in the forest, there was a little fort or a trading post, scarcely known or even heard of by the rest of the world. Now and then, a hunter, after months of roving in these wilds, would go back to his friends in the East and tell wonderful stories of the fertility and beauty of that Western country. Now and then, some traders would return from the Ohio region with loads of skins and furs and with many a tale of danger and escape in the savage wilderness.

No person could have dreamed that within less than a century, this unknown region would become, as it is to-day, covered with countless farms and dotted with busy towns the home of millions of happy people.

Indeed, there were thoughtful men who said that, for ages to come, there would be plenty of room in the states east of the Alleghany Mountains for all the inhabitants of our country, and that the territory to the west would remain a wild, unsettled hunting ground, perhaps forever.

But there were a few men who believed otherwise. They had listened to the stories that were told of the extent and the hidden wealth of the lands in the Ohio Valley, and they believed that new states would soon be formed there. A year or more before the declaration of independence two companies of settlers, from Virginia and North Carolina, established themselves in the beautiful region south of the Ohio. One, composed at first of men alone, built a stockade at the place now called Harrodsburg. The other, among which were women and children, was led by the hunter, Daniel Boone, and the settlement which he founded was named Boonesborough.

The country in which these daring pioneers made their homes was an uninhabited land and was known by its Indian name, Kentucky. It was in the very heart of the untraveled wilderness two hundred miles from the nearest settlement in Virginia. But it was one of the fairest regions in the world. Eastward, back to the crest of the mountains, the forest stretched unbroken; but westward, there were grassy openings between groves of woodland, and treeless meadows covered with rank herbage. Here were the hunting grounds of the Indians. Herds of bisons, or buffaloes, grazed on the wild meadows or roamed among the trees. Huge elks, with branching horns, browsed in the forest openings; and timid deer nipped the herbage in secluded places and sought shelter from the sun and rain in the shady woods. And there were other animals less harmless than these bears in great plenty, packs of wolves, prowling panthers, not a few, and many smaller and more timid beasts. Thousands of squirrels played unscared among the branches of the trees; and the forests and meadows seemed alive with birds of every kind.

No Indians had their dwellings there. But the tribes beyond the Ohio, as well as those to the east, the south, and the west, sent their brave men there every year. It was common ground for them all—to hunt in, but not

to live in and many and fierce were the battles that were fought when the paths of hostile parties crossed each other.

It was a daring thing for Boone and his friends to settle in that country, for every red man would be their foe. But they had come to stay, and stay they did. They built at Boonesborough a fort of round logs; and under its shadow they raised their log cabins, one for each family. Then around all they erected a stout stockade a high fence made of heavy squared timbers, set upright in the ground and very close together. This being done, they felt themselves safe from any attacks the Indians might make; and they began to clear away the forest trees and to make fields and plant corn.

Very soon other people in Virginia and North Carolina heard of their success and ventured to follow them. Other settlements were made and other forts were built; and before the war of the Revolution was quite ended many eyes were turned toward Kentucky as the new land of promise in the far, far West. But it was like a fair island in the midst of a dangerous sea. The way to it was beset with perils; and notwithstanding all the beauty and the richness of its land, it had little to promise its settlers but labor and privation. And so the most of those who ventured to go thither in search of homes were men careless of danger and used to all kinds of hardship.

* * *

At about this time there was living in Virginia a farmer whose name was Abraham Lincoln. He was a friend of Daniel Boone's, and had heard often of the wonderful country in the heart of the Western woods. He longed to go there himself, for he was something of a hunter as well as farmer; and Boone had sent him glowing accounts of the abundance of game and the richness of the soil. The state of Virginia, to which Kentucky then belonged, was selling land in the new territory very cheap. There would never be a better time to buy.

And so, while the great war for independence was still going on, he sold his farm in Virginia and went to Kentucky to look for a new home. On Floyd's Fork, near where the city of Louisville now stands, he bought

four hundred acres of rich bottom land. In another place he bought eight hundred acres of wood land, and in another five hundred. Then he returned to Virginia for his family.

The next year, with his wife and children, he was safely settled on the land near Floyd's Fork, and was clearing a farm in the midst of the woods.

The Indians had begun to be troublesome, and were very dangerous. They were angry because their hunting grounds had been invaded, and because the wild game was being driven away. They had made up their minds to drive the white people out of Kentucky. And so, as a matter of precaution, Mr. Lincoln built his cabin within half a mile of a fort—Fort Beargrass, near the falls of the Ohio River. He did not believe that the Indians would dare to trouble him there.

* * *

Thus three years passed. In the meanwhile, peace had been made with England, and it had been agreed that the Mississippi River should be the western boundary of the United States. Great numbers of people began at once to cross the Alleghany Mountains to seek new fortunes in the fertile valley of the Ohio. Several settlements were made in the Kentucky country. Men were busy cutting down the trees, making roads through the woods, clearing farms, building for themselves homes in the new land. Soon there were more than six hundred people in the town of Louisville; and other towns had sprung up, as if by magic, in places where lately the buffalo and the deer had roamed unharmed.

* * *

One morning in summer, Farmer Lincoln went out into a cornfield near his cabin to do some work. His little son Thomas, who was only six years old, went with him. The two big boys, Mordecai and Josiah, were burning logs in another field close by. There were still so many dead trees and blackened stumps in the clearing that the corn had scarcely room to grow among them. On one side there was an open space through which

one could see Fort Beargrass and the houses of other settlers nearly a mile away; on the other side were green woods with dense thickets of briers and underbrush where birds sang and squirrels played and fierce beasts found lurking places.

As the two big boys were busy with their smoking log heaps, they were suddenly alarmed by the sound of a gun. They looked across the clearing. They saw that their father had fallen to the ground. Their little brother was standing over him and screaming with fright. A faint cloud of smoke was rising from the bushes at the edge of the woods.

"Indians!" cried Josiah; and he was off with a bound, running like a wild deer toward the fort.

Mordecai ran to the house, calling to little Thomas to follow him. But the child stood by his father's side, crying pitifully and not knowing what to do. A minute later the painted face of an Indian peered out from among the bushes. The child screamed louder than before, and turned to run. But the Indian was after him. Little Thomas heard the savage leaping over the fallen trees; he heard his swift feet; he ran very fast, but his pursuer ran much faster. At the top of a little hill the child fell. The house was in plain sight, and Mordecai and his mother and sisters were safe inside. Thomas scrambled to his feet; but as he did so, the Indian's arm was about him. Then he heard the sharp crack of a rifle from the house, and the Indian, letting go of him, tumbled to the ground.

The child did not stop to see more, but ran faster than ever. In another minute he was safe inside the cabin and in his mother's arms.

Mordecai was standing guard by the window, with one rifle in his hands and two others leaning near him against the wall. Now and then he would take aim and fire; and savage yells could be heard from the Indians who were lurking in the edge of the woods. Then quite soon another kind of shout was heard in the clearing, on the farther side of the cabin. Josiah had come with a number of men from the fort.

"They have killed father," said Mordecai, opening the door, "but the fellow who was trying to catch Thomas is lying dead in the field. Let us

after them, and not leave one of them alive!”

But the savages were already skulking away through the thick woods, and there was no use trying to overtake them. “I will have vengeance upon them,” said Mordecai; and from that time till the end of his life, he was a bitter foe to all Indians.

Thus the pioneer, Abraham Lincoln, like many another brave settler in the wilderness, found an untimely grave in the land where he had hoped to make a home for himself and his children.

* * *

After the death of his father, hard times were in store for Thomas Lincoln; but they were perhaps no harder than these that came to other pioneer children in Kentucky. His mother thought it would be better to live in a more thickly settled neighborhood; and so the family soon moved some forty miles southeastward, and settled upon a large tract of land which their father had owned there.

It was the law in Kentucky that when a man died, his eldest son should be heir to his whole estate. And so, when Mordecai Lincoln grew to be of age, he became the owner of all the property; and Josiah and the two sisters and young Thomas were left without anything. But Josiah was steady and industrious and found plenty of work, so that he was soon well-to-do in the world; the girls were already married and settled in homes of their own; and the only one who really felt the pinch of poverty was little Thomas.

He was allowed to grow up in a careless way, without much knowledge of the world in which he lived. There were no schools near his home, and so he never learned to read. He became very skillful in using a gun, and liked much better to be hunting in the woods than doing any kind of useful work at home. He was kind-hearted and gentle, slow to anger, and a pleasant companion. He was strong and brave, also, and no one dared impose too far upon his good nature.

While Thomas Lincoln was thus growing up, unheard-of and unknown, many great things were being done in the world of which he knew so little. From the states on the east side of the mountains settlers were still pouring into the new country. They came in wagons over a road which Daniel Boone had marked out years before; they came in boats down the Ohio River. Wealthy families from Virginia came with their slaves and their cattle and their fine manners to build up great estates in the Ohio Valley. So many people settled in Kentucky that, when Thomas was fourteen years old, it was separated from Virginia and became a state. It was the fifteenth state in the Union; for the thirteen which had won independence had been joined by Vermont just the year before.

Many pioneers from the Carolinas made their homes in the country south of Kentucky, and there, in 1796, the sixteenth state, Tennessee, was formed. The great territory north of the Ohio River, which had been claimed by Virginia and other states, had finally been ceded to the United States, and was being rapidly settled by people from all parts of the East. But it was still the home of powerful tribes of Indians who were not willing to be deprived of their lands and who were determined to defend their hunting grounds; and so for many years a cruel war was waged between the red men and the white. The backwoods settlements were often the scenes of terrible deeds. Battles were fought and treaties were made, and at last the Indians, knowing themselves beaten, sold their lands and went farther west. In 1802 the easternmost part of the territory north of the Ohio River became a state and was called Ohio. All the rest of that vast region of woodland and prairie was called Indiana Territory.

It is not to be supposed that young Thomas Lincoln, growing up in the backwoods of Kentucky, knew very much about any of these things. I doubt whether at that time he had ever seen a newspaper; and, indeed, of what use would a newspaper have been to one who could not read? He probably did not know that about the time he was passing his tenth birthday, George Washington was elected the first President of the United

States. In 1796, when John Adams was chosen to be the second President, the boy was eighteen, and it is likely that he heard some talk concerning the election, but without understanding or caring much about it. But in 1800, when Thomas Jefferson was elected, the young Kentuckian was of age and might have voted; and yet we must believe that he cared far more for deer hunting in the woods than he did for election day or for politics.

In 1803 a great change took place in the boundaries of our country. Until then, as has already been told, the United States reached only to the Mississippi River, and Kentucky was spoken of as being in the far, far West. But in that year President Jefferson bought from France all the country that lies between the great river and the Rocky Mountains. Look at a map of the United States, and you will see that more than half of our country lies there. Count the states that have since been formed out of the Louisiana Territory, as it was then called, and they are more than equal to the original thirteen that fought for independence.

At that time, however, all that region was a wild land where few white men had ever dared to go. Just how wide it was, or how long, or where it ended, or what it contained, no one knew. By the purchase of this territory, however, the Mississippi River became all our own, and the people living in the West had now a free outlet by water to the Gulf of Mexico. They could send whatever they had to sell down the river to New Orleans, and this was of much advantage to them. Within a very few years the Mississippi became the great highway of trade between the settlements in the West and the rest of the world. For you must know that there were no railroads at that time, nor until many years later. Indeed there were scarcely any roads of any kind; and for the Western settlers to carry grain or goods of whatever sort to or from the states east of the mountains was a thing so difficult and costly that it was hardly to be thought of.

* * *

Thomas Lincoln was now twenty-five years old. Since early boyhood he had been obliged to make his own way in the world. Easy-

going though he was, everybody liked him; and so he was never without a home or something to do. He had been careful of his small savings, and was at last able to buy a piece of wild land in Hardin County not far from Elizabethtown.

In Elizabethtown there lived a carpenter whose name was Joseph Hanks. He had known Thomas Lincoln for a long time, and he now asked him to come and live with him and help him at his trade. Young Lincoln was known to be very skillful with an ax or a froe, and that was about all the skill that a good carpenter needed in those days. For the building of a house was a very simple matter. The walls were made of round logs, and the roof and floor of boards split from a tree. Wooden pegs were used instead of nails, and often there was not a piece of iron or a pane of glass in any part of the house.

Being always careful to do his work well, Thomas Lincoln soon became known as a first-rate carpenter. But the habits of his boyhood still clung to him. He was contented with earning simply his food and clothing; he loved his rifle better than his ax; and he would rather hunt deer than build houses.

It was while living thus in Elizabethtown that he first met Nancy Hanks, the niece of his employer. She was a fair and delicate girl; but like young Lincoln she had been used to hardships all her life. Her parents had been neighbors and friends of old Abraham Lincoln years before, when all lived in Virginia. They had also been friends of Daniel Boone and had been drawn to Kentucky by the glowing accounts that were given of the richness of its soil and the plentifulness of everything necessary to support life.

There were few girls in that neighborhood who were the equals of Nancy Hanks. She could read and write, and they could not. She had learned that some where outside of the Western country there was a great, busy world where people lived and thought in ways quite different from those of the folk whom she knew; and she had a vague longing for something better in life than what the rude settlements in the backwoods could ever give her. But her companions were content with the little world

which they could see around them, and did not feel the hardships which were a part of their lives.

In the midst of rudeness and coarseness, Nancy Hanks was always gentle and refined. We cannot wonder that when Thomas Lincoln came to live in the same town with her, he lost his heart. And we must believe that when she at last promised to be his wife, she had been won by his kindly nature and his jovial manners rather than by any energy of character which he possessed.

It was in June, 1806, that the wedding took place. The bride was twenty-three years old, and the groom was five years older. For a year and more they lived in Elizabethtown, and Thomas Lincoln went hunting often and tinkered occasionally at his trade, thus contriving to find food for both himself and his wife. There were not many houses to be built, and there were other carpenters more energetic than he; and so there was but little work to be done, and no prospect of more.

A little daughter was born to the young couple; and then it was decided to move out to the land which Thomas owned on Nolin Creek; for game was still plentiful in the woods, and corn could be raised in the clearings, and life would be easier in a home which they could call their own.

* * *

And now while Thomas Lincoln is building his cabin, and before we begin the story of the great man who was born there, let us take a brief view of the condition of our country at that time.

Thirty-two years have passed since that 4th of July when independence was declared. Great changes have taken place, some of which we already know. The country is no longer bounded on the west by the Mississippi River, but reaches all the way to the Rocky Mountains. Yet it does not include Florida or Texas, or New Mexico, or California: for these are still held by Spain. The region between the Alleghanies and the Mississippi is dotted in many places with little settlements; the forests are being rapidly cut away to give place to fields and orchards and roads. Instead of thirteen